

that promotes understanding of the needs of children and youth who are gifted and talented?

**4.1 Professional development about gifted education and talent development is embedded throughout a school year.**

Principals, teachers, counselors, librarians, and special teachers of physical education, art, and music need to understand the characteristics of gifted children and their social-emotional and cognitive needs. No one falls for the myths that gifted children will “get it on their own,” that only students who aren’t problems in the classroom are gifted, or that students who have a learning difficulty can’t be gifted. A Gold Standard School discovers students’ needs, interests, abilities, and levels of readiness, so individualized learning takes place and so that each child learns new things every day she is in school—elementary through high school.

These four descriptors and the related points of evidence are combined in a checklist for guiding the development of your school to a gold standard. This checklist can be used to focus your advocacy efforts as well as to determine the impact of your advocacy.

Our next column will focus on role groups in the school and what these educators do in a Gold Standard School.

**Resources**

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**Authors' Note**

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Tracy Ford Inman, M.A., serves as Associate Director of The Center for Gifted Studies at Western Kentucky University. She has presented at the state, national, and international levels; trained hundreds of teachers in differentiation; published multiple articles; and served as writer and editor for The Center's award-winning magazine, *The Challenge*. She and Julia Link Roberts have coauthored another book project: *Assessing Differentiated Student Products: A Protocol for Development and Evaluation* (2009).

## Checklist for a Gold Standard School

### Characteristic 1: Focus on Continuous Progress

- 1.1 The school mission statement specifies that every child will realize his potential or each child will make continuous progress.
- 1.2 Preassessment is routine and establishes the interests, preferred ways of learning, and levels of readiness of all students.
- 1.3 Grouping for instructional purposes is a standard practice in order to facilitate all children (remember that includes gifted children) learning at appropriately challenging levels. Most groupings are flexible to allow students to be regrouped as the level of readiness changes with different content or topics as well as when interest shifts into high gear.
- 1.4 Assessment is ongoing to see that all children are learning. This type of assessment is called formative, and it is important because it monitors progress to make certain that a child is neither practicing skills incorrectly nor misunderstanding content.
- 1.5 Lessons are differentiated to match the level of challenge to the needs of individual students or clusters of students. Differentiated learning experiences are not “just different” nor are they simply more of the same.

### Characteristic 2: Talent Development

- 2.1 Opportunities in a variety of content and talent areas are sought out, announced, and encouraged.
- 2.2 Achievements in a variety of content and talent areas are recognized and celebrated.

### Characteristic 3: Policies that Remove the Learning Ceiling

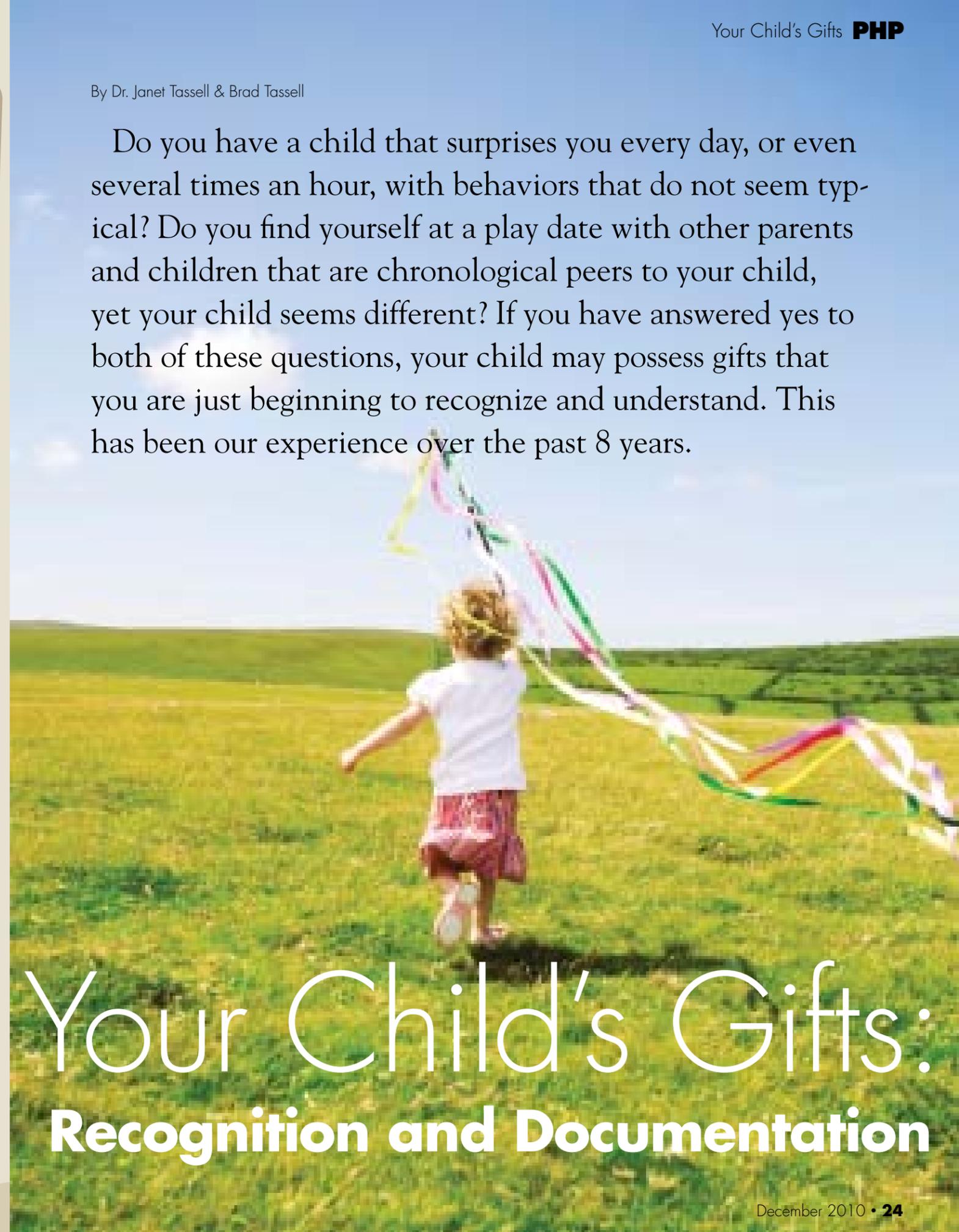
- 3.1 A policy for acceleration is in place.
- 3.2 A policy for performance assessment is established.
- 3.3 A policy for educational enhancement is adopted.
- 3.4 Policies and practices do not inhibit continuous progress.

### Characteristic 4: Ongoing Professional Development

- 4.1 Professional development about gifted education and talent development is embedded throughout a school year.

By Dr. Janet Tassell & Brad Tassell

Do you have a child that surprises you every day, or even several times an hour, with behaviors that do not seem typical? Do you find yourself at a play date with other parents and children that are chronological peers to your child, yet your child seems different? If you have answered yes to both of these questions, your child may possess gifts that you are just beginning to recognize and understand. This has been our experience over the past 8 years.



# Your Child's Gifts: Recognition and Documentation

While still in diapers, Darby had memorized 20 states and their capitals, loved anatomy, and began playing computer games for preschoolers on her own. Before the age of 3, she was already testing the limits of analytical thinking and precocious behavior, challenging our entire worldview of age-appropriate learning and development. This transformation was startling, considering that 8 months earlier our 23-month-old had yet to say one word. By 2 years, 10 months Darby began correcting us if we read a word incorrectly or skipped a word in a story. Not only was she reading over our shoulders, she was also delighted in our mistakes and her chance to correct.

We were excited, proud, confused, worried, and a little scared. How were we to nurture these gifts appropriately?



**Using the Kingore Parent Information Form: Learn More About Your Child**

One of the first things we decided was that no learning was off limits. We would use correct terms, real language, and answer every question in as much detail as our understanding allowed, and failing that we would research those questions with her. That led to a lot of interesting conversations with a 3-year-old who loved anatomy, and a few talks with the preschool teacher who also was a nun. We had a mantra and a goal for our little gifted learner: “Experience continuous learning . . .”

In our search for ways to document what we were seeing in our child, we had stumbled across parental sup-

port in the The Kingore Observation Inventory (KOI; Kingore, 2004). This chance opportunity came when participating with the local school district in an initiative for improving gifted education identification where the teachers were being trained in the teacher Kingore Observation Inventory. We discovered the Parent Information Form (PIF) that could be used as well. The KOI was developed over a period of 28 years, in which hundreds of classrooms and students participated.

We were trying to be subjective with our thoughts and opinions regarding Darby’s behavior in order to determine her educational needs. We found that research confirmed that parents are good identifiers of children’s abilities, and that their input should be included in the identification process.

The Kingore Observation Inventory (Kingore, 2004) begins by outlining parent goals for learning about your child’s strengths.

**1. Parents are guided toward interpreting the pattern of abilities and strengths of their gifted child.**

With Darby, it was a relatively easy interpretation. When she found one thing that ignited her passion, the study of it consumed her. At 2 years, 6 months it was state capitals. Between 3 and 4 years old, it was dinosaurs and anatomy. Questions would come for hours at a time. Memorizing long complicated names was her joy. She loved science discovery, reading, and deep analysis.

**2. Learn how to document observed gifts.**

As parents anticipating that we would need to show school administrators and teachers what Darby was able to do at home, we took a proactive stance. At age 4, we had Darby tested by a school psychologist. We were able to take these independent results with us. We also collected artifacts and documented amusing things Darby would say or do. The PIF was a tremendous help for us in organizing our thoughts and documentation.

**3. Learn why it is important to identify gifted learners.**

A common myth is that gifted children will naturally do well in school—after all, they are gifted! Failure to identify does not allow parents to advocate fully on their child’s behalf. With official identification, parents can collaborate with the school to develop an approach for education that benefits both the child and teacher. Another critical reason for identifying gifted learners is to ensure that they get to learn something new at school every day.

**4. Suggestions are shared for nurturing talents at home.**

The PIF (Kingore, 2004), includes categories of

awareness along with helpful hints for what to do at home. We found this useful as we began noticing Darby exhibited some of these qualities.

**5. Learn alternative ways to advocate for your child.**

One of the most difficult roles for us in parenting is how to advocate constructively for our daughter. On one hand, we have ideas that we believe would improve her education. But, on the other hand, we want to maintain a healthy relationship with the school. The PIF provides ways to advocate for your child.

**Importance of Early Identification**

Parents, in many cases, see their children’s gifts, but may never recognize the need or advantages in nurturing them. Parents often figure their child will naturally move onto some other interest, while many fail to see these interests as assets and perhaps even try to quell intellectual and creative tendencies. Hence, they never delve into the sometimes murky waters of early identification. The PIF lists possible lifelong detriments of not being identified and assets of early identification.

**Early Identification: What Can Happen If We Don’t?**

The following list provides concerns about what can happen if high-ability children are not identified (Kingore, 2004):

- deterioration of potential skills;
- easy achievement, no struggle or need for persistence;
- pattern of low performance;
- boredom, depression, behavioral issues; and
- hidden abilities remain hidden.

With Darby, we struggled with the “ease to excel” syndrome. Meaning she was so far ahead of the curve at some tasks (i.e., reading, analytical understanding) that she refused to push any boundaries of learning past what came easy. She was light years ahead already—why struggle to the next universe? That led to extreme frustration and early abandonment of anything that was not immediately gratified with understanding.

**Early Identification: What Can Happen If You Do?**

- The following list provides benefits of identifying high-ability children (Kingore, 2004). Children:
- develop confidence,
  - increase self-esteem,

- maintain enthusiasm for learning, and
- gain in achievement, motivation, and self-concept.

As we have identified and focused on Darby’s strengths, she has benefitted in many ways. She now has the confidence to more readily accept failure. Roadblocks are becoming more like detours to circumvent than stopping points. An important side note is that she also can enjoy things for which she has no talent. She has the task commitment for things she may never master, but loves the attempt.

**Negatively Perceived Characteristics**

Many educators and counselors inappropriately miss students that have pervasive gifted characteristics that are perceived as negative. Because they refuse to fit into the archaic model of a stale learning environment, students are not recognized for their talent. These include:

- being bored with routine tasks,
- refusing to do rote homework,
- being concerned more with concept than detail,
- turning in messy work,
- making puns or jokes at inappropriate times, and
- refusing to accept authority.

These perceived inappropriate behaviors can lead directly to discipline problems at school and to misdiagnosis of psychological or medical problems. When gifted children are left in a “lazy” educational environment—completing repetitious worksheets and mundane tasks—they can be reprimanded for lack of compliance or even referred for behavior modification. Identification already in place prior to entering a traditional education setting may help dispel misconceptions before they take root.

**Supporting Gifted Characteristics**

A good start to the identification of a gifted learner is understanding some common characteristics. The PIF identifies seven of these characteristics and reminds us that gifted children can exhibit one or more of them.

- Advanced Language (AL)
- Analytical Thinking (AT)
- Meaning Motivation (MM)
- Perspective (P)
- Sense of Humor (SH)
- Sensitivity (S)



**Advanced Language (AL)**

The child may demonstrate:

- Wanting to learn multiple languages.
- Using words other children do not.
- Excellence at reading, writing, language arts, social studies.
- Good test-taking skills.

AL gifted children can unassumingly and appropriately display advanced vocabulary and an ability to effectively use more complex language in a variety of situations. Many have a natural ability with simile and metaphor, or will use analogy to express insights.

What can parents do for AL children at home? KOI suggests avoidance of word drills as they limit the use of real-world application. Encourage the use of art to draw words and pictures to help cement meaning and build creativity. Read great books with your children paired with fun, in-depth, and creative discussion, using higher level vocabulary. Darby was reading and speaking at a third- or fourth-grade level by the time she finished preschool, but did not speak until after age 2. She could understand and complete complicated instruction and was fully able to hold eye contact and play actively with others. We decided that even as an infant we would use clear, coherent, and useful language with Darby.

**Analytical Thinker (AT)**

The child may have the following characteristics:

- Demonstrates abstract reasoning skills.
- Makes connections between and among things others may miss.
- Excels at math and/or science.
- Can be a good test taker.

A strong analytical thinker will shatter preconceived notions of conventional “wisdom.” These children demonstrate an ability to discern components of a whole, and solve more difficult problems using uncommon means; strive to determine more complex; and recognize abstract relationships and patterns in procedures, experiences, ideas, and/or objects. They may appear disorganized, yet blaze their own trail of planning, procedure, and organization.

What can parents do for AT children at home? Help AT children by involving them in logic play and tactic games. Include them, when possible, in planning and organizing trips or parties, and creating budgets. Seek out intellectual peers for them even if they are of different ages. When Darby was in kindergarten, the school placed her for part of the day with a second-grade group of students to complete certain projects. This gave her a chance to use her analytical skills to solve problems with intellectual peers, and lobby for her specific ideas of how

things could be done. She learned leadership skills, and the group many times did defer to her answers and ideas.

**Meaning Motivation (MM)**

This student may:

- Be an extensive questioner.
- Have topic-based passions.
- Ask intensively intellectual questions.
- Prefer intellectual peers.
- Need to be around those who appreciate his or her perspective.
- Exhibit an inner drive for thorough, independent understanding that results in the development of expertise in one or more areas.
- Pursue issues atypical of chronological peers.
- Demonstrate an extensive memory, and ask penetrating, intellectual questions.

What can parents do for MM children at home? We have encouraged Darby's intense interests, even helping her research the subjects she finds particularly fascinating. We encouraged her to role-play and insert her creativity. Allow the MM learner to take the lead in fun, immersive projects, while supporting his or her vision with needed resources.

**Perspective (P)**

This child:

- Can have multiple perspectives at the same time.
- Walk to a different drummer.

- May have art as a strong talent.
- Can get hung up on tests because they interpret questions another way.
- Develop unique graphics or patterns and display an ability to interpret and incorporate unexpected or unusual points of view through oral language, writing, manipulatives, art, and/or problem solving.
- Insightfully interpret another's point of view.

Perspective learners may challenge all of your preconceived notions. It is important not to discourage their insights even when their point of view differs from your own. Remember no one ever made a discovery or invented anything by following the status quo. These students need to have the opportunity to express themselves and discuss their thoughts with others.

What can parents do for P children at home? Students with this type of talent need to be encouraged in their creativity. Try to understand their point of view, especially when others question their methods. We also need to reassure them when others do question their methods. With Darby we have encouraged her to use her unique perspective while studying animals of prey—she is fascinated by this topic. Rather than being alarmed or telling Darby to relinquish her interest, we ask her about what she has understood and learned.

**Sense of Humor (SH)**

This child may:

- Memorize popular comedy routines even if they do not completely understand the meaning.
- Prefer political cartoons.

**1/3 Page Ad**

# Book Reviews

- Often share jokes and create original humor that many do not understand.
- Use humor to gain peer acceptance.
- Demonstrate an appreciation of high levels of humor and an application of a finely developed sense of humor by understanding the subtle humor of others or by producing original jokes, puns, or other humorous effects.
- Use humor to defuse volatile situations and gain approval.

What can parents do for SH children at home? To show children support for this gift, value their performance and find opportunities for this outlet. At the age of 6, Darby became engrossed with Dilbert. She loved the ever put upon intellectual engineer, his brilliant but morally ambiguous dog, and all the hapless workings of corporate America. She memorized many cartoons and repeated the jokes often. You might imagine that her first- and second-grade classmates did not share in her enjoyment of Dilbert's forever, misunderstood genius and his frustration with suffering fools that revel in ignorance and sometimes get to control his life. Perhaps the parallels were the reason she loved it? Gifted learners often exhibit an extensive and sometimes age-inappropriate concept of humor.

### Sensitivity (S)

Many gifted learners exhibit the following behaviors:

- Care a lot.
- Want action for change even if not popular.
- Read other people well and can become quite manipulative.
- Very concerned about human issues, demonstrate a strong sense of justice, intensely sensitive to the needs and motivations of others, and set high standards for self and others.
- Empathy expressed through words, art, or actions.
- May seek intellectual (older) peers if ones of a similar age are not available.

What can parents do for S children at home? These students need someone to debrief the day's events and provide feedback. Recognizing and empathizing with gifted children who are sensitive can help them cope with the enormous weight of their caring, but be careful not to marginalize their concerns. Try to filter or limit their input of news, media, and world events. Dealing with a very sensitive gifted child is one of the only times it makes sense to temper the child's exposure to certain knowledge. You should certainly help with activities, charities, and projects that fulfill their need to connect with solutions (e.g., recycling, volunteering), so they

can see actions making a difference, but do not let them get overwhelmed by the weight of the world's tragedies.

### Conclusion

Identification gives us leverage and purpose, and can provide strength and resolve when dealing with educators. We have a vision for our daughter to continue to explore in her creative and sometimes quirky nature that we find so endearing.

We have had wonderful opportunities to share what we have learned with other parents. Kingore's Parent Information Form can serve as a practical and useful tool for parents. Another valuable resource is "20 Tips for Nurturing Gifted Children" (Kingore, 2008) where parents can find ideas to nurture, appreciate, recognize, understand, encourage, and participate in the development of their gifted child.

Recently, we had a conversation with a parent who feared her child was being identified with an attention disorder. Hence, the child was also not being allowed to attend the school's gifted pull-out program. We encouraged the parent to take a look at the PIF and begin documenting what she observed—providing a tool to advocate for her child.

### References

- Kingore, B. (2004). *Kingore Observation Inventory*. Austin, TX: Professional Associates.
- Kingore, B. (2008). 20 tips for nurturing gifted children. *Gifted Education Communicator*, 39(2), 29–31.

### Authors' Note

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Brad Tassell is the award winning author of the novel for teens and preteens, *Don't Feed the Bully*. Read in class last school year by thousands of students, the book helps students move the bully target, love reading, and build empathy. For information on books and programs go to: <http://www.dontfeedthebully.com>



Janet Price and Jennifer Engle Fisher, professionals who work with and advocate for children with learning disorders, share their combined experience in *Take Control of Asperger's Syndrome: The Official Strategy Guide for Teens With Asperger's Syndrome and Nonverbal Learning Disorder*.

The book covers a range of topics from self-advocacy both at home and at school, to academic organization and successes, friendship in terms of making friends and maintaining friendships, and hygiene and personal appearance.

The authors begin each chapter of the book with "missions" that are written as learning objectives. At the end of the book, a "Mission Log," is included for students to journal about the missions they have set for themselves. This gives students the opportunity to test the tips offered by the authors and reflect on what is working for them.

This book also includes technical information such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed.) definitions and clinical manifestations of Nonverbal Learning Disorder (NLD) and Asperger's Syndrome (AS). The authors include side notes or call outs in the form of speech bubbles or notebook paper to highlight unfamiliar terms and their definitions (e.g., dysnomia: difficulty in finding or remembering the correct word to use).

Many sections of the book present quotations from real students interviewed by the authors. These quotes illustrate how these students cope with the challenges of AS and NLD and offer advice and strategies for students, by students just like them.

Graphic organizers are interspersed throughout the book. These serve multiple functions, which include helping students create daily or weekly schedules, aiding in organizing thoughts for writing assignments, and creating checklists for assignments so that students can be sure that they have completed all of their work.

Aimed at teenagers, the chapters are something students could work through on their own or with the help of a parent. This book is unique in that it includes helpful advice from both professionals working with students and from students themselves who face the challenges of NLD and AS.

**Title:** *Take Control of Asperger's Syndrome: The Official Strategy Guide for Teens With Asperger's Syndrome and Nonverbal Learning Disorder*

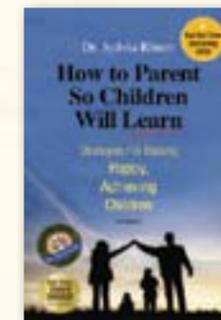
**Authors:** Janet Price & Jennifer Engle Fisher

**Publisher:** Prufrock Press

**http://www.prufrock.com**

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**Publication Date:** 2010



Originally released in 1990 and now in its third edition, *How to Parent So Children Will Learn: Strategies for Raising Happy, Achieving Children* by Dr. Sylvia Rimm provides practical advice for parenting children from preschool to college. Chapters include "Empowering Your Children With the V of Love," "United Parenting," "Teaching Habits That Encourage Learning," and "Positive Expectations." Dr. Rimm addresses a wide range of topics from appropriate praise and getting kids to bed and ready for school in the morning, to helping them deal with

sibling rivalry, parenting patterns, divorce, parent rivalry, and communication with teachers, caregivers, and extended family members.

"Parent Pointers" direct readers to concise ideas that can be used and applied almost immediately or cues as to how to implement the techniques being discussed appropriately. Each chapter also includes Dr. Rimm's responses to letters from parents and other concerned adults (grandparents and other family members). Many of the questions involve the most common yet complex situations that families face. Examples include appropriate parent and teacher reactions to ADHD behaviors, sibling (natural, step, and adopted) issues, and children's reactions to divorce. Dr. Rimm offers frank, yet caring advice.

This book challenges parents to take a serious look at the patterns that may already exist in their family, which may be the underlying cause of issues in the home. For example, in the chapter on "Teaching Habits That Encourage Learning," she asks the reader to consider the following question: "Do you and your child's other parent(s) disagree on how to discipline them?" (p. 191). This is followed by: "Do you find yourself in continuous power struggles with your child, after which you feel quite helpless?" (p. 192). These questions can be touchstones from which to begin conversations that can lead to personal and familial growth and improvement.

The book is text heavy but provides detailed advice organized in a manner to address immediate concerns and suggestions for families, whether they are two-parent, single parent, blended, or multigenerational households.

**Title:** *How to Parent So Children Will Learn* (3rd ed.)

**Author:** Dr. Sylvia Rimm

**Publisher:** Great Potential Press

**http://www.giftedbooks.com**

**ISBN:** 978-0-910707-86-2

**Publication Date:** 2008