



EDUCATION FOR ADVANCED LEARNERS & GIFTED STUDENTS

Manara Academy Newsletter

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Advanced Students at Manara Academy

At Manara Academy, we are honored to have a very diverse student body. There are some students who are struggling to master grade level content, and we scaffold their learning to ensure mastery of grade level knowledge and skills. Many students are appropriately challenged with on grade level instruction; some are operating above grade level in their cognition, while several others are truly gifted students and need instructional modifications in order to maximize their potential. This newsletter is focused on both the high achieving or bright student as well as the gifted learner.

Campus Instruction

Every campus at Manara Academy is currently meeting the needs of the advanced learner in the following ways:

Irving Elementary

- An **Enhancement Block** is built into the master schedule each week where more challenging and rigorous activities are provided.
- **Small Group Instruction** where content is differentiated for advanced learners is provided by classroom teachers.
- **Math Olympiad** is an international competition offered to the highest achieving students in grades 4-6.

Arlington STEM Academy

- **Research Projects** connect students' skill development to real world issues.
- **Technology Instruction** focuses on real world applications.
- **Acceleration Groups** allow teachers to differentiate instruction.

Manara Leadership Academy

- **Advanced Placement (AP)** classes are available for students ready to engage with content on an advanced level.
- **Dual credit** classes with North Lake College are accessible for obtaining high school credit and college credit simultaneously.
- **Internship** programs are designed for students within their selected area.
- The **Mathia** program, provided by Carnegie learning allows students to be placed in advance pathways in math.
- **Extension projects** require students to take learning from within the classroom and extend and apply it to the real world.
- **Genius Hour** allows students who are highly creatively to take real world problems and employ college level research and techniques to write about global issues.

Gifted & Talented (GT)

Program Development Update

Steps for Joining Manara Academy's Gifted & Talented Program:

- 1. Families are provided with a list of the criteria that must be met in order for an evaluation to be conducted.*
- 2. Families submit applications and parent recommendations for their child to be evaluated.*
- 3. A committee of Manara Academy officials review the applications and invite selected families to give permission for the student to be formally evaluated.*
- 4. Teacher recommendations are collected on those students invited for evaluation, and students are tested on a standardized tool.*
- 5. A committee of Manara Academy officials evaluate each student's data portfolio objectively and rate each student on a rubric.*
- 6. Students selected for admission to the program are identified.*
- 7. Families are notified of the results.*
- 8. The instructional program for identified students is enhanced.*

Currently, the identification process and evaluation rubrics outlining the qualifying criteria are being finalized.



There is a difference between bright children and gifted learners.

First, to be absolutely clear: there is nothing wrong with being "just" a bright child! Often parents feel that the distinction is, in some ways, a slight on their child. But some might even argue that having a bright child, rather than one who is gifted, is a wonderful thing because the characteristics often associated with giftedness can be particularly challenging. Often, bright children are the ones who succeed better in a typical school setting. They are the teacher pleasers. They work, perhaps, harder than their gifted counterparts and receive praise for those efforts. They make few waves, get A's, and complete their assignments. Parents and teachers alike are happy to have these kinds of students.

Though these qualities may be apparent, though the child may seem to sail through what the teacher offers in the typical classroom, these qualities often are mistaken as signs of giftedness. This distinction is worth identifying. Here are a few ways to fine tune the differences.

Bright children know the answer; gifted learners ask the questions.

The bright, above-average students, as previously mentioned are likely to get A's. They memorize well, comprehend at a high level, absorb information, and complete their work. Gifted learners, on the other hand, *already know*. They have an outstanding memory for details and possess a lot of information about the topic at hand. They comprehend the nuances of the subject's material in a more complex, in-depth manner. Where bright children accept and readily retain information about the topic, the gifted learners manipulate that information in order to draw unique inferences. Examples: The bright student knows that animals adapt to their environment. The gifted student wonders if this is still happening to humans at the same rate as life-saving, live-extending technology becomes more ubiquitous. The gifted student may initiate projects on his own to explore these ideas while the bright child completes the teacher's required assignments in an efficient manner. Certainly, the bright child performs at the top of the group. The gifted learner is the *beyond* the group.

Bright children work hard to achieve; gifted learners know without working hard.

For bright children, the average classroom teacher offers precisely what they crave: clear expectations, a path to an A, and an environment where this sort of success is rewarded. However, where bright children may very well earn those As, the gifted learners are far less likely to be motivated at all by grades; where bright children need 6-8 repetitions for mastery, gifted learners need only 1-2. Bright students copy the teacher's model response to a question or task accurately, while gifted learners are original and continually developing. Bright students learn with ease and generate good ideas because they are very *able*--but it is gifted learners who would, in fact, be the truer *intellectual*.

Bright children enjoy school; gifted learners enjoy self directed learning.

Bright children are interested and attentive at school; they listen to the material and are receptive; they enjoy their peers. Gifted learners, conversely, are more than merely *interested* in the way that seasons change: they are *highly curious* about it. Bright children show their attentiveness by staying in their seat and keeping their eyes on the teacher. But gifted learners are genuinely mentally--and sometimes *physically*--involved in the topic. They may have a hard time listening to the discussion of the Earth's movement around the sun *without* actually moving their hands and arms in an elliptical fashion. When the lesson is over, bright students find their friends; gifted learners prefer the teacher or some other adult in the room or perhaps they prefer working alone. Bright students are *receptive* at school; gifted learners can be downright *intense* at school. Bright students may enjoy the curriculum and its pace; gifted learners may tolerate it.

Bright children have a fine imagination; gifted learners use that imagination to experiment with ideas and hunches.

The ideas of bright students are clever, but those of gifted learners are original. Bright students can see an alternate route to a solution; gifted learners can easily "track" two or more approaches to a similar solution simultaneously. Because bright students are clever, they can find relationships between loosely connected ideas; but gifted learners value the very nonconformity of concepts--and look for ways to draw even further distinctions between them. Bright students, "get the joke." Gifted learners use original and inventive thinking to create humor because they have a more sophisticated understanding of the central reason about *why* the joke works.

Defining these distinctions is not easy, but it is essential to recognize that giftedness is something beyond high achievement. Often gifted students are high achievers but, perhaps just as often, they are not. This is why being able to draw the fine line between the two is so important. Comprehensive data from multiple sources helps to identify where that line is for each student.