

Ensuring Quality Test Reports

When parents decide to have a gifted child tested, they rarely consider the quality of the examiner's report. Finding a tester who knows gifted children is uppermost, proximity is also an issue and, of course, cost is a factor. However, reports vary significantly. They may consist of only a single page of scores; a brief computer-generated report that simply reports scores and discusses relative strengths and weaknesses; two or three pages of scores and interpretations (with or without recommendations); or multiple pages of carefully described background information, current assessment, observations, and recommendations.

The individual intelligence (*IQ*) test usually forms the backbone of gifted testing. Because gifted children reach IQ test ceilings early, the best time to test is when they are young. Therefore, *current* or frequent intelligence tests are not recommended for this population, and a child's *first* test report, from an early age, may be used for many years, provided testing went well and the test had sufficient ceiling. In most cases, it is this original report that serves to document eligibility for numerous programs and guides teachers planning the child's curriculum year by year. For this reason, a quality report is essential because it explains the child's needs to the school.

Even when additional intelligence testing is indicated, that report must document *why* eloquently. If a child needs assessment on a test with a higher ceiling, it must be explained to readers who doubt the existence of higher intelligence. Or, if disabilities accompany giftedness, the report must strongly recommend support for the child's advanced abilities *first*, and ways the weaknesses can be addressed *second*. Many disabilities respond to interventions, so a child whose weaknesses lowered test scores should definitely be retested later to gain a better estimate of abilities. In all of these cases, the report provides pivotal support for advocacy efforts.

When choosing a tester, it is wise to discuss the following. Does the tester's standard style of report include parent information on developmental and health history? Is a positive picture of the unique child painted by the report, using parent and tester observations? Are the tests described and the meaning of the scores interpreted? Are strengths emphasized and any relative weaknesses considered? Are recommendations made for the school, and the parents, to support the child's strengths? If the child has relative weaknesses, are suggestions made for gently accommodating them? Are evaluations with specialists suggested to clarify needs or provide interventions? Are resources offered for further exploration of issues addressed (books, websites, professionals)? Are extra-curricular recommendations made to develop the child's talents in music, dance, art, sports, martial arts or a variety of other activities that appeal to gifted children?

Is the report well-written, scholarly and thoughtful, so that it would be accepted by schools? Are the tests chosen and the use of those tests appropriate to the gifted population and explained thoroughly? The newest generation of tests has subtest and

scoring choices which are still unfamiliar to some testers. Does the report show a current understanding of these issues (e.g., the WISC-IV GAI)—better yet, does it cite references for best practices?

Parents should keep in mind that most testers assess children with disabilities. Few work with a gifted clientele. As a result, typical interpretation looks for relative strengths and weaknesses in relation to a child's mean scores, with an eye to finding the *weaknesses* that explain a child's underachievement or other problems in school. When the tester can find and document these weaknesses, the child may qualify for help through programs that address disabilities.

In contrast, the gifted child needs access to gifted programs and accommodations for advancement, which requires an emphasis on *strengths*. Are the strengths highlighted throughout? Is the level of strengths noted correctly (some testers ignore scores higher than the 99th percentile, when the child actually earned scores as high as the 99.9th percentile or higher)? A thorough description of scores is critical to understanding just how unique the gifted child's learning needs are—and fighting for unusual accommodations to meet them!

Many gifted children are placed with teachers who have minimal background in gifted education. Does the report offer a road map for the teacher to meet the gifted student's needs in a busy classroom? Are concerns voiced by the child's teacher addressed? Many wonder, "Does acceleration hurt social development?" or "If this student is given advanced work, will there be holes in his knowledge?"

The Gifted Development Center writes individually crafted reports for each child. Full reports are minimally 7 to 8 pages long, and cover all of the areas suggested above. First drafts of reports are supervised by senior staff members who check the accuracy of scores, interpretations, and writing quality. Testers revise their edited reports accordingly and re-submit them for a second check for any typos or fine errors that might have been missed. We strive to ensure each report is of the quality we would want for our own children.

A report that can assess not only the gifted child's strengths and weaknesses, but offer educational responses, is truly helpful to the child, the parents, and the teacher. With such a report in hand, the parent advocate's job is considerably easier. The uncertainty about a child's needs is clarified, and the real work of providing options together can begin.

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