



**Pre-K Gifted Program Standards**

Developed for Andrea Wilson's Pre-K Home School  
A Model Program for Gifted Children  
ages 3 to 5

by

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# Pre-K Gifted Program Standards

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**Foreword:**

We were recently approached by a colleague who asked, "What do you do for a two year old who can identify all the letters of the alphabet placed on the refrigerator in random order?"

Which brought up a similar question about a four year old who could visualize complex designs and would then spend forty-five minutes creating them with a small hammer, nails, and wooden geometric shapes.

To better serve these children we needed standards and guidelines for a Pre-K program for gifted children. We Googled every source imaginable and could find no such standards.

The closest we came was the National Association For Gifted Children (NAGC) which has standards for gifted programs K-12 but no separate standards specifically for preschools. We were told, "There hasn't been a demand for such standards, probably because the majority of school districts do not offer gifted services before grade 2 or 3." [Any experienced preschool teacher can tell you that giftedness doesn't start at age seven or eight.]

Four State Departments of Education were contacted and none had any such guidelines or standards specific for Pre-K; therefore, we created our own, by gathering information from experts in the field of education for the gifted.

We would like to thank the following organizations for providing source material:

- The NAGC Position Paper on Early Childhood
- the Connecticut Association for the Gifted "A Teacher's Handbook"
- the Connecticut Department of Education Preschool Assessment Framework (PAF)
- the CT Dept of Ed. Prekindergarten to Grade 8 Curriculum Standards for: English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies
- the Stanford University and University of California 2005 study by S. Loeb et al
- and, the American Association for Gifted Children website at Duke University, "A Special Guide For Parents."

And special thanks to the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) at the University of Connecticut.

**Identification:**

Parent nomination and teacher assessment are the first steps in identifying the gifted child. This is supplemented with the Renzulli-Hartman Scales for Rating Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students (used by many school districts for K-12 screening).

The CT Dept. of Education's Preschool Assessment Framework (PAF), which measures the Performance Standards for 2 ½ to 6 year old children, is the second teacher assessment. The PAF classifies and assesses four domains: Personal and Social,

Physical, Cognitive, and Creative Expression. In this assessment there may be what (for lack of a better term) we are calling "break away ability."

For example, the gifted child will perform at an appropriate age level in most areas assessed; however, if a three year old can hit a golf ball thirty yards, or has a curiosity in math that you would not expect until age five, they have "broken away" from the crowd.

The "break away" observations are then matched to the CT Dept of Ed. Pre-K to Grade 8 Curriculum Standards and an estimate of the age and grade level of that particular aspect of the child's ability is documented. At this point, CogAT tests may be recommended.

The final criterion is a referral to a University, or independent tester, for a Stanford-Binet or a Wechsler test. I.Q. tests are not the sole determinate of giftedness, but they can be useful.

**Curriculum:**

Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood by Dodge and Colker is a widely used and an excellent standard for preschool curriculum. In addition, it ties in well with the CT Preschool Assessment Framework (PAF) and can be applied using the Reggio Emilia philosophy and principles.

The Reggio Emilia principles include:

- Children must have some control over the direction of their learning.

- Children must be able to learn through touching, moving, listening, seeing, and hearing.
- Children have a relationship with other children and with material items in the world which they must be allowed to explore.
- Children must have endless ways and opportunities to express themselves.

Using the guidelines below, from the Connecticut Association for the Gifted's Teacher's Handbook, and the National Association for the Gifted Position Paper on Early Childhood, "Creative Curriculum" can readily be adapted to the gifted. The process of letting the child choose and set the pace (some children like to move on to new things, while others like to go into more depth) is called Emergent Curriculum.

From the C.A.G. Teacher's Handbook:

### **Curriculum**

- Focus on and be organized to include more elaborate, complex, and in-depth study of major ideas, key concepts, and themes that integrate knowledge within and across disciplines.
- Be an extension of core learning, using both acceleration and enrichment strategies. Streamline or compact curriculum that the student is able to master quickly.
- Encourage exposure to, selection of and use of varied, challenging and specialized resources.
- Provide opportunities for students to recognize complex relationships and arrive at sound generalizations.
- Stress higher-level thinking, creativity, and problem solving skills.
- Set high standards that demand rigorous expectations for student work and performance demonstration.

### **Instruction**

- Promote in-depth learning and investigation that deals with real life problems and issues. Select concepts and content that promote students' involvement as practitioners of the discipline.
- Allow for the development and application of productive thinking skills to enable students to re-conceptualize existing knowledge and/or generate new understanding.
- Be flexibly paced and matched to the student's ability, pre-assessment data, learning style, interest, and motivation.

### **Process**

- Provide students with the freedom to choose topics to study and the methods to use in manipulating and transforming information.
- Promote independent, self-directed and in-depth study. Encourage the application of advanced research and methodological skills.
- Focus on open-ended tasks.
- Provide opportunities for students to develop leadership and group interaction skills.
- Allow student-centered discussion, Socratic questioning and seminar-type learning.

The following is quoted from the National Association for the Gifted Children Position Paper on Early Childhood:

#### **Core elements include:**

- recognition of students as individuals who enter school with a unique set of experiences, interests, strengths, and weaknesses that will influence their readiness to learn (Elkind, 1998; Feinburg & Mindess; Smutny & von Fremd, 2004)
- informal and formal observations about student strengths and readiness that inform the planning of learning opportunities (Smutny; Smutny & von Fremd)
- flexibility in the pace at which learning opportunities are provided (Some gifted learners benefit from acceleration to prevent needless repetition while others make

gains with additional time to explore a topic in a more in-depth manner than same-age peers.) (Smutny & von Fremd)

- challenging and content-rich curriculum that promotes both critical and creative thinking across all academic disciplines including reading, math, science, and the arts (Robinson et al., 2002; Smutny & von Fremd)
- opportunities to build advanced literacy skills (Gross, 1999; Stainthorp & Hughes, 2004)
- ample and varied materials including but not limited to technology, print material, and manipulative resources (Barbour & Shaklee, 1998; Bredekamp & Rosegrant; Clark, 2002)
- instructional strategies that foster an authentic construction of knowledge based on exploration, manipulative resources, and experiential inquiry (Barbour & Shaklee; Clark; Katz & Chard),
- early exposure to advanced concepts in age-appropriate ways (Clark; Smutny)
- learning opportunities that provide choice and the development of independent problem solving (Robinson et al.)
- the identification and use of individual student interests to encourage investigative behaviors (Barbour & Shaklee; Smutny & von Fremd)
- interaction and collaboration with diverse peer groups of children having like and different interests and abilities (Bredekamp & Rosegrant; Elkind)
- experiences that range from concrete to abstract (Katz & Chard; Smutny & von Fremd)
- opportunities for social interaction with same-age peers as well as individuals with similar cognitive abilities and interests (Bredekamp & Rosegrant; Clark)
- engagement in a variety of stimulating learning experiences (including hands-on opportunities, imaginative play, and problem-solving) (Barbour & Shaklee; Clark; Smutny), and
- caring and nurturing child-centered environments that support healthy risk-taking behaviors (Barbour & Shaklee; Clark; Elkind; Smutny).

### Learning Environment:

The classroom should be a place of wonder. Classroom centers for math, science, manipulatives, library, language, dramatic play, and art, where children are free to choose activities that challenge their curiosity, are essential. Lesson plans and classroom materials need to be adjusted to meet the child's interests, judiciously using the scaffolding technique as a bridge to the next level, i.e. setting up challenges or assisting children to work "on the edge" of their current competence.

One of the few psychological truths educators and psychologists agree on is that the most learning occurs when an optimal match between the learner's current understanding and the challenge of new learning material has been carefully engineered. (Roedell, Wendy C)

The C.A.G.'s "Teacher's Handbook" has some helpful suggestions for a differentiated classroom.

- Provide multiple opportunities for creative outlets through open-ended projects and products.
- Provide depth in content areas and subjects of interest to gifted students, moving beyond the curriculum.
- Make sure gifted students are not punished with MORE work or a lesser grade because they take a risk. Replace the standard curriculum with more challenging opportunities and/or an accelerated rate of instruction.
- Provide higher-level activities and lesson options on a regular basis, including divergent and evaluative thinking.
- Allow time for gifted students to explore their passion areas and express them in varied disciplines and mediums.

- Provide opportunities for gifted learners to be challenged and encourage perseverance in the face of obstacles.
- Encourage independent study and research skills, including the use of multiple resources and the reading of original documents.
- Reduce the amount of lecture, worksheets, drill, and practice.

**Play:**

Play, whether indoors or outdoors, is an essential part of childhood. Children learn through play.

Outdoor play including running, jumping, throwing, and other gross motor activities can complement a preschool child's ability to focus and concentrate in the classroom.

Gross motor activities help a child develop coordination and confidence.

From Miraca U.M. Gross, PhD:

Hollingworth (1926, 1942) was the first psychologist to undertake a systematic study of peer relationships of children scoring at different levels of intellectual giftedness. She defined the IQ range 125-155 as "socially optimal intelligence" (Hollingworth, 1926). She found that children scoring within this range were well-balanced, self-confident and outgoing individuals who were able to win the confidence and friendship of age-peers.

She claimed, however, that above the level of IQ 160 the difference between the exceptionally gifted child and his or her age-mates is so great that it leads to special problems of development which are correlated with social isolation, and that these difficulties appear particularly acute between the ages of four and nine (Hollingworth, 1931).

The importance of play as an aid to socialization is widely documented.

**Social and Emotional Considerations:**

“How much is too much? The influence of preschool centers on children’s social and cognitive development” by Loeb, Bridges, Bassok, Fuller, and Rumberger was a joint Stanford University and University of California study of about 23,000 kindergarteners from approximately 1,000 kindergarten programs, published in 2005.

Does exposure to center-based care in the year before kindergarten improve children’s outcomes in kindergarten?

The cognitive benefits appear to be modest to strong for some groups; however, researchers estimating effects on children’s social-behavioral outcomes have found largely negative social effects (NICHD ECCRN & Duncan, 2003).

What are the effects of the intensity and duration of center attendance on children?

A concern for parents and policy makers is how much time children should spend in preschool or child-care programs; yet, little empirical work has focused on the effects of the length of exposure to center programs between the ages of two and five years, nor on the intensity of exposure in terms of hours per day.

Research to date on cognitive outcomes generally shows that earlier intervention is best, at least for children from poor families (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Initial work with the California sub-sample of the ECLS-K data indicates that starting center-based care at age three provides a boost to children’s early reading and math skills, in comparison to starting later (Bridges et al.,

2004). Clements, Reynolds, and Hickey (2004) echo this finding for children attending Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPCs).

In contrast, entering child care early may hold negative social-developmental outcomes, including disruptive and aggressive behavior in centers and later in school (Belsky, 2002; Han et al., 2001). These negative effects on social behaviors also have been observed for children who begin center programs later (age four), and they may be associated with the cumulative amount of time in child care, rather than the age of initial entry (Colwell, Pettit, Meece, Bates, & Dodge, 2001). For example, children spending longer hours or more months in center care each year exhibit greater problem behaviors, including elevated levels of aggression and less effective impulse control (Bates et al., 1994; NICHD ECCRN, 2003).

**CONCLUSION:** The results provide evidence that center care improves children's reading and math skills but also increases behavioral problems relative to parental care.

From the NAGC Position Paper on Early Childhood: Research indicates that highly gifted young children frequently hide their advanced abilities or outstanding behaviors in educational settings to fit in socially with their peers (Gross).

From the CAG Teacher's Handbook: Giftedness is fragile ... Gifted students are often ostracized socially ... Without guidance and support, gifted students may lose motivation or underachieve.

What can a parent do?

“Playdates can add stimulation—and fun—to your child's daily life. But socialization—the process of learning how to get along with others—is not the same thing as socializing. Frequent socializing with peers does not necessarily lead to better social skills. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. Too much time with

peers can make kids behave badly. It's the sulky elephant in the room that no one likes to talk about. Even upscale preschools are likely to make kids behave worse. As recent scientific studies confirm, preschool attendance increases childhood stress and retards social development." Gwen Dewar, Ph.D.

Some recommend that parents arrange playdates once a week for two hours or less.

"When gifted children are asked what they most desire, the answer is often 'a friend'." (Silverman, 1993).

Sayler (1997) points out that, "a key issue in friendship is the quality, rather than the quantity of one's friends. Intimate friendships center on an exchange of feelings, insights and confidences. Friendship offers support, closeness, warmth, trust, enjoyment and kindness; indeed, true friendship seeks the good of the other. Intellectually gifted children ... appreciate, at earlier ages, the difference between friendship and popularity."

It is very important that a child have at least one peer social interaction. A noted Yale Child Study Researcher states, " (paraphrased) Having a mutual best friend is a protective factor against being bullied. And if bullied, there are less serious psychopathological consequences if the victim has a best friend." This researcher also states that, "It (bullying) starts in preschool."

Dorothea Ross, Ph.D. (1996) reported that bullying is not uncommon in preschool environments and that assertive children take over these environments.

Small "Home School" Environments vs. Large Preschool Center Environments?

The 2005 Stanford University /University of California, Loeb, Bridges, Bassok, Rumberger, Fuller paper references, "Participation in carefully controlled and expensive 'boutique' preschool (as) generating immediate and long-term benefits (Barnett 1995)."

In his 1995 paper, *Long-Term Effects of Early Childhood Programs on Cognitive and School Outcomes*, Rutgers Professor W. Steven Barnett describes the model “boutique” preschool programs as having: (1) a highly qualified staff closely supervised by experts, (2) lower child-staff ratios, and (3) smaller group size.

**Problem Solving and the Scientific Method:**

Problems, scientific or otherwise, cannot be solved until they can be clearly stated and understood.

Knuffle Bunny by Mo Willems is a wonderful children’s book that illustrates this point.

Preschool teachers are continually telling young children to, “Use your words.” For example, the words, “I have to go potty,” can go a long way toward solving the problem.

This may not seem like the “Scientific Method” but it is. It may be some time before the gifted child uses the complete Scientific Method (i.e. stating the problem, forming a hypothesis, testing it, collecting & analyzing data, and drawing a conclusion) but with repeated success at “Using your words” or defining the problem, the first step will become intuitive.

**Parental Involvement:**

Parents can arrange playdates, enroll their child in enrichment programs, and make sure their child has at least one friend their own age.

From the American Association for Gifted Children(AAGC) website at Duke University:

### **“A Special Guide for Parents”**

#### **How Can I Help?**

- **Read With Your Preschooler!**

Reading with young children is a major factor in the child's later reading and academic performance. Read stories and talk about the pictures. Children know what they want to read at a very early age and often ask to have the same books read over and over.

- **Talk With Your Preschooler!**

Tell stories with your child. Use past and future experiences to help him/her learn that telling stories is different from ordinary conversation. Learning to tell stories may help your child learn the forms and purpose of reading and writing.

- **Write With Your Preschooler!**

Involve your child in reading and writing notes and letters to family and friends. Make lists of household objects and label them. Help your child to think like a writer.

- **Talk About The World!**

Tell your child about the world as you go through it together. Look at maps or a globe before a trip, or when you talk about an out-of-town relative or friend. Explain why leaves change color as you are raking together. Talk about steam as you blow a frosty breath or look at the cloud above a pot of boiling water.

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