

What Each Level Needs During the School Years: A Guide for Educators

Types of Schools

Just as there are Levels of Giftedness, there are Types of Schools. This paper describes only the Kindergarten through 12th grade school years. For ease of explaining what each Level of Giftedness needs, school options have been designated as follows:

- **Type I School** – This is usually a public school that serves the general population with a wide range of student socio-economic backgrounds, including recent immigrants still learning English, residents who may be highly mobile, and sometimes a high proportion of poverty-level students (with many students who qualify for free or reduced lunch).
- **Type II School** – This is a public school, a private parochial school, a small rural school system, or a specialty magnet school which accepts children on criteria other than ability and achievement scores, e.g. a portfolio of previous work or demonstrated talent and interest. This type of school usually draws from a strongly middle class population with few students from families in either poverty or wealth.
- **Type III School** – This type of school has a reputation for high standardized test scores, a high percentage of students going on to colleges and universities, and a virtually non-existent drop-out rate. It can be public or private. Parents are often from a high educational and high socio-economic background, and the school draws from a population with little or no poverty.
- **Type IV School** – This is a magnet school—public or private—for highly gifted students where admissions are based primarily on standardized test scores and demonstrated achievement.
- **Type V School** – This is any school, anywhere, which facilitates continuous progress throughout the subject levels without regard for the children's ages. This type of school or school system instructs all children at their own ability and readiness levels without regard to age or typical grade level designations. It is sometimes described as cross-age grouping or cross-grade grouping. This means that students of varying ages and abilities will be moving at different rates through the school's coursework. Any student feelings of isolation or strangeness will be minimized because all students are grouped flexibly in mixed-aged classes. Schools based on the Montessori method do this type of grouping well, but few Montessori programs are available after the primary grades, which means the opportunity for similarly minded classmates diminishes in the later grades.

Types of Options That Work For Gifted Students

A variety of educational options, which are useful for different Levels of Giftedness, are explained briefly below. Only those relevant to the schools are included in this paper. The following options are presented in an order from the simplest to the most difficult to arrange.

- **Early entrance**
Early entrance gives the child the opportunity to be at a closer mental age to the other children in the class.¹ This approach cost nothing and has been shown to be quite effective.
- **Ability-grouped instruction**
Children of similar learning ability—from an otherwise mixed-ability class—are placed together within the classroom for instruction in one or more subjects.
- **Differentiated Instruction**
In this instructional strategy, the teacher modifies or tiers the instruction and assignments so that children can learn at the pace for which they are ready and complete different levels of

assignments according to their ability to complete them. There are many excellent materials on classroom differentiation, but its utility is limited to children who are not too far different from the core group of children, or who are not already too advanced for the material. A drawback to this approach is that Levels Three, Four and Five students would need to spend the majority of their time working alone, because if it is truly appropriate for the child's own readiness level, no one else in the mixed ability class is likely to be ready for it, too.

- **Single subject acceleration**

In this option, a child stays at her own grade level with age mates for the majority of the day but moves up one or more grade levels in specific subjects where she shows high ability and needs to learn at a more advanced pace. How well this works depends on the child's personality—extroverted students are less likely to accept such accommodations.

- **Online and correspondence courses**

Students may use school time for either method, or the courses can be part of a full or partial home school arrangement. Courses like these provide an alternative to age-level classes that are below the student's learning capabilities; they also avoid placing the youngster in situations (such as college classes with nineteen-year-olds) before the child is ready.

- **Gifted Programs**

School gifted programs can have any or all of the above-mentioned components. However, many programs employ an intermittent pullout method, where children leave their regular classroom for unrelated activities that generally focus on enrichment, particularly "lateral enrichment²". Most gifted programs also start very late—at 3rd grade.

- **Whole grade acceleration**

This option involves moving ahead of age mates by skipping a full grade and receiving instruction with older students. *A Nation Deceived: How America Holds Back Its Gifted Children* (2004), referred to earlier, analyzes acceleration research from more than 100 years. There is no question but that acceleration is the most effective approach to maximizing children's learning. *The Iowa Acceleration Scale*³ (2003) is a tool to guide a child study team through a discussion of indicators regarding whether a child is a good candidate for a full grade skip, or whether some other option, such as single subject acceleration, or mentoring, should be considered instead.

- **Full time ability-grouped classroom**

Children of similar stages of intellectual development are placed together for instruction in all of their subjects all day, every day. This option can be part of a magnet school, a gifted magnet program within a school, or simply a cross-section of the students in one school who are ready to learn together at a specific, identified level of instruction. For example, the teachers within an elementary school can identify all the students—regardless of their current age or grade-level—who are ready for algebra instruction and bring them together daily for instruction with one teacher who has the necessary background in algebra.

- **Radical Acceleration**

This is a process of promoting or grade skipping a child more than a single grade at a time, possibly more than once, so that he or she takes progressively more complex and advanced subjects with progressively older and older classmates thereby graduating from high school early and entering university anywhere from two to six years younger than is usual.

- **Advanced coursework in high school**

Honors courses, Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate⁴ (IB) are options that senior high school students have in some high schools. Honors courses are special courses that an individual school designs and offers for advanced students. Some schools have honors courses available from sixth grade through high school. AP courses are actually college level

courses with exams that qualify students for concurrent high school and college credit. IB is a rigorous program that follows a specific course and is less flexible than AP class choices. It requires fluency in a foreign language, and four years of lab science, for example.

- **Concurrent enrollment**

Concurrent enrollment generally refers to the practice of attending both college and high school classes at the same time. Some states actually pay tuition for advanced, qualifying students to take university courses for both college and high school credit. The students attend high school, live at home, but take one or more courses at a nearby institution of higher learning. They receive credit for the class in both high school and college. A middle school student who attends one or more high school classes and receives high school credit is also using a concurrent enrollment option.

Level One Needs

Early Grade School Years

The Level One children are already ahead of Type I school curriculum goals, but a Type II or III school will likely have primary grade goals that are more advanced. It is ideal if Level One children can attend such academically challenging schools during the primary and middle school grade years. If they can, further adjustment is rarely needed. Most Level One students won't qualify for most Type IV schools—magnet schools for gifted students—unless they are from a recognized underrepresented group, and I would not advise parents to send Level One children to schools where the academic level and pace is too strenuous. It is demoralizing and does not lead to better learning. A Type V school—a school which facilitates continuous progress for each child—would be wonderful, of course, if such a school is available.

If the child attends a Type I school, one way to accelerate the complexity of the curriculum is to move the child into a slightly older group of classmates by using early entrance, single subject acceleration, or a full grade skip. A full-grade acceleration will take care of advanced learning needs of Level One students without putting their social and emotional interactions too out-of-sync with their classmates. Cluster grouping, in-class ability grouping, and instructional differentiation also meet the needs of many Level One students, but it is important that the other children in the group actually are as capable as they.

Middle School Years

Middle schools, just like the elementary schools, almost always group students solely by age. Since the achievement gap between the slowest learners and the fastest learners gets larger every year, the gap between the classroom instructional level and the Level One child's achievement and ability level is quite large by the time a child reaches middle school. Ability grouped or accelerated courses are the simplest approach, but if that doesn't happen, Level One students can benefit from taking one or two subjects at the high school, by working with a tutor on advanced curriculum replacing one or two regular classes, or taking an on-line course.

High School Years

Most high schools are fine for Level One students because coursework is offered for different ability levels. Level One students should register for all required courses, some Honors courses, and at least one Advanced Placement (AP) course per semester. They should take advantage of the activities that high school provides, and make sure they don't concentrate more on perfect grades than in rounding out their experiences, the breadth of their high school transcript and their portfolio for college admissions and recommendation letters.

If the Type I high school has no AP or college-level advanced courses, teachers should arrange for such children to take at least one demanding, higher-level course each year to give the student the opportunity to practice study skills and experience academic rigor. This can be accomplished with on-line or university correspondence courses, or through a university affiliated summer institute for advanced students. Level One students should thrive in Type I and II schools, and may find a Type III school too competitive. They should be careful not to enroll in too many AP or Honors courses at the same time. It takes more time for Level One students to learn new material than it does Level Two and Three students — the students who are most plentiful in Type III high schools.

Social Life for Level One Children

Level One children appear frequently in most school populations, which makes it easier to group them in ways that enable optimal social interactions and friendship formation. When classrooms are organized by age, and abilities are mixed for the majority of the day's instruction and activities, social life for the Level One child is enhanced if their place in the mix is slightly above average for the group. This is why a Type II and sometimes a Type III school automatically provide a good social fit for such students. Level One children who attend Type I schools may experience great loneliness and find it difficult to tolerate the interests and activities of their classmates. This is particularly sad when, as a result, teachers and parents blame the child for poor social skills and a bad attitude. Conversely, Level One children who attend Type III schools may find themselves in the lower half of the group as far as their learning abilities are concerned. Under these circumstances, they can develop an inaccurate self-concept that their ability and potential are relatively lower than is the case. This can lead to bitterness, hostility toward the perceived advantages of others, or efforts to compete too hard or not at all.

Level Two Needs

Early Grade School Years

Most Level Two children could complete the basic K-6 curriculum in about three years if it were compacted or telescoped for them. The best education solution for Level Two children is placement in Type III, IV or V schools. They easily qualify for gifted programs, of course, but unless the program provides full time ability grouping, acceleration, or continuous progress, it does not offer enough to stimulate the potential of Level Two students. When Level Two students attend Type I schools, they desperately need grade acceleration or ability grouping across grade levels in order to have their social as well as their academic needs met.

If the child cannot go to a Type III or IV school, and the available gifted program is just an infrequent pullout, then subject level acceleration is an excellent first-step option. It is not unusual for a Level Two child to need to move up two to four grades in several subjects to receive the appropriate pace and content. Generally, the student can continue with that particular group rather than skip any further grades after the initial acceleration. School systems could provide the same transportation assistance for accelerated students as they currently do for special education students to go to instruction and therapies in other buildings. If there were transportation, depending on the size of the school district, students from numerous grade levels could be brought together at one location for instruction at their own readiness levels.

Middle School Years

Mixed ability same-aged grouping does not work at all well for Level II students by middle school. Parents and teachers must understand that not all of the classes and assignments are good for

such children. Although compliant and adaptable children may appear to be “okay,” grade level instruction often creates severe underachievement and loss of precious learning opportunities for Level Two students. For less compliant students, teachers must recognize that the children’s resistance is a clear sign that the school environment is inappropriate, and changes are needed, such as taking higher level courses through the high school and ability grouping for core subjects at the very least.

The achievement range within a typical middle school mixed-ability 7th grade class goes from approximately 3rd grade equivalency to post-graduate college level⁵. Level Two gifted students may require more than acceleration of one grade, and not just for math. Type III schools appear to be the most convenient option for Level Two students because all students will be college bound, and additional academic arrangements are seldom required. Independent study with or without a tutor or mentor is a good option. Even when the children crave social interaction and opportunities, Level Two learners are too different from the instructional level of most mixed-ability classrooms to benefit significantly in the typical middle school’s social or academic arena.

High School Years

High school is generally a refuge for gifted students because they are finally with true peers, people who get their jokes, in ability based classes. Each of their 9th grade high school semesters could contain at least three courses that are taught at a rigorous level. Professional or individual tutoring services may be necessary for renewing the confidence and developing the now-needed study skills that many Level Two did not develop prior to high school, but which they now need. Students should also sign up for sports, music, drama, visual arts, and different organizations that interest them so that they can meet others who share similar interests.

By the time Level Two students are ability grouped for difficult courses, they will meet students who are smarter than they are—Level Three and Four students in a large high school, or maybe even one Level Five. Someone needs to explain this to them, and maybe to their parents, so that they don’t assume they aren’t good enough or aren’t trying hard enough when they encounter this new level of competition.

Many Type I school districts have high schools that will meet the needs of Level Two students. The exception may be the small rural school. In a school that does not offer advanced classes, concurrent college enrollment or online courses will be essential. If the student can’t afford the cost, scholarships and financial aid awards are available.

Social Life for Level Two Children

Whether or not Level Two students will feel particularly odd, different, or lonely depends upon which type of school setting they experience. If they are in a school where there are many others like themselves intellectually—some Type II and most Type III and IV schools—they will experience more accepting and positive feedback than if they are around children who don’t appreciate or understand what they are talking about. Intellectual compatibility is ultimately more important to social relationships and interactions than socio-economic class. It is a fallacy to conclude that the typical middle school environment, which is set up to cater to the social interests and needs of adolescents while maintaining little or no ability grouping or academic acceleration, is socially good for Level Two students. Most high schools, however, work fairly well socially for Level Two, and these are the students who are most likely to enjoy taking on leadership roles.

Level Three Needs

Early Grade School Years

For their primary grade years Level Three children need to be in a school environment where what they are already able to do is not taught over and over again. If they could travel through the elementary material at their own pace, most Level Three children could complete all six grades in about two years.⁶ If they need to wait for the slower pace of the rest of the class, they learn to underachieve and hate repetition; they have trouble paying attention; and they feel hostility toward the teacher who has the power to make them do things they already know how to do. They can also feel like social isolates among same-aged children whose interests and abilities may be very different from their own.

Almost all kindergarten programs will be more enjoyable and acceptable to Level Three children than a more structured 1st grade. Because of this, I usually recommend *against* early entrance for Level Three children so that they can start school with their age mates and then skip 1st grade. If the school doesn't allow a later skip to 2nd grade, then early entrance is the next best option. Being younger than most of their 1st grade classmates takes away a slight bit of these students' intellectual advantage and makes the slower pace a little more tolerable for a while. Level Three children who skip a grade or start early will still be the smartest kids in their classes under most circumstances, and will certainly be better off than if they had stayed with age mates.

The best place for grade school Level Three children is a Type III, IV or V school that has flexibility and allows for subject level acceleration and some ability grouping across ages. After either early entrance or an early grade skip, there is little short of a special school for the Highly Gifted that will meet the needs of a Level Three elementary aged child. A gifted magnet school or a self-contained classroom for gifted students is a good start. Subject-level acceleration in all core subjects is a good option. Any ability grouping that includes Level Three students must draw from a large enough population group that at least ¼ of the class is Level Three or above, and none of the students is below a high Level One. Exceptions to this include classes where the Level One student is exceptionally gifted in that subject domain. There are instances where a Level Three child is not as gifted as a Level One child in a particular subject area, for example.

Middle School Years

The learning disparity between the bottom and the top of most mixed-ability classes is so large that little meaningful learning takes place for Level Three students. If the Level Three student is in a Type I school, the slowest learners still struggle at very basic reading and math skill levels—some as low as 2nd and 3rd grade—while the highest learners can already read, interpret and analyze material at college levels. Although the achievement spread isn't as severe in Type II and Type III schools, it can be troublesome enough to lead to poor study habits and underachievement for Level Three students.

The old junior high format with tracking and ability grouping worked well for Level Three students both academically and socially. Present day middle schools, however, do very little ability grouping, and advanced courses are usually only one year advanced. Level Three students can successfully take community college courses by the time they are about 11 or 12 years old, but socially and emotionally that is a less than ideal solution for such young students.

Type III, IV and V schools are a good start for Level Three, and the middle schools of private college preparatory schools—Type III schools—are considerably more advanced than their public counterparts. Public schools can accomplish much the same if the middle school is located close enough to high school buildings to permit advanced students to attend high school classes in core subjects. On-line courses, correspondence courses through a university, tutors or mentors, and

independent progress designed by parents to be completed at school or at home can all enhance the middle school years while still allowing the student to benefit from the activities and social interactions at school that work for him or her.

High School Years

Most High schools provide the kind of options that Level Three students need for academic and social success. Type I school systems are the exception. If a student is in a rural area or a school with a high level of poverty and a majority of students who are well below the national average in achievement, then early college is almost a necessary choice. Many areas offer concurrent enrollment in high school and college, and some provide funding for high school age students to take university courses. Students who attend high schools that offer AP or IB courses should be sure to take a wide variety of courses, and can expect to handle at least two or three advanced courses per semester while also participating in other school activities. Both AP and IB are challenging options; the primary difference is flexibility. The International Baccalaureate Program is prescribed and works well for students who simply want to follow a predesigned program. Some Level Three students will prefer the flexibility of Advanced Placement courses because they may want to specialize or pace their course load to work with the rest of their activities and schedule—sometimes light, and sometimes more intensive.

Social Life for Level Three Children

People in Level Three can be at great risk for social difficulties because they are usually away from others like themselves through so many years of school. The key for good social interactions and friendships is to arrange classes and other activities where other Level Two, Three, Four and Five people are involved. Young people learn good social skills when they spend time with others who “get their jokes” and share many of the same interests and abilities.

Level Four Needs

Early Grade School Years

Level Four children could complete the typical elementary curriculum in about a year; thus, it would be difficult to find any school that could meet such children’s needs without significant adjustment. Type I schools rarely have any Level Four children in them; Type II schools usually have at least one per grade level; Type III schools have at least one and sometimes more in each class; and Type IV gifted magnet schools for Highly Gifted will have a noticeable proportion of them, though it depends upon the size of the district or the area from which they draw.

These children are more than highly gifted, and even a Type IV or V school will need to provide some subject level acceleration and ability grouping across age levels. How much adjustment will need to be made depends upon which Type of school the child attends. Some Level Four children are significantly advanced in all subject areas, but some are more—or less—gifted in only one subject area, or two. Educators and parents should not expect uniform achievement. They must also keep in mind that Level Four students may balk at inappropriate assignments or classroom situations and not do well in school, i.e. get poor grades.

The goal is to give Level Four children a chance to take as many subjects as they can at their actual ability level while they are in their elementary grade years. These children are capable of moving through the curriculum so fast that a school team, along with the parents, needs to decide how they want to balance social, emotional, and academic aspects of the children’s childhoods. A metropolitan area might establish a school and provide transportation for all students who are this bright, as has been done in the Seattle area⁷. With this option, Level Four students develop

acceptance of challenging material, are less likely to develop habits of underachievement, learn organizational and study skills, and learn at least a portion of what they are capable of learning during these early years.

The fit is so poor for a Level Four child in a Type I school that parents must search for other options and try to at least integrate alternatives into the child's schedule as often as possible. A Type I school rarely has a Level Four child in it at all, so individualizing and ability grouping for such a child would be difficult except through a form of radical acceleration⁸. A Level Four child in a Type I school is an ideal candidate for a school choice move to a high performing Type III school; and even then he or she will still need subject-level acceleration and tutor or mentor support in advanced subjects.

Middle School Years

The only middle school options that work well for Level Four children are a highly flexible Type III or IV school that is willing to accelerate a child or group children in some subjects by ability, radical acceleration right into high school, or homeschooling. The long-term effects of inappropriate curriculum can be significant. The middle school period is the period where the most emotional damage is done to Level Four students if their needs are overlooked or if they seem to be adjusting too well and are left to fend for themselves. These students can easily handle high school courses by the time they are in middle school and should be allowed and helped to go where the courses are or be allowed to take correspondence or on-line courses. Academic talent search evening or summer courses should be allowed to supplant middle school coursework rather than be added on top of it.

High School Years

Level Four high school students must have regular access to advanced courses through Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), college courses, or concurrent enrollment in both high school and college courses. The personality and interests of the individual will determine whether AP or IB is more appropriate. Sometimes it is better for Level Four students to simply leave high school without graduating. A GED (Graduate Equivalency Diploma) is possible, and easy to obtain, but isn't necessary for gaining admission to college programs. Level Four students should weigh carefully whether or not the available high school programs are adequate and appropriate for their learning needs, and seriously consider at least part-time enrollment in order to enjoy some of the social or athletic benefits of high school while pursuing other learning elsewhere. As mentioned in other sections, many concurrent enrollment programs allow highly or exceptionally gifted youngsters to complete high school and college at the same time on a college campus. However, living away from home so young doesn't suit everyone, and some of the programs specifically designed for concurrent enrollment are actually not challenging enough for Level Four students.

Social Life for Level Four Children

Level Four children and adults spend a great deal of their childhood time with people who don't always understand them or appreciate their interests. Because of their early and persistent existentialism, their awareness of what could be, and their general inability to be less cerebral than they really are, Level Four people often have trouble making casual social connections. Obviously, social awkwardness can be painful. It makes no sense and is inappropriate to force Level Four children to work on any but the most rudimentary friendship skills with others who are very intellectually different from them. They do need to learn to be polite and sensitive to other's needs, of course. Because the brightest students from an entire district are pulled together for advanced

courses in high school, Level Four students may finally have the opportunity to enjoy class time with others who appreciate their insights and truly enjoy their company. If they are fortunate, they will meet a few others like themselves in an academically challenging college or university environment, as well.

What School Systems Could Do for Level Four

School systems can start by simply recognizing that different students have different educational needs and abilities, as well as social and emotional needs, and that these require a variety of flexible options and approaches. This must be stated as policy and part of the school's mission statement. The school can train its personnel to recognize Level Four children so that they can be proactive in placing them with others whose mental ages and abilities are more in line with the Level Four student for as much of each day as possible. The school system can train teachers to pay closer attention to standardized test scores, and to grasp that student achievement is measured less by compliance to school assignments and requirements than by standardized achievement test results. Level Four children's behavior in school should not be used to determine whether or not they "deserve" appropriate instruction at their own level.

The school system also can arrange for an entire school community or district to pull its brightest students together for instructional time and social opportunities during each school day. The school can permit and support subject level radical acceleration and offer the opportunity to "test out" of courses where the student has already learned the material. The school can modify its course, promotion, and graduation requirements for such students, especially at the high school level where a diploma is currently denied unless all required courses are taken regardless of the student's demonstrated mastery of the subjects.

Level Five Needs

Early Grade School Years

Level Five children could easily complete the typical elementary curriculum in less than one year, largely because most Level Five children start school already knowing more than the typical 5th or 6th grader. School Types I, II, III, and V – do not regularly have any Level Five children in them. Type IV gifted magnet schools for Highly Gifted may attract Level Five children, but unless the school has enough grade levels to provide great flexibility and continuous progress, the situation will still be problematic for the family of a Level Five student. Gifted magnet schools are usually found only in large metropolitan areas, and they may not serve all the school systems within the area. This lessens the chances that more than one or two Level Five students will ever be in any one school at the same time. If a metropolitan area of two to four million people had one highly gifted magnet school, there might be at least one Level Five child per age group, but these students would need more than the regular curriculum and pacing provided by the school. These children need subject level acceleration and ability grouping across age levels. Under no circumstances is it appropriate to keep a Level Five student with age mates at grade level for more than socialization-type activities during the elementary years.

As with Level Four students, the goal should be to give Level Five children a chance to take as many subjects as they can at their actual ability level while they are still in their elementary years. This means that even though they can stay in elementary school for gym, recess, lunch, and field trips, they should skip quickly through most subjects to middle school level, talent search programs for math by age eight or nine, and tutoring at their level for a variety of subjects until they are independent enough to work in a classroom with 7th graders and older. The only appropriate academic subject at grade level for a Level Five child is handwriting, and then only for a year or

two. Whether in school or home school options will work best depends on the child's personality, but in either case, parents and schools should work together to find mentors, special classes, tutors, and activities to increase exposure to others who can provide social as well as intellectual opportunities.

These children are capable of moving through the curriculum so fast that parents need to discuss and then decide how they want to balance social, emotional, and academic aspects of their child's childhood. Ideally, children would simply go at their own pace learning in great depth with others who learn like they do, but Level Five children are truly too unusual for this to happen very easily.

Middle School Years

By the time they are the regular age for middle school, typically 5th or 6th grade or age 10 or 11, Level Five children are easily ready for the challenges of college courses. Even the best, most advanced middle schools cannot meet the academic and learning needs of a Level Five child except through some coursework when the child is about seven or eight years old. I do not recommend a middle school environment for a seven or eight-year-old child, however. Although some parents start their children in college at this point, considerable longitudinal and observational feedback from people who did this indicates that it works fairly well at the time, but that the students often end up wondering what they missed by skipping high school. For that reason, I generally recommend a combination of correspondence courses along with high school and accelerated program attendance during the normal middle school years, ages nine to 13. Many Level Five students complete most of the high school coursework and get a good start on college courses by the time they are 12 or 13; some are happy to do this when they are even younger. Although Level Five—and many Level Four—children could start college coursework in their strongest academic areas by age 9 or 10, this works best when the child does not actually attend classes with college-age students.

High School Years

The high school “coming of age” years are such a strong part of our nation's identity that many Level Five students will want to experience it, at least for a while. Parents who have worked hard for years to provide flexible environments and accelerated opportunities for their Level Four and Five children should not feel too disappointed if their youngsters opt for something more normal and traditional at this juncture. These students should take all the advanced courses that are available and participate in all the academic competitions, the arts, sports, and social opportunities that interest them. Many Level Five students start college with their first year or two completed ahead of time, thanks to Advanced Placement course exams taken in high school and a number of the other previously mentioned options, but they can still join others their age in the freshman dorms and mixers.

Social Life for Level Five Children

More than any other Level, it is important to help Level Five children to look for and be around people of all ages who share their interests. It is possible to have many different peers—one for chess, one for silly stuff, one for video games, one for trivia contests, and still another for hiking or bike riding, for example. If the child's schedule is flexible and the parents are open to many different programs and opportunities, Level Five children will find friends and enjoyable companions everywhere they go. When someone is very different from others, parents need to talk honestly about these differences and help their children to navigate socially and look for ways to connect with and show interest in others. There is no need for any of us to get along with everyone we meet, but we can learn how to look for the best in others, be polite, and keep looking for those

with whom we want to spend more time. Even Level Five people can make good, fulfilling social connections, especially if they have been shown how during their formative years.

What School Systems Could Do for Level Five

School systems can help Level Five students by formulating policy that allows very flexible programming for such children and by listening to parents. All of the Level Five children I have known had parents who advocated for them almost immediately upon entering school. Their needs were simply incredibly obvious to their parents.

Because these children almost always score very high on standardized achievement tests, it is not too difficult to prove to the school that something needs to be done. Administrators and teachers then need to react to the parents in a supportive way, deciding jointly what course of action to follow to confirm the child's ability level, and then helping the parents design a flexible, supportive educational pathway that enables use of the schools where possible, yet not suffering from undo criticism or truancy issues while they find their way.

Level Five children should never have to stay at grade level instruction. After skipping middle school coursework, they should be allowed to take every course that the high school offers that interests them. They should not be required to meet graduation standards and projects that have no relevance to their advanced mastery of many subjects unless they, themselves, decide it would be fun or interesting. Because each Level Five child may be the only experience the school ever experiences—and the parents certainly haven't traveled this road before, either—the school should remain flexible and open to some trial and error.

¹ In the early years of school, mental age is greatly connected to chronological age. There is somewhat of a ceiling effect for certain kinds of intellectual abilities that makes small degrees of difference less noticeable and important as children get older. By this I mean that by the time highly intelligent people are adults, it doesn't matter how old the other adults are with whom they work or study; it only matters if they are intellectually and socially compatible. For example, for the purpose of playing together, it matters if one child *can* do a puzzle and another cannot. Nearly all older children can do puzzles even though some will continue to enjoy them and do better at them than others.

² Lateral enrichment is an instructional method that adds depth of content to the subject matter rather than one that moves the students ahead of their age mates. It is most acceptable in literature and social studies type classes where more reading, discussion, and fact learning with higher order thinking are included. For example, the whole class may be studying communities and using just their grade level textbook. The advanced learners could also be assigned separate literature such as biographies or nonfiction material that goes into more depth about some facet of community life. These students would then get an opportunity to discuss what they read, present it to the class, or develop some sort of product – a paper, a model, a series of labeled photos from the Internet – to add to their learning experience. The problem with lateral enrichment is that busy teachers often don't have enough time to sustain the separate group and instead add more worksheets or extra end-of-chapter questions rather than substantive material.

³ *The Iowa Acceleration Scales* are one such excellent tool for measuring the advantages and disadvantages for specific students to grade skip.

⁴ International Baccalaureate is a program designed to combine the educational goals of numerous countries covering specialization as well as breadth. Different schools provide this option for 16-19 year-olds within their high school setting.

⁵ Lohman, D. F. (1999). Minding our p's and q's: On finding relationships between learning and intelligence. In P. L. Ackerman, P. C. Kyllonen, & R. D. Roberts (Eds.), *Learning and individual differences: Process, trait, and content determinants* (pp. 55-76). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

⁶ This information is based on my personal experience as an elementary classroom teacher and my study of an extensive comparison of achievement test data as it relates to children of different ages and grade levels.

⁷ Seattle's Accelerated Progress Program (APP) established by the late Halbert Robinson of the University of Washington is at least two years' advanced of typical curriculum and is for about 1000 students from around the Seattle area grades K through 8 each year.

⁸ Radical acceleration is moving the child up through as many grade levels as necessary to have him or her work at the right level and pace for the ability. This often puts the child out of sync with classmates as far as size, dexterity, and maturity and can lead to social and emotional problems or unhappiness unless there is a lot of support for the child.