

# What Motivates Gifted Learners?

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Gifted students develop asynchronously, which means that different aspects of their learning process develop at different rates. For example, a child who looks unmotivated by the same stimuli as other children of the same age may have developed at a different pace and therefore finds different stimuli motivating. Gifted children might also suffer from physical, social or emotional issues. It is important to identify what motivates students in order to engage them in classroom material.

## Starting by Identifying a Gifted Cluster Group

Grouping gifted students into cohorts helps them engage each other and their teachers. Gifted theorists call this “cluster grouping” because teachers group students together based on ability. Identifying ability in gifted learners can be difficult because these students are not always high achievers in traditional academic environments; however, different assessment tools and informal teacher observations can help identify the gifted cluster.

Once teachers and administrators identify these students, it is critical to make sure these students learn from someone with a [master’s degree in gifted and talented education](#). Graduates with this degree understand how cluster grouping works, how to compact education, and how to use depth and complexity to expand students’ thinking. The more high-level thinking gifted learners engage in, the more interest they will take in the classroom.

## Teaching Motivation to Gifted Learners

According to B. MacDonald in *Today’s School: Shared Leadership in Education*, motivation depends largely on our needs, expectations and incentives – all of which students can learn. Non-academic interests often motivate students who do not achieve in school. If teachers can determine the nature of these interests, they can use them to teach motivation to underachieving students. Teachers enrolled in an online master’s degree in gifted and talented program can study student expectations and motivation, which prepares them to effectively evaluate and implement theories of motivation and cognitive engagement in the classroom.

## Strategies for Promoting Motivation in Gifted Learners

Motivating gifted learners requires a shift in mindset. All students deserve to learn something new every day, regardless of standard benchmarks. The following strategies can help

teachers motivate gifted students who struggle to engage in the classroom:

- Provide choices to increase motivation.
- Establish long- and short-term goals.
- Give pre-tests to ensure students are encountering new material.
- Teach students to be organized so they know what teachers expect of them.
- Coach students by supporting strengths and modeling how to overcome weaknesses.
- Vary instructional methods for different topics.

### Respect Their Hard Work, Not Their Intelligence

When parents and teachers praise gifted students for their intelligence, they may be damaging motivation because these students do not struggle intellectually. It is more valuable to praise their hard work, which actually challenges them. Gifted learners often hear that they are smart, so they may not feel the need to go to any extra effort in a standard classroom. When teachers demonstrate how hard work and perseverance affects self-perception and motivation, students may begin to change their minds about school and how to engage it.

Learn more about [Lamar University's Master of Education in Teacher Leadership with a specialization in Gifted and Talented online.](#)

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Sources:

[Educational Research Service: Identifying and Motivating Underachievers](#)

[nprEd: Who Are the 'Gifted and Talented' and What Do They Need?](#)

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