

Enrichment

Your child's most meaningful and impactful educational experiences may happen after school, in an enrichment program, or activity.

In school, gifted children often cannot delve as deeply as they would like into the subjects that interest them—whether they be academic, creative, athletic pursuits, or even hobbies. Enrichment activities, typically extending beyond the school curriculum, can fulfill this need, with the added benefit of socializing with like-minded peers.

Enrichment programs exist in a wide variety of formats and usually occur after school, on the weekend, or during the summer. However, opportunities are often not well-marketed, so it may be worth asking fellow parents, teachers, and administrators about programs in your area.

If you live too far from a program or cannot manage the time and expense involved, you can begin by exploring opportunities nearby. These might include mentorships (with local talent), community resources at libraries, cultural and nature centers, or scholarships at visual or performing arts studios. If your child wants to attend a particular program, you can inquire about transportation options and sliding scale tuition; many programs offer help in these areas.

QUESTIONS PARENTS OFTEN ASK

What are the benefits of enrichment programs?

Enrichment for gifted children is critical to their talent development. Programs can be especially valuable due to their accelerated pace, greater depth, and wide range of topics outside the typical school curriculum. Research has also shown that there are definite socio-emotional benefits to gifted children participating in enrichment programs. They need exposure to peers who share their interests and passions, which further ignites their intellectual growth and love of learning.

What are the different types of enrichment programs?

Elementary students often find appropriate enrichment programs at their own school, through local community organizations, or cultural institutions. These are typically after-school or weekend classes that may meet once a week for a semester.

In addition to after-school and weekend classes, **middle and high school students** have the option of attending summer day and residential programs offered by universities such as Duke, Johns Hopkins, Northwestern, Stanford, or fine arts organizations, such as the Interlochen Center for the Arts or Boston University's Tanglewood Institute. Applicants for these types of programs often have to test in or audition for the program. (Continued)



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

» Enrichment programs are not meant to replace a full day of appropriate academic services for gifted learners.

» As your child's first teacher, you have a wealth of information and insight on her abilities, needs, and interests. Do not underestimate your ability to provide enrichment through local and online resources.

» Share your passions and expertise with your child, create networks with other parents to serve underchallenged children, and mine local resources to enrich your child's learning in significant ways.

» Avoid overscheduling your child. After intense periods of learning, gifted children need unstructured time to decompress.

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QUESTIONS PARENTS OFTEN ASK

What are the different types of enrichment programs? (continued)

Competitions are another way to introduce enrichment opportunities to your gifted child by giving them a chance to showcase and be recognized for their abilities and talents.

While many of these are school-based options, parents can volunteer to start a team or chapter with their child's school. Many are subject-based competitions (MathCounts, WordMasters, International Torrance Legacy Creativity Awards), while others are creative problem-solving challenges (Destination Imagination, Future Problem Solving Program International, Odyssey of the Mind).

How do I know whether an enrichment program is right for my child?

When considering an enrichment program, look for depth, rigor, flexibility, and exploration in your child's interests. And, be sure it includes a high dosage of fun!

Avoid programs that offer little more than the kind of work your child is already doing in school. Ideally, the program's teachers are experts in their subjects who can share their passion and ignite it in the group. Children should be active participants in researching and choosing appropriate enrichment for themselves. Research has shown that when children are self-motivated and interested, they will have better outcomes.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- **Are the learning experiences organized by key concepts?** Gifted children may already have a breadth of knowledge about a subject. Classes that primarily teach facts will be too simplistic for them.
- **Do they offer a higher degree of difficulty, require higher level thinking skills, or prompt creative problem solving?** Many gifted learners will enjoy the challenge of finding solutions to problems that do not have a clear right or wrong answer or only one way of doing things.
- **Who are the classes taught by?** Enrichment classes should be taught by experts in the field and, preferably, by teachers experienced in working with gifted children. Look for programs that have a track record of success with your type of child.
- **What will happen if my child is already familiar with the concepts?** Enrichment programs should not have a "one size fits all" program, but rather allow your child to move faster or go deeper on a project.
- **How do previous participants feel about the program?** Search for testimonials from previous program participants to learn about their experiences first-hand.

LEVELS OF PROGRAMS

Introductory-level enrichment introduces a child to an area of interest and may be easier to find, local, and inexpensive. Look to local organizations, schools, cultural institutions, sports programs, and online learning as resources.

Intermediate and advanced learning classes further develop an area of strength and may be further afield, more expensive, and lead by an expert in the field. Examples include sport travel teams, academic and creative problem-solving competitions, weekend programs, and summer (day and residential) programs.



FOR MORE INFO

Browse:

Art of Problem Solving,
artofproblemsolving.com

NAGC's Gifted & Talented Resource Directory, www.nagc.org

Student Education Programs,
studenteducationprograms.com

Search:

Destination Imagination
Future Problem Solving Program Intl
Intl Torrance Legacy Creativity Awards
Kids Philosophy Slam
MathCounts
Odyssey of the Mind
Science Olympiad
WordMasters

Read:

Serving gifted learners beyond the traditional classroom: A guide to alternative programs and services by Joyce VanTassel-Baska (2007).

The best competitions for talented kids: Win scholarships, big prize money, and recognition by Frances Karnes & Tracy Riley (2014).



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