



**GUIDE**  
**TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM**  
**IN THE UNITED STATES**

BY

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# OPPORTUNITIES FOR “GIFTED AND TALENTED” STUDENTS IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

## Elementary and Middle School

In Elementary and Middle schools, gifted education programs support students with special talents. Special talents are defined and identified differently in different school districts; however, they generally refer to students who need more rigor or challenge in one or more areas of the curriculum. “Gifted Students” are identified through standardized test scores, recommendations from classroom teachers or resource teachers, anecdotal information that might be available, etc.

Gifted education programs respond to a student’s individual needs and provide him/her with challenging learning activities. The Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning recommends two components for gifted services: curriculum-based services and student-based services. Curriculum-based services are modifications of the regular curriculum in response to the learning needs of the student. Student-based services are those learning opportunities above and beyond the regular curriculum and often extended to learning activities outside the classroom.

Gifted education programs are implemented differently in different school districts, and may include a variety of services, including direct instruction with a gifted resource teacher, classes with an enriched curriculum, and special extracurricular opportunities. Often, even students not formally identified for gifted services benefit from all-school enrichment programs (often offered in the form of extracurricular afternoon activities) and events. In addition, students who demonstrate a need in the classroom might qualify for some services, such as special pullout lessons along with formally identified gifted students.

Generally, gifted services are founded on the assumption that school staff and family will work in partnership. The underlying belief is that parental involvement is a significant factor in a student’s success, and schools strongly encourage parent participation and involvement in their child’s school career. In fact, it is not uncommon for parents to advocate for their own children so that they are given access to gifted resources.

## High School

Many high schools provide Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. These are special forms of honors classes where the curriculum is more challenging and lessons more aggressively paced than standard courses.

AP classes follow a rigorous standardized curriculum and prepare students for final examinations that are scored on a numeric scale, 1 to 5.

IB programs are administered by the International Baccalaureate Organization, a recognized pre-university educational program. They offer curricula that are broadly applicable worldwide and acceptable for university entrance qualification in countries throughout the world. Students take six subjects, and must also complete 3 extra requirements: the Theory of Knowledge course (ToK), a 4000-word Extended Essay (EE), and at least 150 hours in CAS (Creativity, Action, Service) areas. Marks are awarded from 1 to 7 in each subject with 7 being the highest, and up to three additional points may be awarded depending on the results of the EE and ToK essays. The maximum possible point total in the Diploma Program is 45. In order to receive an International Baccalaureate Diploma, candidates must receive a minimum of 24 points.

AP or IB courses are usually taken during the 11th or 12th grade of high school. Students can self-select to take AP or IB courses or might receive a referral by their teachers.

Most colleges take AP or IB exam results into consideration in the admissions process. Because AP and IB courses are intended to be the equivalent of the first year of college courses, some colleges may grant unit credit which enables students to graduate early. Other institutions use examinations for placement purposes only: students are exempted from introductory course work but may not receive credit towards a concentration, degree, or core requirement. Colleges vary in the selection of examinations they accept and the scores they require to grant credit or placement, with more elite institutions tending to accept fewer examinations and requiring higher scoring. For example, some institutions accept AP scores of 4 or 5, and some accept scores of 3.

Also, in many states there are often mechanisms by which gifted students may seek permission from their school district to attend community college courses full time during the summer, and during the school year at no additional cost for families. In Minnesota, for example, gifted students may qualify to participate in the University of Minnesota's Post-Secondary Enrollment Option, a program which allows advanced high school students the opportunity to take more challenging coursework than what may be provided at their high schools. The units earned through participation in programs like this one can often be transferred to one's university, and can facilitate early graduation.

## Resources

### [Outside Opportunities for Students](#)

When looking for outside opportunities to challenge and enrich your gifted child, the best thing to do is talk to your child's gifted resource teacher. In addition, we have compiled links to some of the opportunities available in our area (including enrichment classes, programs for credit, talent searches, and distance learning).

## Academic Enrichment

### [Minnesota Institute for Talented Youth](#)

The Minnesota Institute for Talented Youth provides and maintains an educational community where a diverse group of talented students can expand their academic and social visions and experience the joy and excitement of learning. The Institute has three available programs:

Expand Your Mind, for students currently in Grades 7-12, offers three summer sessions, two of which are available to residential students.

ExplorSchool, for students currently in Grades 5-6, offers one 2-week summer commuter session.

YES: Your Extraordinary Saturday, for students currently in Grades 1-4, offers Saturday morning classes on four Saturdays in November.

For more information, visit the website above or call the office at 651-696-6590.

## District 287 West Suburban Summer School

Courses are designed to give high-potential students a unique experience to challenge their abilities beyond their regular school-year classroom activities. Classes are interdisciplinary, focused on a theme that includes several disciplines such as math, science, writing, and art. Questions? Contact Joan Cundiff 763-550-7167 or email [jccundiff@int287.k12.mn.us](mailto:jccundiff@int287.k12.mn.us)

### [District 287 Arts and Academic Opportunities](#)

District 287 has compiled a list of classes and special events that, though not exclusively for gifted and talented young people, provide valuable enrichment options.

## Programs for Credit (Local)

### [University of Minnesota Talented Youth in Mathematics Program \(UMTYMP\)](#)

UMTYMP provides a challenging alternative to grade 8-12 mathematics coursework for Minnesota's talented mathematics students in grades 5-12. The highly accelerated courses are specially designed to provide these students with an intense academic environment that will stimulate their mathematical interest and abilities. Coursework begins with High School Algebra 1 and goes through College Calculus III and other advanced topics. Participating

students take a two-hour class once a week after school and are not required to take mathematics in their home schools. Interested students must pass a qualifying exam, given in mid-April.

#### [District 287 Mentor Connection](#)

The Mentor Connection Academic Program connects eminent professionals with gifted high school students in pursuit of advanced learning.

#### [Minnesota Department of Education Scholars of Distinction](#)

The Scholars of Distinction program nurtures and recognizes distinguished achievement by highly motivated students. Each specialty area was developed through partnerships of educators, business and others. To earn this recognition, students must complete required work in Minnesota's Academic Standards, demonstrate mastery of complex subject matter and apply their knowledge to challenging projects. Areas include: Applied Geography, Leadership, Mathematics, Science and Theater Arts. Students interested in earning recognition as a Scholar of Distinction must complete the Intent to Apply form online. Students may access the form as well as the program overview, important dates, rubrics, and project consultant contact information by visiting the site.

#### [Post-Secondary Enrollment Options](#)

The Post-secondary Enrollment Options program was established in 1985 as a means to "promote rigorous educational pursuits and provide a wider variety of options for students." Through PSEOP, high school students in Grades 11 and 12 receive high school credit for college or university courses completed and subsequently may apply for postsecondary credit upon entering college. Minnesota students may enroll at any area college and receive high school or college credit for day, evening, independent study and correspondence classes. The high school counselor should be involved in planning. Contact Darrell Sedio, (651) 582-8297. Talent Searches

#### [Belin-Blank Exceptional Student Talent Search \(BESTS\)](#)

The Belin-Blank Exceptional Student Talent Search (BESTS) is a program initiated by the Belin-Blank Center in 1992 for students in grades 4-9 who score in the 95th percentile or higher on a nationally normed, standardized in-grade achievement test. The goal of the Talent Search is to discover, via above-level testing, students who need further educational challenge to fully realize their academic talent. Participants take either the EXPLORE®, ACT Assessment®, or SAT® I.

#### [Midwest Talent Searches](#)

Students in Grades 3-9 who earn qualifying scores on acceptable standardized in-grade achievement tests are eligible for participation in the Midwest Talent Search, sponsored by The Center for Talent Development at Northwestern University. Participation requires that the student take either the EXPLORE®, ACT Assessment®, or the SAT® I. The CTD believes that these out-of-level tests can discern different levels of ability in many content areas and are far better measures of a student's intellectual abilities than standardized in-grade achievement tests.

## **Distance Learning**

### [EPGY \(Education Program for Gifted Youth\), Stanford University](#)

A continuing project dedicated to developing and offering multimedia computer-based distance-learning courses. Combining technical and instructional expertise, EPGY provides high-ability students of all ages with an individualized educational experience, optimized in both pace and content.

### [CTY \(Center for Talented Youth\), Johns Hopkins University](#)

CTY's unique distance education program provides challenging academic courses all year long for eligible students in grades K through 12. The distance courses are varied, demanding and very appropriate for highly able students.

### [Center for Talent Development, Northwestern University](#)

The Center for Talent Development's LearningLinks Program (previously LetterLinks) allows academically talented 4th-12th graders to take advanced courses through distance learning. Courses are taught by master teachers who accommodate the abilities and learning styles of academically talented students and work with students in a variety of formats.

## **Minnesota Extension Agency**

The University of Minnesota Extension Service is committed to delivering high-quality, relevant educational programs and information. Their statewide network of researchers, educators, and volunteers addresses critical needs by focusing on issues where research-based education can make a difference.

The Minnesota Extension Agency's website contains information on raising children and living in Minnesota. Please visit their website to see their extensive offerings:

[www.extension.umn.edu/index.html](http://www.extension.umn.edu/index.html)