

Multiple measures needed to evaluate 'true giftedness'



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The New York Department of Education had noticed an increase in the number of students qualifying for the Gifted and Talented program at different prestigious schools. So in 2012, they eliminated the previous GT test and replaced it with the Naglieri Non-verbal Ability Test (NNAT) in response. The NNAT is meant to recognize a student's actual intellectual ability—not his or her learned ability. Recently though, NNAT test prep books have been popping up, and parents in New York City have been tutoring their children in hopes of having them qualify for GT programs.

While GT programs are important and necessary, all of this—the test prepping, the prestigiousness, the frantic parents—most likely creates a cloying air for the children having to endure it. There are children being assessed at age 4, and they have to sit through these

stressful tests that even their parents have trouble completing, in order to qualify for a program that picks only the “best of the best.”

As recently as last year, Pflugerville I.S.D. has implemented the NNAT as one of the “multiple measures” that Texas requires in testing prospective GT students. Other measures include observations from parents and teachers and a portfolio of the student's work.

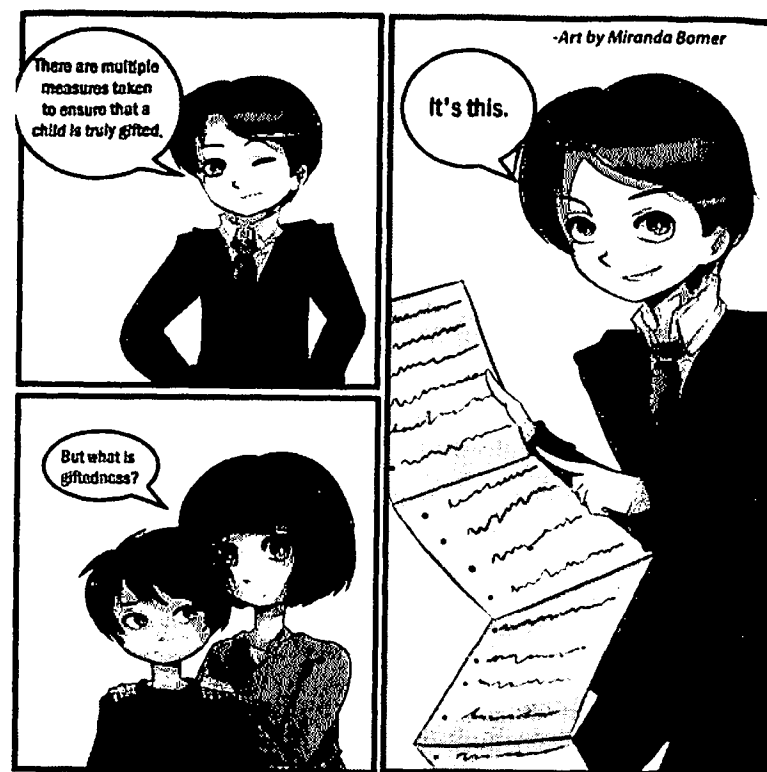
Now, the race to get into GT in Texas isn't as intense as it is in New York, but that's not to say that it isn't as potentially damaging. The truth is, there are kids—bright, hard-working kids—who are told they qualify for the GT program, when they might not. Giftedness, at its core, is very gray, and because of this, it is also difficult to pinpoint. These “gifted” children might merely be more mature than their classmates. When these kids grow up along with their GT peers—if they're not doing as well as they'd like to be doing—they might become very hard on themselves. These kids, who are so used to being the “best of the best,” feel like they fall short because while their GT peers seem to be progressing, they seem to be stagnating, or

going more along the lines of their non-GT peers. This might lead to perfectionism, anxiety or even depression.

This is a concern for all GT students, regardless of whether they are mislabeled or not. Sometimes it's the fault of the parents, who push too hard and expect more than their child can give them. And sometimes it's the fault of the school system; maybe a child is in an environment where he or she just doesn't feel comfortable. Regardless of what it is, it's damaging. The countless people who whine and moan about the “elitism of the GT program” don't make it any easier for the children that are in it either.

Now, there are also a lot of former GT students who liked the GT program and blossomed in that environment. They liked the creative atmosphere and being surrounded by like minds under the guidance of a teacher who understood. That's why the GT program can be so important for the children who may be “properly labeled”—because it provides a safe space where innovative thinking and leadership is allowed to flourish.

That's not to say I like the labeling of kids because that's one of the



problems with the program—that it starts so young. Testing children at that age for something so big doesn't seem very judicious, but I do get that administrators want to catch those signs of giftedness young so that the students can be properly cared for and challenged. But again, sometimes children get mislabeled which can lead to negative consequences.

It's good that Texas has “multiple measures” to thoroughly identify those who are “truly

gifted,” and that with the NNAT, the testing is less biased for ethnicity, language, and socio-economic standings (even though more affluent families can afford tutoring for their child before taking the test, thus leading to better test scores). Maybe along with the cultivation of these measures and the program itself, every single GT student can be a little more comfortable in the GT program and in their own skin.