

**Gifted Education in Ireland:
Parents' Beliefs and Experiences**

A Report Prepared for the Centre for Talented Youth Ireland

Summary Report*

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Executive Summary

In an effort to expand the knowledge base about gifted education in Ireland, the Centre for Talented Youth Ireland (CTYI) and the William & Mary Center for Gifted Education collaborated on a study of parents of children who had attended CTYI programmes. The purpose of the study was to explore this population of stakeholders, in particular, their attitudes toward gifted education and their perceptions of the educational experiences of their children. The 1,440 parents who completed the survey reported on the experiences of 1,914 of their children who had attended CTYI programmes.

Demographics of Participating Parents of CTYI Attendees

The parents of this study represented every county in Ireland, including four counties of Northern Ireland. Eighty-five percent of respondents were female. A majority of parents responding had post-secondary educations (65%), with more than a quarter having earned graduate-level degrees: master's (26%) and doctorate (5%).

Parent Perceptions of Child's Educational Experiences

Parents described the schools of their CTYI-attending children ($N = 1,914$) as mostly public (78%), with 11% attending DEIS schools. Approximately half of children described were in primary level (51%). Fewer than one in five reported having a system to identify gifted students (19%), but many parents did not know if their child's school had such a system in place (35%). Most schools did not have a policy for accelerating high-ability students (55%).

Parents believed that most of their CTYI-attending children were not receiving assignments in school that were targeted at their child's ability level (55%). Nearly three quarters of parents indicated their children were rarely or never receiving differentiated assignments. A common thread in parents' descriptions was a lack of planning and consistency in special assignments for their children. By Sixth Year, more than a third of students were spending more than 10 hours each week on homework. Although some parents indicated they believed homework assignments were beneficial (26%), many considered their children's homework assignments to have little or no value, especially parents of primary students (46%), although many secondary students' parents (33%) also felt this way.

When asked, "Have you always been satisfied with the education your CTYI-attending child(ren) received in school?" quite a few parents responded "Yes" (37%) and this was equally true for primary and secondary students' parents. In open-ended comments, many parents said there was nothing they would change about their child's education. Some parents were completely happy with their child's school. In general, quite a few parents reported their children liked school "quite a bit" or better (56%) and were happy or "very happy" there (63%). Parents reported that fewer than a third of their children were being challenged in school (29%) and fewer than a quarter were receiving assignments targeted at their ability level (22%).

Although some parents had positive perceptions of their children's schools, the majority of parents describing their CTYI-attending child's challenge in school indicated they were not challenged (54%) and this was especially true for primary school students, 70% of whom were not challenged in school, according to their parents' perceptions. Nor were the majority of children receiving assignments targeting their ability level. Parents believed that more than half of the children were not working at an appropriate level. Differentiated instruction, when students of differing ability levels in heterogeneous classes are given lessons designed to fit their needs, appeared to be rarely or never happening for these high-ability students. Parents believed their secondary students were particularly underserved, with 71% never receiving special assignments that were different (e.g., more challenging, more complex) from the assignments of their classmates. Although parents believed primary students were more likely to have a greater frequency of such assignments than secondary students, the majority of them only received appropriately differentiated assignments rarely (26%), if at all (50% reported "never").

Parents' Opinions About Gifted Education

1,236 parents completed a survey of opinions about gifted education. They did not object to gifted education—in fact, they highly valued it—and did not consider it elitist. They did, however, oppose grade acceleration. To explore variability among scores, a latent profile analysis (LPA) identified four groups of parents, who

described 1,765 children. These groups were labeled the *Determined Advocates* (parent $n = 542$; children $n = 822$), *Ambivalent Supporters* (parent $n = 470$; children $n = 655$), *Uncertain Objectors* (parent $n = 39$; children $n = 61$), and *Tepid Supporters* (parent $n = 185$; children $n = 247$). All four groups were similar in their opinions opposing grade acceleration, but they differed in the other three factors. Demographically, the groups were very similar in terms of income, education level, age, gender, and county. Nearly all the parents perceived their children as happy in school and liking it.

The Determined Advocates had the most positive opinions about gifted education, expressing virtually no objections to it and holding the strongest opinions regarding the value of giftedness to society and of special services to support the unique needs of gifted students. Parents in this group were most likely to say they were dissatisfied with their children's education and were most likely among the four groups to know about gifted education practices and policies in their schools. Determined Advocates had shared their children's CTYI test scores with schools more often than the other parents. These parents were most likely to say they were not always satisfied with their children's education (76%) and that their children were not being challenged in school (72%).

Parents in the Ambivalent Supporters group highly supported gifted education and valued giftedness, but had a few objections to gifted education and some concerns about possible elitism. Nearly half reported they did not know about their school's policies regarding identification or acceleration of gifted students. About half (47%) had been dissatisfied with their children's education at some point and a majority believed their children were not being challenged in school (56%).

The smallest group of parents was named the Uncertain Objectors. Making up only 3% of parents, this group strongly supported special services for gifted students and valued giftedness, but also had objections to special programmes, because of their potential negative impact on peers and the greater obligation to help students with disabilities. Nearly a third of the children of parents in this small group attended DEIS schools; a much higher rate than the other groups. More than half did not know about their schools' identification or acceleration policies. Nearly all were "always satisfied" with their children's education (75%) and most believed their children were being challenged in their schools (62%).

The Tepid Supporters were the most moderate supporters of gifted education, with strong objections to it and a belief that it is elitist. Only about a fourth believed their children received assignments targeted at their ability level and more than half (52%) believed their children were not being academically challenged. Despite these beliefs, 66% reported never having been dissatisfied with their children's education.

The differing opinions about gifted education of parents in these four groups and the variability in their perceptions of their children's experiences indicate they would attempt to meet their children's academic needs differently. Determined Supporters would likely be vocal and persistent in pursuing special services; Ambivalent Supporters less so, but still likely to make some efforts because of their dissatisfaction with their children's education. Uncertain Objectors and Tepid Supporters may accept what services are provided, as members of both parent groups had concerns about special services being unfair and were mostly satisfied with their children's education.

Parents' Experiences and Perceptions of the Centre for Talented Youth – Ireland

Most parents bring their children to CTYI for the enhanced learning experiences. The challenge and variety of courses were stimulating to their children and the social experience helps to build their confidence and develop social skills. They learn about CTYI primarily by recommendations from their children's schools (50%) or by word-of-mouth (21%). About half found their child's participation at CTYI helpful with schools, primarily because of the children's learning, in terms of content and enhanced interest. Nearly all children were reported to have positive experiences. Three-fourths or more of children in three of the groups had positive social experiences at CTYI, but the Ambivalent Supporters were more likely to report a neutral social experience. Parents generally feel proud and happy that their children participate in CTYI, but some express disappointment, especially regarding the expense and difficulty of access for those not in Dublin.

Recommendations

CTYI offers an introduction into the world of gifted education, but it should not be the only entity to which parents in Ireland can turn to support the needs of their high-ability children. CTYI serves an important function in increasing awareness of these needs. The link between schools and CTYI may be enhanced as the

public becomes informed about CTYI students and what they are capable of. CTYI can continue to encourage the professional development of teachers and administrators about the needs of high-ability students and methods for maximizing their potential. Psychologists may be a good target for information sharing, as they may be able to recommend CTYI to underserved high-ability students in their practice.

The primary responsibility for improving the educational experience of high-ability students lies with the schools. Professional development for teachers, school leaders and other staff is critical. A deliberate, planned approach to addressing the needs of this population will take a commitment by the schools to maximize all students' potential, including that of their most capable students. The talent development model that has been gathering support in the US emphasizes the movement from potential to achievement among all students, with increasing rigor and skill development as students show their abilities. Such an approach may provide a foundation for gifted education upon which all stakeholders can agree.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The field of gifted education has grown significantly in the United States, with research on giftedness and practice dating back to the 1920s (e.g., Terman, 1925). Due to cultural and political influences, gifted education has not yet integrated into the mainstream Irish education system (O'Reilly, 2013). The Centre for Talented Youth – Ireland (CTYI) on the campus of Dublin City University (DCU) has been the sole provider of enrichment programmes for high-ability students since 1993. As part of an ongoing collaboration with the William & Mary (W&M) Center for Gifted Education (CFGE), a research base on this special population and their education in Ireland is being established. To complement the studies of Irish high-ability students (e.g., Cross, O'Reilly, Kim, Mammadov, & Cross, 2015) and educators (Cross, Cross, O'Reilly, & Mammadov, 2014), this study sought to explore the attitudes and experiences of parents of high-ability students who participated in the CTYI programme. These findings have the potential to improve educational access and opportunities for all high-ability children and their families in Ireland.

In the summer of 2016, researchers at the CFGE and CTYI developed a multi-part instrument to explore parents' experiences with and perceptions of their high-ability child/ren's education and their attitudes about gifted education, in general. CTYI sent a request for parents to complete the online survey through its database of 10,949 parent email addresses. Thirteen percent of these parents completed the survey, for a final sample of 1,440. To ensure that parents could differentiate their responses to the survey, many of the questions allowed responses for up to four children. For each CTYI-attending child, parents were asked to share information about their school, along with perceptions of the child's coursework and attitudes.

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Chapter 2: Parents and Their High-Ability Children

Parent/Family Data



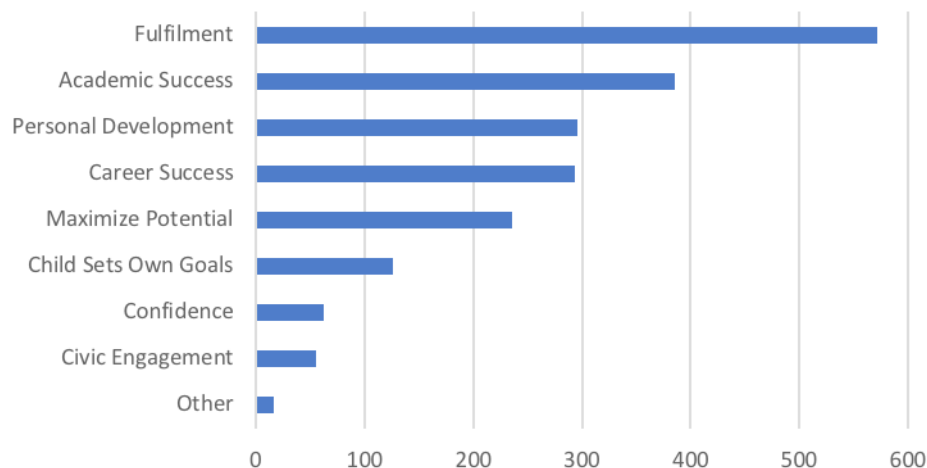
The survey explicitly specified that only one parent per family should complete the survey. Participants were from every Irish county and four Northern Ireland counties were represented as well (one each from Antrim, Armagh, Down, and two from Derry). A third of the 1,440 parents responding were from Dublin and nearly a fifth were from counties where CTYI offers programmes (Cork, Galway, and Limerick). The remainder were from other counties or did not enter a county. Most respondents were female (85%), varying in age from late-20's to over 55.

The parents who responded to our survey were quite well-educated. A majority of parents reported having post-secondary educations (65%), with more than a quarter having earned graduate-level degrees: master's (26%) and doctorate (5%). A total of 12 parents reported that they had attended CTYI themselves.

Parents also reported about their own educational experiences. A majority of parents reported they had not been challenged in their own schooling (46%), but many parents did believe they had been challenged (39%).

When asked what goals they had for their children's future, nearly half said they would like their children to be fulfilled. Many parents wanted their children to have academic success, to maximize their potential or to develop personally (e.g., increase in maturity and responsibility or in their social interactions).

What goals do you have for your child's future?



What goals do you have for your child's future?

Fulfillment

- *To be happy and fulfilled.*
- *I want my children to be happy. I am concerned that if they do not get the opportunity to realise their potential, they will experience huge frustration and discontent. I want them to be all they can be so that whatever they end up doing in life is by choice, not a failure to flourish. I want people to stop assuming that their intelligence means life is easy for them when this is often not the case at all, and treat them with compassion and kindness.*
- *For her to feel fulfilled intellectually, creative, and interested in learning and challenging herself.*

Academic Success

- *I want her to be happy, confident and secure in her own skin. I want her to achieve her full potential socially and academically so that she will be able to support herself and be happy own her work.*
- *That she enjoys her education and proceeds to university to pursue whatever career she chooses.*
- *Continue on to Cambridge university to study law and languages.*

The Children

Most respondents (76%) reported having from one to three children, but there were several large families in the sample. Ninety-three (7%) families had six or more children. A subset of these children attended CTYI programmes.

Parents were asked to share information about their children who had attended CTYI. Attendance at CTYI is mostly based on performance on an out-of-level test—usually, the SAT or PSAT—or through an educational psychologist report. Students who receive scores at the 95th percentile are admitted into CTYI programmes in primary and secondary school. These children would meet the criteria for giftedness in most settings. The Center for Academic Talent (CAT) programme provides educational enrichment opportunities for secondary school students who score between the 85th and 95th percentiles. Students who were previously eligible for the CTYI Primary School Programme are automatically transferred to the CAT Secondary Programme upon entry into secondary school. If they wish to attend the CTYI secondary school programme they must take the secondary school admission test. Parents could respond to questions for up to four CTYI-attending children. Most parents reported on one (68%) or two (24%) CTYI-attending children.

Children who had attended CTYI were in every year of schooling, with a majority (52%) attending fourth class through second year. Eleven percent of students attended designated disadvantaged (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools [DEIS]) schools.

Parents were asked to describe their child's academic passion areas and could choose as many as applied. Many parents were hard pressed to name a single area of their child's passion. Most indicated two to four subject areas about which their child was passionate. Science, math, English, and history were the most frequently named subject areas.

A number of CTYI-attending children would be considered twice-exceptional (2e). 2e students are gifted and also have a special need or disability (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], n.d.). Respondents reported 16% of their children attending CTYI presented with exceptionalities, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), learning disability (LD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), physical disability, or another exceptionality, in addition to their giftedness. Research has shown that 2e students often experience underachievement, low levels of academic self-efficacy and academic self-concept, and are also underrepresented among gifted populations (Bell, Taylor, McCallum, Coles, & Hays, 2015; Missett, Azano, Callahan, & Landrum, 2016; Wang & Neihart, 2015). Parents of 2e children have reported challenges in navigating the gifted education system and finding appropriate supports for their children's academic and social needs (Rubenstein, Schelling, Wilczynski, & Hooks, 2015).

Parents were asked to rate each child's liking of school on a 5-point scale from 1 = "Likes it very much" to 5 = "Hates it." The average score of 2 ("Likes it quite a bit") indicates that most CTYI-attending children like their schools. Asked if each child is happy in school, on a 5-point scale from 1 = "Very happy" to 5 = "Very unhappy," parents reported happy children, with an average score of 2 ("Happy"). Children's liking

of and happiness in school was not a major concern for many of these parents. This will be explored further in Chapter 5.

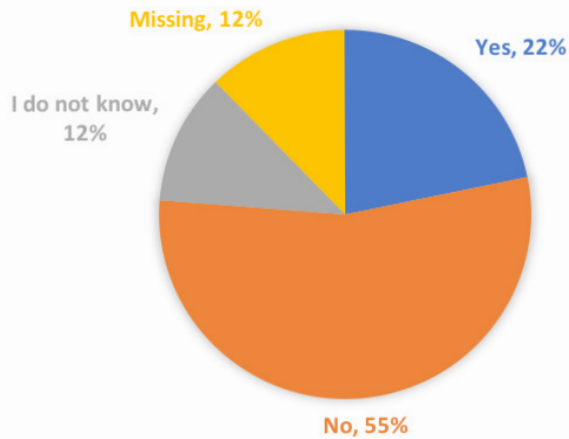
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Chapter 3: High-Ability Students in School

Parents described the schools of their 1,914 CTYI-attending children as mostly public (78%), with a portion attending DEIS schools (11%). Students could be found in all grades, from Junior Infants to Sixth Year. Approximately half of children described were in primary level (51%). A few parents described the schools of students who had already completed their secondary schooling (5%). How much these schools catered for their high-ability children varied. Fewer than one in five reported that their children’s school had a system to identify gifted students (19%), but many parents did not know if their children’s school had such a system in place (35%). Most parents reported their children’s schools did not have a policy for accelerating high-ability students (55%).

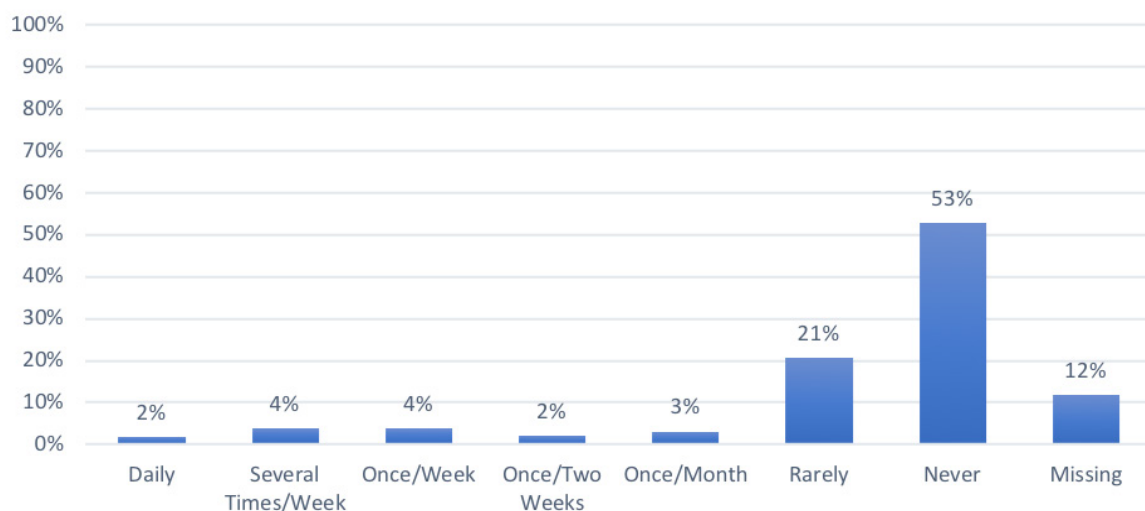
ASSIGNMENTS TARGET ABILITY LEVEL



Parents believed that most of their CTYI-attending children were not receiving assignments in school that were targeted at their child’s ability level. To identify any differentiation that may be happening in the child’s instruction, parents were asked, “How frequently does your CTYI-attending child receive special assignments at school that are different (e.g., more challenging, more complex) from the assignments of his/her classmates?” Nearly three quarters of parents indicated this was rarely or never happening. The different assignments may be simply additional work

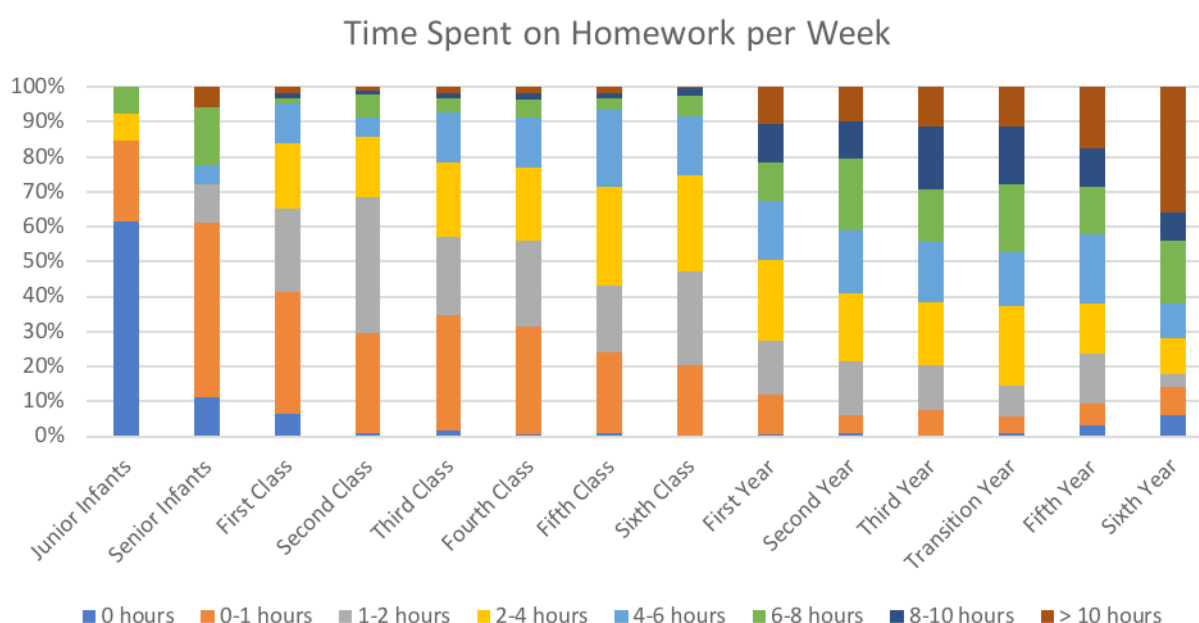
(“My son would get extra maths to do when he’s waiting for the rest of the class that are not finished.”) or work at an advanced level (“Maths sheets from higher classes.”). Project work was sometimes given, offering a welcome opportunity to stretch (“Usually there is a project done in the week. The projects tend to be stimulating and interesting with good teamwork and collaboration required.” “Visual online learning with project is very rare to get but brilliant.”). A common thread in parents’ descriptions was a lack of planning and consistency in special assignments for their children (“Intermittent and half-hearted, at best.” “It really is either 1. More of the same type of work or 2. Doing a chapter from a book from a class ahead of my child. But I must stress the extra work is very much dependent on the teacher - not all teachers do this and it is not always consistent when it is done.”)

Frequency of Special Assignments



Students spent an increasing number of hours per week on homework as they matured. By Sixth Year, more than a third of students were spending more than 10 hours each week on homework. When asked to describe

how beneficial homework assignments were, only a quarter of parents believed homework was beneficial. Parents of secondary students were more likely to feel this way than parents of primary students. Parents particularly saw benefits of project-based work, especially the parents of primary students. Homework also gave parents an opportunity to engage with their child's academic experience. Some parents (4.2%) considered homework valuable for the discipline it fostered. Many more parents, however, considered homework to have little or no value, especially parents of primary students (46%), and many secondary students' parents (33%) also felt this way. As one parent put it, "In primary school I felt he was not stretched enough and in secondary the level of homework created stress and left little time for family or for reading or researching for pleasure and intellectual stimulation." Some parents considered homework assignments a mixed bag, with opinions that it is beneficial and that it is not.



What is your opinion about how beneficial your child's homework assignments are?

Homework is Beneficial

- It helps me to see what they are doing in school for the younger child in primary. The older child in secondary will use the homework assignments as part of the study towards the end of year exams.
- They relate to subjects studied and therefore support further understanding of the subject

Little to No Value

- Not very beneficial, especially when they are not corrected. I feel that giving loads of the same work instead of less and doing it very well isn't effective. The homework is very much regurgitating information or memo rising. There isn't much opportunity to think outside the box or creative thinking.
- He feels that the homework is a waste of time and does not offer a challenge to him, so it can be a struggle to get him to focus and do it.

Mixed

- He says [homework is] not beneficial, but beneficial in terms of organisation and structure, ability to think critically on their own.
- For my primary school kid I don't find the majority of homework to be of benefit with the exceptions of the research projects that she has to complete individually and as part of a team. For my secondary school kids, it depends on the subject/teacher. Some teachers frame homework as a challenge to apply the knowledge learned in class and add to it, which is positive. Others frame it as repetition of the what was taught in class which leads to boredom. Also, timely results and constructive feedback are essential elements to keeping teens motivated.

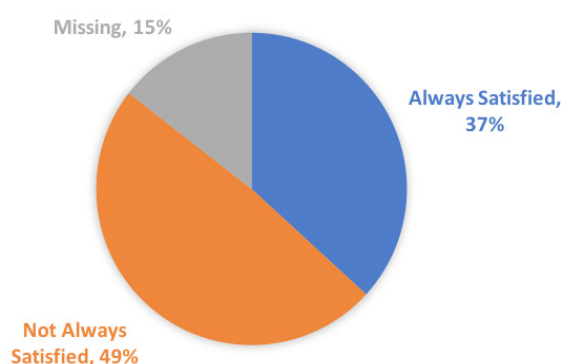
Parents' Attitudes Toward Their Child's School

Positive attitudes and experiences.

When asked, "Have you always been satisfied with the education your CTYI-attending child(ren)

received in school?”, more than a third of parents responded “Yes” and this was equally true for primary and secondary students’ parents. In open-ended comments, many parents said there was nothing they would change about their child’s education. Some parents were completely happy with their child’s school, as this parent explained, “Her school brought out the best in her and nurtured her all the way through Primary School. Totally happy with her progress.” Most of these satisfied parents reported that their children were happy in school or that they liked it (35%), although a small percentage reported being satisfied even when their child was not happy or did not like school (2%). This may indicate the dissatisfaction had been in a prior educational setting or had been resolved. Liking and happiness were strongly correlated among the children.

PARENT SATISFACTION WITH CHILD'S EDUCATION



In general, quite a few parents reported their children liked school “quite a bit” or better (56%) and were happy or “very happy” there (63%). Parents reported that many of their children were being challenged in school (29%) and nearly a quarter were receiving assignments targeted at their ability level (22%). Parents believed their secondary students were more likely than primary students to be challenged. Differentiated assignments were more frequent among primary than secondary students.

What would you like to change about your child’s school experience?

Change Nothing

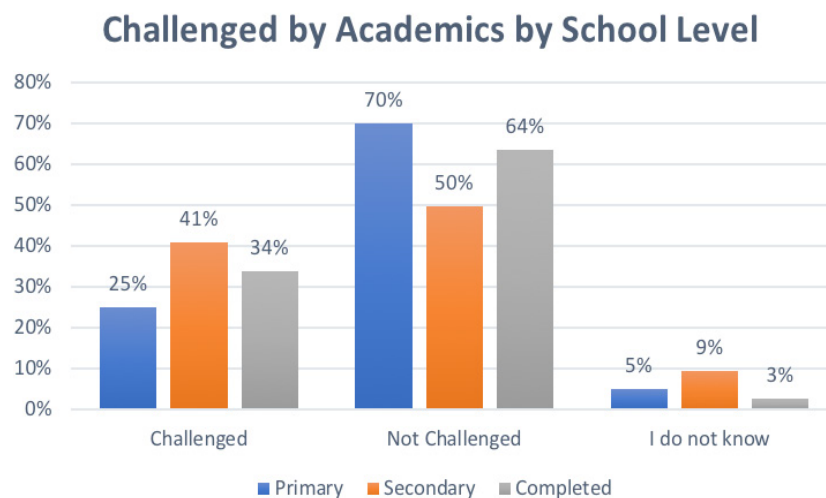
- *Can't think of anything. The school is quite receptive to parental input and because it is a school with a foreign language, different challenges can be integrated through the use of language. Not every teacher has been so good or receptive but overall the children have had a very positive experience of school.*
- *Nothing, she has always received encouragement and tasks to push her abilities.*
- *Nothing, the school is excellent.*

Negative attitudes and experiences.

Although there were satisfied parents who described positive academic experiences among their CTYI-attending children, many more had negative academic experiences. The charts above indicate the percentages of parents who were not always satisfied with the education their child had received in school. Parents expressed dissatisfaction with the education of nearly half the children of this study (49%). Even when their child was happy in or liked school, many parents had been dissatisfied with their education at some point (72%).

The three most frequent factors related to being dissatisfied with school that parents described in open-ended comments were a lack of challenge, bad teachers, and a lack of academic support. Parents felt that most schools provided “repetitive and unchallenging work” that their children felt was “frustrating and pointless.” Some schools acknowledged this, but did not make changes: “Neither child has ever had differentiated work prepared for them or been accommodated in any way despite the acknowledgement of their boredom or lack of challenge.” This often led to behavioral challenges: “I find it hard to hear that my son has been reprimanded for fidgeting and not listening, when the reason for it is that he is not finding the material challenging enough.” One parent recounted a particularly difficult year: “He was beside himself with the tedious repetition, with no outlet he used to read in class and subsequently was punished for his reluctance. It was excruciating to watch him become more and more disinterested.”

Often the lack of challenge was tied directly to the teachers: “My daughter has, by now, countless, even daily, anecdotes of instances when the teachers failed her in terms of providing stimulating material.” Some students

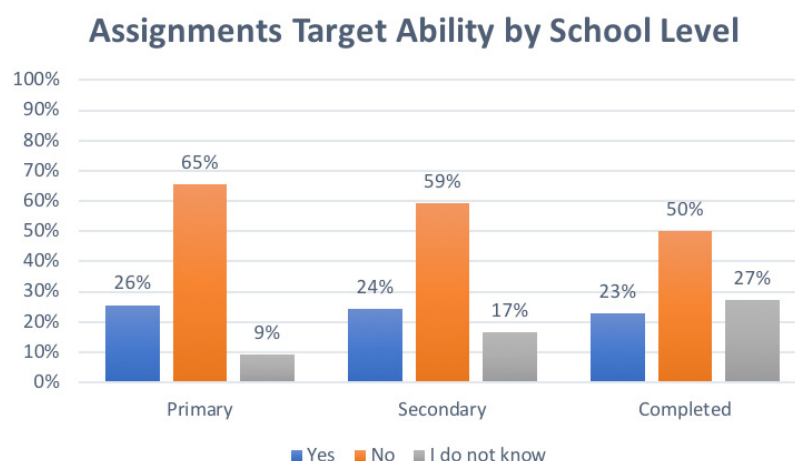


felt limited in their education by specific teachers: “My first child chose not to do physics for leaving certs, the teacher had a high fail rate.” Some teachers were outright unwilling to provide extra support: “In third class we asked the teacher to give her extra-curricular studies, she refused point blank, we then spoke with the principal and he ignored our request.” Most parents pointed out that this was highly dependent on individual teachers, which is an added frustration: “It depends entirely on the teacher. That changes every year. Her teacher last year was outstanding. But she has not always received the same level of support from her school. It seems to be targeted at the middle road.”

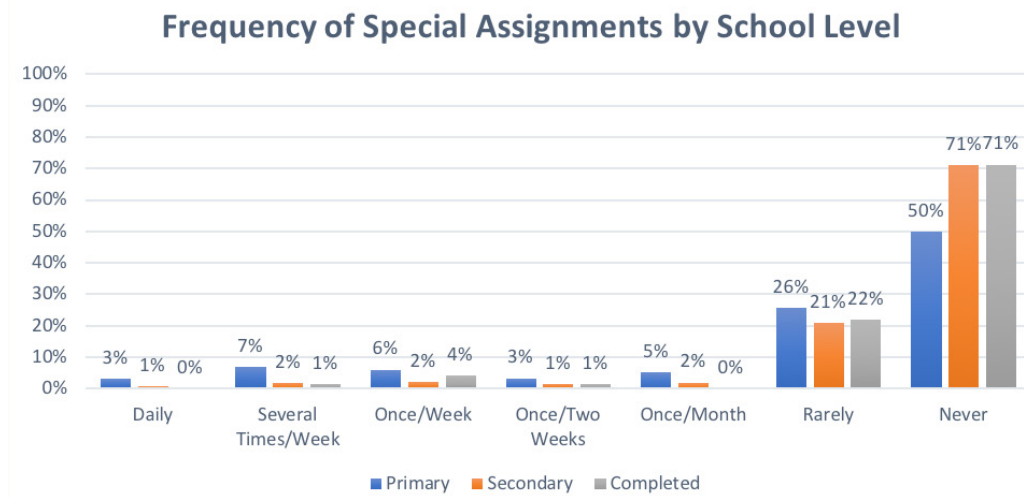
Parents felt that their children often did not receive necessary academic support. Often schools “did not recognize” students’ ability, or misidentified ability as “ADHD” or other behavioral problems. Some schools recognized ability and “promised all sorts of projects which never happen.” In general, parents felt like their children weren’t recognized, encouraged, or supported in favor of “standardized” education or “fitting in” with the average pace of the class. Comments about dissatisfaction with their children’s education were found throughout the survey responses. When parents had an opportunity to make additional open-ended comments, they frequently referred to their dissatisfaction with their children’s educational experiences.

The majority of parents describing their CTYI-attending child’s challenge in school indicated they were not challenged (54%) and this was especially true for primary school students, 70% of whom were not challenged in school, according to their parents’ perceptions. Nor were the majority of children receiving assignments targeting their ability level. Parents believed that more than half (55%) of the children were not working at an appropriate level.

Differentiated instruction, when students of differing ability levels in heterogeneous classes are given lessons designed to fit their needs, appeared to be rarely or never happening for these high-abil-



ity students. Parents believed their secondary students were particularly underserved, with 71% never receiving special assignments that were different (e.g., more challenging, more complex) from the assignments of his/her classmates. Although primary students were more likely to have a greater frequency of such assignments than secondary students, the majority of them only received appropriately differentiated assignments rarely (26%), if at all (50% never). The common refrain through-



out parents' comments was that their children were not receiving appropriate instruction or challenge.

Lamenting the many ways in which they considered schools to not be serving high-ability students, the thing these parents would like to change most in their children's educational experience was to have gifted education in the schools. They would like their children to have diverse, fun, and autonomous learning opportunities and better trained, more motivated and interested teachers.

Many parents believe their high-ability children need the encouragement of those around them, including teachers who recognize and value their talents.

What would you like to change about your child's school experience?

Gifted Education

- *In an ideal world, I would like my children to have attended or attend a magnet school for highly gifted students, i.e CTYI school. In the absence of that scenario, I would settle for a better understanding from their schools and teachers of what makes gifted pupils different from bright ones. I would like them to understand that my children's ability and interest stretches far beyond what the Leaving Cert expects of them, and that there may be no satisfaction for them in striving for A1's when they can see how limiting the curriculum is. I would like their teachers to understand that an underachieving gifted student is setting themselves up for future problems if they are not challenged in these crucial years. I would love them to understand that my children are passionate and sensitive, and that their age-peers are unlikely to meet their need for intellectual connection. I would like them to acknowledge my children's abilities, even if they cannot cater to them in a meaningful way within our exam system.*
- *More challenge in work. A way to nurture rather than kill the joy of learning.*
- *There should be a gifted programme set out in Irish schools for the school to follow. At the moment, it depends on what school you go to and the staff's attitude to helping gifted students. Some teachers were very helpful while others told us to be happy that he wasn't struggling to read and write! There is no consistent approach within the Irish education system regarding gifted children.*
- *I'd like learners to be grouped according to ability in different areas, not according to age, so that they would be in different groupings according to the subject being studied. More project-based, autonomous work. More focus on developing creativity. More emphasis on arts. More multiple intelligences approaches being applied.*

Diverse Learning Opportunities

- *More challenging assignments that allow them to research and present their findings.*
- *Encourage the freedom to explore knowledge. CTYI children enjoy solving problems without being provided with all necessary information, carrying out independent research, and not just learning how to solve a particular problem with just the parameter changed.*
- *Offer smaller challenge groups incorporating children from different classes but with similar interests and abilities as they would challenge and stimulate each other. This shouldn't be too difficult! Offer debate and discussion opportunities from a younger age. Allow gifted children the opportunity to get it wrong, not always 'know,' feel what it's like to have to work for your education. I fear, mostly for my younger child, that they will lose the ability to learn in a systematic manner and will one day realise they don't know it all and not know how to recover from it.*
- *I would like my child to have his mind stimulated by what he is learning in school. I'd like him to look back on his school days with a feeling of fun, excitement, and passion. I'd like the school experience to be more about discussion, discovery, and working through topics rather than being told how to think or what to learn.*
- *More acknowledged approach to children's gifted abilities and a structured curricular support to harness their abilities. More flexibility in terms of subject choices. More emphasis on lateral thinking.*

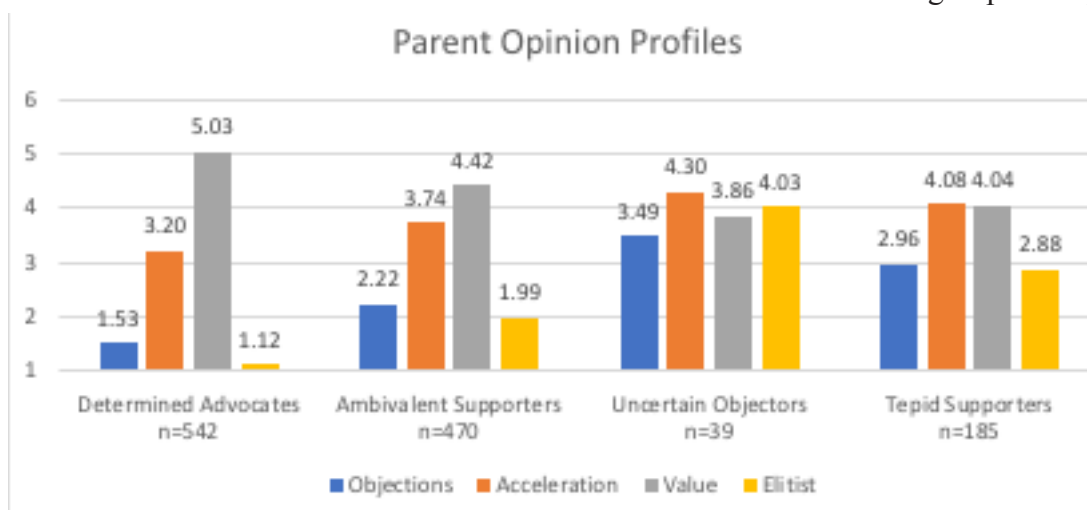
Better Teachers

- *To have had more open, understanding, and interested teachers in him as an individual.*
- *I would like teachers to have more education on how to stimulate gifted children in the class, while at the same time keeping them included in the group.*
- *Primary teachers seem to excel at Irish music and sports and don't have the same strength in maths and science.*
- *I don't like the old-fashioned approach to teaching that "teacher knows all," and I would love to see more individuality encouraged among the students.*
- *Teachers should be accountable for delivering to a high standard. I do not believe that they are. Too much [rote] learning, and need more discussion & analysis to develop thinking. Class sizes are too large.*

Chapter 4: Parents' Opinions About Gifted Education

The most commonly used instrument for studying opinions toward giftedness and gifted education is Gagné's (1991) Opinions of the Gifted scale. 1,236 parents in this study completed a modified version of this scale. The four factors found in this study were *Objections* to gifted education (e.g., "We should not have special education services for gifted children, because children with difficulties need special education services the most."), opposition to grade *Acceleration* (e.g., "Gifted children should not be allowed to skip a grade because they will miss important ideas."), *Value* of gifted education (e.g., "We should have special education services for gifted children because the regular school programme stifles gifted children's intellectual curiosity."), and *Elitist* (e.g., "We should not have special programmes for gifted children because it is an unfair advantage for them to receive special educational services."). Based on the average scores of each factor on a scale of 1 to 6, in general, the parents did not object to gifted education ($M = 2.07$, $SD = .88$), did oppose grade acceleration ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.11$), highly valued gifted education ($M = 4.61$, $SD = .73$), and did not consider it elitist ($M = 1.81$, $SD = .78$). However, the standard deviations of each of these factors indicated considerable variability among parents. To explore this variability, a latent profile analysis (LPA) was conducted. This statistical procedure classifies cases (parents, in this study) according to similarities in scores. Only cases with a complete set of responses can be used for an LPA, so parent group information is available for 86% ($n = 1,236$) of parents. These 86% ($n = 1,236$) of parents provided information on 1,785 children, spread across school levels.

Four groups of parents were identified. Statistical information about the profile of each group is available in the full report (www.dcu.ie/ctyi/research.shtml). Demographically, all parent groups were similar in their composition. Groups did not differ significantly in the proportions of age, gender, highest degree earned, income, or total number of children. Differences that were found are included in the group descriptions below.



Opinion Profiles

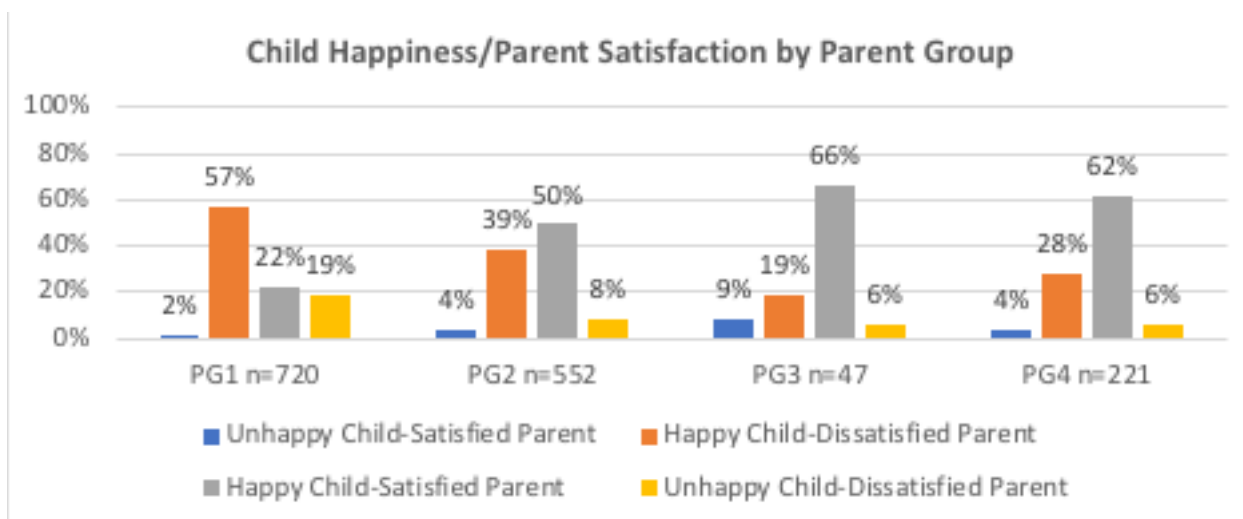
Parent Group 1: Determined Advocates.

Parents in the first group ($n = 542$; children $n = 822$) were the strongest supporters of gifted education of the four groups. These parents had virtually no objections to gifted education and did not agree with any items that suggested it might be elitist (e.g., that it would be "an unfair advantage for them to receive special educational services"). This group was most likely to have shared their children's CTYI scores with their schools. They were most likely to know whether their children's schools had a system to identify gifted students; only 30% said "I do not know". Usually, their schools did not have such a system (52% "No"). This was also true for a policy to accelerate. Parent Group 1 parents were more likely than parents in the other groups to say their children's schools did not have an acceleration policy (74%) and were less likely to say they did not know about their school's policy (22%). Fewer Parent Group 1 parents reported their children attended DEIS schools (8%) than in the other groups.

Another way Parent Group 1 parents differed from the other groups was in their level of satisfaction with their children's education. They were most likely of parents in all the groups to say their children were

not being challenged in school (72%). When asked, “Have you always been satisfied with the education your CTYI-attending child(ren) received in school?” Parent Group 1 parents were most likely to say “No” (76%). In open-ended comments, Parent Group 1 parents were most likely to say they believed there was little or no value in the homework assignments their children received (42%). Although Parent Group 1 parents believed a majority of their children had an education better than their own (70%), this was a lower proportion than in the other parent groups. Unlike Parent Group 4 parents, a majority of Parent Group 1 parents did not agree that they were challenged in their own education (62%). Parent Group 1 had the highest percentage of parents claiming neither they nor their child was appropriately challenged (39%).

Despite their dissatisfaction with their children’s education (and their own), Parent Group 1 parents reported that their children like school at least “quite a bit”, which is not as strong a liking as in Parent Groups 3 and 4. They also considered their children to be relatively “happy in school”, but not as happy as children in the other parent groups. Parent Group 1 parents had the highest percentage of dissatisfied parents of both happy and unhappy children.



Parent Group 1 parents are likely to be determined in their pursuit of special services for their high-ability children. Their dissatisfaction with their children’s educations mirrors the lack of challenge they experienced in their own education. Although they believed their children were receiving a better education than they had, it is still unchallenging and inadequate.

Parent Group 2: Ambivalent Supporters.

The second group of parents was nearly as large as the first, making up 38% (n = 470; children n = 655) of the parents providing Opinion scores. Like their fellow Parent Group 1 parents, Parent Group 2 parents were believers that gifted students have needs that require special services and are a value to society. Parent Group 2 parents had a few objections to gifted education and some concerns about possible elitism. Most Parent Group 2 parents indicated their children did not have an acceleration policy in their schools (54%), but many did not know (43%). This pattern was true also for their children’s schools’ system to identify gifted students. Many indicated there was not such a system (32%), but they were less likely to know (44%) than their Parent Group 1 counterparts.

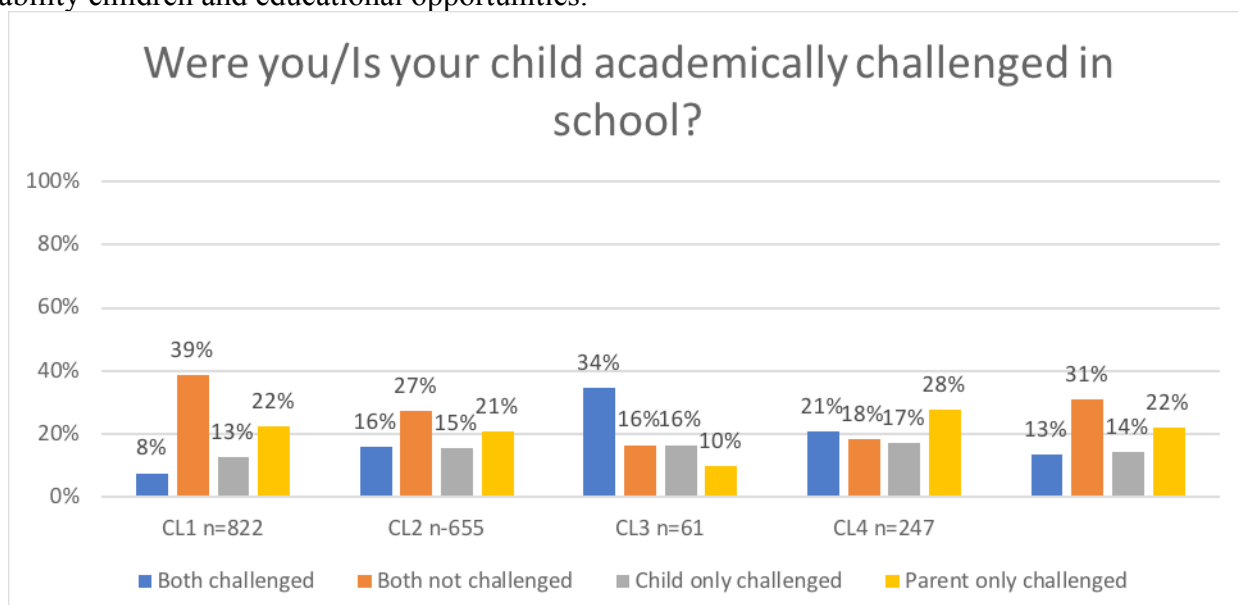
Parents in Parent Group 2 reported they had always been satisfied with more than half of their children’s educations (53.3%). They also reported that most of their children were happy in or liked their school. They were not as likely to be dissatisfied with their child’s education as Parent Group 1 parents, but 47% had been dissatisfied at some point. Parent Group 2 parents reported that a majority of their children (56%) were not academically challenged in their schools. A slight majority claimed they had not been challenged in their own education (53%), which may contribute to their dissatisfaction. A majority believed their children were receiving a better education than their own (81%). They did not all, however, believe homework assignments were all beneficial. In open-ended comments, 29% indicated they considered homework to have little or no value to their children.

While Parent Group 2 parents were supportive of gifted education, their slight tendency to agree with objections to it and concern about elitism may mean they will not be consistent in their demands to achieve appropriate services for their children. This may be especially true for those parents who believed their children were happy in school.

Parent Group 3: Uncertain Objectors.

The smallest group of parents was Parent Group 3 ($n = 39$; children $n = 61$) and these parents appear conflicted about gifted education. They acknowledge the needs of gifted students and consider them valuable to society, but object to special programmes for their potential negative impact on peers and the greater need to help students with disabilities. Parent Group 3 parents also worry about elitist gifted education practice. This group had nearly three times greater proportion children attending DEIS schools (30%) than in any of the other groups. From open-ended comments, it appears this group includes several first-time attenders to CTYI (21%¹), a much higher percentage than in Parent Groups 1 and 2. There were also more students who had completed school (13%) in this group than in the others. More than half did not know if their school had a system for identifying gifted students (55%). Half reported their child’s school did not have a policy related to acceleration (51%). Parent Group 3 parents reported they had always been satisfied with nearly all their children’s educations (75%). The proportion of happy child – satisfied parent was higher in Parent Group 3 (66%) than in Parent Groups 1 and 2.

Nearly all Parent Group 3 parents believed their children’s education was better than their own (90%). They considered their children to be challenged by the academics in their schools at a rate twice what would be expected – the highest rate of all the parent groups (62%). The highest percentage of parents claiming both they and their child had been academically challenged in school was in Parent Group 3 (34%). Only Parent Group 4 parents responded with a similar proportion. In combination with uncertain beliefs about the morality of providing a possibly elitist gifted education, the belief that their children are appropriately challenged may make it unlikely these parents will advocate strongly for their children’s special needs. The Parent Group 3 parents who are new to gifted education may benefit from resources and informational meetings about high-ability children and educational opportunities.



Parent Group 4: Tepid Supporters.

On average, the fourth group ($n = 185$; children $n = 247$) of parents “somewhat disagree” with objections to gifted education (e.g., “We should not have special education services for gifted children, because children with difficulties need special education services the most.”). With an average score just at the “somewhat agree” level on the Value factor, coupled with Elitist scores higher than Parent Groups 1 and 2, support for gifted education is likely to be weak among these parents. Half of Parent Group 4 parents reported they did not know if their school had a system for identifying gifted students (49%). Half were aware that their school did not have a policy for accelerating high ability students (52%). Even without these systems or policies in place,

1 Note that open-ended comments were at the parent level ($N = 1,236$ in the latent profile analysis), rather than the child level ($N = 1,785$ in the latent profile analysis).

a large majority believed their children were receiving a better education than their own (81%). In open-ended comments, several Parent Group 4 parents indicated the homework assignments their children were receiving were beneficial (27%; $n = 50$). They were more likely than Parent Group 1 parents to make such positive comments about homework. A majority of Parent Group 4 parents did not believe their children were challenged by the academics in their schools (52%).

A notable characteristic of Parent Group 4 parents is the high percentage who report children being happy in or liking school and being satisfied with their child's education. Nearly two thirds (62%) were in this category. Although this is similar to the proportion of happy-satisfied parents in Parent Group 3, the larger number of parents represented in Parent Group 4 adds weight to their position. In general, very few Parent Group 4 (and Parent Group 3) parents were dissatisfied with their children's education, which is surprising in light of how many believed their children were not being challenged. It is possible these parents are less interested in their children's achievement than other factors. Concerned that others need support more than their children and that gifted education may provide high-ability children with an "unfair advantage," these parents may be unlikely to pursue school-based academically appropriate options for their children.

References

Gagné, F. (1991). *Brief presentation of Gagné and Nadeau's attitude scale "Opinions about the gifted and their education."* Unpublished manuscript.

Chapter 5: Parents' Experiences and Perceptions of CTYI Ireland

A primary research question of this study was “What are parents’ perceptions of the educational experiences of their gifted children?” CTYI offers a powerful educational experience for these students. Throughout the survey, parents were asked a variety of questions about their children’s experiences of CTYI.

Half of parents responding learned about CTYI through their children’s school. Friends (21%), internet searches (12%), and other sources (17%; e.g., radio or television interviews, documentaries, Irish Times newspaper articles) informed parents about this academic opportunity for their high-ability children. One of the few differences between parents from Dublin and counties that did not have CTYI programmes was that a smaller percentage in these outside counties learned about CTYI from friends (17%) in the non-CTYI-served counties than in Dublin (26%). Presumably, word-of-mouth is more likely to spread in a location where so many students are participating. Psychologists were frequently the source of information about CTYI and physicians were sometimes mentioned. More than half of parents reported that their child’s school had recommended being tested for CTYI (57%). Many parents did not know if the teachers in their children’s schools were aware of CTYI (36%), but quite a few reported they were aware (54%).

To participate in CTYI, students must take an out-of-level exam. These exams enable the assessment of scores for students who would “hit the ceiling” of grade- or age-level tests (O’Reilly, Shelton, & Apostolou, 2017), to best determine their level of ability. Test scores such as these could provide valuable information to schools, but parents rarely shared them (32% shared). Parents most likely to share scores tended to be in Parent Group 1 or 3. Very few used these scores beyond entrance to CTYI (3%). Scores were used primarily in applications to secondary schools, but also for entry into programmes or courses. Some parents gave their children’s scores to psychologists as part of the diagnostic process.

Parents were asked to indicate all CTYI programmes in which their children had participated. Most parents reported their children had attended CTYI primary school (76%), but it should be noted that many secondary students had attended primary programmes, as well. These secondary students would be included in the large percentage of primary programme attendees.

The great majority of parents indicated their children had attended the CTYI programmes (77%). Attendance in CTYI programmes was equally likely across Parent Groups 1, 2, 3, and 4. Most families had one child who had attended CTYI (74%), but many had two (21%), three (4%) or more.

Why CTYI?

Parents bring their children to CTYI for a variety of reasons. The top three reasons mentioned in open-ended comments were to expand or broaden their learning experiences, to receive academic challenges, and to find peers who will accept them and with whom they can identify.

Broadened experiences often included new subjects, new ways of learning, new people – frequently experiences that CTYI provided that regular schools did not. Some parents wanted subjects that would be otherwise unavailable: “I think it was a good opportunity for the children to learn about other subjects that they wouldn’t normally be exposed to at school.” Others wanted their children to have the chance to focus on particular areas of interest: “To give her the opportunity to explore subject areas that are of interest to her and more suited to her ability level which she would not normally get to try in mainstream primary.” Other parents focused on new ways of learning when their children did not seem to benefit from their regular school:

To learn how to learn. Neither of them seems to be able to learn much in a traditional classroom, anytime they showed interest in a topic in school and asked for extra information or did some work on their own, they were discouraged from sharing what they found. [...] In CTYI they can explore a topic in as much detail as they need to.

CTYI was seen as a way to expand past a homogenous learning experience: “Mainstream schools try to fit children into one way of thinking that is not liberating.” Parents sent their children to CTYI in order to “expand their horizons,” “open their minds to new experiences,” and to “enrich their education in a way not

catered for in mainstreams school.” Many parents saw this as a way to increase their child’s interest or opportunity for a career path.

The second most frequent reasons parents cited for bringing their children to CTYI related to challenge and stimulation. Many parents stated that their children’s school experience “didn’t sufficiently challenge,” “was too repetitive,” or “wasn’t advancing at a sufficient pace.” Many children were described as “bored” and never having “to make any efforts in order to achieve,” with one parent afraid their daughter would “switch off” of learning.” Parents saw CTYI as a way to “keep the learning environment a challenge,” not just for educational achievement but to keep “enthusiasm for learning fulfilled.” The opportunity to provide education that their children found challenging, engaging, and enjoyable was important to parents: “Because she finds it exciting and challenging. It’s the one activity she loves.” Parents also saw increased confidence among their children who attended CTYI.

Parents saw the educational aspects of CTYI as primary reasons for bringing their children, but also strongly valued the social experiences. The opportunity to have successful social experiences with like-minded students and peers was sometimes even more important than the education and challenge: “Firstly to give him a place of acceptance and socialisation with other kids who are equally gifted, secondly to provide the kind of intellectual stimulation he needs.” Parents often saw their children struggling to fit in due to their interests and abilities and believed that CTYI provided something different: “To meet other kids with similar interests. To feel like she ‘fits’ in and aid her socialisation skills. To know that she is not alone and there are other kids like her.” One parent described initially seeking out the programme for educational benefits, only to find out that the social aspects seemed more important:

At first, to let them learn something that would interest and challenge them. When they qualified for the summer programme, it became about allowing them to be with true peers, which for teenagers is a crucial part of their development. To see them so happy and engaged is the most satisfying aspect of the programme. After the long school year often fraught with difficulties around achievement, friendship, unhappiness and lack of academic challenge, CTYI is an oasis in the desert of all our lives.

CTYI Participation and School Effects

About half of parents considered their children’s attendance at CTYI to have been helpful with their schools (48%). The most commonly expressed reasons parents felt CTYI was helpful with their children’s school were that it broadened the student’s engagement with learning, was complementary to regular schooling, and increased their children’s confidence.

Participation in CTYI was seen to help students engage in learning in their normal context. One parent said their child “blossomed once attending CTYI. She improved in all aspects of school participation and achievement and is always now so positive and enthusiastic about learning.” Another said that CTYI gave their child “a broader view of learning which has helped her to take a bigger picture view of assignments in school.” While it may not have changed the types of education available in school, one parent thought it made their child “a bit more tolerant of the boredom at school.”

Parents also described how CTYI was complementary to their children’s regular schooling. Some parents mentioned benefits to specific subjects and activities: “CTYI has helped them express themselves in a very structured/methodical way so their English and descriptive subjects benefit. It has also helped them in discussion classes and debating topics in class - as they know how to research and present a topic.” Some schools were helpful when they learned about CTYI: “Some teachers wanted to know more and wanted to help where they could.” This wasn’t always the case, but was a benefit when it was: “[Teachers who were aware of CTYI] were very engaging & liked to ask him about his course, etc. Most other teachers were not interested. My son responded well to teachers that were engaged & interested in his activities outside of school.” CTYI had the potential to help teachers engage gifted children more:

Child was bored and disruptive in class. CTYI results helped to inform teachers that my child needs to be stimulated and encouraged to learn. Helped to get teachers to give harder material to my child/

children and that by doing so, my child is happier and better behaved in class. Also gave teachers an understanding about where child is coming from and needs more explanation on rules. A reason why my child was questioning everything.

The third most referenced benefit from CTYI was a positive impact on confidence. CTYI was seen as “a great confidence builder.” Parents saw development “both socially and academically” which helped “confidence rise immensely.” This increase in confidence was often tied back to engagement in school:

CTYI (primary) has given my son a confidence in his abilities and a knowledge of a broad spectrum of topics. As a result of feedback from CTYI, he understands that he should not try to hide his own intelligence for fear of being singled out, and that he should push himself where possible. Rather than sit back and accept that his school work is relatively easy for him, he actively seeks additional work in order to further his education and also to avoid boredom if he has to wait for the rest of the class to complete their work.

When asked if their child’s participation at CTYI had been helpful in school, many parents explained that the schools were not helpful. Schools were unaware of CTYI and many were disinterested in its purpose in the lives of their children. This lack of support for their high-ability children leads to frustration among parents.

The Social Experience of CTYI

According to their parents, the social experience is a powerful one for many CTYI-attending children. Overall, parents believed that 66% of their CTYI-attending children had a positive experience of other students in the programmes. Only 2% had a negative experience of other students and 20% were neutral about it. These perceptions differed among the parent groups. Parents in Parent Groups 1 and 2 were more likely to report their children had positive experiences than did parents in Parent Group 3. Parent Group 3 parents reported the highest percentage of neutral experiences (38%).

The two primary positive experiences of other students related to finding like-minded peers and being engaged in the course. Parents reported that their children made friends, found a sense of identity or belonging, and had positive social experiences that they might have struggled with in other settings. Parents also described their children finding other students engaged in the course, which seemed unique to CTYI.

Group belonging was a common refrain: “My child has found a peer group that he can thoroughly relate to.” Parents described their children as often feeling “different” or alone, and that CTYI allowed them to experience something new: “For the first time in his life, he felt he was surrounded by people like himself at CTYI. He’s made some great friends.” CTYI allowed children to realize “there are other kids like them.” Being around like-minded peers helped children feel more comfortable about themselves: “It has helped him to accept himself for who he is and that he is not alone or different from everybody. There are other kids just like him.”

One aspect of being around like-minded peers was that other students were engaged with learning at the same levels.

It was great for him to be in a class with other people who had the same interests as him for once. It was also the case that the students were interested in answering questions and not afraid to show how much they knew about a particular subject and that was welcomed and encouraged by the class tutors. This would not have been the experience in school in general for him.

Parents described their children appreciating being around peers with the “same interests and desire to gain knowledge,” which was “different to what they get from their usual school classes.” Many parents mentioned that their children liked that their classmates were willing to participate as much as they were: “They like the level of participation and understanding of subjects by their peers in the groups.”

When parents did mention negative experiences with other students, they generally revolved around a lack of social skills and how that affected engagement in class. Some were frustrated by others’ “behaviors during class discussion,” “misbehavior in certain classes.” Parents mentioned they believed this was due to

“underdeveloped social skills” or “dual exceptionality.” Some parents did mention their children found certain others to be “know-alls” or “very self-important/entitled and irritating.”

Parents’ Responses to CTYI

In general, parents were exceptionally positive about CTYI. In many different ways, they expressed their appreciation for the programme. To access their emotional responses, parents were asked to “Please complete this statement: When I think about my child participating at CTYI, I feel _____.” Items in this open-ended response could be classified into 19 categories. The image below is a word cloud, produced by Atlas TI, a qualitative data analysis software package. The size of words in the cloud indicates their frequency in the 1,116 responses provided. Most parents felt proud of their children and happy for their opportunity to attend CTYI. Less frequent were negative feelings, such as disappointment or being money conscious.



The most frequent responses involved feeling proud and happy. Parents described being proud of their children’s hard work: “Our daughter works exceptionally hard at school, and she viewed CTYI as a reward.” The opportunities afforded through effort were a source of pride for parents, “She works very hard and deserves all the encouragement I can give her and also I hope to be able to give her many more chances in education than I had myself.” Tied into the pride for their children was an acknowledgement of the difficulties inherent in sending them to the programme. Parents were proud of themselves for being able to give their children more opportunities. One parent mentioned that they were “Proud that I managed to send her there” because “Financially it was difficult and she really wanted to go.” Parents acknowledged that it was a “privilege and not something everyone can experience,” that “only a small percentage of students” can attend, and that “not all parents can afford to send their child to CTYI.” One parent summed up their feelings:

Extremely proud of him. It’s not always possible to have opportunities like this when you come from a disadvantaged area, and only for his teacher putting him forward for this. We his parents were not aware of the programme.

Parents who felt happy about their child’s participation in CTYI often mentioned the academic and social benefits of the programme: “I feel happy that he’s participating in something worthwhile and developmental while mixing with peers of a similar ability.” One parent said they were happy “because her academic ability has been recognized and that gave her self-belief and confidence.” Parents saw their children benefit from the programme and were happy that their children were happy:

Excited and happy for him. Because it is like a homecoming for him. He loves it so much. He becomes animated and enthusiastic. This enthusiasm is contagious. Everyone is genuinely delighted for him. You can see it written all over him. He is in a place where he is accepted completely, without question, for who he is; is extremely interested in the subject matters; is involved in the social life and cherishes every minute he is with all in CTYI.

There was also a smaller contingent of negative responses, many of which focused on the difficulties involved in accessing services. Parents felt that CTYI is “too expensive and involves travel to get to the course, which is also difficult.” A common refrain was satisfaction with the programme itself, but worry about costs: “Satisfied in the knowledge that this service exists and that she so much looks forward to, but concerned that I might not afford it for the next time. She glows when she gets the chance to participate, but we have a lot of financial demands, with 6 to be educated.” The strains made the programme unavailable for many. One parent felt, “Deflated, because I think it would help them [their children] in many ways, but it is frustrating as it is beyond our reach with limited resources.” These parents were often frustrated with the overall availability of gifted education and not specifically with CTYI: “All kids have a right to be educated to their own personal capacity. Shouldn’t have to be a weekend event, should be a daily occurrence in school.” While these numbers were overall much smaller, the difficulties did affect the feelings of many parents.

References

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Chapter 6: Responding to High-Ability Students' Needs

Are schools providing what the students of high ability who attend CTYI need? To answer this question, an in-depth analysis of school practice, including observations in the classroom and an assessment of teacher professional development, would be required. The question to be answered by this study was “Do parents believe schools are providing what their high-ability children need?” If examined by averaging responses, it would appear from this data that parents are dissatisfied; their children are not being challenged; and differentiation is rare, at best. On average, it appears that parents do not object to gifted education, they value giftedness and support special services for gifted students, do not consider such services elitist, but do oppose grade acceleration. These summary beliefs belie differences among parents, however. The ability to classify parents into groups according to their different opinions paints a more nuanced portrait of parents' beliefs and their perceptions of their children's experiences. Understanding this nuance can be useful in developing plans to advocate for the services schools can provide to their high-ability students.

The Determined Advocates (Parent Group 1), Ambivalent Supporters (Parent Group 2), Uncertain Objectors (Parent Group 3), and Tepid Supporters (Parent Group 4) are all parents of children attending CTYI programmes. Members of each group are likely to take a different approach to fulfilling their children's academic needs. Parents' comments parallel their group assignment. For example, this Tepid Supporter expresses both objections and support: “I don't really think of my child as gifted - I don't really like that word 'gifted'. CTYI has been a great stimulus for our son and we are delighted he has attended.” Through education and thoughtful design of special services that respect the powerful desire for egalitarianism as they help students maximize their individual potential, such concerns can be allayed. As gifted education is still nascent in Ireland, perhaps a different term can be adopted.

Educational Experiences

Many parents were dissatisfied with their children's education. The lack of challenge was the most frequent complaint. Differentiated assignments targeted at students' ability level were rare, inconsistent, and dependent on specific teachers with the interest and ability to implement them. If schools had systems for identification of their high-ability students or policies for acceleration in place, many parents in this study did not know about them. CTYI offered a portal to gifted education not otherwise available to most of these high-ability children. Even as they lauded the services provided by CTYI, many parents lamented the lack of a public offering of similar advanced opportunities. Stimulated by their enrichment at CTYI, their children return on Monday morning to a school that does not offer a deliberate, advanced education appropriate to their exceptional ability. So few parents sharing their children's CTYI test scores suggests the schools may be unprepared to utilize information about their exceptional capabilities. The fee-based programmes, located in Dublin, are inaccessible to many eligible students across Ireland. CTYI cannot and should not be expected to bear the sole responsibility for educating the highest ability students throughout the entire country.

Improving the CTYI-School Linkage

The benefits CTYI can offer to high-ability students are not known in all schools. Information shared widely about the programme; procedures for determining eligibility; and, especially, scholarship availability; will help to reach more students who would benefit from participation. Perhaps the most important role CTYI can play in improving the education of high-ability students is in increasing awareness of this unique population and the possible ways schools can teach them appropriately. By offering a model of one means of identifying high-ability students – the talent search – CTYI educates schools about this perspective on their students. When teachers and administrators learn that some of their students have been selected for participation at CTYI, not only can they be alerted to the child's potential, but they may also see the increased engagement with learning and improved social skills these parents report. CTYI is not obligated to do so, but in its efforts to expand gifted education across the country, it can continue to encourage the professional development of teachers and administrators about the needs of high-ability students and methods for maximizing their potential. Psychologists in the school systems should also be targeted. They were frequently reported as being the source of parents' learning about CTYI. Boredom and the associated negative emotional and, possibly,

behavioral outcomes may lead many high-ability students to the psychologist's office. They need to know that an appropriate educational experience may be the solution to the presenting problem.

Addressing a Dissatisfying Educational Environment

Some parents in this study had no complaints about their high-ability children's education and would change nothing about it. Many parents, especially those in Parent Groups 2, 3, and 4, were not clamoring for change. The majority, however, identified a lack of challenge for their children and inadequate differentiation of instruction in the schools. CTYI provides one opportunity to address these students' needs, but the primary responsibility lies with the schools. Ideally, an appropriate education would be planned and executed with the maximization of every student's potential as the goal. This requires attention to the unique needs of the students at the highest levels of ability.

Gifted education has existed in the US for more than 60 years. Even with legislative mandates for identification of gifted students and certification of teachers, adequate provisions for high-ability students are not found in many places across the country (National Association for Gifted Children and the Council for State Directors of Programmes for the Gifted, 2015). Resistance to support for those at the top of the ability curve is found in many communities. Some Irish parents of CTYI-attending children in this study had concerns that gifted education is elitist or provides an unfair advantage. Segregated gifted classes are common in the US, potentially establishing a two-tiered educational system. With varied definitions and practices for identification, school systems in the US have likely spent more energy and resources on keeping students out of gifted education than on providing an appropriate education to their most capable students. A differentiation model, where teachers offer a different education to the heterogeneous ability levels in their classes, is difficult or impossible to achieve in large classrooms with undertrained teachers (Adams & Pierce, 2009; Mills et al., 2014). The most recent gifted education movement in the US is based on a talent development model (Cross & Coleman, 2005; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011). With this approach, schools provide ample opportunities for all students at early stages to identify areas in which they have outstanding potential or interest. As students are exposed to advanced content or skills in multiple domains, their abilities are assessed continuously to determine how best to support their individual talent development. With a talent development approach, there is no need for formal identification of students based on a test score or for a label, such as "gifted," which several parents in this study strongly reject. Instead, students are identified by their increasing success within a domain over time. This model emphasizes the movement from potential to achievement. As Irish educators examine options for gifted education in their schools, it would be beneficial for them to consider the benefits of a talent development model.

Regardless of the approach taken, teachers and administrators require professional development on the population of high-ability students and best practice in schools. In the previous report in this series (Cross et al., 2014), an apparent disconnect was identified between administrators' and teachers' perceptions of the support teachers in their schools had to differentiate instruction for high-ability students. Effective differentiation requires significant time and resources, in addition to the training required for teachers. To be of benefit to the students, all stakeholders should be aware of the actual requirements. Through professional development, educators can be made aware. Parents can best support these efforts by encouraging professional development activities and demanding an appropriate education for all students, including those who are highly able.

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Chapter 7: Recommendations for Parent Advocacy

Based on the survey results, parents of children attending CTYI generally agreed that Irish schools and the Department of Education could do more to adequately meet the academic and socioemotional needs of their high-ability children. Although some parents reported being satisfied with their children's current experiences in school, more attention can be directed to the needs of high-ability students across the country of Ireland to increase access and equity to an appropriate education. Parents of high-ability students can advocate for services and supports; however, all parents may not have the knowledge or capacity to conduct advocacy efforts for and on behalf of their children. When parents are passive or avoid involvement in their children's educational progress, the high-ability child aimlessly drifts along with boredom rather than moving purposefully with challenge (McIntyre, 2004). Thus, this section of the report will offer recommendations for parents to effectively advocate for their children's needs and engage in beneficial and collaborative activities to become a more informed advocate.

Previous research and expertise from gifted education researchers, educators, and parents suggested that parents can advocate for their high-ability children by beginning at the school level. Parents begin by enhancing their own knowledge and awareness of giftedness and gifted education, and then parents can work collaboratively with teachers, seek services from the school, and even advocate at the local and national levels.

Self-Education for Parents

Parents can develop an understanding of the diverse characteristics of giftedness and the unique needs of their children. Grantham, Frasier, Roberts, and Bridges (2005) suggested that parents can learn about and use the 10 core attributes of giftedness, according to Frasier's Talent Assessment Profile (F-TAP) Model (Frasier, 1994), to understand their own children's giftedness. These 10 core attributes are:

1. Motivation: Evidence of desire to learn.
2. Interests: A feeling of intentness, passion, concern, or curiosity about something.
3. Communication skills: Highly expressive and effective use of words, numbers, symbols, and so forth.
4. Problem-solving ability: Effective, often inventive, strategies for recognizing and solving problems.
5. Memory: Large storehouse of information on school or non-school topics.
6. Inquiry: Questions, experiments, explores.
7. Insight: Quickly grasps new concepts and makes connections, senses deeper meanings.
8. Reasoning: Logical approaches to figuring out solutions.
9. Imagination and creativity: Produces many ideas, highly original.
10. Humor: Bringing two or more heretofore unrelated ideas or planes of thought together in a recognized relationship. (p. 145)

Parents can also engage in independent readings for themselves about giftedness as well as teach their children about what it means to have the capacity to achieve at an exceptional level and monitoring how they best learn inside and outside of the classroom setting (Davidson Institute for Talent Development, 2009a; Rogers, 2002). The Davidson Gifted Database offers various recommended readings for parents and children to learn about giftedness. (See <https://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database>). Moreover, parents can peruse resources from the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), which offers tip sheets and tools for parents to understand and advocate for their high-ability children's needs. (See <https://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/gifted-education-practices/acceleration>).

Parents Advocating for Their High-Ability Children

Initiating in-school supports.

To seek appropriate academic services for their high-ability children at school, parents are the best advocates when they understand and explain their child's needs, and then help other educators understand how their children learn and grow (Center for Talent Development [CTD], n.d.). In addition, parents need to be educated about how schools define and identify giftedness and what programmes and services are already

offered to match what is available with their child's needs (CTD, n.d.). Although the parents of this study indicate no such supports are available, schools may have more to offer in the form of interested teachers or resource hours that could be applied, for example, if administrators are made aware of the need. To comprehensively present their child's strengths and needs, parents can begin by gathering pertinent data and information about their child's cognitive functioning (including ability and achievement scores), teacher and parent ratings of cognitive ability and strengths, academic and non-academic content that demonstrates the child's abilities, a list of the child's learning strengths and preferences, personal characteristics, and in-school and out-of-school interests and involvements (Rogers, 2002). Parents are also encouraged to share CTYI data and documentation with schools to add to their child's portfolio.

With the collected information, parents can then collaboratively work with schools and request that the school create and support an educational plan that identifies the students' strengths and needs, as well as the types of academic programmes, services, or accommodations at the school level to consistently challenge their children (Davidson Institute for Talent Development, 2009a; Rogers, 2002). Rogers recommended that within the child's educational plan, 65% of the plan should be focused on developing the child's talent, 10% focused on remediation of gaps in knowledge or skills, and 25% focused on socialization and self-esteem building. High-ability children benefit most when accessing challenging and rigorous curriculum on a direct, daily, and consistent basis, whereas a pull-out programme and other sporadic programmes not only create divisions among children in schools but also inadequately provide the consistency required for continuous practice and challenge (McIntyre, 2004; Rogers, 2002). In addition, advocating for subject-based or grade-based acceleration may be appropriate for high-ability children's educational planning, which not only requires a presentation of collected information about the child, but also requires school and Department of Education support and approval (NAGC, n.d.; Teach, n.d.). The parents of this study were generally quite strongly opposed to grade acceleration, but it should be noted that there are more than 20 types of acceleration, one or more of which may be effective and acceptable to all parties (Cross, Andersen, & Mammadov, 2015).

Parent-teacher collaboration.

Another important role for parents as advocates is to establish positive and collaborative partnerships with their children's classroom teachers. Irish teachers have generally reported seeing gifted education favorably (Cross, et al., 2014), but without adequately trained and supportive teachers, high-ability students risk being bored, getting assignments of busywork, and feeling intellectually starved and alienated from peers (Coleman & Cross, 2005). In a study of elementary teachers' attitudes toward gifted education, teachers with greater negativity toward parents expressed greater negativity toward gifted students and programmes, as well as decreased interest in teaching gifted students (Chipego, 2004). Chipego (2004) reported that the study's findings connect to previous research by Seligman (1979) in which, when teachers feel subordinate, intruded upon, or controlled by parents, whether through intimidation or legal means, they express less positive feelings toward the child. Parents can avoid becoming adversarial with the school, and instead, approach the school in a collaborative manner (Chipego, 2004; CTD, n.d.). Suggestions include:

- Rather than saying how bored your child is, reframe the statement to focus on your child's need for challenge through quality, not necessarily quantity (i.e., more work).
- Share your perceptions of your child in the home environment when he or she is working on academic and non-academic tasks, and help the teacher understand your perceptions.
- Avoid telling the teacher how he or she should teach, as this may appear offensive. Instead, ask the teacher, "How can we work together to support my child? What types of cooperative learning opportunities have you done in the past that have worked well? What strategies and resources do you have for us at home? What classroom interventions or school personnel provide the needed supports for my child?"

Outside-of-school supports.

In addition to academic services, high-ability children benefit from socialization opportunities and extracurricular activities that connect with the child's choice and interests (Rogers, 2002). Rogers recommends that parents offer activities that support, yet challenge, students' academic and socioemotional development, as well as promote a balance in which children can express, practice, and enhance their gifts and talents in

multiple ways. For instance, one or a few activities can cover a broad spectrum of developmental goals, including talent development, socialization with children and adults of like and varying abilities, self-awareness and confidence, fine and gross motor skills, memorization, communication, and problem solving and critical thinking in social and real-world issues (Rogers, 2002). In the US, there are many gifted programme opportunities outside of the school, including early college entrance and mentorship opportunities, which can offer gifted children connections with peers and adults who highlight and support their gifts and talents (Davidson Institute for Talent Development, 2009b; Robinson & The Davidson Institute Team, 2009; Smutny, 2015). Some of these exist through CTYI, but it may be possible for parents to approach other institutions to find appropriate advanced experiences, particularly for older students. Parents also need supports for themselves, and it may be useful and helpful to connect with local parent groups who experience similar challenges or can share helpful ways of navigating schools and school systems to access gifted programming (Smutny, 2015).

Systemic Advocacy for High-Ability Children and Gifted Education

If parents are dissatisfied with their children's academic experiences, it is suggested that parents begin with the classroom teacher (CTD, n.d.; Smutny, 2015), and if the classroom teacher is either resistant or unaware of how to adequately support your child, then move up the ladder to seek the principal, superintendent, and the school's Board of Management.

Parents can seek and collaborate with educators and policy makers to advocate on behalf of high-ability children and their unique needs as learners (Besnoy, 2005; Robinson & Moon, 2003). In addition, parents can raise awareness of how schools require systemic changes, such as educator trainings in gifted education, as well as structured and consistent gifted programme offerings in-school and out-of-school, so that all capable students can equitably access gifted education services. As advocates, parents have the potential to create forums for dialogue and share their knowledge with other parents to seek rigorous learning standards for any student who desires the challenge (Hertzog, 2003; CTD, n.d.). Advocacy at the local and national levels of the political process by attending advocacy group meetings or other public education forums can increase awareness about the gaps in programme access and services for high-ability students, and even become the starting point for introducing formal legislation that increases funding and services for all high-ability students (Delcourt, 2003; Enerson, 2003; CTD, n.d.; Robinson & Moon, 2003).

According to Smutny (2015), progress may be slow and incremental at first, but parents should never underestimate their power. Most importantly, parents are modeling to their children the value of determination, collaboration, and creative problem solving, which are important skills needed for progress and achievement (Smutny, 2015). Parents are powerful individuals, and with the support of CTYI and a spirit of collaborative advocacy, parents can make impacts not only on their own children but also on all high-ability children across the country.

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