

[Gifted Learners: Advocating for Screening and Referrals for Children of Color](#)

By [Kara L. Higgins](#)



My son, Ezekiel, is never without a book in hand and a backpack full of reading on-the-go. As the youngest of five, he probably got read aloud to a little longer and a little more often than his siblings, with me not quite ready to let go of that sweet stage of snuggles and bedtime stories. So, it was no surprise when he was reading early and often. His descriptive storytelling, broad interests, and vast vocabulary are encouraging and impressive.

Yet my avid reader is not in the talented and gifted program at his school, and he has never been screened. English is his second language, and he despises numbers (like his mama!). However, as a 4th grader, he reads at a 9th grade level, and his standardized test scores are well above average. Although I should know, I did not realize until recently that children across all state lines undergo IQ tests and gifted screenings at the teacher *or parent* request. Shame on me!

Our student population nationwide has become increasingly diverse. However, African-American students are $\frac{1}{3}$ less likely to be enrolled in any talented or gifted program in public or private sectors. There is an overrepresentation of White and Asian students in gifted and talented programs, while Black and Hispanic students are typically underrepresented. However, research does not support the notion that any one group is more intelligent than another (Renzulli, 2004). So how does this make sense?

Students from underserved populations, of all races, may not exhibit characteristics that are stereotypically “gifted”. Some gifted individuals with exceptional aptitude may not demonstrate outstanding levels of achievement due to environmental circumstances, such as limited opportunities to learn as a result of poverty, discrimination, or cultural barriers. Other

obstacles include physical barriers, emotional challenges or behaviors resulting directly from outside stressors. Hence, school faculty and administrators may overlook the child's aptitude and high ability learning because of these other factors. Moreover, with ample evidence that our Black sons are often over-targeted as disciplinary problems from a very young age, it's easy to assume that their gifts are therefore being overlooked.

Brown vs the Board of Education was a step in formally attempting, as a nation, to achieve educational equality. The reality is still quite different; and we all know equality does not always equate with quality. No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a Congressional Act of 2001 that attempted to keep lower level learners from falling through the cracks, is a good example of equality, but not quality, impacting the children who are exceptional learners. Since NCLB, many teachers are forced to more or less ignore gifted children, instead teaching to a one-size-fits-all curriculum that caters to the lowest common denominator—the average classroom student—with the thought being that our gifted students don't need the extra work or attention. We as moms all know very well that the ignored or forgotten child often resorts to behavior and actions that will draw attention, whether good or bad.

What can be done? Like anything else, knowing is half the battle. Be an advocate for our Black sons and for all kids who are more likely to get missed. Know that you can request for your son to be screened. Show up to all the parent-teacher conferences, no matter how much your son may be excelling. Bring this up in conversations with other parents and ask your child's teacher if she knows the statistics.

Following are a few resources for further empowerment:

- [Supporting Emotional Needs for the Gifted](#): Provides resources and support for families and students.
- [Acceleration Institute](#): Dedicated to research and curriculum that supports gifted students.
- [Parenting Gifted Kids](#): This blog is written by a fellow mom and covers information for several ages and stages of childhood.
- Unfortunately, a literature review revealed very little specific support or information for families or children of color. The National Association of Gifted Learners does have a web series written by a black student, regarding advocacy and experiences in academics. Check out this great [blog post](#).

For more resources, contact our Education and Engagement Committee Lead, Kumari Ghafoor-Davis, at education@mobbunited.org.