PART 2

RESULTS FROM A NATIONAL TEACHER SURVEY

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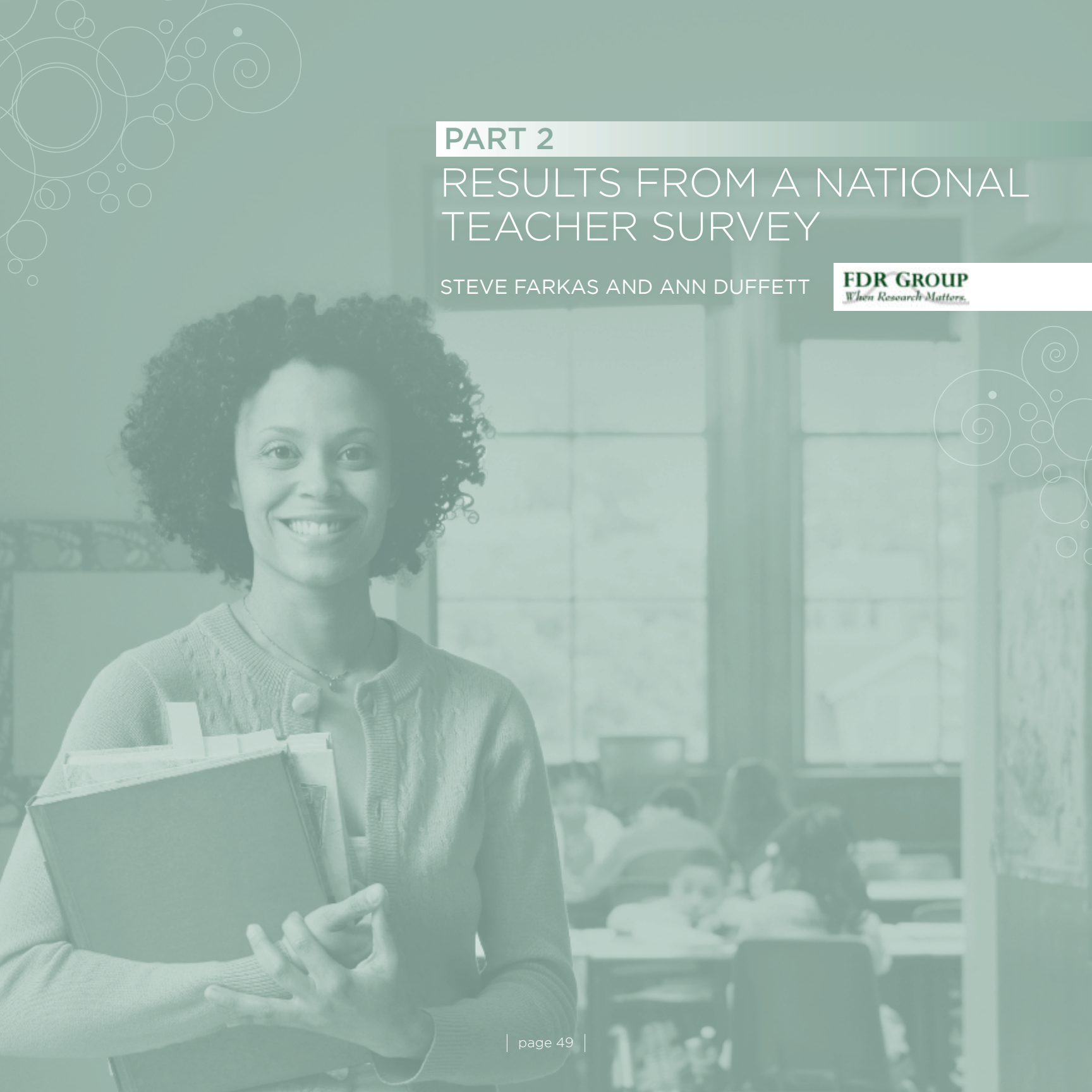
FDR GROUP
When Research Matters.



INTRODUCTION

The great historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., once wrote that "a basic theme of American history has been the movement, uneven but steady, from exclusion to inclusion"—a movement "fueled by egalitarian political principles . . . that constantly goad Americans to live up to their own proclaimed ideals."[1] He might well have been talking about America's public education system. The nation keeps discovering segments of its pupil population that have been overlooked or neglected—and then tries to do something about it.

Standards-based education reform in general and the No Child Left Behind Act in particular make it no longer possible—either in America's inner cities or in its affluent suburbs—for public schools to overlook entire groups of students whose education is not succeeding. Similarly, because of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, schools are required to address the needs of youngsters with physical disabilities or special learning needs; it is no longer possible to neglect these children, either. Nowadays, public school systems must also grapple with how best to educate immigrant children who do not speak English—avoidance is a hard strategy to justify. The resulting educational approaches and policies that schools have adopted may be tangled and confused; they may not be working as they should. But the public schools are constantly challenged by circumstances to live up to their own proclaimed ideals. And they challenge themselves, too.

In the findings from a national teacher survey on how well schools serve high-achieving students, public school teachers do some challenging of their own; they challenge both themselves and America's current education policy priorities. They point to a segment of the pupil population they believe is being overlooked: students with unusual intellectual talent and higher levels of academic achievement. Teachers believe that these youngsters deserve more classroom attention and conscious effort than they now get, and they have their own explanations for why academically advanced students are being neglected. Teachers also have recommendations to make, some of which fly in the face of conventional education wisdom and contradict prevailing practices.

Teachers want these advanced (some say "gifted" or "gifted and talented") students to move up the list of education priorities because educating them properly is the right thing to do and because it's good for the nation, but mostly because they see in their own classrooms youngsters whose considerable talents are not adequately challenged or fully utilized.

TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this report, we interchangeably use such terms as "academically advanced," "talented," and "high-achieving"; they do not refer to specific programs, nor are they based on achievement data. We have deliberately avoided the use of the terms "gifted" and "gifted and talented," which refer to actual programs, except where we are referring to those programs. The survey questionnaire relied on the term "academically advanced" because prior focus groups indicated this was consistently most comfortable for teachers to use.

LISTENING TO TEACHERS

This study is an in-depth exploration of the attitudes of third- through twelfth-grade public school teachers toward the issue of how academically talented youngsters fare in today's schools. It does not and cannot say whether teachers' diagnoses are true or whether their recommendations are sound. It is not a program evaluation or review of schools' efforts to serve advanced students. Since this is the first time these questions and this survey have been fielded, we cannot track teacher attitudes over time and look for trends.

Still, the questioning by America's public school teachers of the orientation and policies that currently prevail on this issue deserves respectful hearing. Teachers are the ones who often face tough tradeoffs in their classrooms. Smart architects, auto engineers, urban planners—even politicians—eventually circle back to the folks who actually use their products and services to ask, "How am I doing?" and "What could I be doing better?" Policymakers, too, need to ask such questions—and to listen to teachers' responses.

ABOUT THE STUDY METHODS

The study is based upon survey findings from a randomly selected, nationally representative sample of 900 public school teachers teaching in grades 3 to 12, plus qualitative data from five focus groups, conducted in winter-spring 2008. The margin of error for the overall sample is plus or minus three percentage points; it is higher when comparing percentages across subgroups. In general, the qualitative data from the focus groups serve to contextualize the survey findings and provide illustrative quotations and examples of teachers' experiences. These data are presented under the "Observations" subheadings throughout the report. A description of the methodology as well as the entire questionnaire and complete survey results are included in appendices.

SECTION 1
HOW MUCH OF A PRIORITY ARE ACADEMICALLY ADVANCED STUDENTS?

ARE ADVANCED STUDENTS A PRIORITY?

Most teachers believe that academically advanced students are not a high priority at their schools. They think that these students are bored, underserved, and unlikely to get the curriculum enrichment and resources that high achievers need.

Fewer than one in four teachers (23%) say that the needs of advanced students are a top priority at their schools; the remainder says their needs are either a middle (44%) or low (32%) priority. By an 18 to 31% margin, teachers working in the lowest-income schools (schools with more than three in four pupils eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) are less likely to say the needs of advanced students are a top priority than those teaching in the most affluent schools (no more than one in four students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch).

Figure 1—Relative Priority Given to Needs of Advanced Students

Would you say that the needs of the academically advanced students at your school are a:

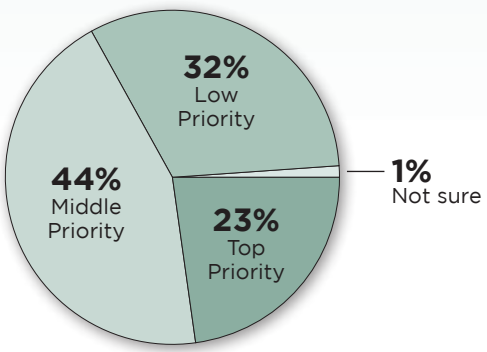
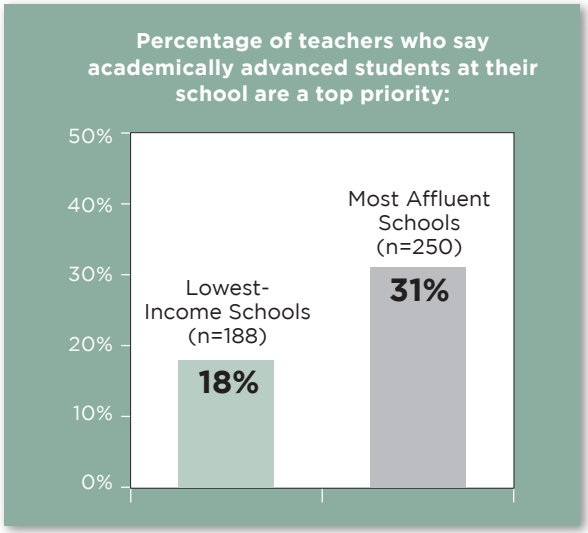
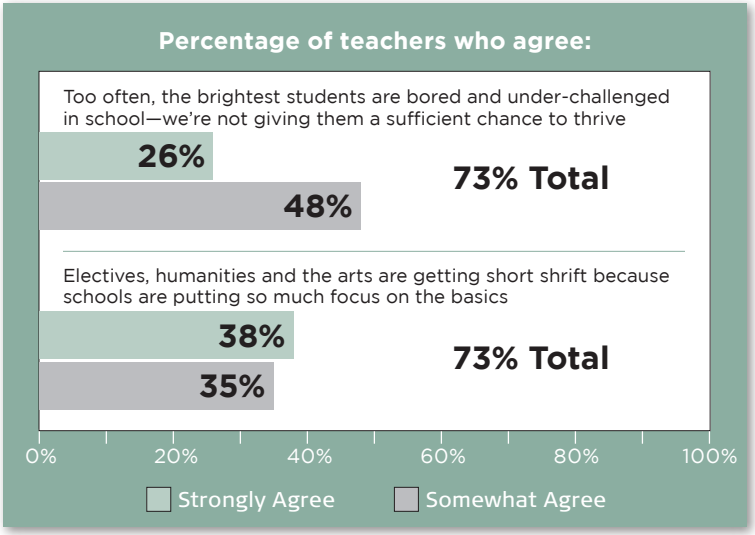


Figure 2—Top Priority for Advanced Students, by School Poverty Status



Note: Lowest-income schools > 75% students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch; most affluent schools ≤25% students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch.

Figure 3—Shortchanging of Students and Subjects



More than seven in ten teachers (73%) agree that "too often, the brightest students are bored and under-challenged in school—we're not giving them a sufficient chance to thrive."

The same majority of teachers (73%) agrees that electives, humanities, and the arts "are getting short shrift because schools are putting so much focus on the basics."

OBSERVATIONS

In the focus groups, it was not unusual to detect a sense of guilt among teachers about the fate of students with extra talent. To hear teachers tell it, their schools are sometimes at a loss about what to do with advanced students; they lack a strategic plan or creative ideas. And teachers feel bad when they see talent going to waste.

> **"I feel like sometimes we're cheating them. Cheating them out of their own personal glory . . . They could be so much more magnificent in their own right and happier, because I think they feel a level of frustration when they have to sit by while we're babysitting."**

> **"I don't think enough is done for them. They do get lost in the classroom, especially if you have very low-performing students or if you have behavior issues. You're over here. Meanwhile, they're done, and they're patiently waiting."**

> **"It does seem that the resources, when we do get them for the higher achieving, are always geared toward things like day trips to places.... The problem is that when we do get funds for the gifted students, it's always, 'Take them to the science museum.'"**

WHERE ARE RESOURCES LIKELY TO GO?

Teachers say that while the public schools muster serious effort to improve the academic achievement of struggling students, their resources rarely converge on the needs of high achievers. Most teachers responding would prefer that all students get equal levels of attention from the schools, but they do not believe that is currently happening.

About a quarter of teachers (23%) say the needs of the academically advanced students at their school are a top priority—compared with 60% who say the needs of struggling students are a top priority.

Scant proportions of teachers believe advanced students are most likely (compared to average and struggling students) to get one-on-one attention from teachers (5%); or be given a specially designed curriculum and instruction (10%); or have attention paid to tracking and raising their achievement data (5%).

One in two teachers (50%) believes that all students should get equal levels of attention, whether they are academically advanced, average, or struggling. But only 16% say that, at their school, attention is now divided equally among students of different abilities, versus 63% who say struggling students get the most attention. Just 7% think advanced students are getting the most attention, and 13% believe that average students are.

A plurality of teachers (45%) says that, over the past few years, the amount of attention and resources devoted to academically advanced students at their school has stayed about the same. Teachers are about equally likely to say it has increased (23%) as they are to say it has decreased (26%).

Figure 4—Attention and Resources Given to Advanced Students Relative to Others

Question	Struggling Students	Average Students	Advanced Students	It's Equal
Who gets the most overall attention at your school?	63%	13%	7%	16%
Who should get the most attention at your school?	24%	16%	5%	50%
Who is your school most likely to focus on when it comes to tracking achievement data and trying to raise standardized test scores?	68%	15%	5%	11%
Who is most likely to get one-on-one attention from teachers?	81%	4%	5%	9%
And who is most likely to be taught with a curriculum and instruction specially designed for their abilities?	51%	19%	10%	18%

Figure 5—Changes in Attention and Resources Provided to Advanced Students

Over the past few years, would you say the attention and resources given to academically advanced students at your school has:

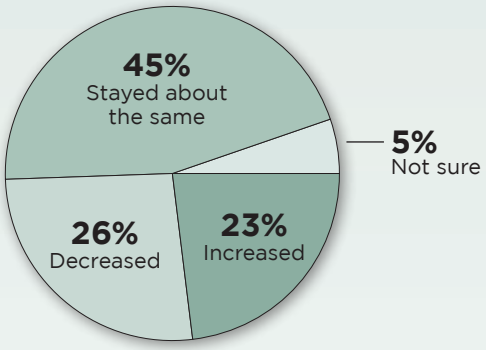
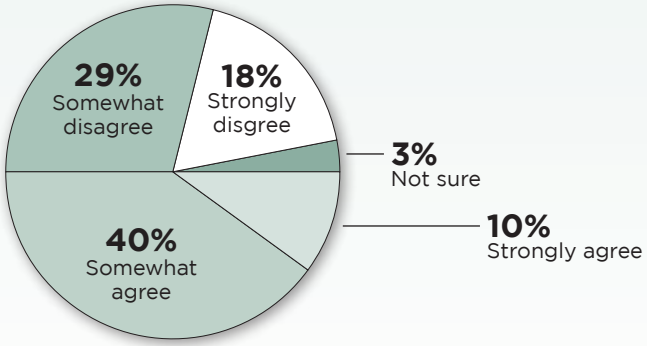


Figure 6—Role of Parents in Identifying Advanced Students

Too often, students are labeled as advanced only because their parents are overzealous and know how to work the system



OBSERVATIONS

Teachers in the focus groups said that departmental meetings often concentrate on low-achieving students but rarely on the high-achieving. They felt they were leaving some kids behind—or to the side—and acknowledged that this made them feel uncomfortable.

> **"One thing I've seen is . . . that most of the resources go to the lower-end students. In my classroom, the administration feels that I don't need anything more. My students are doing just fine."**

WHAT ABOUT "GIFTED AND TALENTED" PROGRAMS AND HONORS CLASSES?

Elementary and middle schools typically have some version of a "gifted and talented" program; high schools may have honors, Advanced Placement (AP), and/or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. But teachers report that some efforts to accommodate high achievers can fall short or get subverted. Many teachers suspect that these programs misidentify students, either by wrongly overlooking those who belong in them or wrongly categorizing as "gifted" those who do not.[2]

Half of teachers agree (50%) with the statement that, "Too often, students are labeled as advanced only because their parents are overzealous and know how to work the system" (47% disagree). High school teachers (61%) are more likely to agree than are elementary school teachers (40%).

Fewer than one in ten elementary and middle school teachers (9%) think the tests used by their district to identify gifted and talented students are "very accurate and reliable"; a plurality (46%) says they're "somewhat accurate and reliable."

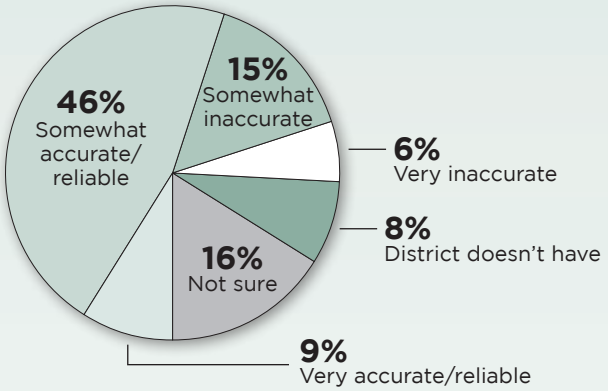
Some teachers doubt that the system can be relied upon to effectively identify true academic talent. If a lot more attention were paid to the needs of academically advanced students, almost half (47%) of teachers say they would be very (8%) or somewhat (39%) concerned that "the tests and the experts will misidentify which students are advanced and which are not." On the other hand, half say they would not be worried about this (37% are not too concerned and 13% are not concerned at all).

While 50% of high school teachers say that honors and accelerated classes in their schools are "truly rigorous and challenging," 40% say they're too often "watered down and lacking rigor."

One-third of high school teachers (33%) estimate that, in their school, more than one in four students (that is, at least 26% of students) in honors and accelerated classes are there for reasons that have nothing to do with academic ability, such as parental pressure or demographic diversity.

Figure 7—Reliability of "Gifted and Talented" Tests

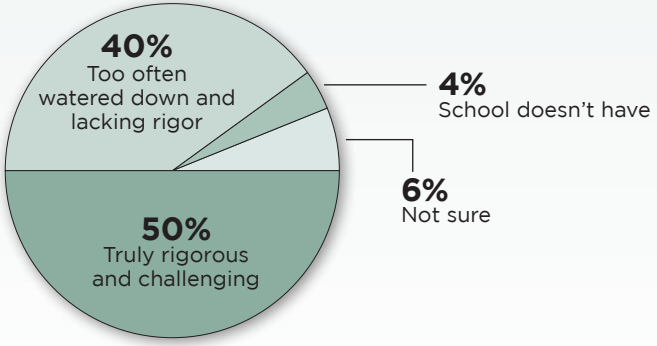
As far as you can tell, how accurate and reliable are the procedures and tests your district uses for identifying students eligible for the "gifted and talented" program?



Base: *Elementary and middle school teachers (n=621)*

Figure 8—Rigor in Honors and Accelerated Classes

Is it your sense that the content and curriculum for honors and accelerated learning classes are:



Base: *High school teachers (n=253)*

OBSERVATIONS

In the focus groups, high school teachers said parents sometimes push unprepared kids into advanced classes to beef up their college applications or to make sure they go to class with better-behaved students. Several talked about administrators anxious to enhance the school's reputation in the community by creating advanced classes—even if they would have to populate those classes with academically average students. Teachers in the lower grades complained that many students funneled into the gifted and talented program didn't belong there. Meanwhile, some teachers talked about overlooked students who deserve to be in advanced classes but lack advocates.

> **"They call them honors classes or they call them AP classes, but it's sad. They're not."**

> **"You have plenty of talented children, and you've got language issues—because they don't fill in that circle correctly or they miss a word and they can't get it translated. It doesn't translate correctly into what their true abilities are."**

> **"We have what we call the true GATE [Gifted and Talented Education] and then we have the GATE 'wannabes.' The ones that may have gotten in just by test scores, but had none of the skills or the classroom abilities to do the studying, and just keep up with it, didn't have the motivation. We were forcing these kids to do things that they didn't really want to do."**

The portrait painted by teachers is not pretty: schools without a real plan or thought-through strategy on how optimally to serve advanced students; teachers who suspect—and often feel guilty—that some of their students are getting shortchanged; parents who sometimes get their way when they shouldn't; and advanced programs and classes that have lost their focus. "There is no real gifted curriculum," said one teacher. "It's up to the teacher to come up with it."

If teachers depict a situation where academically talented students are languishing in a system that has somehow settled on a strategy of inattention, what's their explanation for how the system has gotten to this point?

SECTION 2
TEACHERS TALK ABOUT VALUES AND TRADEOFFS

One hypothesis going into this study was that public school teachers might be carrying into their classrooms attitudes that constrained the amount of attention they gave to advanced students, such as the view that these youngsters already have ample educational advantages. But in fact, teachers believe that balance and equal investment in all students is the right approach for schools. Few fear that pushing the best and brightest students harder would hurt their emotional development. Nor do they worry that giving them more attention would damage the self-esteem of other students.

WHERE SHOULD THE SCHOOLS DIRECT THEIR ATTENTION?

A commitment to fairness and equity is one reason teachers think academically advanced students ought to get as much attention as other students. Another is the belief that the nation will need the talents of these students with strong academic skills. Few accept the notion that these youngsters need less attention because they are already academically ahead.

The answers to one survey question were particularly telling: "For the public schools to help the U.S. live up to its ideals of justice and equality," the question asked, is it more important that the schools "focus on raising the achievement

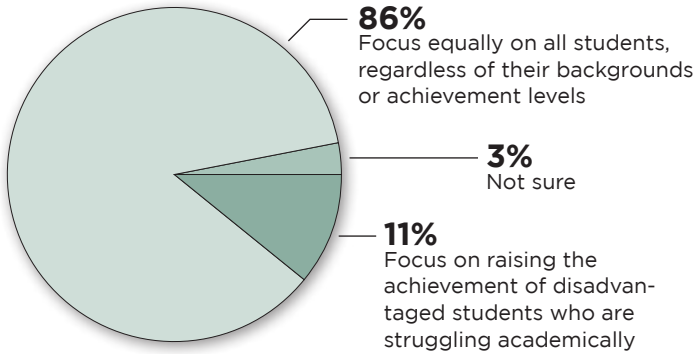
of disadvantaged students who are struggling academically" or "that they focus equally on all students, regardless of their backgrounds or achievement levels"? Focusing equally on all students was the hands-down choice of teachers by an overwhelming 86 to 11% margin.

Nearly three-quarters of teachers (73%) reject the view that "the schools don't have to worry as much about advanced youngsters because their talent, resources and backgrounds have already set them on the right path."

Four-fifths (81%) believe that "our advanced students need special attention—they are the future leaders of this country, and their talents will enable us to compete in a global economy."

Figure 9—Commitment to Fairness and Equity

For the public schools to help the U.S. live up to its ideals of justice and equality, do you think it's more important that they:



OBSERVATIONS

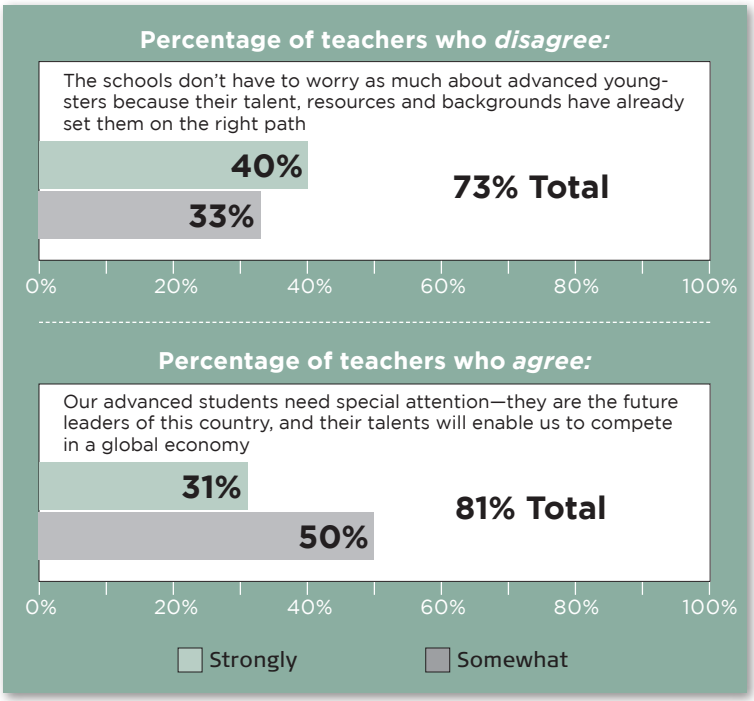
To teachers, equity means that no group of students should be neglected. If it were up to them, the schools would pursue this strategy: when students are behind, help them move forward; when students are ahead, help them reach their potential. Teachers believe that a rebalancing of school effort is needed.

> "If we're truly saying 'no child left behind,' hello!?!"

> "You know, I wouldn't feel right as a teacher knowing that I did all I can with one group and I kind of left another group just saying, 'You're advanced. You know it.' No, I have to teach . . . If they're already at the top of their game, how can you push them to the next level?"

> "I could have the next great writer in my course, and if I don't pay that extra attention to them, it's never going to happen."

Figure 10—Schools' Responsibility toward Advanced Students



WHAT'S THE DOWNSIDE OF FOCUSING MORE ATTENTION ON ADVANCED STUDENTS?

From the perspective of most teachers, there are few downsides to paying more attention to the needs of academically advanced students. Teachers do not worry, for example, that pushing such pupils to do more intellectual work at a faster pace will hurt their social development. A corollary concern—that singling out the academically talented may damage the self-esteem of less advanced students—also fails to resonate. Many teachers are concerned that struggling students might lose resources if their schools paid more attention to high achievers, but many are not.

Well over half (57%) reject the view that "pushing advanced kids to develop faster will endanger their emotional and social well-being," although 41% do worry that this could happen.

Almost three-quarters of teachers (73%) dismiss as overblown concerns that "paying too much attention to the accomplishments of advanced students will stigmatize the other students and damage their self-esteem." By a 38 to 21% margin, teachers working in the lowest-income schools—where more than three in four students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch—are more likely to be concerned that this might happen than are teachers working in more affluent schools.

Figure 11—Potential Consequences of Concentrating on Advanced Students

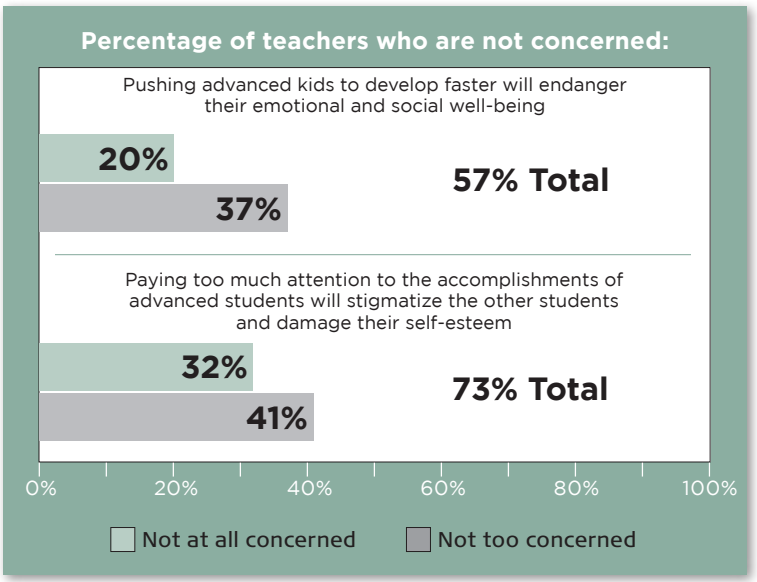
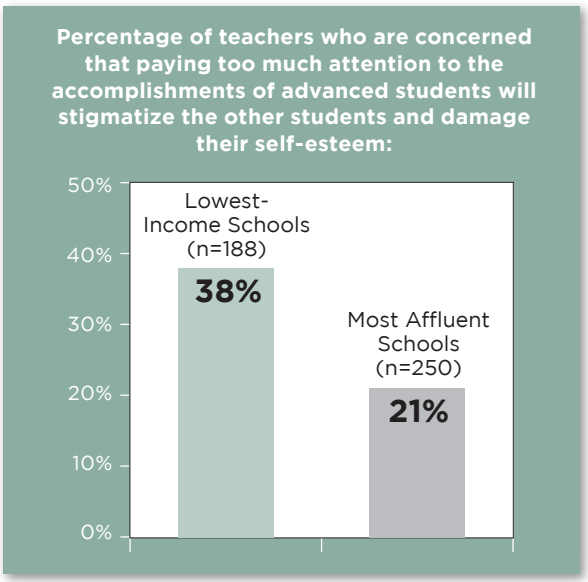


Figure 12—Potential Consequences of Concentrating on Advanced Students, by School Poverty Status

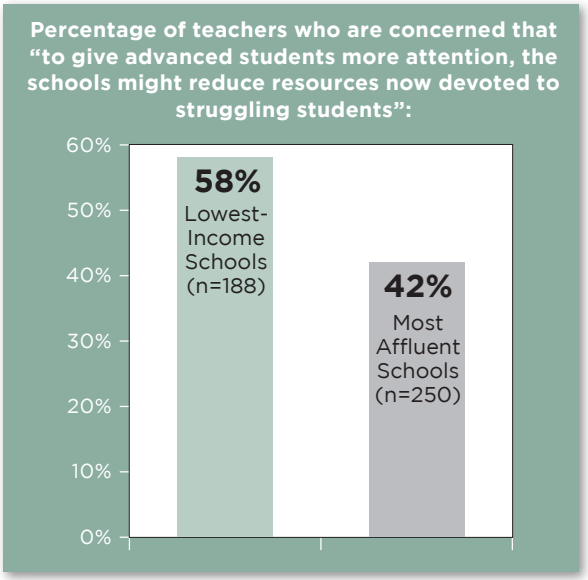


Note: *Lowest-income schools > 75% students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch; most affluent schools ≤25% students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch.*

Elementary school teachers are more likely than high school teachers to be concerned about potential impact on children's emotional well-being. Specifically, they're more likely than high school teachers to worry that paying a lot more attention to advanced students would stigmatize other children (30% to 19%). And they are more likely than high school teachers to worry about the emotional consequences of pushing advanced kids to develop faster (46% to 35%).

Teachers are divided over whether giving advanced students more attention may have the unintended consequence of reducing the resources that go to struggling students: half (50%) are not concerned that this would happen but 45% are. Teachers working in low-income schools are more likely to be concerned (58%) than teachers working in affluent schools (42%).

Figure 13—Distribution of Resources a Zero-Sum Game, by Poverty Status



Note: Lowest-income schools > 75% students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch; most affluent schools ≤ 25% students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch.

OBSERVATIONS

We wondered whether teachers favored a no-pressure school environment where protecting students and imparting self-esteem to all is paramount, even if excellence goes unrecognized. But most teachers do not believe that the emotional health of advanced students will suffer if schools push them harder. Most also don't think that saluting their accomplishments means that struggling students will feel slighted. Such concerns are somewhat more prevalent, however, among teachers working in low-income schools.

RACE, INCOME, AND TALENT

The concern that paying a lot more attention to academically advanced students could result in racially skewed classrooms is not widespread among teachers. Still, most teachers do worry that talented youngsters from low socioeconomic backgrounds are ignored because they may not have someone at home or in the school system to watch out for them.

Most teachers (58%) are not concerned that paying greater attention to the needs of advanced students might mean that "those classes will end up disproportionately white and higher income"; but 37% are concerned. Teachers working in inner-city schools are more likely to worry about this, however; over half (52%) of them worry that such classes would end up excessively white and affluent, compared with their suburban (37%) and rural (28%) counterparts. Teachers in low-income schools are also likelier to worry about this (48%) than teachers in affluent schools (33%).

There is a widely shared sense among teachers that "academically talented youngsters from low socioeconomic backgrounds are often overlooked—they fall through the cracks because no one advocates for them," with almost six in ten teachers agreeing (59%), compared with 37% disagreeing. Teachers working in low-income schools are even more likely to agree (76%), compared with their counterparts in affluent schools (52%).

OBSERVATIONS

Teachers seem less worried about the political appearance of academically advanced classes that are skewed by race or ethnicity than about the possibility of low-income and minority students falling through the cracks because their parents might lack the know-how to promote their interests. Teachers think the context of students' lives matters most—if youngsters come from families with low socioeconomic backgrounds and are pigeonholed by the schools, it may be more difficult for their talent to carry the day.

"They [school board members] feel that there's not enough minorities and poverty-level [students]. They pull from other groups to put them in the honors classes, but they're watering it down. They have to water down the curriculum. Again, it's a political thing."

Figure 14—Concern about Demographic Skew in Advanced Classes, by School Type and Poverty Status

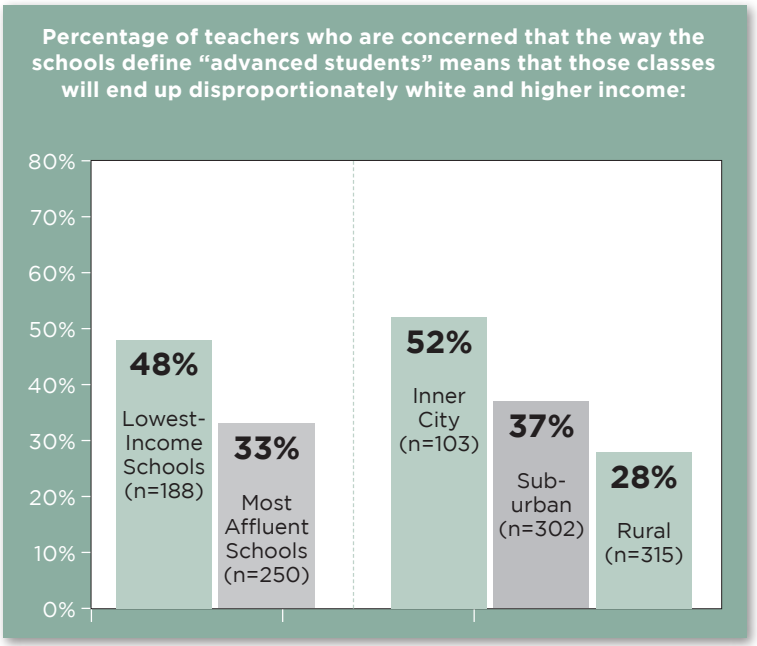
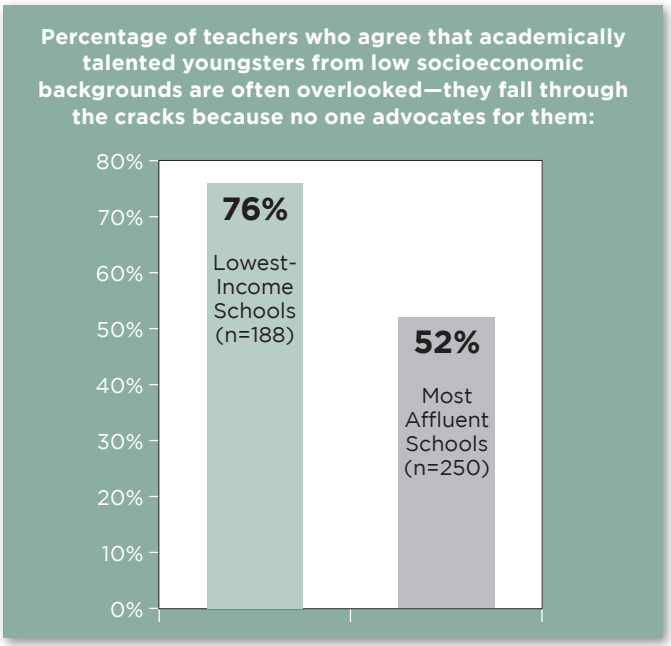


Figure 15—Relative Concern about Neglect of Academically Talented Poor, by School Poverty Status



Note: *Lowest-income schools > 75% students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch; most affluent schools ≤ 25% students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch.*

> **"For my school, we're half white, half Hispanic. The majority of the Caucasian parents are really involved and really advocate for their children. The majority of the Hispanic parents really aren't familiar with the education system in America. They don't know what you need to do or what you have to say to get things done. They're not advocates."**

The lack of focus on academically advanced students does not seem to be driven by teachers who hesitate to pay much attention to the best and brightest. On the contrary, teachers say it's wrong to neglect these students, especially because teachers' definition of equity means teaching each child to her or his individual potential. If anything, teachers are quite open to a reordering of schools' priorities so that academically talented students get more attention and more resources.

SECTION 3
TEACHERS TALK ABOUT THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Teachers point to powerful factors in the school environment that may cause schools to neglect high achievers. They indicate they face pressure to raise the test scores of low-achieving students and that their own preparation programs provided inadequate training on how to work with advanced students. Many teachers report that their schools have few classes segmented by academic ability—yet most teachers believe that advanced students would thrive in such classes. And according to teachers, it is a real challenge to implement differentiated instruction in their classrooms.

IMPACT OF NCLB ON ACADEMICALLY ADVANCED STUDENTS

Teachers believe that holding schools to account for bringing the standardized test scores of underachieving students to proficiency has pulled attention and resources away from higher-achieving students. Few teachers say positive things about the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) on academically advanced students. More than three in four (77%) agree that "getting underachieving students to reach 'proficiency' has become so important that the needs of advanced students take a back seat."

Only 10% of teachers say that NCLB has had a positive impact on advanced students, while 50% say the impact has been negative, and 35% termed it neutral.

In contrast, a larger proportion of teachers (30%) think NCLB has had a positive impact on academically struggling students—still far from a majority but higher than the 10% who say it's had a positive impact on high-achieving students.

Figure 16—Focus on Underachieving versus Advanced Students

Getting underachieving students to reach "proficiency" has become so important that the needs of advanced students take a back seat

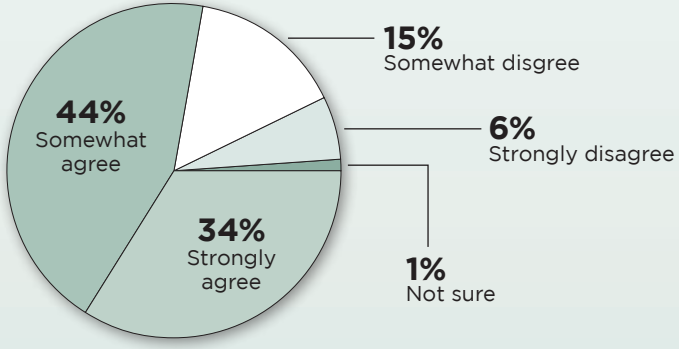


Figure 17—Impact of NCLB on Advanced Students Relative to Others

What kind of effect would you say NCLB has had on the students at your school?

Group	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Academically struggling students	30%	46%	20%
Average students	15%	44%	38%
Academically advanced students	10%	50%	35%

OBSERVATIONS

Teachers in the focus groups talked repeatedly about the drive in their buildings to bring up the scores of so-called "bubble kids"—students with standardized test scores just below proficiency levels. In these conversations, teachers often blamed the No Child Left Behind Act and the need to make adequate yearly progress—for them, it was the clearest embodiment of the negative impact of the trend toward high-stakes testing.

> **"I went around asking teachers if they recommended any of the students for the gifted programs. Nobody has, because they're so concerned with those low kids and getting them to pass. That's our concern. We're not even worrying about the high kids. They're not being identified."**

> **"I'm aware of their numbers. I know where they are. I know who's on the bubble and who I have to push up. We have meetings. I'm on the leadership committee at the school. We have meetings about, 'Okay, who is only two points away from meeting the [state] goal?'"**

> **"At our school, we really broke it all down and we looked at all the gainers and sliders, the kids who have gone up over the last year, or have gone down. All the kids that are what we called 'on the bubble'—that's where the last two years, all of our focus has gone to those kids."**

TEACHER TRAINING

Teachers report receiving little grounding on how to work with academically advanced students. They say the preparation programs they attended as well as the professional development they got once they had their own classroom were unlikely to emphasize this kind of training.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) report that their education courses or teacher preparation programs focused either very little or not at all on how to best teach academically advanced students. Relatively few (34%) say there was a lot or some focus on this subject in their programs.

Nearly six in ten (58%) say they have had no professional development over the past few years that specifically focused on teaching academically advanced students. Four in ten (41%) report that they have.

Figure 18—Emphasis on Teaching Advanced Learners in Teacher Preparation

Thinking back to the school of education or teacher preparation program you went through, how much focus did it put on how to best teach academically advanced students?

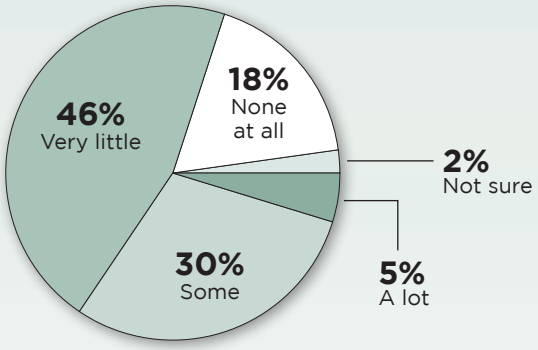
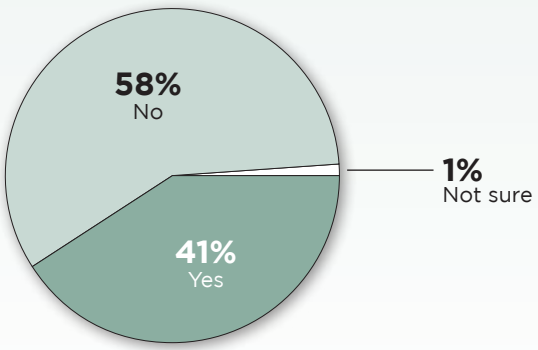


Figure 19—Professional Development Focused on Academically Advanced Students

Over the past few years, have you had professional development specifically focused on teaching academically advanced students, or not?



OBSERVATIONS

It seems likely that advanced students will fare better when taught by teachers who have had some special training in working with that population—and some research supports this[3]—but few teachers talked about having received such training. In one focus group, teachers responded in rapid-fire fashion with a series of negative responses to the question of whether their training included a focus on teaching high-achieving students:

> **"No."**
>
> **"None."**
>
> **"Next to none."**
>
> **"I went to a conference once—that's what I got, and I teach honors."**
>
> **"To me, the whole GATE [Gifted and Talented Education program] subject was one chapter of one class."**

HOMOGENEOUS TRACKING

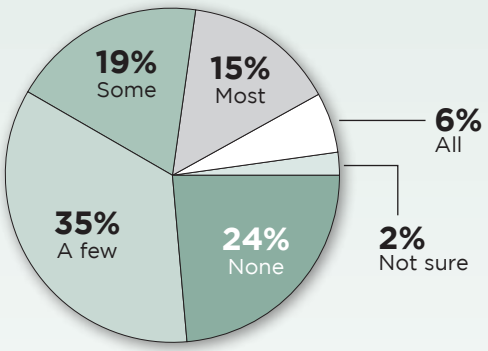
Teachers overwhelmingly believe that academically talented students would thrive in classes grouped by academic ability; tracking would be especially beneficial, most believe, in math. But they also report that such classes are rare in their schools.

About six in ten teachers (59%) say that at their school few or none of the core subject classes are homogeneously grouped by academic ability. Elementary (69%) and middle (59%) school teachers are more likely than high school teachers (44%) to say their schools have few or no such classes.

By an overwhelming 72 to 14% margin, teachers believe that advanced students are more likely, not less likely, to reach their academic potential in homogeneous classrooms.

Figure 20—Core Subject Classes—Extent of Homogeneous Grouping

About how many of the core subject classes at your school are homogeneously grouped by academic ability?



By a margin of 50 to 20%, teachers believe that even average students are more likely, not less likely, to reach their academic potential in such classrooms. The margin is far narrower when teachers are talking about struggling students (46% to 36%).

Almost three in four teachers (74%) believe that "mathematics is the one subject where students could really benefit from homogeneous grouping." Just 20% disagree. And when asked to think about the consequences of having schools pay a lot more attention to the needs of academically advanced students, more than half of teachers (57%) expressed concern that "there will be a big shortage of top-notch math and science teachers who could teach advanced students at a very high level," versus 40% who said that they were not concerned.

OBSERVATIONS

Judging by what teachers report, ability-grouped classes are not widespread. On the one hand, the very word "tracking" has taken on a negative connotation in education circles,

Figure 21—Likelihood of Reaching Academic Potential within Homogeneous Grouping

When classes are homogeneously grouped by academic ability, how likely do you think students are to reach their academic potential?

Group	More Likely	Less Likely	Little Difference
Academically struggling students	46%	36%	13%
Average students	50%	20%	28%
Academically advanced students	71%	14%	12%

as critics warn that it can foster racial inequalities and may typecast low achievers—without giving them the chance to be influenced by high achievers and perhaps become higher achievers themselves.[4]

On the other hand, teachers believe that high achievers pay a price for the fact that schools eschew tracking. Moreover, many teachers see a special need for ability grouping in math.

> **"The only class that we group by in my school is math, and they do that extensively. They have sixth-grade-level math in our seventh-eighth school, all the way through high school geometry. They've even talked about introducing a trig class, which blows my mind, at the eighth-grade level, but some kids I guess are ready for it."**

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Heterogeneous grouping of students in a classroom implies that teachers will respond flexibly to the different learning levels among the students in their classroom. But teachers evince serious doubts about how well they are carrying out differentiated instruction in their own lessons.

More than eight in ten (84%) teachers say that, in practice, differentiated instruction is difficult to implement.

OBSERVATIONS

Differentiated instruction—the strategy whereby teachers adjust their material and presentation to the diverse array of academic abilities within a given classroom—is tricky to implement, according to teachers. Education experts and policymakers who believe that this is the optimal alternative to tracking should recognize that, from the perspective of teachers, it is easier said than done.

Figure 22—Benefits of Homogeneous Grouping in Math

Do you agree or disagree? Math is the one subject where students could really benefit from homogeneous grouping

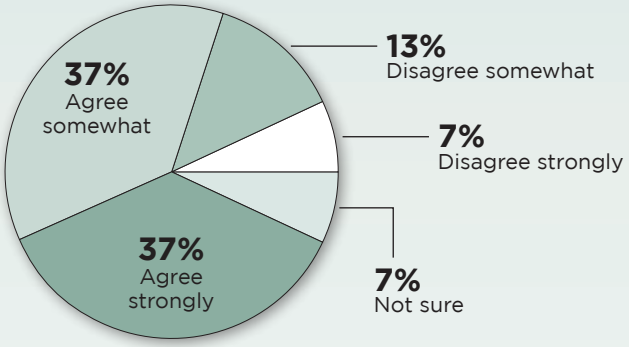
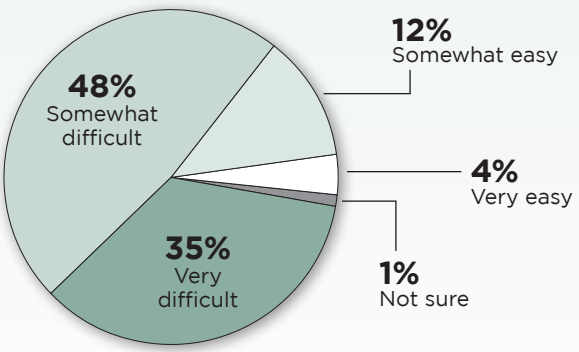


Figure 23—Relative Difficulty of Implementing Differentiated Instruction

In your judgment, how easy or difficult a mission is it to implement differentiated instruction on a daily basis in the classroom?



> **"I think you beat yourself up. There's such a wide range of skills. I try my best. I say my prayers at night. I have to believe in what I'm doing."**

The following description of what it took for one teacher to try to make differentiated instruction work sounds like an engineering exercise requiring the most delicate and complex analysis and judgment. It also reveals substantial self-doubt about the execution:

> **"Language arts, we've really been struggling because we do have so many different levels of kids. They're always in the same classes all mixed together, so I do a lot of differentiated instruction with tiered lessons and flexible grouping. Where kids are really, really strong in writing they're with a particular group of students for writing activities. Then they might be in a different group altogether for reading, just depending on where their levels are. [Moderator: How do you identify that?] Some is teacher observation; some is testing and assessment scores. At the beginning of the year, a lot of it's based on the state standards test scores that they showed the previous year. Sometimes there's teacher observation that follows them [here] as well."**

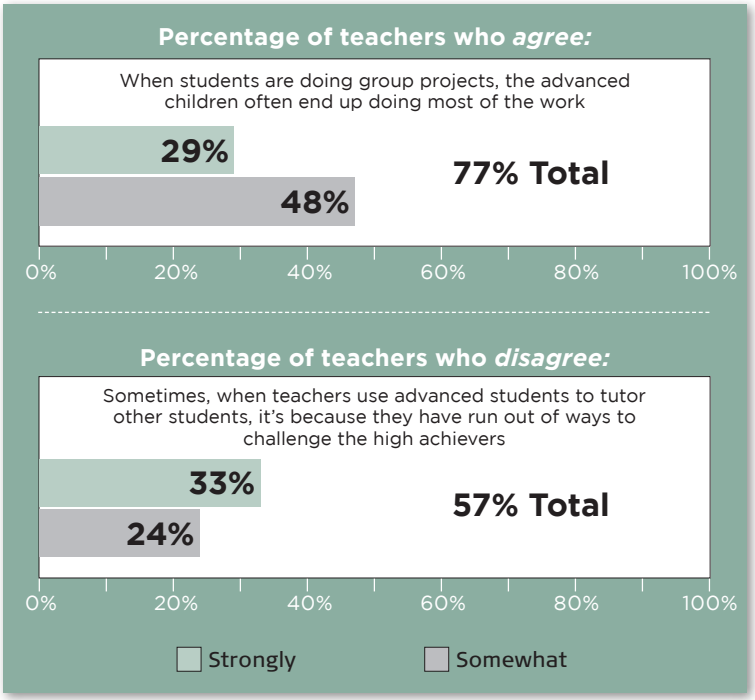
WHAT ABOUT OTHER STRATEGIES?

Most teachers have doubts about group work, thinking that the less academically inclined students defer to the advanced students. But teachers don't think that using advanced students to tutor their peers means the special abilities of advanced students are going to waste.

"When students are doing group projects, the advanced children often end up doing most of the work," say 77% of teachers. That problem appears more troublesome among teachers who have not had professional development on teaching academically advanced students. More than eight in ten of these teachers (82%) believe that the smarter kids inevitably do the work. But this point of view hardly disappears among teachers who have had some professional development; here, too, 68% agree that, in group projects, it is the advanced students who end up doing the work.

Using advanced students to tutor their peers is perceived in a more positive light, with 57% of teachers rejecting the view that "sometimes, when teachers use advanced students to tutor other students, it's because they have run out of ways to challenge the high achievers."

Figure 24—Impact of Certain Instructional Practices on Advanced Students



OBSERVATIONS

While group work is supposed to foster cooperative learning, teamwork, and shared responsibility, from the teachers' standpoint, in practice it often results in a team of one. It may be that, with more training, teachers could better execute the strategy, but it is important to acknowledge teachers' broadly held perception that things are not currently working as intended.

> **"When you do pairing and grouping, one thing that I've found personally is that my higher-achieving students, regardless of whether they've been labeled . . . carry the weight. They do all the work. My other ones are all playing."**

GRADE ACCELERATION

To hear teachers report it, grade acceleration—or skipping a grade—rarely occurs these days.

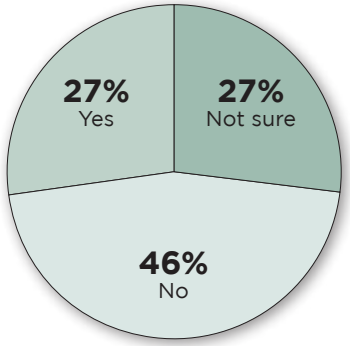
Approximately one in four teachers (27%) reports that their schools allow students to skip a grade, while a plurality (46%) says they do not. Teachers in high school (48%), middle school (45%), and elementary school (46%) are almost equally likely to report that their schools do not allow grade skipping. The fact that such a large proportion of teachers overall (27%) is unsure what their school's policy is may also indicate that grade acceleration rarely occurs.

OBSERVATIONS

That so many teachers either think their district's policies prohibit grade acceleration or are unsure suggests that many school districts today actively discourage the practice.[5]
A few teachers in the focus groups lamented that the progress of talented kids was thereby constrained.

Figure 25—Grade Acceleration

Does your school allow students to skip a grade—also known as grade acceleration, or not?



> **"I actually got in a lot of trouble . . . There was a child who was so smart. He was so smart. . . . The ESE person went nuts. She said, 'How dare you suggest that he skip a grade?' I said, 'I tested him. He's in kindergarten and working out of a second-grade math book. He's reading on a fourth-grade level. What are we going to do with him?' She said, 'That's not your problem.' Usually, these kids are just left there. Unless a teacher feels some kind of moral obligation to move them along, nobody's moving them. So many kids could probably skip or be in really advanced classes. Who even has time to notice them?"**

What teachers report about the practices and policies of school systems raises important questions for educators and policymakers. If differentiated instruction is the pedagogical strategy-of-choice when mixing students of different abilities, how does one respond to the report from teachers that this strategy is difficult for them to execute in their classrooms? If many teachers say they have little training in how to work with academically advanced youngsters, and if grade acceleration is unpopular (or not even on the table), how are school districts effectively cultivating the talents of their strongest students?

CHAPTER 4
TEACHERS TALK ABOUT SOLUTIONS

Teachers favor changing school and district policies so that grouping students by ability becomes more common, yet they also report that schools now eschew that strategy. Given their lack of support for NCLB, it is somewhat surprising that a majority of teachers also favor amending it to add another mandate: requiring schools to break out and report the test scores of high-achieving pupils. But it is not surprising, given their sense of what is happening now with teacher training, that teachers overwhelmingly recommend an overhaul so that greater emphasis is placed upon academically advanced students. One proposal is clearly rejected by most teachers: grade acceleration.

Two in three teachers (68%) favor a proposal that would open up "more specialized magnet programs and district-wide schools that bring advanced students together." Teachers working in the nation's lowest-income schools are considerably more likely to be in favor of this proposal than those working in more affluent schools (by a 76 to 61% margin).

Three-quarters (76%) of teachers overall would like to see the nation "relying more on homogeneous classes for advanced students so that they learn faster and in greater depth."

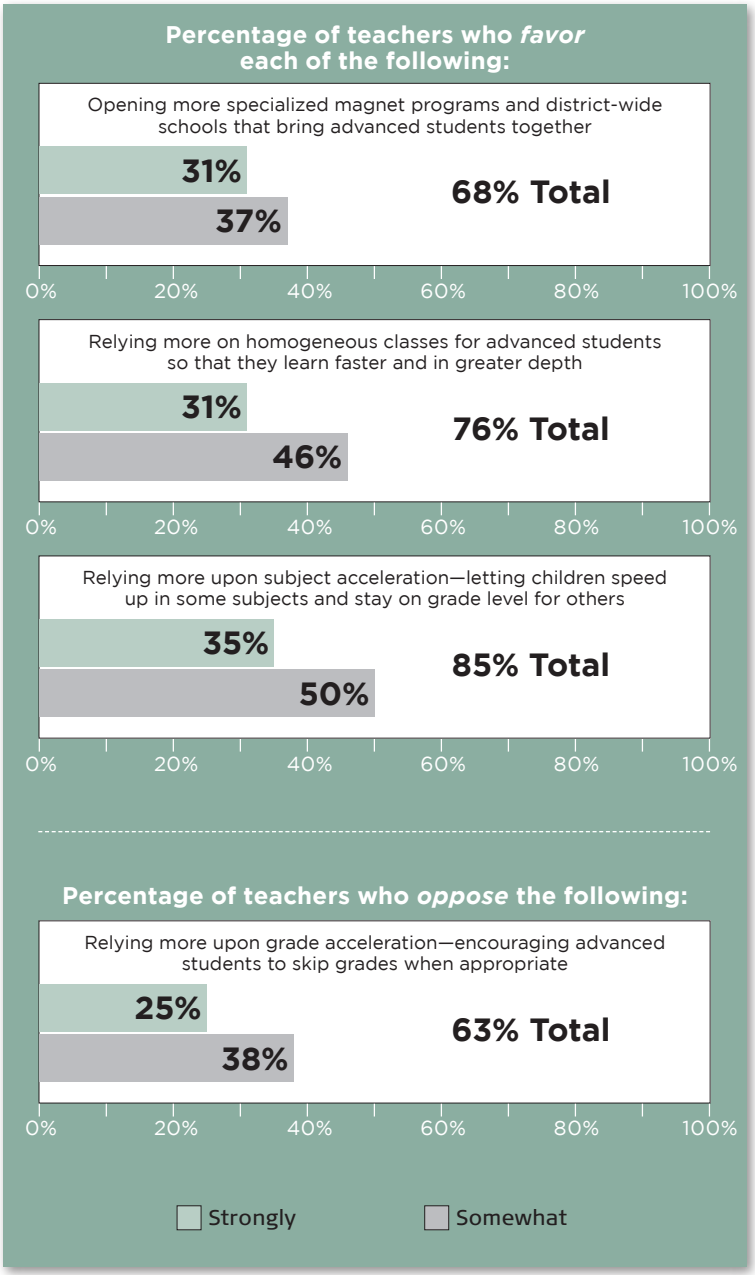
More than eight in ten teachers (85%) also favor more reliance on "subject acceleration," i.e., moving students faster when they have proven their capacity to learn at a quicker pace.

But 63% oppose "encouraging advanced students to skip grades when appropriate."

OBSERVATIONS

Teachers' attitudes seem logically consistent: they say they're having difficulty executing differentiated instruction in their

Figure 26—Proposals for Serving Advanced Students Better



classrooms and think their schools are less likely to pay attention to academically advanced students for a myriad of reasons. They believe that pulling high achievers together—whether in classrooms or in schools specifically tailored for them—would be an effective countermeasure.

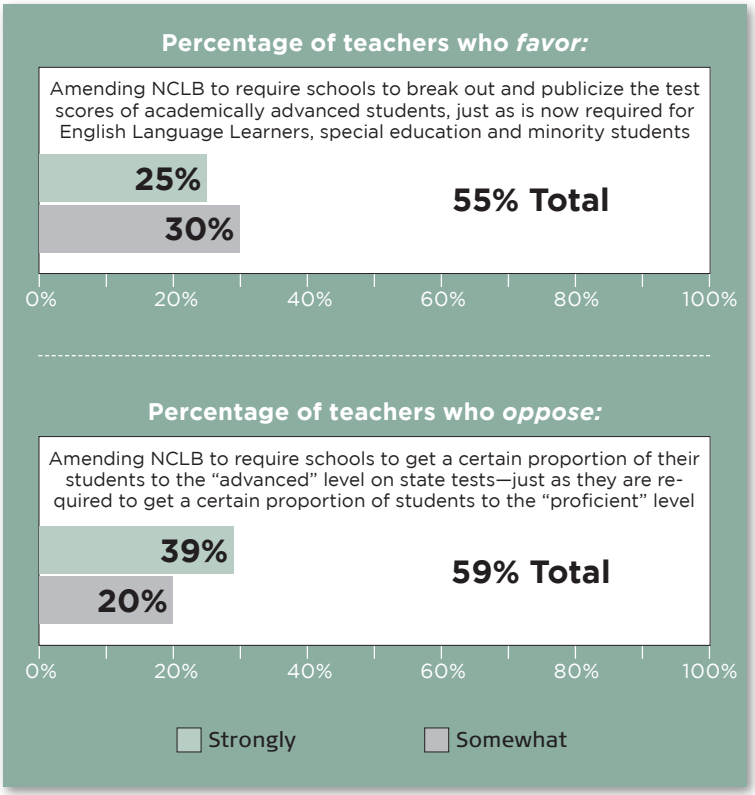
> **"Honestly, if I could ability group and have a whole group of kids, like in math, that was at this particular level, I guarantee you I could do so much more with those kids than just differentiating."**

AMENDING NCLB

A majority (55%) of teachers favors a proposal to amend the No Child Left Behind Act to "break out and publicize the test scores of academically advanced students, just as is now required for English Language Learners, special education and minority students," while 28% oppose it.

Most teachers (59%) oppose amending NCLB "to require schools to get a certain proportion of their students to the 'advanced' level on state tests," while a much smaller share (33%) is in favor. Teachers working in low-income schools—central to what NCLB intended to target—are substantially more supportive of this proposal than those working in the wealthiest schools by a 42 to 26% margin.

Figure 27—Support for Amending NCLB



OBSERVATIONS

In some ways, it is startling to see teachers support any extension of NCLB's reach, given that they so often refer to it critically during focus group discussions. Yet teachers' support for breaking out and publicizing the test scores of advanced students—even if it is not overwhelming—makes sense. They have seen more attention paid to struggling students because of the schools' drive to move more "bubble" students to proficiency. If the schools were also required to report the standardized test scores and progress of their high-achieving students, they reason, that might drive attention and resources to them.

> **"I think our new superintendent puts a lot of pressure on all of the schools to perform. I think No Child Left Behind has put pressure on everyone. Can you really blame anyone for wanting to get their low-performing children up? . . . You know? They have to make their AYP [annual yearly progress] or else."**

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS, ENRICHMENT FOR STUDENTS

The vast majority of teachers (90%) favors "having more professional development for teachers to develop skills for teaching advanced kids."

Additional enrichment opportunities for high-achieving students outside of schools—through mentoring and internship programs, for example—gain overwhelming support from teachers; virtually all (96%) favor this proposal, with 59% saying they strongly favor it. Support is more intense among teachers working in low-income schools, where 71% strongly favor this initiative, compared with 50% of teachers working in wealthier schools.

Just 25% of teachers, or one in four, report that their school currently has mentorship or internship programs that take academically advanced students outside the classroom environment, compared to 62% who say their school does not have such programs and 14% who are unsure.

OBSERVATIONS

With teachers acknowledging that they've had little training on how to work with academically talented students, it makes sense that they would favor more professional development in this area. As for mentoring and internship programs, teachers may be hoping to inspire advanced students with experiences

Figure 28—Support for Professional Development and Enrichment for Advanced Students

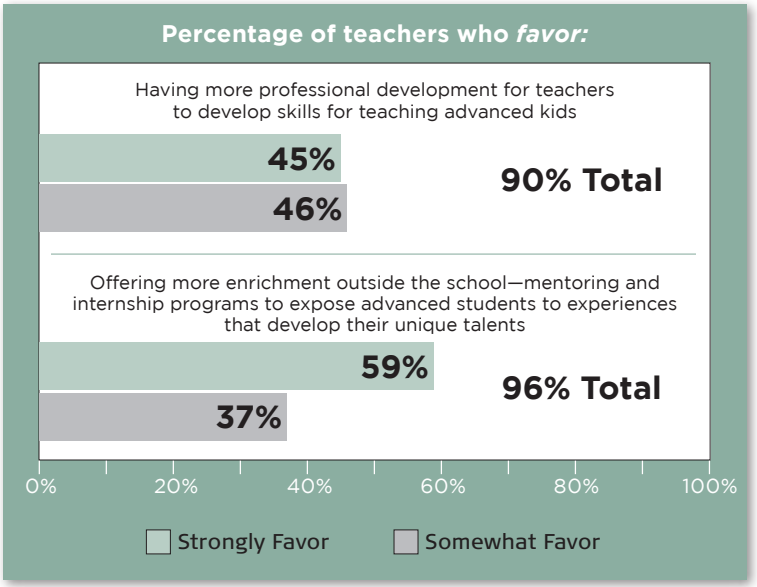
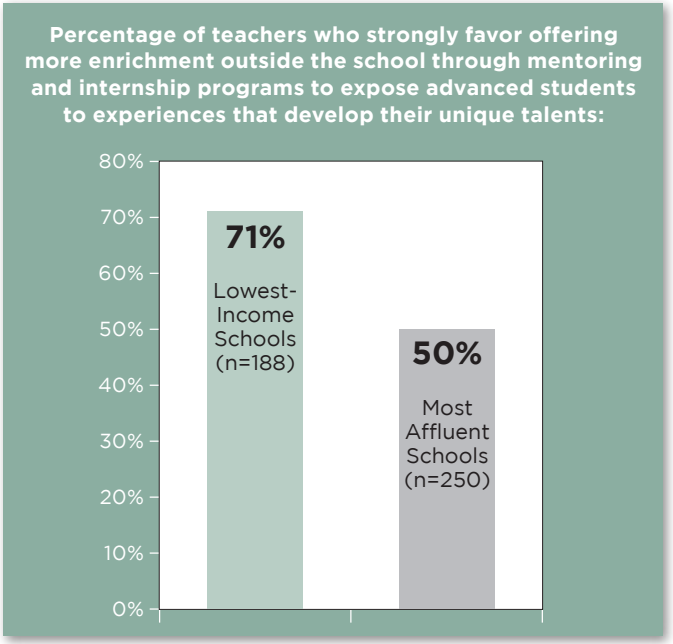


Figure 29—Support for Enrichment for Advanced Students, by School Poverty Status



Note: *Lowest-income schools > 75% students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch; most affluent schools ≤25% students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch.*

and role models beyond the school walls and leverage resources beyond those of their schools.

> **"At one point, we had Senior Seminar. I don't even know if we still do it. Some sort of an internship opportunity I think is helpful for them."**

Those who are comfortable with the status quo when it comes to educating academically advanced students are in an unenviable position. They must either ignore the attitudes of teachers or convince them that, all their experience and observations notwithstanding, things are better than they appear—or that they could be better with some retooling and retraining. Those who suspect teachers of harboring elitist attitudes because they favor homogeneous classrooms should note that teachers working with the country's poorest youngsters are sometimes even more supportive of homogeneous grouping.

Those who believe there's something to gain from listening to the observations and insights of teachers on the ground have plenty of work to do. Achieving consensus on, paying for, and implementing even a small part of the teachers' reform agenda would take a monumental effort over a long period. It could well require reexamining some dominant assumptions embedded in how the best and brightest are schooled today. But at least the reformers would have teachers on their side. And—as any student, principal, superintendent, governor, or president knows—it's good to have teachers on your side.

Given that this is a study of public school teachers' attitudes about and experiences with academically talented students, it's useful to know just how much exposure teachers in this sample have with such students on a day-to-day basis. On the whole, the findings suggest that teachers may have relatively small proportions of academically advanced students in their own classroom during a given school year, with the numbers highest among high school teachers. The vast majority of teachers overall (77%) estimates that "0% to 25%" of their current students are academically advanced. Still, 23% report that more than one in four (between 26% and 100%) of their current students could be deemed academically advanced; among high school teachers it is 37% (versus 20% among middle and 14% among elementary school teachers). Additionally, two out of three teachers surveyed (67%) say that their school has separate classes geared explicitly for the academically advanced. Again, this differs considerably depending on grade: 90% of high school teachers say their schools have separate classes, compared with 75% of middle and 47% of elementary school teachers.

NOTES

[1] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "What Is an American?" in *One America Indivisible: A National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity* by Sheldon Hackney (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1999), 173.

[2] A study looking specifically at Advanced Placement programs through the eyes of AP teachers is in progress and will be released in 2009.

[3] See Free Library, "Certification and Specialized Competencies for Teachers in Gifted Education Programs," http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Certification+and+Specialized+Competencies+for+Teachers+in+Gifted...-a062684723.

[4] A recent National Research Council report on fostering student motivation in urban high schools, for example, recommends that "both formal and informal tracking by ability be eliminated. Alternative strategies should be used to ensure appropriately challenging instruction for students who vary widely in their skill level" (6). Committee on Increasing High School Students' Engagement and Motivation to Learn, National Research Council, *Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Students' Motivation to Learn* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2003), www.nap.edu/catalog/10421.html.

[5] The authors of a Templeton Foundation report on academic acceleration—including single-subject acceleration, grade skipping, early entrance to school, and Advanced Placement courses—were outraged by how widely the schools dismiss it as a strategy, as the title of their report makes clear. See Nicholas Colangelo, Susan G. Assouline, and Maraca U. M. Gross, *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa, 2004).

APPENDIX A—METHODOLOGY

These findings are based on data from a nationally representative random sample of 900 third- through twelfth-grade public school teachers who were surveyed by mail and online in winter-spring 2008. The survey was conducted by the Farkas Duffett Research (FDR) Group for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. The margin of error for the overall sample of 900 is plus or minus three percentage points; the margin of error increases for subgroups within the sample.

The sample was randomly drawn from a comprehensive database of names and school addresses of current third- to twelfth-grade public school teachers. Because school districts typically begin identifying "gifted and talented" children in grade 3 or higher, teachers in grades K–2 were intentionally excluded from the sample. The sample was provided by Market Data Retrieval, a subsidiary of Dun & Bradstreet; data collection and tabulation were provided by Robinson and Muenster Associates.

The survey instrument was designed for two modes: paper (for the mail survey) and online (for use via the Internet). The survey instrument was extensively pretested with third- to twelfth-grade public school teachers prior to fielding.

A total of 6,000 questionnaires (along with cover letter and postage-paid return envelope) was sent to a randomly selected sample of third- to twelfth-grade public school

teachers in the United States. The cover letter described the research and included a URL address for those who preferred to participate online rather than completing and returning the questionnaire by mail. The first mailing was sent on February 19, 2008; a reminder postcard was sent on February 28, and a second complete mailing was sent on March 7. Surveys received through April 25 were tabulated and included in the final results.

A total of 900 surveys was received, 790 by mail and 110 online. The response rate for the survey is 15%. This rate is typical of survey research of this sort and reflects the challenges associated with randomly selecting samples, particularly those that comprise individuals not necessarily associated with a particular program of interest and not receiving incentives. As with all surveys, one of the risks of low response is that the pool of survey respondents could differ from the true population, thereby decreasing the ability to draw inferences from the data. Table A-1 compares the demographic profile of respondents to that of the overall population of teachers as collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Though the population also includes grades K–2, the two groups are similar when it comes to such key variables as sex, urbanicity, and school type. In addition, survey results can be affected by nonsampling sources of bias, such as question wording. Steps were also taken to minimize these, as explained below.

Prior to survey administration, five focus groups were held with third- to twelfth-grade teachers. The groups were conducted in professional focus group facilities in Bethesda, MD; Denver, CO; Fort Lauderdale, FL; and Long Beach, CA. Participants were recruited to FDR Group specifications to ensure a proper demographic mix, and all the groups were moderated by the FDR Group. Quotations in this report are drawn directly from the focus groups. The purpose of the groups was to listen to teachers, to develop survey questions based on their input, and to use within the survey instrument itself language and terms teachers are comfortable using. The focus group discussions were crucial not only for crafting survey items but also for understanding teachers' various points of view. As a final check on validity, the questionnaire was pretested prior to fielding via telephone interviews with current public school teachers.

Table A-1—Demographics of the Teacher Population vs. Survey Respondent Sample

Sex	Population* (Gr. K-12)	Respondent Sample (Gr. 3-12)
Male	25%	21%
Female	75%	79%

School Type	Population* (Gr. K-12)	Respondent Sample (Gr. 3-12)
Elementary (3rd-5th)	52	42
Middle (6th-8th)	20	29
High (9th-12th)	23	29

Urbanicity	Population* (Gr. K-12)	Respondent Sample (Gr. 3-12)
Urban	31	31
Suburban	38	34
Rural/small town	31	35

**Sources—U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Science, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 2006; NCES Schools and Staffing Survey, 2003–2004.*

APPENDIX B—NATIONAL SURVEY OF PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS GRADES 3–12

The findings from High-Achieving Students in the No Child Left Behind Era are based on a national random sample of 900 third- through twelfth-grade public school teachers. The survey was conducted by mail and online between February 19 and April 25, 2008. The margin of error is plus or minus three percentage points. Complete survey findings in percentages are provided here. Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding; similarly, percentages in the body of the report may not perfectly match numbers in this appendix due to rounding. An asterisk (*) indicates less than 1%.

1. Do you currently teach at:
Elementary school (42%)
Middle school or junior high (29%)
High school (29%)
Something else (*)

2. In terms of academic achievement, do you think that your school generally expects kids to learn:
Too much (13%)
Too little (19%)
Expectations are about right (66%)
Not sure (2%)

3. Would you say that the needs of academically struggling students at your school are a:
Top priority (60%)
Middle priority (34%)
Low priority (5%)
Not sure (1%)

4. How about the academically advanced students at your school? Would you say their needs are a:
Top priority (23%)
Middle priority (44%)
Low priority (32%)
Not sure (1%)

5. Please estimate the number of academically advanced students at your school this academic year.
0% to 25% of students (76%)
More than 25% to 50% (15%)
More than 50% to 75% (3%)
More than 75% (1%)
Not sure (5%)

6. Please estimate the number of academically advanced students that you personally are teaching this academic year.
0% to 25% of your students (77%)
More than 25% to 50% (13%)
More than 50% to 75% (6%)
More than 75% (4%)
Not sure (1%)

7. Over the past few years, would you say the attention and resources given to academically advanced students at your school has:
Increased (23%)
Decreased (26%)
Stayed about the same (45%)
Not sure (5%)

For the next series of questions, think about the students at your school in terms of their academic ability.

Question	Struggling Students	Average Students	Advanced Students	It's Equal	Not Sure
8. Who gets the most overall attention at your school?	63%	13%	7%	16%	2%
9. Who should get the most attention at your school?	24%	16%	5%	50%	6%
10. Who is your school most likely to focus on when it comes to tracking achievement data and trying to raise standardized test scores?	68%	15%	5%	11%	2%
11. Who is most likely to get one-on-one attention from teachers?	81%	4%	5%	9%	2%
12. And who is most likely to be taught with a curriculum and instruction specially designed for their abilities?	51%	19%	10%	18%	2%

When classes are homogenously grouped by academic ability, do you think that each group below is more likely to reach their academic potential, less likely or does it make little difference?

Group	More Likely	Less Likely	Little Difference	It's Equal
13. Academically struggling students	46%	36%	13%	5%
14. Average students	50%	20%	28%	3%
15. Academically advanced students	72%	14%	12%	3%

16. About how many of the core subject classes at your school are homogenously grouped by academic ability?
None (24%)
A few (35%)
Some (19%)
Most (15%)
All (6%)
Not sure (2%)

17. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Mathematics is the one subject where students could really benefit from homogenous grouping.
NET Agree (74%)
NET Disagree (20%)
Agree strongly (37%)
Agree somewhat (37%)
Disagree somewhat (13%)
Disagree strongly (7%)
Not sure (7%)

18. Does your school have separate classes geared explicitly for the academically advanced students, or not?
Yes (67%)
No (32%)
Not sure (1%)

19. Does your school allow students to skip a grade—also known as grade acceleration—or not?
Yes (27%)
No (46%)
Not sure (27%)

20. Does your school have mentorship or internship programs that take academically advanced students outside the classroom environment, or not?
Yes (25%)
No (62%)
Not sure (14%)

21. At your school, how common is it for teachers in core subjects to use ability grouping in mixed-level classes?
NET Common (50%)
NET Uncommon (36%)
Very common (16%)
Somewhat common (35%)
Somewhat uncommon (15%)
Very uncommon (21%)
Not sure (13%)

22. In your judgment, how easy or difficult a mission is it to implement differentiated instruction on a daily basis in the classroom?
NET Difficult (84%)
NET Easy (16%)
Very difficult (35%)
Somewhat difficult (48%)
Somewhat easy (12%)
Very easy (4%)
Not sure (1%)

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS (n=621)

23. As far as you can tell, how accurate and reliable are the procedures and tests your district uses for identifying students eligible for the "gifted and talented" program?

NET Accurate (55%)
NET Inaccurate (21%)
Very accurate and reliable (9%)
Somewhat accurate and reliable (46%)
Somewhat inaccurate and unreliable (15%)
Very inaccurate and unreliable (6%)
District doesn't have such procedures or tests (8%)
Not sure (16%)

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS (n=253)

24. Is it your sense that the content and curriculum for honors and accelerated learning classes:

Are truly rigorous and challenging (50%)
OR
Are too often watered down and lacking rigor (40%)
School doesn't have honors/accelerated classes (4%)
Not sure (6%)

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS (n=262)

25. About what percentage of the students in your school's honors and accelerated classes do you think are there for reasons that have nothing to do with academic ability (e.g., parental pressure, demographic diversity, a better learning environment)? Your best estimate will do.

0–25% (48%)
26–50% (21%)
51–75% (7%)
76–100% (6%)
Not sure (20%)

26. For the public schools to help the U.S. live up to its ideals of justice and equality, do you think it's more important that they:

Focus on raising the achievement of disadvantaged students who are struggling academically (11%)
OR
That they focus equally on all students, regardless of their backgrounds or achievement levels (86%)
Not sure (3%)

27. If you had to pick, what should be a greater priority for the nation's schools:

Maximizing the achievement of academically advanced students (26%)
OR
Closing the achievement gap (57%)
Not sure (18%)

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about academically advanced students?

Statement	NET Agree	NET Disagree	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Not Sure
28. Academically talented youngsters from low socio-economic backgrounds are often overlooked—they fall through the cracks because no one advocates for them	59%	37%	17%	42%	21%	16%	4%
29. "Advanced" is really a nonexistent concept—different youngsters are good at different things at different times	59%	39%	18%	41%	23%	16%	2%
30. Our advanced students need special attention—they are the future leaders of this country, and their talents will enable us to compete in a global economy	81%	17%	31%	50%	13%	4%	2%
31. The schools don't have to worry as much about advanced youngsters because their talent, resources and backgrounds have already set them on the right path	26%	73%	3%	23%	33%	40%	1%
32. Sometimes, when teachers use advanced students to tutor other students, it's because they have run out of ways to challenge the high achievers	38%	57%	6%	32%	24%	33%	5%
33. Too often, the brightest students are bored and under-challenged in school—we're not giving them a sufficient chance to thrive	73%	26%	26%	48%	17%	9%	1%
34. When students are doing group projects, the advanced children often end up doing most of the work	77%	21%	29%	48%	17%	5%	2%
35. Too often, students are labeled as advanced only because their parents are overzealous and know how to work the system	50%	47%	10%	40%	29%	18%	3%

Statement	NET Agree	NET Disagree	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Not Sure
36. Electives, humanities and the arts are getting short shrift because schools are putting so much focus on the basics	73%	23%	38%	35%	17%	6%	4%
37. Getting underachieving students to reach "proficiency" has become so important that the needs of advanced students take a back seat	77%	21%	34%	44%	15%	6%	1%

Some people have concerns about what might happen if the schools were to pay a lot more attention to the needs of academically advanced students. Other people think these concerns are overblown. How concerned are you about each of the following?

Question	NET Concerned	NET Not Concerned	Very Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Not Too Concerned	Not at All Concerned	Not Sure
38. The way the schools define "advanced students" means that those classes will end up disproportionately white and higher income	37%	58%	8%	28%	38%	20%	6%
39. Paying too much attention to the accomplishments of advanced students will stigmatize the other students and damage their self-esteem	26%	73%	4%	22%	41%	32%	2%
40. Pushing advanced kids to develop faster will endanger their emotional and social well-being	41%	57%	5%	36%	37%	20%	2%
41. The tests and the experts will misidentify which students are advanced and which are not	47%	50%	8%	39%	37%	13%	4%

Question	NET Concerned	NET Not Concerned	Very Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Not Too Concerned	Not at All Concerned	Not Sure
42. There will be a big shortage of top-notch math and science teachers who could teach advanced students at a very high level	57%	40%	20%	37%	25%	15%	4%
43. To give advanced students more attention, the schools might reduce resources now devoted to struggling students	45%	50%	12%	33%	35%	15%	5%

Thinking about academically advanced students across the nation, how much would you favor or oppose each proposal?

Proposal	NET Favor	NET Oppose	Favor Strongly	Favor Somewhat	Oppose Somewhat	Oppose Strongly	Not Sure
44. Having more professional development for teachers to develop skills for teaching advanced kids	90%	8%	45%	46%	5%	2%	2%
45. Offering more enrichment outside the school—mentoring and internship programs to expose advanced students to experiences that develop their unique talents	96%	3%	59%	37%	2%	*	2%
46. Opening more specialized magnet programs and district-wide schools that bring advanced students together	68%	28%	31%	37%	20%	8%	5%
47. Relying more upon grade acceleration—encouraging advanced students to skip grades when appropriate	33%	63%	7%	25%	38%	25%	5%

Proposal	NET Favor	NET Oppose	Favor Strongly	Favor Somewhat	Oppose Somewhat	Oppose Strongly	Not Sure
48. Relying more on homogeneous classes for advanced students so that they learn faster and in greater depth	76%	21%	31%	46%	16%	5%	3%
49.Relying more upon subject acceleration—letting children speed up in some subjects and stay on grade level for others	85%	12%	35%	50%	9%	3%	4%
50. Amending the No Child Left Behind Act to require schools to break out and publicize the test scores of academically advanced students, just as is now required for English Language Learners, special education and minority students	55%	28%	25%	30%	14%	15%	17%
51. Amending the No Child Left Behind Act to require schools to get a certain proportion of their students to the "advanced" level on state tests—just as they are required to get a certain proportion of students to the "proficient" level	33%	59%	12%	21%	20%	39%	8%

What kind of effect would you say the No Child Left Behind Act has had on the students at your school?

Group	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Not Sure
52. Academically struggling students	30%	46%	20%	4%
53. Average students	15%	44%	38%	3%
54. Academically advanced students	10%	50%	35%	5%

55. To the best of your knowledge, is your school currently identified as "in need of improvement" as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act, or not?
Yes (26%)
No (67%)
Not sure (8%)

56. Thinking back to the school of education or teacher preparation program you went through, how much focus did it put on how to best teach academically advanced students?
A lot (5%)
Some (30%)
Very little (46%)
None at all (18%)
Not sure (2%)

57. Over the past few years, have you had professional development specifically focused on teaching academically advanced students, or not?
Yes (41%)
No (58%)
Not sure (1%)

58. Are you:
Female (79%)
Male (21%)

59. For how many years have you been a public school teacher?
1–4 (13%)
5–9 (20%)
10–20 (34%)
>20 (33%)

60. Approximately what percentage of students at your school are African American or Hispanic?
0% to 25% of students (54%)
More than 25% to 50% (19%)
More than 50% to 75% (13%)
More than 75% (15%)

61. Approximately what percentage of students at your school are eligible for the free or reduced lunch program?
0% to 25% of students (28%)
More than 25% to 50% (28%)
More than 50% to 75% (22%)
More than 75% (21%)

62. Which best describes your school:
Inner city (12%)
Urban (not inner city) (19%)
Suburban (34%)
Rural (35%)