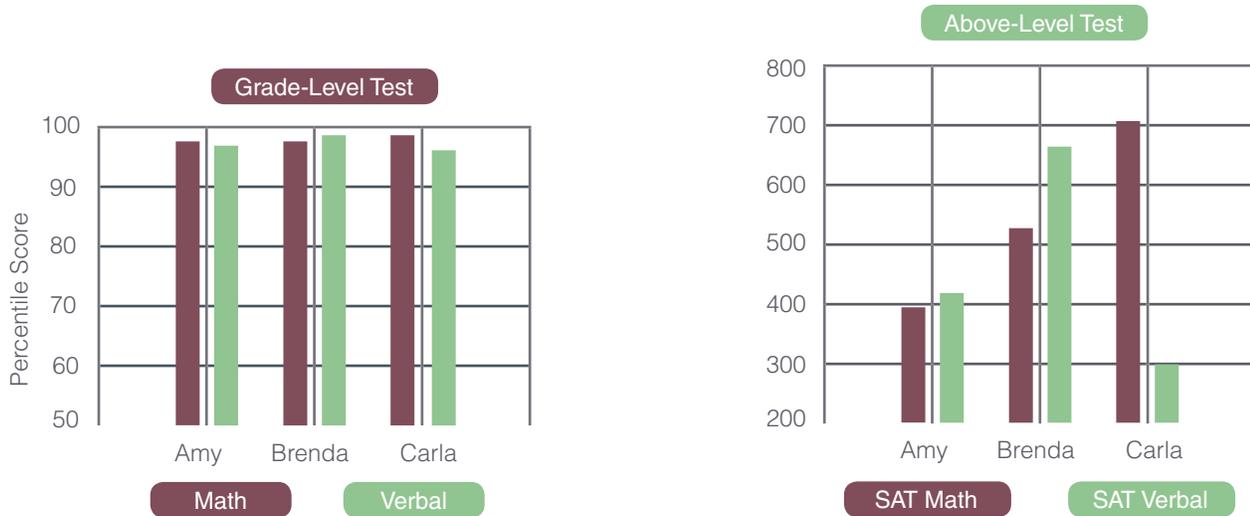


Above-Level Testing is an Important Tool for Assessing the Educational Needs of Academically Talented Students

Precise and accurate assessments of what students currently know are needed to ensure that gifted students are challenged in school and taught only what they do not already know. Everyone agrees that the purpose of education is to help individuals expand their knowledge. But for students who achieve very high scores on grade-level tests, accurately assessing what they already know is difficult. Scores on many grade-level tests do not measure how far students have mastered material beyond their grade level. Grade-level testing can be compared to measuring every child’s height with a four-foot measuring stick: it does not tell us the actual height of children taller than four feet.

As shown below, students can appear quite similar in their academic performance using a typical grade-level test—but an above grade-level test reveals huge differences in their actual academic achievement:



All three students are posting near-perfect scores on their grade-level tests. However, the above-level test scores on the right illustrate that the students differ significantly from each other. Knowing this allows educators and parents to build a more effective learning plan for each student.

Some well-meaning parents or educators may believe that higher test scores only matter up to a certain point and then don’t matter very much. However, research shows that no matter how high you go, higher scores are linked to higher outcomes. Even within just the top 1% of students, higher test scores are associated with higher adulthood accomplishments and more significant achievements.

Above-level tests let educators and parents identify relative strengths as well as more accurately assess what material students have already learned.

Take Action

Parents and educators: To see if above-level testing would be appropriate for your fourth–sixth grade students, visit www.tip.duke.edu/tests; for students in grades seven and above, visit www.tip.duke.edu/7tests.

- 1. Appropriate learning environments, motivation, encouragement, and even luck can all play a role in helping students develop and succeed.**
- 2. Tests, including IQ tests, are good at predicting later life performance.** IQ scores are highly predictive of performance in school, occupation, income, and even with physical and mental health. IQ scores from childhood can even predict mortality: smarter people generally live longer, even after controlling for social class.
- 3. Higher scores are related with higher outcomes throughout the full range of ability.** Even within just the top 1% of students, higher test scores are associated with higher adulthood accomplishments and achievements.
- 4. All people have different abilities that are typically positively related that form an overall general ability.** This means that people who tend to be good at one thing also tend to be good at other things, but they can have strengths and weaknesses in specific areas.
- 5. Early high performance in a domain predicts later educational, occupational, and creative accomplishments in that domain.** People strong in math or verbal domains at an early age tend to achieve extraordinary accomplishments in their domain of strength.
- 6. Non-verbal tests alone will not tell us if students will succeed in school,** especially when success relies on verbal skills. Nonverbal tests are also not necessarily “a more fair assessment” of academic potential.
- 7. Fewer students will be identified as gifted** when participation in a gifted program requires students to have high ratings on all criteria (for example: high test scores + high teacher rating scale scores + a parent nomination) compared to when a single criterion is used.
- 8. Classes grouped by age have huge variations in student learning needs.** This supports the need for differentiated instruction based on student learning needs, not student age.
- 9. The claim that being taught using a student’s preferred learning style leads to greater achievement is not supported by evidence.** However, there is substantial strong evidence that good teaching is effective for all students.
- 10. Current measures do not reliably differentiate academic achievement from ability** even though we have the verbal skills to create unique definitions for each.
- 11. There is no consistent relationship between acceleration and social-emotional problems.** But the research does show that acceleration can have huge academic benefits for students.
- 12. In general, more education is better, especially if matched with student interests and passions.**

Please visit www.tip.duke.edu/justthefacts to review the studies supporting these statements.

