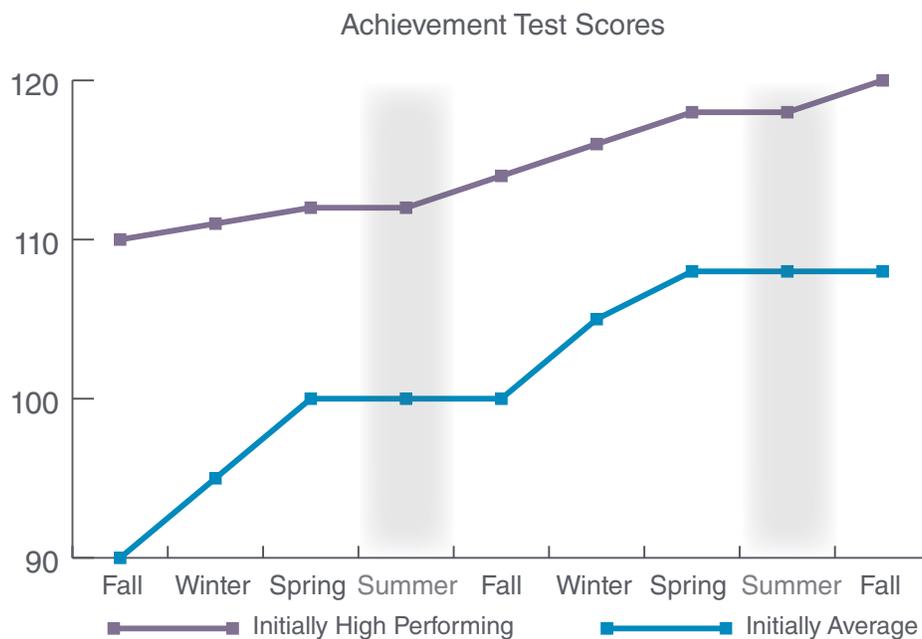


Being High-Achieving Does Not Mean Students Are Learning as Much as They Could Be in School

High-achieving students have similar summer and school year academic growth rates—indicating that they may not be receiving adequate challenge in school.

Research shows that there is inequality between typical students and high-achieving students when it comes to how much is gained from attending school. Students who start out as high-achieving showed similar academic growth rates during the summer and the school year. On the other hand, typical students improved during the school year, but not during the summer. The figure below is a representation of these trends. The dashed blue line for typical students shows achievement growth during the school year, but not during the summer. The solid purple line shows high-achieving student’s growth does not vary regardless of whether or not they were in school.



These results indicate that, on average, high-achieving students do not receive adequate challenge in school. If initially high-achieving students were receiving appropriately challenging curriculum during every academic year, growth would be higher during the school year than in the summer. These findings also indicate that high-achieving students do not benefit from school as much as the typical student.

Take Action

Parents: You can use this information to advocate for gifted program services. Action steps you could take include meeting with a gifted program coordinator to examine your child’s progress and considering above level assessments to provide insight into the level of challenge that is appropriate for your child’s educational needs.

Parents and educators: Research shows that providing reading instruction at least two grades ahead of each high-achieving student’s actual grade level may help buffer an inequality in achievement growth rates.

- 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.

