

Should I Grade-skip My Gifted Child?

The American school system puts students in grades based on age. However, for a large number of students, being with same-age peers in the classroom does not work.

A [recent report](#) from Johns Hopkins University shows that about two out of every seven children are ready for a higher-grade curriculum. These children are not learning something new each day, and are likely bored in class.

This has serious implications: Research has shown that [greater intellectual stimulation](#) is important for helping talented kids achieve their full potential.

One effective way to help talented students remain intellectually challenged and engaged in school is to have them skip a grade. [Research shows](#) that about 1 percent of students grade-skip. Students can skip grades at any level, and they can even skip multiple grades.

Grade-skipping has led to many concerns. In particular, [concerns have been raised](#) related to students' social adjustment and emotional health.

We are scholars of gifted education. Our research – [A Nation Empowered](#) – shows many advantages to grade-skipping for talented students. However, students skipping grades need to be socially and emotionally ready for it.

What Studies Show

A [synthesis of many studies](#) by a professor of gifted education, [Karen B. Rogers](#), on the impact of grade-skipping showed uniformly positive effects across a range of academic outcomes.

These outcomes included higher grade point average, school satisfaction, honors received, success on exams, number of university credits awarded, education level attained, income as an adult and innovations made.

When gifted students who grade-skipped were compared to similarly gifted students who did not grade-skip, the grade-skipped students came out ahead in all academic categories.

For example, a [study](#) by K–12 educational research and policy expert [Katie L. McClarty](#) found that grade-skippers were more likely than non-grade-skippers to have more prestigious jobs, higher earnings and job satisfaction.

Another study, by researchers [Gregory J. Park](#), [David Lubinski](#) and [Camilla P. Benbow](#), that followed highly gifted children 40 years into their adulthood and examined the [long-term impact of grade-skipping](#) related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) came up with similar findings.

Grade-skippers were found to be significantly more likely to achieve Ph.D.'s, publish their first paper at an earlier age and achieve highly cited publications by age 50. Grade-skippers compared to non-grade-skippers were 1.6 times as likely to earn a doctorate of any kind, twice as likely to earn a STEM Ph.D., 1.6 times as likely to earn a STEM publication, and 1.6 times as likely to earn a patent.

More Social Skills, Better Mental Health

However, there have been concerns whether grade-skippers are able to make [social and psychological adjustments](#).

Psychologist [Maureen Neihart](#), who [reviewed many studies](#) on the social and psychological outcomes of grade-skipping, concluded that there was no major positive or negative impact.

However, the [meta-analysis](#) by [Karen B. Rogers](#) described earlier showed, in fact, positive effects on a range of social and psychological adjustment outcomes, including greater social skills, maturity, peer acceptance, motivation and persistence.

Additionally, a [20-year longitudinal study](#) by gifted education expert [Miraca Gross](#) also found social and psychological benefits to grade-skipping.

Gross found that students who had skipped two or more grades (37 percent of the sample) in early elementary school had higher social self-esteem in childhood and built better social relationships later in life.

Should I Grade-Skip My Child?

Overall, we found that grade-skipping is a highly effective method of challenging talented students and helping them stay engaged in school. We did not find any negative social or psychological impact of grade-skipping.

So how should parents and students decide whether or not to skip a grade?

The answer to this question depends largely on the degree to which students are bored in school and whether they are mature enough to be able to interact with older peers. It is not recommended for all gifted students.

Researchers have now developed [a scale](#) that can help a parent make such a decision for their child in kindergarten through eighth grade. The scale helps parents or teachers look at the main factors they need to consider when making such a decision. It also provides guidelines on how to weigh the relative importance of each of these factors.

Generally, decisions on whether to grade-skip center on academic and social readiness. Parents also need to understand

that students can grade-skip at any point of their academic trajectory. For example, it could be as early as entrance to kindergarten or much later, such as [an early start to college](#). [Research shows](#) the benefits are the same whatever the age.

Decision Carries Costs

Despite the positive evidence on grade-skipping, however, the number of students who are academically ready to grade-skip is much larger than the actual number of students that utilize this opportunity. This has costs for both schools and students.

Teaching millions of students content they already know [wastes tens of billions of dollars](#) each year.

For parents concerned about the negative impact on social and psychological adjustment, it may also be important to consider the potential fallout even when a student does not skip a grade.

Unchallenged students can become bored and disengaged from school and lose their joy of learning, and this can lead to underachievement. This can be a loss both for the student and for society.

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