

## SUGGESTIONS

**1 . Supportive Strategies:** These validate a child's contribution in the classroom and allow him/her to see the promise of greater potential.

- Examples: eliminating work already mastered, holding daily conferences between teacher and child

**2 . Intrinsic Strategies:** These help students learn to develop an intrinsic motivating system.

- Examples: child helps to set rules, establishing rewards and praise

**3 . Remedial Strategies:** These are specifically designed to help a child overcome the bump in his/her learning.

- Examples: private instruction, weekly goals, immediate assessment and feedback

These three strategies put the child back in charge of his/her learning. Success breeds success.

When addressing a child with behaviors of underachievement or selective consumerism, many aspects should be addressed including:

- parent, teacher, curriculum instruction, peer groups, and special services.

*“Many parents and teachers of gifted children would like the gifted child to be “normal” in every way except the ability to perform academic tasks.... As the developmental trajectory diverges from the norm (very early in life) it takes on a unique shape that will remain unique.”*

**Stephanie Tolan**

*“Students do not need to be labeled or measured by more than they are....they need energetic teachers who believe that all children are achievers and who take personally the failure of any one child.”*

**Marva Collins**

## GIFTED UNDERACHIEVERS:

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### *Isn't that an Oxymoron?*

*Information and Suggestions for Parents of Gifted Children Who Struggle with Achievement*

#### Content from:

- **When Gifted Kids Don't Have All the Answers** by Jim Delisle and Judy Galbraith
- **How the Gifted Brain Learns** by David Sousa
- **Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom** by Susan Winebrenner

*Compiled by Pat Gerber*

# UNDERACHIEVER OR SELECTIVE CONSUMER?

*“You’re a smart kid – if only you’d apply yourself.”*

*“I don’t care if the homework is boring. An assignment is an assignment! Everyone else has to do it, why shouldn’t you?”*

*“If you would just do your homework and quit complaining, you would be done by now.”*

*“I just can’t make him/her do it.”*

Do any of these comments sound familiar to you? All parents need to push and cajole their children to do their best at one time or another. But some parents of gifted children face a daily struggle when trying to have their children live up to their potential.

It is important for parents to learn the difference between “underachievement” and “nonproduction”. “Nonproduction” can also be called “selective consumerism”.

## Underachievement:

People associate underachievement with negative words such as:

- Belligerence
- Uncooperative
- Unmotivated
- Pity

Many times, once a child is labeled as an “underachiever”, the blame game begins. The “fault” is attributed to parents, teachers, environment, etc.

Important points that should be understood with underachievement are:

- **It can change over time.**  
Actions must be pinpointed and altered.
- **It is content and situation specific.** Look for where success is occurring in a child’s life.
- **It is in the eye of the beholder.** Underachievement can vary from student to student and parents may perceive it entirely differently.
- **It is tied to self-image development.** Positive self-talk is important for children to learn. Successes should not be “lucky breaks”. Failures should not be “the obvious sign of self”.
- **It implies that adults disapprove of a child’s behavior.** Children see their “efforts” as disappointing to adults. “So why should I try?”
- **It is a learned set of behaviors.** Gifted children may separate “school” and “education” if not challenged daily.
- **It is taught.** Gifted kids need a differentiated curriculum.

## Selective Consumer:

Some students may exhibit behaviors generally associated with underachievement (UA) or they may be more in the category of selective consumers (SC).

- UA do not understand causes or cures. SC can explain both the problem and the possible solutions.
- UA are dependent and reactive. SC are independent and proactive.
- UA tend to withdraw. SC tend to rebel.
- UA respect or fear authority figures. SC see teachers as adversaries/ can be contentious.
- UA need both structure and imposed limits. SC require little structure and need breathing room.
- UA exhibit uniformly weak performance. SC exhibit performance that varies relative to the teacher and content.
- UA generally require family intervention. SC can usually be dealt with within school resources.
- UA may change over the long term. SC may change “overnight”.
- UA are often **perfectionistic**; nothing they do is ever good enough. SC are frequently satisfied with their accomplishments.
- UA have a poor academic self-image. SC see themselves as academically able.
- Both UA and SC may have socialization issues with their peers.
- Both need to change their behaviors and attitudes and may need guidance or counseling to achieve academic success.