

**Differentiating
Instruction
for
Advanced
Learning
in the
Regular
Classroom**





Introduction to Differentiation

Classrooms, like the world around us, are made up of increasingly diverse learners. In the regular classroom, there is a wide variety of learning needs. Students differ in readiness levels, interests, and approaches to learning. To create classrooms that are appropriately responsive to students' differing learning needs, teachers can adapt and vary activities through differentiated instruction.

By differentiating instruction in the regular classroom, teachers provide all students with various ways to develop their talents. Students who need more advanced opportunities are able to find these options within a differentiated classroom. They are likely to feel more challenged, to encounter both success and growth, to be called upon to develop higher level study and production skills, and to be able to develop their particular interests and talents.

Differentiation as Part of a Comprehensive Talent Development Program

Differentiated instruction within the regular classroom is a cornerstone of the overall K-12 talent development program offered through the Anne Arundel County Gifted/Talented/Advanced Programs Office. Differentiated instruction is an integral component in a continuum of comprehensive services for advanced students that also includes:

- separate G/T curricular resources
- designated G/T activities in curriculum guides
- various acceleration options
- co-curricular and extra-curricular academic and fine arts programs
- individual and small group services provided by resource teachers
- assorted site-based programs

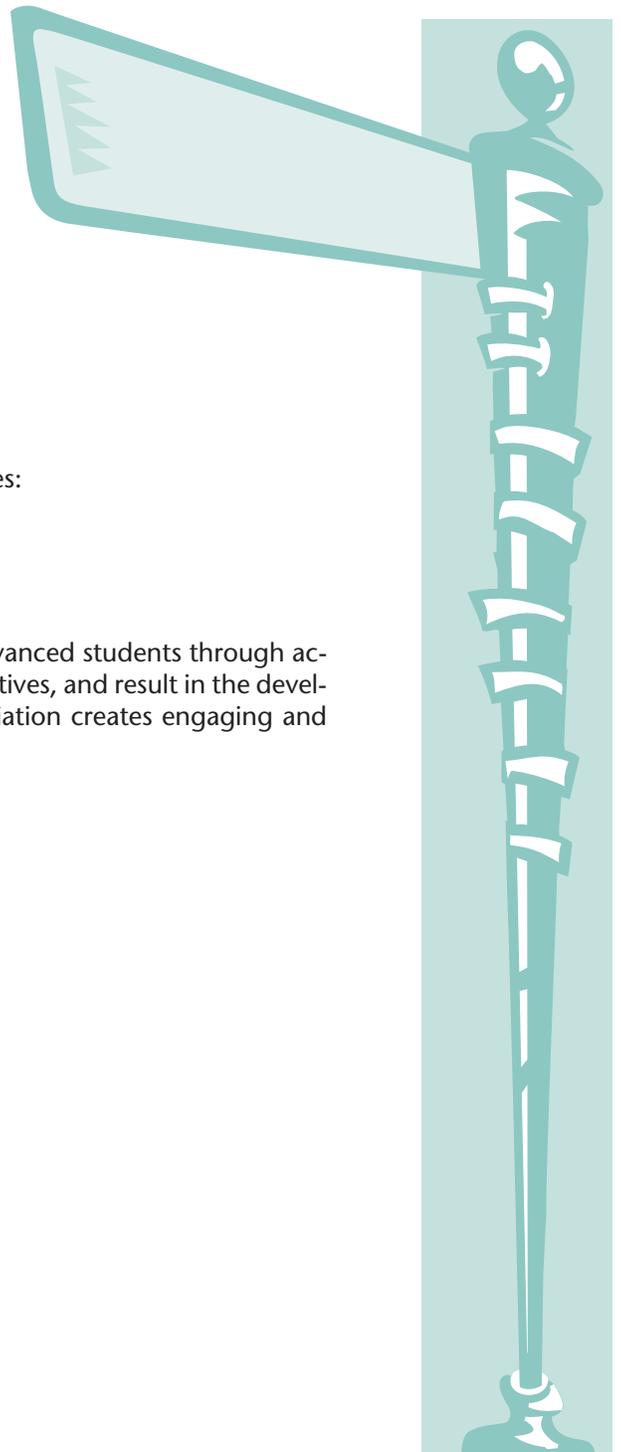
General Characteristics of Differentiated Instruction

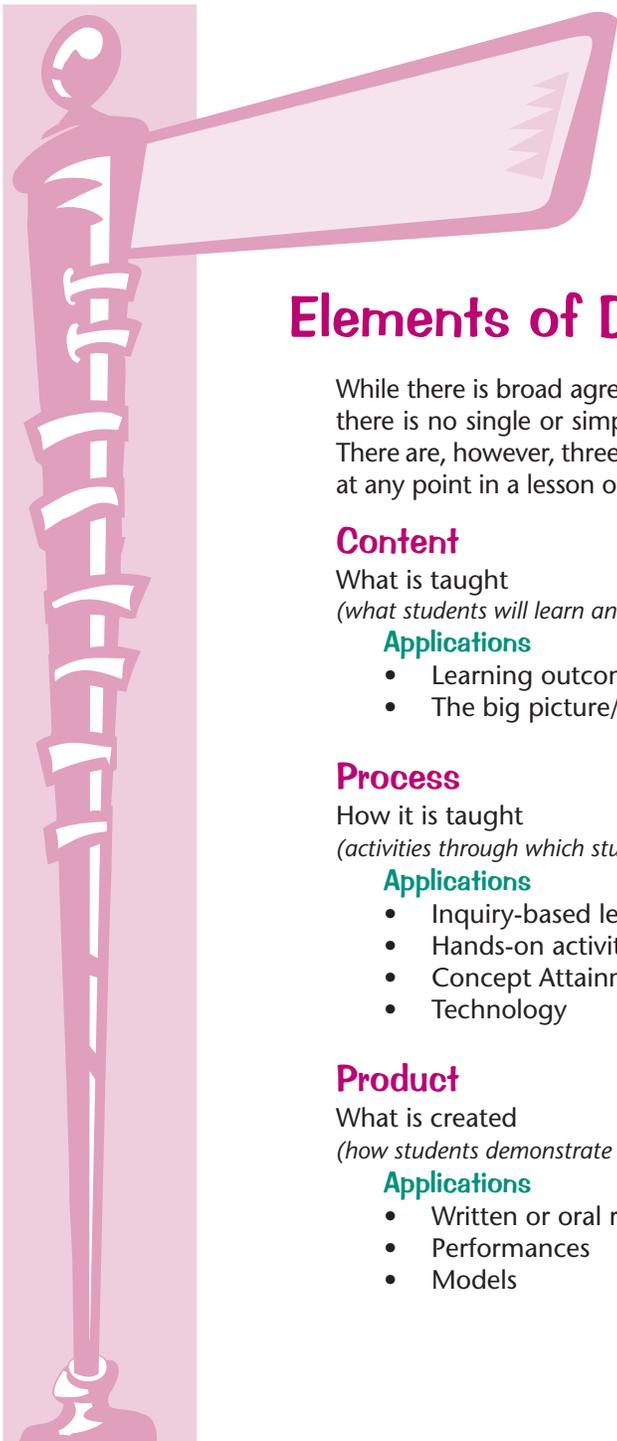
Advanced learners prefer and benefit from instruction that includes:

- a faster pace of learning
- greater independence in study and thought
- increased complexity and depth in subject content

Effective differentiation directly supports the learning needs of advanced students through activities that simulate real world problems, address multiple perspectives, and result in the development and sharing of a variety of authentic products. Differentiation creates engaging and challenging instruction that is:

- inquiry based
- open ended
- multi-faceted
- concept centered
- interdisciplinary
- interest based
- student selected





Elements of Differentiation

While there is broad agreement about the need for and the potential of differentiated instruction, there is no single or simple formula for creating differentiated classrooms for advanced learning. There are, however, three recognized curricular elements which teachers may adapt or differentiate at any point in a lesson or a unit: *content, process, and product*.

Content

What is taught

(what students will learn and the materials which represent that learning)

Applications

- Learning outcomes
- The big picture/generalizations/essential concepts and key questions

Process

How it is taught

(activities through which students make sense of key ideas using essential skills)

Applications

- Inquiry-based learning
- Hands-on activities
- Concept Attainment
- Technology

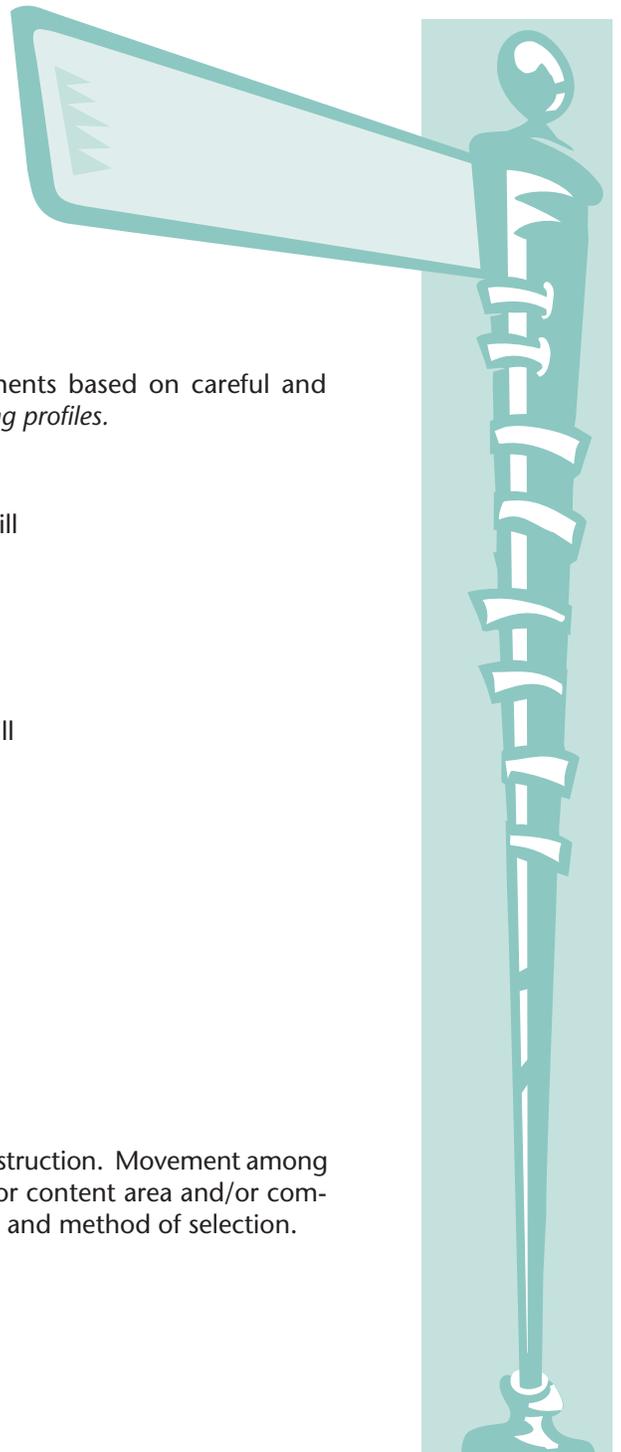
Product

What is created

(how students demonstrate and extend what they understand and can do as a result of their learning)

Applications

- Written or oral reports
- Performances
- Models



Elements of Differentiation (cont.)

Teachers may adapt one or more of these three curricular elements based on careful and continuous assessment of students' *readiness, interests, and learning profiles*.

Readiness

A student's entry point relative to a particular understanding or skill

Tools

- Formal assessments (*tests*)
- Informal assessments (*observations, interviews*)

Interest

A student's affinity, curiosity, or passion for a particular topic or skill

Tools

- Inventories
- Interviews
- Surveys

Learning Profile

A student's preference for modes or styles of learning

Tools

- Multiple Intelligences graphs
- Learning styles survey

Flexible skills grouping is also a major component of differentiated instruction. Movement among groups is common, based on a student's readiness in a given skill or content area and/or common interest or learning profile. Groups will vary in size, duration, and method of selection.



Differentiation Strategies

Teachers use a variety of strategies to create an instructionally responsive classroom for advanced learners. These strategies involve modifying the content of what is being taught, the process used for learning, and the products students are expected to create. These strategies also involve adaptations for individual student readiness, student interest, and student learning profiles. They are meant to work *with, not in isolation from*, core curriculum. A teacher selects a strategy or combination of strategies based on student needs, teacher style and expertise, curricular content, and available resources.

High-level Questions

Questions that draw on advanced levels of information, require leaps of understanding, and challenge thinking that are presented to the advanced learners.

Contracts/Management Plans

An agreement between teacher and student in which the teacher grants certain choices about how a student will complete tasks, and the student agrees to use the choices appropriately in designing and completing work according to specifications.

Tiered Instruction/Assignments

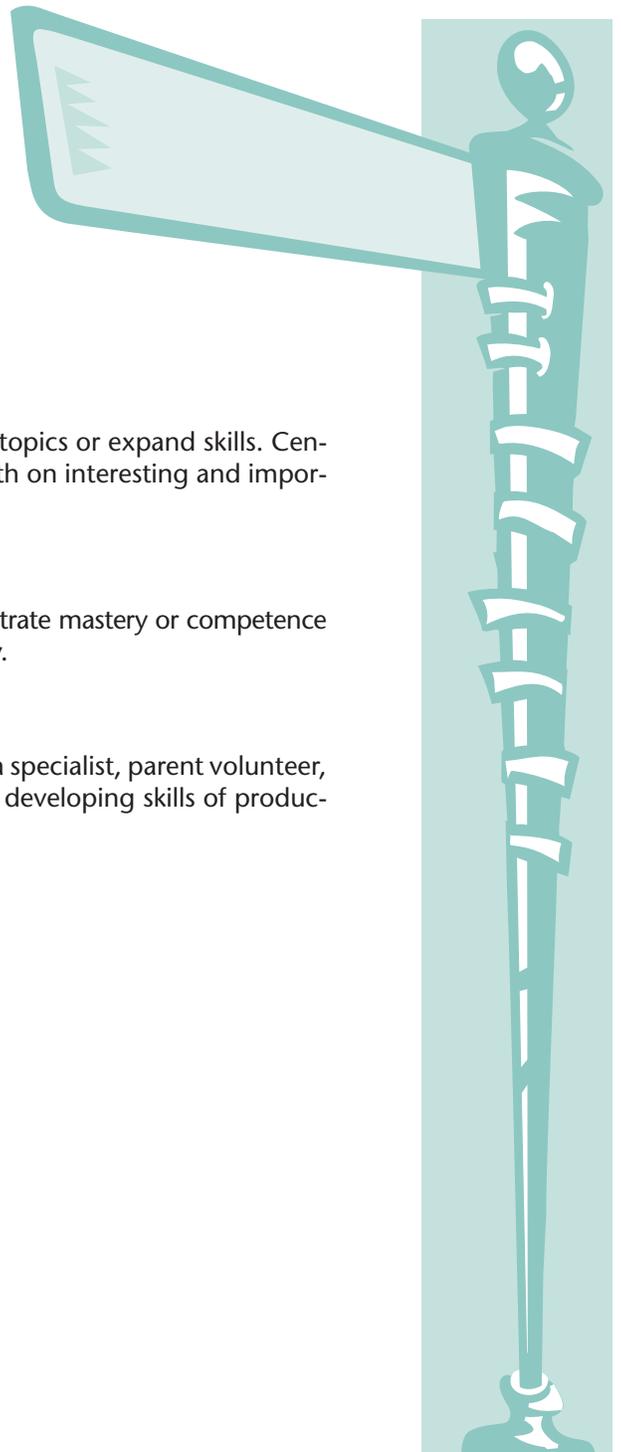
A technique by which all students are taught the same skill or concept with varied content, process and/or product, at a level that builds upon prior knowledge and prompts continued growth.

Curriculum Compacting

A three- step process that a) assesses what a student knows about material to be studied, b) plans for learning what is not known, c) plans for freed-up time to be spent in enriched or accelerated study.

Independent/Small Group Projects

A process through which the teacher and student(s) identify problems or topics of interest to the student(s), plan a method of investigating the problem or topic, and identify the type of product the student(s) will develop.



Differentiation Strategies (cont.)

Learning Centers

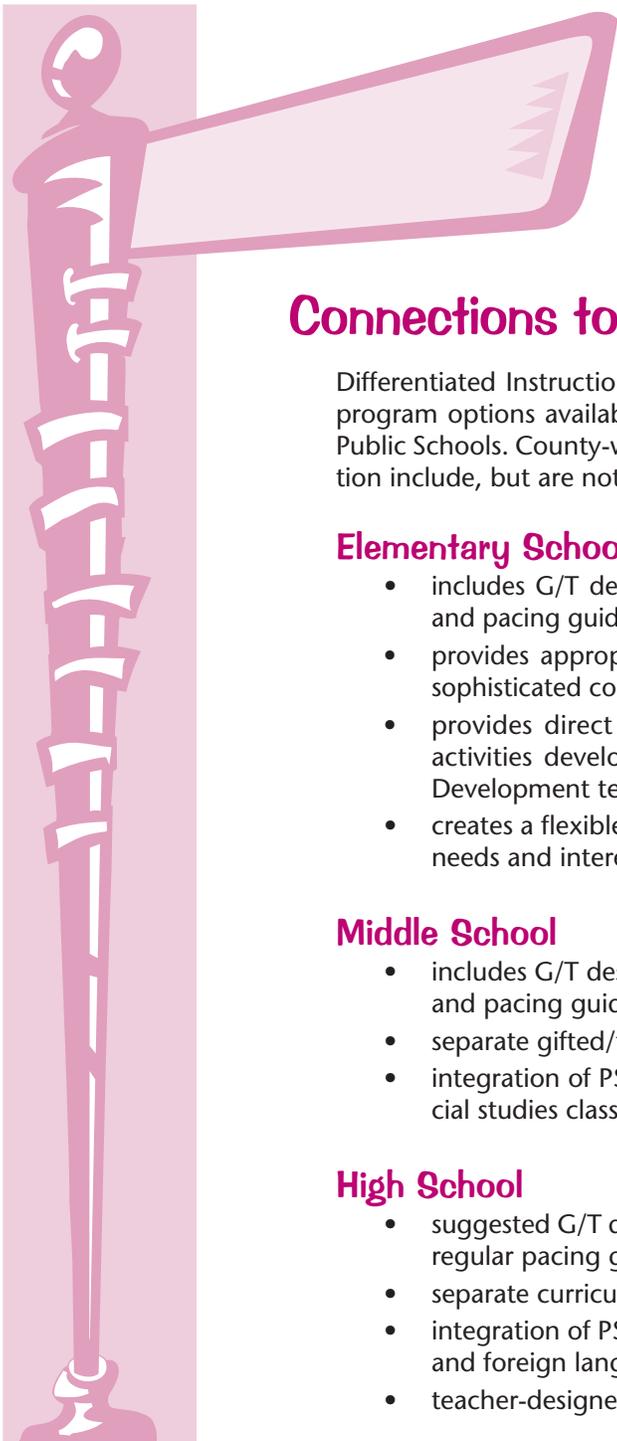
Stations or collections of material that learners use to explore topics or expand skills. Centers are designed to provide study in greater breadth and depth on interesting and important topics within a curriculum.

Interest Centers

Activities that can provide enrichment for students who demonstrate mastery or competence with required work or who complete required assignments early.

Mentorships

Program in which students work with a resource teacher, media specialist, parent volunteer, older student, or community member who can assist them in developing skills of production in a field of study.



Connections to AACPS Talent Development Program

Differentiated Instruction is a major component in the comprehensive menu of services and program options available for advanced students in all grade levels in Anne Arundel County Public Schools. County-wide resources containing specific applications of differentiated instruction include, but are not limited to, the following:

Elementary School

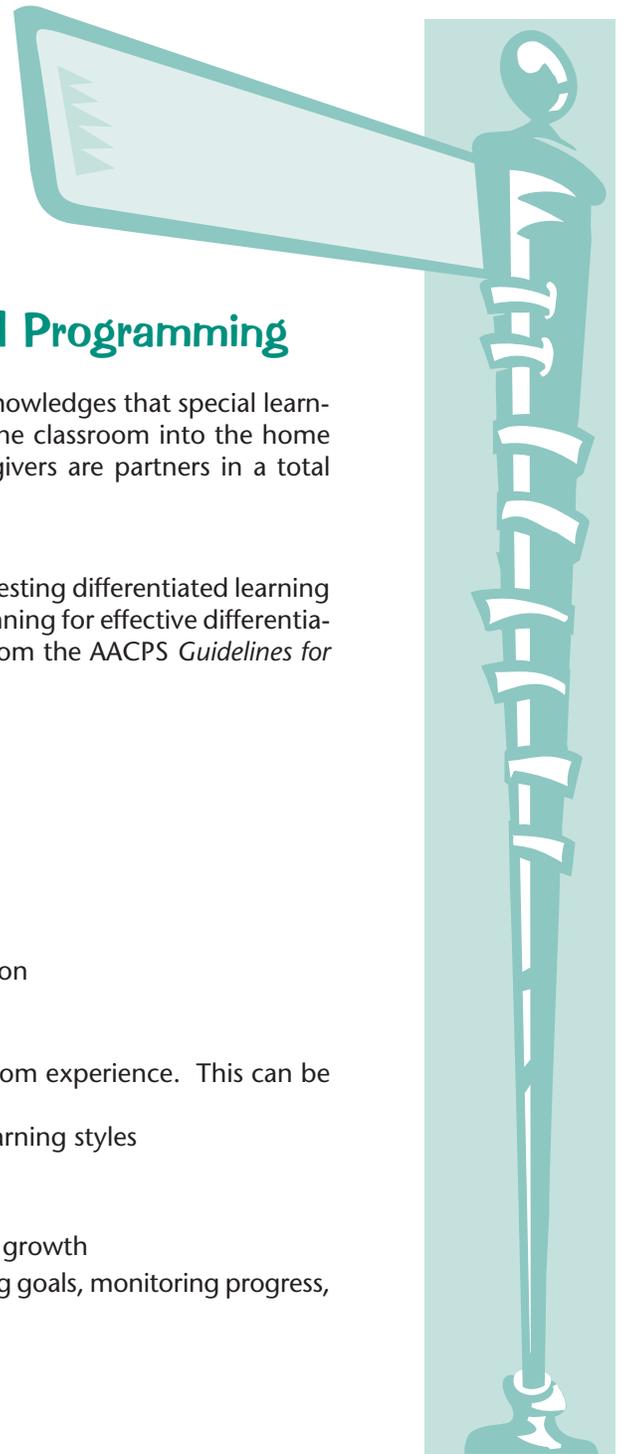
- includes G/T designated lessons, activities, and assessments in elementary curriculum and pacing guides
- provides appropriate educational opportunities for in-depth study of integrated and sophisticated content in the core curricula
- provides direct services working with students, and indirect services (lessons and activities developed and implemented collaboratively by the classroom and Talent Development teachers)
- creates a flexible model in which students receive services based on their pre-assessed needs and interests

Middle School

- includes G/T designated units, activities, and assessments in middle school curriculum and pacing guides in social studies, science, and language arts
- separate gifted/talented curriculum guides for accelerated mathematics courses
- integration of PSAT/SAT preparation into mathematics, language arts, science and social studies classes

High School

- suggested G/T designated outcomes, content, activities, assessments, and resources in regular pacing guides
- separate curriculum guides for Honors and Advanced Placement courses
- integration of PSAT/SAT preparation into mathematics, English, science, social studies, and foreign language classes
- teacher-designed instructional activities and resources to challenge students



Roles & Responsibilities in Differentiated Programming

Differentiation recognizes that every student is unique. It also acknowledges that special learning experiences to nurture high potential must extend beyond the classroom into the home and community. As such, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers are partners in a total talent development program.

Teachers

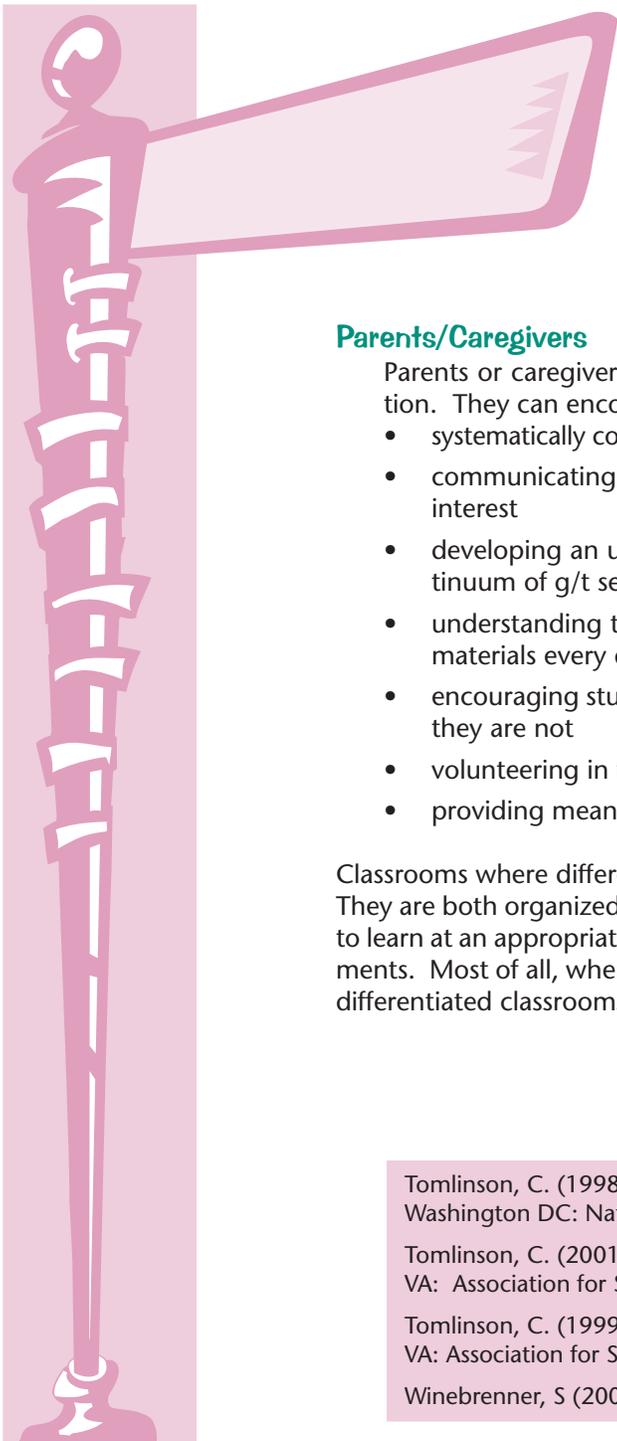
Teachers are the key players in providing challenging and interesting differentiated learning opportunities for their advanced learners. As part of lesson planning for effective differentiation, they should consider in particular the following items from the AACPS *Guidelines for Completing the Instructional Lesson Plan*:

- assessment of student needs
- student grouping
- availability of suitable materials
- appropriate use of technology
- effective instructional models
- effective instructional strategies
- effective questioning techniques
- assessment of student understanding throughout the lesson

Students

Students, too, are partners in shaping all parts of their classroom experience. This can be achieved by:

- developing awareness of their strengths, interests, and learning styles
- assuming ownership in the learning process
- setting high standards for themselves and others
- making choices that enhance their learning and promote growth
- working together with teachers and other students in setting goals, monitoring progress, and analyzing successes and setbacks
- demonstrating scholarly behaviors



Parents/Caregivers

Parents or caregivers also play essential roles in the enrichment of their children's education. They can encourage appropriate differentiation by:

- systematically collecting information and examples of their children's talents and interests
- communicating information to school staff on a student's areas of strength, talent, and interest
- developing an understanding of the nature of differentiation and its place in the continuum of g/t services in AACPS
- understanding that teachers can not and should not differentiate all assignments and materials every day
- encouraging students to let teachers know when assignments are a good fit and when they are not
- volunteering in the classroom and helping to secure enrichment materials
- providing meaningful advanced learning experiences outside the classroom.

Classrooms where differentiation is consistently employed are student-centered and dynamic. They are both organized and flexible. They provide varied opportunities for advanced students to learn at an appropriate pace, with significant depth and breadth, and in stimulating environments. Most of all, when combined with the other elements of talent development programs, differentiated classrooms result in advanced experiences for all involved.

Resources:

Tomlinson, C. (1998). *How can gifted students' needs be met in mixed-ability classrooms?* Washington DC: National Association for Gifted Children.

Tomlinson, C. (2001). *How to differentiate instruction in mixed ability classrooms.* VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Tomlinson, C. (1999). *The differentiated classroom: responding to the needs of all learners.* VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Winebrenner, S (2001). *Teaching gifted kids in the regular classroom.* MN: Free Spirit Press.



For more information about county-wide programs, call the Office of Gifted/Talented/Advanced Programs at 410-222-5430.

OR

visit our website at:

www.aacps.org/aacps/boe/instr/CURR/tag/gt/gt2.html

For specific programs available in individual schools, please contact the local principal

**Anne Arundel County Public School
Department of Instruction
Office of Gifted/Talented/Advanced Programs**

Eric J. Smith, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools



**ANNE ARUNDEL
COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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