

## **How Did You Become So Smart? It's a Gift. (5/1/12)**

Many elementary schools offer "gifted" programs, but what does it mean to be "gifted" at that age? How do I know if my child qualifies for a gifted program? And what if she is accepted? Does that mean her elementary education will be full of stress and too much homework?

To answer these questions and more, we spoke to one of the teachers in the gifted program at Woodcrest School in Tarzana. **Mehri Golab** has been teaching at Woodcrest for 12 years. Along with two other teachers, Mrs. Golab is entrusted with the education of a small group of students who have demonstrated a capacity to perform consistently above grade level since Kindergarten.

**Mrs. Golab, what exactly is the gifted program at Woodcrest?** Our gifted program is a small, energetic learning environment tailored to those students who learn, who retain information and who process information at an accelerated pace. Gifted students are fast learners and require little repetition of information.

**How does a student qualify for the gifted program?** It's a combination of standardized test scores, teacher and principal recommendations, and a demonstration of higher level critical thinking skills, which is also part of the recommendations.

**What do you expect of students in the gifted program?** One of things I really love about the gifted program is our ability to go into a particular subject in depth at the elementary level. I am constantly planning challenging lessons and assignments that allow accelerated students to work at their ability level and beyond. The curriculum is expanded, and it allows students to expand their thinking. Students in the gifted program have specific learning needs. They need to spend the majority of their school days being challenged and learning something new rather than re-learning information they already know.

**And how are your students doing this year?** My students are amazing. The quality of their work continues to amaze me. Their understanding of sometimes complex concepts...well, I shouldn't say it surprises me, but at this age [of the children], it does. And every single year, they exceed national norms on their standardized tests.

**What advice do you have for parents who may think that their children should be in a gifted program?** The number one thing that parents should do is maintain an ongoing dialogue with their child's teacher - the one person who knows your child as well as you do, if not more so in terms of learning capacity. Together, you and your child's teacher can determine your child's specific learning needs and then find the right program with the right pacing and challenges.