

# An Analysis of Public Opinions Regarding Gifted and Talented Education

## Purpose of Study

This study sought to gain a greater understanding of the public's perspectives on gifted and talented education.

## Background

The public discourse surrounding gifted and talented education (GATE) is marked by several tensions, including the balance of excellence and equity, the preeminence of nature or nurture, and the classification of giftedness as an identity or behavior (Dai, 2009). Messages about societal benefits and inequities preventing gifted students from receiving needed services tend to elicit public support. However, GATE is viewed less favorably when framed as taking away resources from mainstream students (Jones & Gallagher, 2019). Because of the link between messaging and public support, it is important to systematically understand how GATE is framed in the popular press.

## Methods

Content analysis was performed on 133 English language letters to the editor ( $n=50$ ) and editorials ( $n=83$ ) from the Nexis Uni (formerly LexisNexis Academic) News database.

### Search Parameters

- Search terms: "gifted and talented"
- January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2023
- Newspaper opinion sections

### Documents sorted by opinion

- **Positive:** Advocates the necessity or benefits of GATE ( $n=57$ )
- **Negative:** Discusses negative implications of GATE for students and society ( $n=54$ )
- **Mixed:** Generally supportive of GATE with concerns, advocates reforms ( $n=22$ )

### Text Analytics

- **Pre-Preprocessing:** Removed stop words and punctuation, made text lowercase, and lemmatized (i.e., removed word endings)
- **Data Analysis:** Python's *CountVectorizer* function tokenized the documents, transforming them into vectors of unigrams, bigrams, and trigrams. This allowed the token frequency of positive, negative, and mixed documents to be counted.

## Results

### Country

- United States ( $n=55$ )
- Australia ( $n=49$ )
- United Kingdom ( $n=22$ )

### News Source

- *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Australia,  $n=34$ )
- *The New York Times* (United States,  $n=27$ )
- *The Guardian* (United Kingdom,  $n=6$ )

**Table 1**  
**Top Word Frequency**

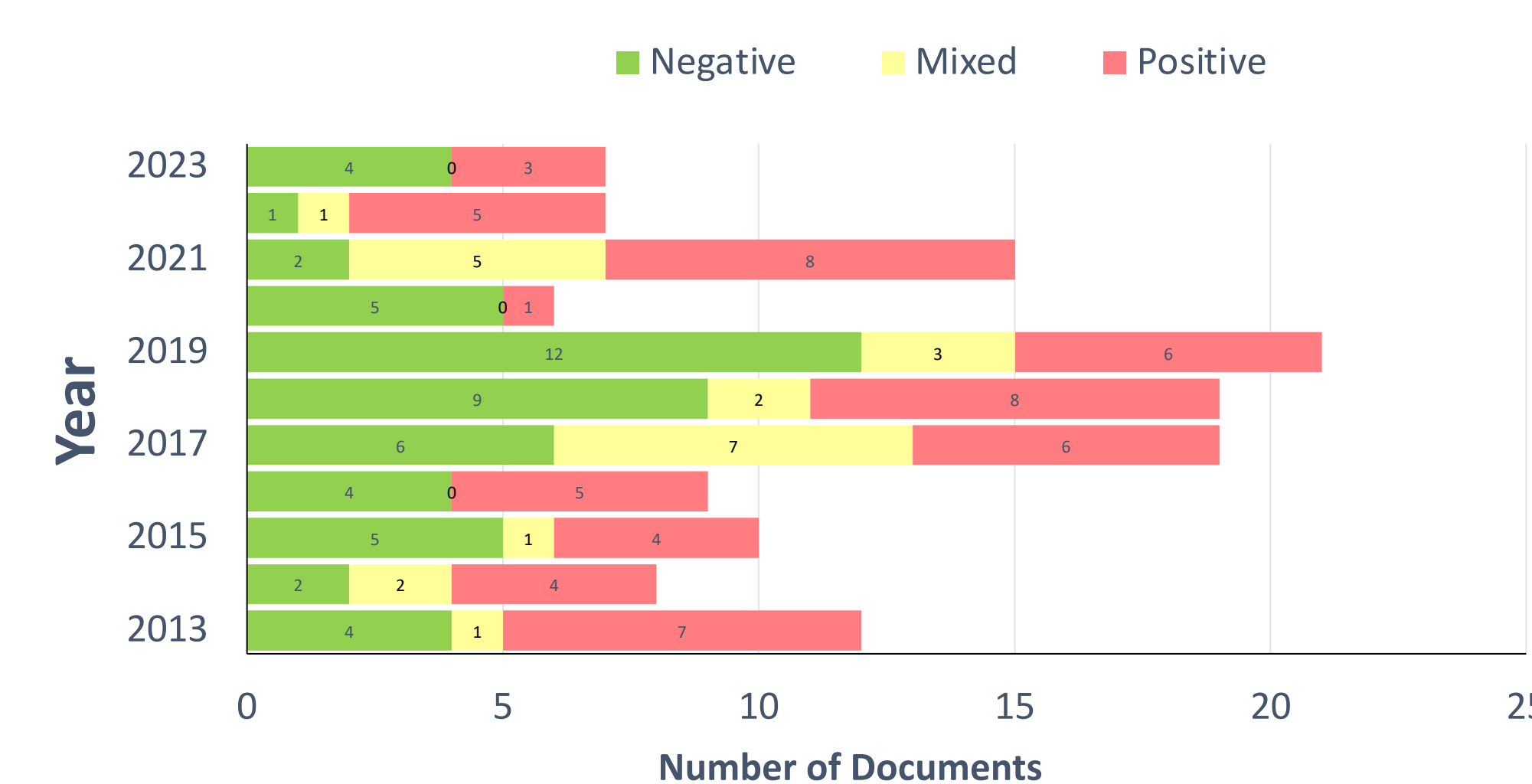
Rank	Pro words		Negative words		Mixed words	
	Pro word	f	Negative word	f	Mixed word	f
1	school	332	school	400	school	216
2	student	220	student	288	student	120
3	education	148	child	191	education	53
4	american	136	year	123	high	51
5	gifted	129	one	121	one	51
6	child	126	education	118	black	51
7	asian	103	parent	103	teacher	50
8	need	88	test	81	program	50
9	year	85	gifted	82	child	43
10	one	82	new	82	gifted	40
11	new	70	time	77	year	39
12	teacher	67	class	77	talented	35
13	talented	64	teacher	74	need	35
14	time	63	would	71	would	34
15	high	63	high	70	city	34
16	parent	61	people	68	selective	34
17	would	61	public	67	grant	33
18	like	61	talented	66	percent	32
19	public	59	family	66	many	31
20	selective	53	white	61	kid	29

Note.

Yellow: parents/family	Orange: Social Class
Green: National Values/Democracy	Lavender: Charter/Non-Public Schools
Blue: race/culture	Red: Testing
Magenta: Needs	Gray: Selectivity

**Figure 1**

**Number of Documents by Opinion and Year**



**Table 2**  
**Top n-gram Frequency**

Rank	Pro n-grams		Negative n-grams		Mixed n-grams	
	Pro n-gram	f	Negative n-gram	f	Mixed n-gram	f
1	asian american	73	gifted talented	53	high school	39
2	gifted talented	54	high school	48	gifted talented	31
3	high school	36	selective school	44	selective school	22
4	selective school	35	new york	38	new york	19
5	new york	30	public school	27	de blasio	19
6	public school	28	per cent	27	talented program	15
7	gifted student	18	implicit bias	21	gifted talented program	15
8	affirmative action	16	middle class	17	public school	14
9	international student	15	test score	17	black hispanic	13
10	public education	15	charter school	17	black student	11
11	talented student	15	education system	17	middle school	9
12	york city	15	social mobility	16	hispanic student	9
13	gifted child	14	private school	15	new york time	8
14	new york city	14	last year	12	york time	8
15	school system	14	gifted student	11	elementary school	8
16	asian american voter	13	learning pod	11	black hispanic student	8
17	gifted talented student	13	school student	11	selective high school	7
18	united state	13	new york city	9	selective high	7
19	american voter	13	york city	9	make sure	7
20	york time	12	talented student	9	school system	6

## Data Analysis

### Positive Themes

- **Asian, Asian-American, and Asian-American voter** are consistent with model-minority myth in GATE discourse (Kao & Hébert, 2006).
- **American, United States, and voter** reflect the effectiveness of appeals to national interest (Jones & Gallagher, 2019).
- The prominence of **need** reflects the effectiveness of appealing to unique learning needs to justify GATE (Jones & Gallagher).

### Negative Themes

- **White** and **implicit bias** reflect the criticism that giftedness is embedded in hegemonic Whiteness (e.g., Garces-Bacsal & Elhoweris, 2022), inequitably servicing Black, Latinx, and Native American students.
- **Middle class** and **social mobility** reflect concerns about GATE underserving students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Test** and **test score** reflect concerns about the validity of testing and its negative impacts upon students.
- **Charter school, private school, and learning pod** are linked to discussion of GATE, primarily negatively.

### Mixed Themes

- Balanced concern for gifted students' learning **need** and GATE's inequity.
- Discussion of **Black** and **Hispanic** students was most prominent in this category of documents.

## Conclusions

- Consistent with Jones and Gallagher (2019), student needs and national interest align with support for GATE.
- Testing and inequity inform negative opinions.
- Discussion of selectivity is high across all opinions--a mark of excellence in positive and exclusion in negative.
- Race is heavily infused in the public discourse of GATE.
- Current events impact the volume of discourse. For example, GATE reforms were proposed in New York City in 2019—corresponding with the highest number of opinions.

### References

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- Garces-Bacsal, R. M., & Elhoweris, H. (2022). Decentering Whiteness in gifted education: Addressing the needs of the gifted "others" through social justice and culturally responsive pedagogies. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 66(2), 121-123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00169862211037713>
- Jones, E., & Gallagher, S. A. (2019). *America agrees: Public attitudes towards gifted education*. Institute for Educational Advancement. <https://ieap.educationaladvancement.org/>
- Kao, C.-Y., & Hébert, T. P. (2006). Gifted Asian American adolescent males: Portraits of cultural dilemmas. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 30(1), 88-117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016235320603000105>