The primary purpose of this study was to examine extensively intellectual and psychosocial development from the sixth grade through high school. A unique aspect of this study was its breadth and inclusion of information from parents. Because parents play an active and important role in their children’s development, they should be active participants in a study of talented children’s growth.

The ways in which parents get involved and advocate for their children’s education rely upon parents’ conceptions of academic success. Mothers (n = 547) and fathers (n = 547) of sixth-grade, academically talented students (62% males) completed a questionnaire assessing parents’ definitions of academic success. Definitions were classified as Internal (i.e., emphasized behaviors relative to the student, had individual importance, or were self-satisfying), External (i.e., emphasized behaviors recognized as eminent by others or superior to peers), Both, or Neither. Conceptions were related to parents’ education level, gender, and ethnic group. Parents likely to emphasize internal standards were those without a doctorate or medical degree, mothers, and White parents. These groups may be supportive of programs catering to individual needs and abilities. Fathers were more likely than mothers to measure academic success by external standards including high grades, college acceptance, and employment in a good career, which suggests that they support programs fostering the attainment of eminent achievements and may exert more pressure on their children to achieve.

Parents of academically talented students have been accused of pushing their children to attain high levels of achievement, as well as fostering performance anxiety and perfectionism in their children. Parents’ achievement goals for their children, in terms of the focus on high
performance or learning for understanding, were examined in relation to children's perfectionism. Parents (127 sets) and their sixth-grade academically talented children (56% boys) completed the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale and parents reported their achievement goals for their children. Most parents reported learning goals, suggesting that emphasis on meeting external standards is not predominant among parents of talented students. Children of performance goal parents were significantly more likely to exhibit dysfunctional perfectionism than children of learning goal parents, reporting a combination of high concern about mistakes, doubts about actions, parental expectations, and parental criticism. Parents' achievement goals can help predict which students might be at risk for adjustment problems and future underachievement.