

Eight Motivation Strategies for talented math students

1. **Let students know what to expect.** Tell students that the problem or activity will take time. Let them know that they will sometimes get stuck and that their work will probably not be perfect. Give them a time frame, and let them know how you will support them.
2. **Redefine success.** Tell students that success is not just about speed and accuracy. Let them know that you value effort, progress, creativity, insight, and clear communication—in short, you care more about learning than perfection.
3. **Praise effort over ability.** Praising effort over ability encourages risk-taking. Seeing intelligence as a quantity that changes through effort empowers students to reach their potential. Carol Dweck develops these ideas in her book *Mindset* (2007).
4. **Focus on process more than answers.** Respond to right and wrong answers in a similar manner, focusing on the mathematical ideas and the opportunity to learn something new. Show students that you value an interesting question as much as an accurate answer.
5. **Offer emotional support.** Some talented math students do not accept real challenges due to a fear of not looking “smart.” They may not be accustomed to feeling frustration. They need help managing these feelings, especially if math has always come easily to them.
6. **Offer meaningful responses to written work.** You do not have to write a lot, just a few specific and thoughtful comments on students’ completed work to let them know that you have read and considered their ideas.
7. **Allow students to collaborate.** In addition to the enjoyment of social interaction, collaboration makes students feel safer taking risks. And, of course, they have more success, because they are sharing ideas!
8. **Debrief.** After you finish a problem (or set of problems), talk about it before you move on. Kids love this! Share answers and strategies. Talk about what went right and what went wrong. Summarize key ideas. Discuss things that are still confusing. Think of new questions to ask.