

# Think Fast!

BY WENDY NASON

## The Davidson Academy nurtures our nation's brightest minds

**T**he Davidson Academy is a free public school for profoundly gifted students. The students score in the 99th percentile on standardized tests, but there's one question they can't answer: What grade are you in? At the Davidson Academy, grade levels don't exist.

According to founders Jan and Bob Davidson, matching a student's education with his or her abilities is more important than being in a certain grade. The Davidsons say profoundly gifted students (children with an IQ over 145) are the most likely to fall through the cracks; they are the ones experiencing the greatest gap between their potential and the curriculum they are provided by our nation's schools.

### Nurturing a need

Jan Davidson's background in teaching and educational software led her and her husband, Bob, to own a thriving software business. After selling the business, the couple established the Davidson Institute for Talent Development (DITD) in order to support the nation's most intelligent children.

The 9-year-old nonprofit institute has several branches, including the Davidson Young Scholars (YS) program, which provides free advocacy to more than 1,300 profoundly gifted children nationwide. YS parents continuously asked the Davidsons to open a school, so they worked with state lawmakers and University of Nevada, Reno administrators to establish the academy in August 2006.

This fall, the Davidson Academy has 80 students, nine teachers, several extracurricular clubs and one graduate (she attends UCLA in the honors program). Bob Davidson says the academy's high school diploma guidelines are more rigorous than those required by the state. Students can be any age, but must be able to perform at middle school level or above.

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### Accelerated academics

Each student meets with guidance counselors, teachers and parents to develop a personal learning plan to ensure the student is challenged. Bob Davidson says, "They're not here to check off courses as fast as they can. They're here to learn."

But these students are fast learners. The academy's location, the second floor of the renovated Jot Travis Student Union at UNR, facilitates accelerated learning. Students are allowed to enroll in UNR classes, which are just a step away.

Sixteen-year-old Cody Nolan wasn't sure how UNR students would react to him. "It's a lot less nerve-racking than I thought it would be." Now, Nolan is accustomed to taking UNR classes. He's already earned 30 university credits. What's the rush? There isn't one. He just enjoys taking the classes. "The Davidsons have succeeded in creating a one-of-a-kind experience that I don't think I could find anywhere else."

### Banishing boredom

Thirteen-year-old Claire Evans' parents moved from Northern California so Claire could attend the academy. Claire's mom, Cindy, says Claire wasn't challenged, even when she skipped from first to third grade. One teacher assumed Claire was chronically tired when she put her head on her desk. Claire wasn't tired. She was bored.

Claire's head stays up at the Davidson Academy. "I have to pay attention for the whole class, otherwise I won't learn, whereas in elementary school, I knew what they were teaching, so I didn't bother to pay much attention."

Cody and Claire say they have developed great friendships at the academy. Cindy says her daughter is happy and challenged. "Isn't that what all parents want for their children?"

For more information, visit the Davidsons' website at [www.ditd.org](http://www.ditd.org) or call 852-3483. ©

*Wendy Nason is studying to be a marriage and family therapist.*



**LEFT:** Cody Nolan, Annalise Brasil, Erik Jensen and Quin Berry in class at the Davidson Academy. Nolan says it's more than just an academic powerhouse; he has made meaningful friendships, too. Photo courtesy Davidson Academy

**RIGHT:** Claire Evans says the Davidson Academy is the best school she's ever attended, because she is not only with students her own age, but she is challenged in school. Photo by Crista Hecht