



Northwest Gifted Child Association (NWGCA)

Gifted Unlimited, II

This NWGCA newsletter is designed to point parents to a variety of excellent resources to help with the education of their gifted children.

Vol. 9, No. 1, Fall 2009

Chartered in 1963, NWGCA is a statewide, nonprofit organization of people with an interest in meeting the special needs of highly capable children

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It's a learning difference

By Tamara Fisher

Gifted does not equal "special." Yet that is how many people interpret and use the term, i.e., "all kids are gifted." Every child ever born is special. Every child brought into our world has something special to offer the world. Even after billions and billions of people have stepped foot on Earth, we each remain unique from

one another. Specialness is inherent in our humanness.

Let's marvel in and celebrate the specialness of every child and of each other. When I, and others, use the term "gifted," we are not trying to imply that some children are more special than others are. We are not saying that "my students" or "my children" are "more special than

yours." They're not more special. Everyone is special in his or her own way. All children are special.

But giftedness is not specialness. And all children are not gifted.

Giftedness is a learning difference.

"Gifted," as used in the field of gifted education, does not mean "having a gift." It means that there's a

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A September secret

From: *SENG—Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted*

Dear Teacher,
I'm excited about being in your class this year. I love it when you smile at all of us, when you read us stories, and when you give us interesting projects to do. I love going to the library with everyone in our class, and I look forward to our class parties. I'm trying really hard this year to make a lot of friends, and to have fun in school.

I'm writing you because I want to tell you a secret about me. My mom and dad are thinking they need to tell you about me, but they can't agree on when or how to do it. Mom wants to give you a month or two to get to know me on your own. I think the school principal told mom to wait like that. Dad thinks the school should have given you information about my secret before the first day

of school. At the very least, dad says, my teacher from last year should have told you my secret.

Because the adults can't agree on where and how to tell you, I figure it's best if I just tell you myself. Maybe together we can come up with a plan to keep all the adults happy. I really don't want mom or dad or the principal to worry about me this year, and I really

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President's letter: News Bulletin

It seems as if the 2009 legislative session happened years ago. And what a session it was!

Those of us who worked so hard throughout the winter and early spring of 2009 were fearful that gifted education would not be included among the programs being considered in the omnibus school education funding bill. We were equally fearful that all funding for gifted education for the upcoming school year would be deleted or severely cut as well.

It is said that in the political arena those who work, win. And win, we did!

Funding for gifted education for the upcoming 2009 school year was renewed with the smallest of cuts in the supplemental budget (\$12,000). Surprisingly, the per student allocation was even increased by a few pennies. We are fortunate to have strong legislative advocates for the gifted, parents who made key legislative contacts, and the Washington Coalition for Gifted Education whose volunteer leaders worked countless hours carrying the message that gifted children need to be educated appropriately in our state.

Gifted education was also included within the definition of basic education for the first time in the history of our state.

Representative Sullivan (D) from the 47th District is a champion spokesperson for gifted education and deserves great appreciation from the gifted education community for his leadership and courage in speaking out for the educational needs of gifted children. His amendment to SHB 2261 on highly capable was adopted on March 12, 2009.

The effect of Representative Sullivan's amendment is that it includes

highly capable programs within the definition of Basic Education and creates a funding allocation based on two percent of a district's full-time equivalent enrollment to provide an extended school day, extended school year, and an allocation for maintenance, supplies, and operating costs. It declares legislative intent that highly capable students be identified using multiple criteria and that school districts should identify those most highly capable to receive accelerated learning and enhanced instruction. It states that access to accelerated learning and enhanced instruction through the Highly Capable Program is not an individual entitlement.

Our work has just begun, however. Because the legislature did not fund the education reforms outlined in SHB 2261, three legislative work groups have been launched to determine how to do so and which programs should be funded first. These work groups are:

- Quality Education Council, chaired by Superintendent of Education, Randy Dorn.
- Funding Formula Technical Working Group
- K-12 Data Governance group, chaired by Bob Butts of OSPI

The Washington Coalition for Gifted Education has communicated with all three groups, urging them to consider funding the gifted education program in the first wave of funding. None of these teams had gifted education on their radar, but now they do.

If you have not made your financial contribution to the Coalition yet this year, you need to do so. The Coalition is the only voice for gifted active in the policy arena.

CHALLENGE FOR PARENTS:

Your school district may be reducing the gifted program, cutting your district gifted coordinator, insisting that your gifted child is being adequately served in the regular classroom while not providing any support or training for the classroom teacher.

RESOURCE: Three Washington state volunteer organizations serve as spokespersons for gifted students. **No one else is protecting the funding for your child's gifted education.**

These organizations are:

Northwest Gifted Child Association (NWGCA)

Washington Association of Educators of Talented and Gifted (WAETAG)

Washington Coalition for Gifted Education (WCGE)

CALL TO ACTION: Invest in your child's educational future by joining all three organizations for a mere \$90 a year—only \$10 a month for each school year (see p. 7 for membership form). Your membership, pooled with those of parents and educators from across the state, pays for lobbyist and volunteer activities that ensure state funds for gifted education and for well-thought out legislation that provides appropriate education for gifted children in Washington.

—Marcia Holland

Save the Date!!
February 5, 2010
Gifted Education Day
Capitol Building
Olympia Washington

Secret, Continued from p. 1

don't want anyone to be sad or angry or envious or mad or embarrassed about my secret.

What is my secret? My secret is that I've been reading books by myself since I was three or four years old, and I've already figured out how to do multiplication, and I've figured out that division is just the opposite of multiplication, and I love fractions. And I can write letters, like this one. In other words, I know things. And I'm always learning new things because I read a lot of books and remember a lot about what I've read. I heard my mom and dad say that I already know most of what I'm supposed to learn this year.

Yes, I make mistakes sometimes. Although I can do simple papers quickly, my mind likes to wander to more complicated things. Remember last week when I had trouble sitting still in the circle on the floor? I was squirming because I had trouble listening to you explain place value in math. I've known almost since I was born that one group of ten pencils is the same as ten pencils. I know that we do math in tens because we have ten fingers.

I would have paid attention, I promise, if you had told the story that my Aunt Martha, the math teacher, invented for me about the seven-fingered aliens who came to earth 7,000 years ago and, probably because they had seven fingers, did math with groups of seven, rather than groups of ten. The aliens' math is called base seven math. It's cool. There's also computer math—base two—because

computers have only electricity as their “fingers,” and they have only two electricity “fingers”—on and off.

I know you're very busy. I don't expect you to make special lessons for me. That's ok. Once I overheard my Aunt Martha say that I'm autopedantic. “Auto” means “self”—as in an automobile moves by itself rather than by horses. “Pedantic” has something to do with learning. Aunt Martha, when she called me autopedantic, meant that I learn a lot by myself. I even learned the word “autopedantic” by myself—I looked it up!

So, can we come up with a plan to keep everyone happy? Maybe the school librarian will let me check out harder books, and I can learn from them. Maybe you can let me make your assignments harder. For instance, maybe I can do my math assignments in base seven rather than base ten. That would make mom happy, especially if Aunt Martha tells mom about the seven-fingered aliens.

Or if we're writing poems in class, maybe I can write one without using the letter “e” or with using a simile or metaphor or zeugma (which is not an animal, but sounds like it should be!). Or if we're doing spelling word sentences, I can let my sentences run together into a story that includes the 10 words everyone else is learning and 10 harder words.

And it would be really cool if sometime, somewhere, maybe once a week, I could spend time with some older kids who read the same books I read, or if I could study fun math with

some other kids who love math as much as I do. Although my classmates are all very nice so far, sometimes I get lonely when people around me don't understand what's happening in my head.

I know that you need to pretend that everyone in our class is the same so you can give us all the same worksheets and we can all be in the same grade and we can all be friends. Yes, I want friends. Or at least I don't want enemies. I don't want to be teased on the playground for being different, or for answering all your questions in class. Please excuse me if I sometimes don't raise my hand when I know the answer, or if I raise it more than you want. It's hard for me to figure out what everyone expects of me.

But I really want to learn things I don't already know. And I want you to understand me. I want to be able to talk to you about my secret and how I feel about it. I want you and mom and dad to understand that I'll do my best to make friends in our class, but I need to have other friends, too—friends who can play chess and talk about interesting books with me.

I promise that if I'm busy learning, I'll be able to pay attention much better. If I learn more, my parents will be happy and my mom will relax. If I learn more, I'll have more fun. Please, let's try and figure out something, OK? Thanks.

Sincerely, J.R. (P.S. I think my mind operates in base two—either it's learning or it's not.)

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I will spend no time on the argument that special treatment of the academically gifted is elitist. It has no moral standing. A special ability is a child's most precious asset. When it comes to athletic and musical ability, no one considers withholding training that could realize those gifts. It is just as senseless, and as ethically warped, to withhold training that can realize academic ability. Real Education, Charles Murray, 2008, Crown Forum, p. 147.

Preaching to the GE Choir

By Dick Kantenberger

We love to talk about gifted and talented (GT) and giftedness. We love to talk to each other about it by the hour. We go to seminars and talk and listen all day about GT and sometimes several days at a time. We read and write books and articles about giftedness primarily aimed at other people in GT and to the students and parents of gifted or potentially gifted children. There is nothing wrong with these things. First, we enjoy talking about GT because we are very interested in it, and second, there are many students and parents that need the help that GT education can give them. But if we are going to broaden the support for GT education in this country, we have to broaden our message.

Look what Special Education has been able to accomplish. But how long did it take them? Both GT and Special Ed have been studied in academia for about 40 years prior to World War II, but after the war special education grassroots advocacy organizations began to spring up, like the American Association on Mental Deficiency, United Cerebral Palsy Association and the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Then in the sixties an increasing level of school access was established for children with disabilities at the state and local levels.

The grassroots advocacy for Special Education began to swell as Congress approved Public Law 94-142

“Education for All Handicapped Children Act” in 1975, but it did not prove effective until legislation for federal funding was approved two years later. It mandated that school districts provide such schooling in the “least restrictive environment” possible. But Special Education did not take off until 1990 with the passage of “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act” (IDEA). Before IDEA, the condition of Special Education in this country was pretty bleak. In 1970, American schools educated only one in five children with disabilities, and many states had laws that excluded children with major disabilities like deafness, blindness and mental retardation. There is no doubt that Special Education programs have helped a great number of students assimilate into the public education system. However, 80 percent of students in Special Education are there because of weak underlying cognitive skills according to LearningRx. Therefore, identifying and retraining these cognitive skills is essential for permanently overcoming learning disabilities.

The goals of Gifted and Talented education are to identify and train the cognitive skills of gifted students whose vulnerability is such that it is estimated **we are losing about a million kids a year** because the public and the state and federal politicians still mostly have the misconception that if a child is gifted then “don’t worry about it, she or he is bound to turn out OK.”

Unless we want to wait another forty years, it seems to me our goal is clear. As much as we love talking about GT among ourselves, we must accelerate the GT grassroots ground-



Megan, New Jersey, Age 11. From In Our Own Words and Pictures, NAGC Web site. Copyright 2009 NAGC. Reprinted with permission of National Association for Gifted Children. No further reprints or redistribution is permitted without consent of NAGC.

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swell by directing our message to the general public and especially to our state and federal legislators....

We in GT education are the “tree-trunks” of our movement. However, we need many “leaves” on our “trees”. The “leaves” we need, if we are to accomplish our goals, are the support of the general public and state and federal legislators. Tree-trunks can not grow many leaves on their own, so we all need to make a concerted effort over a period of time to grow many “limbs” which can in turn grow many “leaves.” This means that since we are small in numbers we **all** have to take a pro-active role in educating all of our non-GT teachers, counselors, principals, and the parents of our GT children. Then **all** of us need to contact the general public and the state and federal governments, especially the state legislators. This being an election year, there is no better time to get our message to these very

CHALLENGE FOR PARENTS:

Almost everyone in our communities believes that gifted children will do just fine on their own and need no special help or accommodation in

schools to manage their giftedness. While those of us who parent gifted know this is not accurate, we have not convinced the powers that be of the cost to the United States for not educating these children.

RESOURCES: 1. Washington Coalition for Gifted Education, 18149 147th Avenue SE, Renton, Washington 98058. 2. National Association for Gifted Children, www.nagc.org.

CALL TO ACTION: a. Most important is to contact your own state senators and representatives via personal contact, telephone, letter, fax, or e-mail and ask them to specifically support Gifted and Talented education by including highly capable programs as defined by ESHB 2261 among the first programs implemented as provisions of the law are phased in beginning September 2011. Programs for highly capable students already exist in 222 of the 296 districts in the state, and districts provide \$35,208,235 of local funds to supplement the \$7,026,729 provided by the state. Delay in implementation could cause district contributions to decrease significantly, thus jeopardizing gifted programs as they currently exist across

the state. (Figures from the *OSPI Annual Report of the Highly Capable Learners Program, School Year 2006-2007*, the most recent data available from OSPI).

To find all of your legislators select www.leg.wa.gov, then select “Find Your Legislator” and type in your personal information.

b. Contact your local school district superintendents and ask them to make the same request of the legislative work groups studying implementation of ESHB 2261.

c. Write to your local newspaper education reporters, and send letters-to-the-editor expressing your concerns about gifted education.

d. Call local radio talk-shows to express your concerns.

e. For more detailed help contact the National Association for Gifted Children at <http://www.nagc.org> and select “Advocacy & Legislation,” then “Toolkit.”

Dick Kantenberger is a Texas teacher certified in secondary and elementary mathematics and science, physics, special education and gifted and talented, and member of the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented.

Resource for skillful advocacy available

Do you struggle to advocate effectively for your gifted child with a teacher, school or school district? NWGCA urges you to order a remarkable CD ROM, the NAGC Mile Marker Series (\$24.95) at www.nagc.org.

The Mile Marker Series is the result of a proactive group of NAGC parent volunteers coming together to identify ways to better serve parents and care-

givers of the gifted. Whether your questions are basic—“How do I help my gifted child stay engaged at school?” or more complex, “How can I get state legislators to support gifted issues?”—you’ll find the resources you need in one, easily accessible, well-organized location.

Five Mile Markers represent different stages of nurturing gifted children:

Mile Marker #1: Discovering Differences. Information about characteristics/identification of giftedness; dispels some common myths.

Mile Marker #2: Exploring the World of G/T. More targeted information about particular areas, such as handling social and emotional issues, keeping a child challenged, developing organizational skills, and knowing

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Learning difference, Continued from p. 1

significant learning difference present in that individual. Everyone has gifts—that something special we each can offer the world—but not everyone learns as a gifted child learns.

“Gifted” is the term we use to refer to those children whose learning is dramatically different. Yes, if you get right down to it, we all do learn a bit differently from each other, gifted or not (“learning styles,” if you will). But we’re talking here about the significant differences that set these kids apart. They can learn two (or more) years’ worth of Math in one year. They can read as well as children eight years older than they are. They have built their own science laboratories in the basements of their homes. They use words most adults have to look up in the dictionary. They can spell words

most adults have never even heard of! These kids are out there...possibly in your classroom...and they ARE different! The word we use to refer to them just happens to be “gifted.”

“Gifted” isn’t elitism or “more special,” it’s just a different way of learning.

CHALLENGE FOR PARENTS:

Key educators believe every child is “gifted” and object to or disregard your requests for appropriate educational services for your child.

RESOURCES: Blog by Tamara Fisher at http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/unwrapping_the_gifted/2007/08/its_a_learning_difference_3.html. With Karen Isaacson, she is also coauthor of *Intelligent Life in the Classroom: Smart Kids and Their Teachers*.

CALL TO ACTION: 1. Share this article with others parents of gifted so that they will know how to respond to this challenge.

2. Make an appointment with your school district superintendent and have several parents of gifted attend the meeting. Ask what resource the district is allocating for gifted. Offer to help educate key district professional about the needs of gifted.

3. Meet with each school board member to find out his or her stand on services for gifted children.

Tamara Fisher is a K-12 gifted education specialist for a school district on an Indian reservation in Montana and president-elect of the Montana Association of Gifted and Talented Education. Used with permission.

Secret, Continued from p. 3

CHALLENGE: Gifted children often are as intensely emotional as they are intensely intelligent. Learning to thrive in a less intense world can be a challenge for the child, the parents, and others siblings in the family.

RESOURCE: SENG (Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted) at www.sengifted.org. SENG fosters environments in which gifted adults and children understand and accept themselves and are understood, valued, nurtured, and supported by

their families, schools, workplaces, and communities.

CALL TO ACTION: 1. Become familiar with the SENG Web site. 2 Consider forming a SENG-model parent support group.

NWGCA Membership Application

Does your employer match contributions? Yes No

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

School District _____

I don't want to share my information with other Washington organizations for the gifted.

Please cut or copy this form and send it with a check for \$35 (yearly dues) to:
NWGCA Treasurer, PO Box 10704, Spokane, Washington 99209. Make check payable to NWGCA.

2009-2010

Washington Highly Capable Membership Campaign

**Be a part of the force to further gifted education in Washington
"Join 1 or all 3 statewide organizations"**

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ex officio

www.waetag.net

WCGE—since 1985

Barbara Poyneer—Treasurer
wagifted@earthlink.net

*Northwest Gifted
Child Association*

*Washington Educators
of Talented and Gifted*

*Washington Coalition
for Gifted Education*

NWGCA

Mission

To support highly capable/
gifted children by:

- Supporting **parents**
- Disseminating information
- Encouraging development and maintenance of programs for gifted students
- Supporting legislation

Major Activities

Publishes a newsletter with local, state and national resources for gifted families

Why Join?

Parents need a voice at the state level as well as a way to connect on a local level. Parents are vital to ensure gifted programming remains a priority.

JOIN TODAY for the
2009-2010 school year

TAX DEDUCTIBLE

WAETAG

Mission

To improve educational opportunities for gifted students by strengthening services to and providing information for **professionals** serving these students in all settings.

Major Activities

- Leadership symposium
- Annual statewide conference and workshop
- Quarterly coordinator meetings by ESD
- Newsletter
- Student scholarship for summer opportunities
- Web page on regional, state, and national issues

Why Join?

Teachers, parents and students face many of the same challenges in meeting the needs of the highly capable student. WAETAG provides a way to share ideas, voice concerns, and increase professional preparation.

WCGE

Mission

To work collaboratively with key state governmental decision makers on issues related to the education of highly capable students, their families, and their schools.

Major Activities

- Employ a **lobbyist**
- Educate key decision makers on issues
- Provide legislators with current information and seek their support for funding and programs .
- Work with state agencies on highly capable issues
- Inform members about legislative issues

Why Join?

The Coalition is YOUR voice in Olympia and is the only non-profit gifted advocacy group in Washington that can hire a lobbyist. As a member of the Coalition, you provide the necessary financial support.

**TOGETHER
WE'RE STRONGER**

Membership Information

Does your employer match contributions?

Name _____ School District _____

Address _____
_____ I do not want to share my information with other WA gifted organizations

Email Address _____

Join: NWGCA \$35/year
 WAETAG \$35/year
 WCGE \$35/year
 JOINT MEMBERSHIP SPECIAL
Only \$90 for all 3 organizations

Mail to PO Box 10704, Spokane, WA 99209
Mail to 830 Cary Rd., Edmonds, WA 98020
Mail to B. Poyneer, 18149 147 Ave SE, Renton, WA 98058
Mail to B. Poyneer, 18149 147 Ave SE, Renton, WA 98058
Make joint membership check payable to WCGE



Advocacy, Continued from p. 5

ways to support high achievement at home and at school.

Mile Marker #3: Asking for Directions. Expert advice about what to expect in a school—including different instructional methods and the vocabulary used by educators.

Mile Marker #4: Enlisting Support. Suggestions for becoming an effective advocate for your child.

Mile Marker #5: Making a Difference. Resources to help you organize a local parent group or build other advocacy efforts.

The CD contains more than 350 resources—most unavailable through other sources. Feel free to begin at any Mile Marker that interests you.

CALL TO ACTION: 1. Order the CD-ROM. 2. Share its contents with other parents, teachers, school administrators, and school board members. 3. Organize a parent support group in your district. 4. Join a statewide organization.

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What is gifted? Students who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. National Association for Gifted Children.

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