

Talented Times

Jan. 2010
Issue #51

For Parents & Educators of the Gifted & Talented

MCGT CHAT Night Coming to Hutchinson “Characteristics & Identification of Gifted Children”

CHAT (Connect, Help, Advocate, Talk) Nights are dedicated to informally connecting parents and teachers of gifted children, helping them find other parents and teachers in similar situations with an ear to listen, experiences to share, and solutions to offer. This free service is offered by MCGT (Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented) and its members.

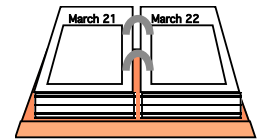
On Thursday, February 4th from 7:00 - 8:30 pm in the Commons of the Hutchinson campus of Ridgewater College, the Crow River Region Chapter of the Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented will be hosting a CHAT night. The evening will begin with a brief (10-15 minutes) presentation by a facilitator provided by the MCGT Board on “Characteristics and Identification of Gifted Children.” Those present then separate out into smaller groups to allow for discussion of the topic with other parents and teachers of gifted children.

Please join us for an evening of information, resources, refreshments, and networking opportunities. There will be books on parenting and educating gifted children available for loan through the Crow River Region Chapter of MCGT. Educators may request clock hours, and school-aged children accompanying their parents will find board games to play.

All interested persons are welcome to join us. Contact Shari at crowriver@mgct.net with questions or for special accommodations.



UPCOMING EVENTS IN 2010



Jan 13 NAGC Wednesday Webinar: Perfectionism see page 6 for more details and dates of other webinars.

Jan 16 Saturday workshop. “Perfectionism: What it is, what it isn’t and how to help,” with Tom Greenspon, psychologist and author. Room 350 in the Edina Community Center, 5701 Normandale Road, Edina, MN 55424. Go to www.mcgt.net for more details.

Jan 16 Family Science Night 2010: Mad Science! 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm - Performing Arts Center, Eden Prairie High School, 17185 Valley View Rd., Eden Prairie. As you read this Mad Scientists are plotting to take over the school, and if you are not careful, you just may learn something. This show will be an exciting collection of scientific demonstrations and experiments that will really stretch your brain. Admission: Adults \$5; Students \$4; \$15 Family maximum. For more information, contact info@epcgt.org

Feb 4 MCGT CHAT Night. 7:00-8:30 in the Commons of Ridgewater College - Hutchinson Campus. Hosted by the Crow River Region Chapter. Topic: Characteristics and Identification of Gifted Children.

Feb 7-9 MEGT Mid-Winter Conference. At Cragun’s Resort near Brainerd, MN. Theme: Raising the Bar: Challenging Gifted Students in an NCLB World. Keynoters: Jann Leppien and Cindy Stricklund. More information on the MN Educators of Gifted and Talented web site: www.megt.org

Jun 13-17 Second Hormel Foundation Gifted and Talented Education Symposium. In Austin, MN, at Riverland Community College. More information may be found on the Minnesota Department of Education web site, http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Academic_Excellence/Gifted_and_Talented/index.html

Staying in Sync: Tips to Form and Maintain Positive Relationships

By Katherine B. Brown

“It takes a village to raise a child.”

This saying remains relevant today and perhaps now more than ever before. With differentiated needs and increased potentials, gifted students can benefit from parents and teachers who recognize the importance of staying in sync or connected with one another. Often a lack of communication, or even miscommunication, can cause unnecessary stress and frustration for parents and teachers. Most importantly, when misunderstandings occur between parents and teachers, the child may not receive the best education that he or she deserves. This article presents tips to both parents and teachers on how to stay in sync with one another by staying involved, communicating respectfully, transferring information, working in cooperation, and promoting independence.

Tip #1: Staying Involved

Researchers have found that parents who are involved in their children’s education are more likely to have children who succeed in school. When parents volunteer in the classroom, they can add new depth to the curriculum and share with students experiences from their own lives.

How can parents stay involved?

If parents are interested in volunteering, they should begin by asking the teacher about volunteer opportunities. Some teachers may want help with field trips, story times, or classroom parties, while others may want help by preparing materials or assisting in enriching the curriculum. If parents are interested in volunteering their time, they should discuss this with the teacher in advance and agree upon times that will work for both parties. Parents should be very professional about coming on the agreed days and times and should be dressed appropriately. Unscheduled visits can do more harm than good for students when the regular routine is interrupted or disruptions occur during focused work periods.

Parents should also feel comfortable sharing their talents and interests with the teacher. Even hobbies and collections can serve as a valuable resource for students. Many high-ability students working on independent projects could greatly benefit from expertise in a specialized area. Exposure to a variety of interests and passions can often pique the curiosity of gifted students who are unmotivated and underachieving. Busy parents could share information with students through e-mails and phone interviews. By sharing talents with the class, students can gain a variety of meaningful experiences.

How can teachers keep parents involved?

Parents are often not aware of the various volunteer opportunities available within the classroom. In the same way, teachers may be hesitant and unsure about how best to involve parents. One way to alleviate this problem is to use a parent inventory to uncover parents' areas of expertise and talents. Once parents have completed the inventory, the teacher can review the responses to determine various ways in which parents may be able to contribute to the curriculum. Teachers can make up their own inventory or use one already created, such as the Community Talent Miner (Renzulli, 1977).

Another great activity that can be used to increase parent involvement is Family Enrichment Trips. These are voluntary field trips on the weekends that are presented to families. The goal is to expose families to low-cost activities in the community that provide students with enriched learning experiences. Field trips may be offered once a year, or as often as once a month. Such trips should involve activities that are free or low cost, easily accessible to families, and related to the state or district curriculum. Examples of Family Enrichment Trips may include a trip to a local community zoo or state park, a symphony or play, a day of reading in a park, an evening observation of the constellations through a local university telescope, a visit to a museum, or walking on a local nature trail. These trips seek to introduce community resources to parent and demonstrate the importance of providing children with learning experiences outside of the classroom.

Tip #2: Communicating Respectfully

Parents and teachers play an important role in a child's social, emotional, and academic development. Recognizing the importance of one another and appreciating what each individual has to offer the child contributes to a positive relationship between parent and teacher.

How can parents support communication?

Parents should remain positive in front of the child when discussing his or her teacher. Once negative views of a teacher are expressed, reversing these opinions can be difficult.

The parent in such a situation should strive to serve as the mediator between the student and the teacher by helping the child devise a plan to speak with the teacher about the concern. By teaching children how to advocate for themselves and speaking calmly to an authority figure about a misunderstanding, parents provide children with a valuable life skill. Parents should explain to the child that such a discussion should be held at a time when the teacher is alone and available to talk uninterrupted—making an appointment before school, after school, or during a lunch break would be most productive. Teachers who are challenged in front of the class, spoken to in a confrontational or overly emotional manner, or who are rushed between classes will not be as likely to respond positively to the child's concern. Delisle and Galbraith (2002) offered the following 10 tips (see p. 5) to help guide students when talking to a teacher about a problem. Parents also can use these tips to help children solve dilemmas from a place of mutual respect.

How can teachers demonstrate positive interactions?

Parents of high-ability students take a keen interest in their child's education. Often, this concern results from experiences in which the child was not provided with appropriate activities due to the difficulty that many teachers have in differentiating curriculum for gifted students. In order to put parents at ease and encourage positive interactions, the teacher also needs to understand a parent's point of view. This can be achieved several ways.

Teachers should ask parents at the beginning of the year for information about the child's perceived strengths, weaknesses, interests, and goals. This can be especially helpful for the high-ability student whom the teacher may assume is achieving in all areas. Parents can make the teacher aware of areas in which the child needs continued challenge or is having difficulties. If the parent sees that the teacher is willing to listen to his or her suggestions and knowledge about the child, the parent is more likely to also appreciate the teacher's suggestions.

Another way for teachers to reach out to parents is to write thank you notes to parents who have helped out in some manner. This can be as simple as a quick message jotted on a Post-it® note to formal thank you card. The key is that the child will see that the teacher recognizes the importance of the parent and respects him or her for helping.

Tip #3: Transferring Information

Communication is the essential ingredient in promoting a positive teacher-parent relationship, and communication is a two-way street. Both parents and teachers must make an effort to keep each other informed in clear language that does not imply blame. Certain forms of communication provide for more effective contact between parents and teachers. Below is a sample e-mail sent to a teacher from a concerned parent.

*From: Cynthia Broomberg
Subject: Concerned Parent
Date: September 1, 2009 6:37: 11 PM CDT
To: Ms. Ricard*

Dear Ms. Ricard,

I am concerned that Shaun is not receiving enough enrichment in science. I feel as though he can be challenged further. What can be done to solve this matter?

Cynthia Broomberg

How can parents keep informed?

Many parents find e-mail an easy way to communicate with their child's teacher. This example demonstrates that e-mail is quick and convenient for the sender, but can lead to misunderstandings when the tone of the message is misunderstood. In this example, Mrs. Broomberg may have simply wanted Ms. Ricard to suggest some ways she could enrich Shaun's science curriculum at home. Ms. Ricard, however, may take the e-mail to say that she is not doing a good job of providing Shaun with enough enrichment opportunities. As shown through this e-mail, brevity can read as terseness, and concern may sound like an accusation. If a parent or teacher wishes to voice a concern, it is usually better to call on the phone or schedule an appointment to talk in person. If e-mail must be used, do not send the message immediately after an upsetting episode. Wait until the situation has calmed and reread the message with a critical eye. Better yet, have an outside person read the message to see if it sets the right tone before being sent.

Many high-ability students have multiple areas of strengths. Because of this, students are very busy outside of the classroom with various activities and events. In order to stay updated and organized, parents might keep a calendar in a prominent place at home. This calendar should be checked and updated often with upcoming events. Another idea would be to keep a file folder for each child in the family. As teachers and coaches send home forms or information sheets, these items can be placed in a corresponding folder.

How can teachers keep parents and themselves informed and organized?

One way teachers can keep parents informed is through agenda books. Daily or weekly communication can occur through the child's agenda book with a sticker, positive comment, or note of concern (regarding behavior or academics). The parent also might sign the agenda each night or week to show that he or she has looked at it. By making this a habit, the parent will see if there is an issue that needs to be discussed. Teachers also can keep parents informed about what is going on at school by sending home a weekly newsletter or creating and regularly updating a classroom Web site.

Teachers also can keep informed and connected by showing an interest in their students' personal lives. A great way to do this is to ask parents for a schedule of activities in which their child is involved in after school.

Some children do not participate in organized extracurricular activities, but may have a hobby or intense interest in something. Teachers can provide these students with ways to further their interest after school or during free time. For example, if a student shows great interest in marine life, the teacher might encourage him or her to begin a marine club. The teacher could support the student as he or she advertises for the club, researches marine life, and plans meeting and activities, or even by offering his or her classroom as a meeting place during lunch or after school.

Tip #4: Working in Cooperation

The occurrence of disagreements is natural; however, the way in which disagreements are handled makes the difference between a healthy disagreement and one that is toxic.

How can parents work in cooperation with teachers?

When a parent has an issue of concern regarding a child, the meeting or phone call should always begin in a positive manner. For example, a parent may start with, "I love the book you sent home with Abigail. It really helped to pique her interest in Egyptian architecture." Then proceed with the issue of concern. The concern should be presented as a challenge that can be overcome by setting a plan and working to carry out the plan together.

When a disagreement occurs, parents should always begin a discussion with the teacher. It is rarely advisable to go above the teacher's head without speaking to him or her first. This only causes anger, embarrassment, and resentment. The teacher may not have even been aware that there was an issue, or the issue may be a misunderstanding that could have been easily solved with a short conversation. Parents should speak to the teacher about the issue first; if there is still concern that the teacher is not responding to the issue at hand, then consulting an administrator may be advised.

How can teachers maintain a cooperative relationship with parents?

When attempting to build and strengthen relationships with parents, teachers should follow the same advice given to them. When a parent is called in for a conference, always discuss the child's positive traits with the parent first, never start with the negative. This will help the parent see that the teacher wishes to support his or her child and is not simply throwing out insults and blame for his or her issues.

If a parent does come in upset or angry, try not to show anger as well. Listen to the parent and encourage collaboration in solving the problem. If the parent begins to display cruel or threatening behavior, stop the meeting and suggest that an administrator become involved.

Tip #5: Promoting Independence

In order for students to become self-motivated learners and reach their full potential, they must become responsible for their learning. Parents and teachers should work together to promote independence.

How can parents promote independence?

When teaching a child to be independent, parents must learn when to let go. Rescuing your child may be the first impulse but isn't always best. This doesn't mean neglecting the child when he or she is experiencing a difficult situation, but gently encouraging the child to take responsibility for his or her own actions and become a problem solver.

Many gifted students go through grade school never experiencing failure. It is important that these students are shown the value of making mistakes. Parents should try to involve the child in an activity that he or she may find challenging and where success is not a given. Mistakes are good when we learn from them and when they result in positive growth.

Another important component of promoting independence is teaching children responsibility for completing their own work. As a parent, children should be encouraged to complete class projects without parental assistance. Children need this opportunity to work independently. They discover the joy of hard work and sustained effort only when they do the work themselves.

How can teachers promote independence?

Parents are not the only culprits who allow children to become overly dependent. It can be a challenge for teachers to work with high-ability students who know they are bright, have never experienced failure, and have minimal study skills. Rather than providing these students with opportunities to learn how to recover from failure and be challenged, some teachers may tend to dominate the classroom and attempt to take control over students' learning. Instead, teachers should find ways to create a student-centered environment where students take responsibility for their own learning and behavior. A shared classroom that is student-centered provides students with opportunities to solve problems related to the curriculum using performance-based activities, questioning, and collaborative work.

For many gifted students who have difficulty remaining organized and keeping up with assigned tasks, teachers should teach these students how to be accountable for their achievement. Instead of sending home a neatly typed homework sheet, students can keep up with their homework by writing down the assignments themselves in agenda books.

One key goal in education is to create lifelong, independent learners. Students should see the importance of having control over their actions and learning, both inside and outside of the classroom. Teachers also can encourage independent learning among gifted students by using independent projects and portfolios.

In conclusion, teachers and parents should come into the school year with the belief that they are a team. Parents and teachers must remain in sync when it comes to what is best for the child. When parents and teachers realize the importance of their shared relationship and identify common goals, the child benefits most.

References

- Delisle, J., & Galbraith, J. (2002). *When gifted kids don't have all the answers: How to meet their social and emotional needs*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.
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Resources

- Steinberg, L., Lamborn, S. D., Dornbusch, S. M., & Darling, N. (1992). Impact of parenting practices on adolescent achievement: Authoritative parenting, school involvement, and encouragement to succeed. *Child Development*, 63, 1266-1281.
- Stevenson, D. L., & Baker, D. P. (1987). The family-school relation and the child's school performance. *Child Development*, 58, 1348-1357.

Author's Note

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Ten Tips for Talking to Teachers

Are you having a problem with a class or an assignment? Can you see room for improvement in how a subject is taught? Do you have a better idea for a special project or term paper? Don't just tell your friends. Talk to the teacher!

Many students don't know how to go about doing this. The following suggestions are meant to make it easier for everyone—students and teachers.

1. Make an appointment to meet and talk. This shows the teacher that you're serious and you have some understanding of his or her busy schedule. Tell the teacher about how much time you'll need, be flexible, and don't be late.
2. If you know other students who feel the way you do, consider approaching the teacher together. There's strength in numbers. If a teacher hears the same thing from four or five people, he or she is more likely to do something about it.
3. Think through what you want to say before you go into your meeting with the teacher. Write down your questions or concerns. Make a list of the items you want to cover. You may even want to copy your list for the teacher so both of you can consult it during your meeting. (Or consider giving it to the teacher ahead of time.)
4. Choose your words carefully. Example: Instead of saying, "I hate doing reports; they're boring and a waste of time," try, "Is there some other way I could satisfy this requirement? Could I do a video instead?" Strike the word "boring" from your vocabulary. It's a word that's not helpful for teachers (and it might even make them mad).
5. Don't expect the teacher to do all of the work or propose all of the answers. Be prepared to make suggestions, offer solutions, even recommend resources. The teacher will appreciate that you took the initiative.
6. Be diplomatic, tactful, and respectful. Teachers have feelings, too. And they're more likely to be responsive if you remember that the purpose of your meeting is conversation not confrontation.
7. Focus on what you need, not on what the teacher is doing wrong. The more the teacher learns about you, the more he or she will be able to help. The more defensive the teacher feels, the less he or she will want to help.
8. Don't forget to listen. Strange but true, many students need practice in this essential skill. The purpose of your meeting isn't just to hear yourself talk.
9. Bring your sense of humor. Not necessarily the joke-telling sense of humor, but the one that lets you laugh at yourself and your own misunderstandings and mistakes.
10. If your meeting isn't successful, get help from another adult. "Successful" doesn't necessarily mean that you emerged victorious. Even if the teacher denies your request, your meeting can still be judged successful. If you had a real conversation--if you communicated openly, listened carefully, and respected each other's point of view--then congratulate yourself on a great meeting. If the air crackled with tension, the meeting fell apart, and you felt disrespectful (or acted disrespectful), then it's time to bring in another adult. Suggestions: a guidance counselor, the gifted program coordinator, or another teacher you know and trust who seems likely to support you and advocate for you. Once you've found help, approach your teacher and try again.



WOW! Webinars on Wednesdays
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NAGC’s Webinars on Wednesdays Series brings high quality professional development to your desktop. No need to hop on a plane or hit the road. Don’t let funding challenges or travel restrictions keep you from getting the training and information you need to be effective.

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Tune in the 2nd, 3rd (monthly “Parent Night”), and 4th Wednesday for these informative webinars.

In order to have active participation between the WOW presenter/s and the audience, a limited number of “seats” are available. Please register as soon as possible to guarantee your space in the webinar. Registration opens about two weeks before the event and closes when capacity is reached. Sessions open for registration will be listed on the NAGC homepage (www.nagc.org) with a link to the webinar page where the "Register Now" link will be live/active.

Tentative Schedule through June 2010

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Bucket</u>
Jan. 13 (12pm EST)	Perfectionism	Expert Perspectives
Jan. 20 (7pm EST)	Gifted Across America: A Look Into NAGC’s Mile Marker Series	Parent Night
Jan. 27 (7pm EST)	Underachievement	Expert Perspectives
Feb. 10 (12pm EST)	Engaging/Guiding Young Advanced Middle School Readers: Reading Choices that Make Sense	Classroom Strategies
Feb. 17 (7pm EST)	Games and Competitions	Parent Night
Feb. 24 (7pm EST)	Resources: Supporting High Ability Learners Inside & Outside the Classroom	
Mar. 10 (12pm EST)	Family and Community Support Structure	
Mar. 17 (7pm EST)	Gifted Boys vs. Gifted Girls	Parent Night
Mar. 24 (7pm EST)	Current Issues in Secondary Gifted Education	From the Bookshelf
Apr. 14 (12pm EST)	Gifted Education: Practical Strategies in the Classroom	From the Bookshelf
Apr. 21 (7pm EST)	Living with Intensity	Parent Night
Apr. 28 (7pm EST)	Understanding Underserved Populations w/Best Practices	Expert Perspectives
May 12 (12pm EST)	C&I for Culturally Diverse Learners	Classroom Strategies
May 19 (7pm EST)	Stress (for the entire family)	Parent Night
May 26 (7pm EST)	Social & Emotional Needs (w/SENG)	Expert Perspectives
June 9 (12pm EST)	Young Adult Reading: Guiding Young Readers	Classroom Strategies



Become a Parent Member of NAGC at a Reduced Rate



Parents may now join the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) for only \$10/year if they are also members of a state affiliate organization (MCGT or MEGT). Contact info@mcgt.net for more information.

As a parent member of NAGC, you will receive the award-winning quarterly magazine, *Parenting for High Potential*, packed with great tips and ideas to help make learning a fun and rewarding experience for your child. Whether you're tackling big questions about giftedness or looking for resources, you can email our Parent Resource Specialist to access a wealth of knowledge and expertise gained from parenting three gifted children and a PhD in gifted studies. Work with advocacy experts at the federal level to raise public awareness of the unique needs of gifted children and ensure that funding continues to be made available to improve educational opportunities that promote educational excellence across the U.S.

As a member of the Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented, you will receive the MCGT newsletter, *Outlook*, five times annually. Membership entitles you to discounts on MCGT conference and workshop registrations. You will also be invited to join MCGTdotnet, an online discussion group established for MCGT members – topics related to parenting gifted children and dealing with the social, emotional and educational needs of gifted children are the focus of the discussion group.

Talented Times Newsletter

The *Talented Times Newsletter* is a collaborative effort of the Crow River Region Chapter of the Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented and local school districts to provide parents and educators of gifted children with information and opportunities to better understand and meet the needs of the gifted and talented children and students in our communities. Though the school districts do not necessarily endorse any programs or activities listed, they do provide assistance with the distribution of the newsletter.

In an effort to reduce costs, future issues of the *Talented Times* newsletter are sent to parents and educators in an electronic format. If you would prefer to receive a printed copy, please contact crowriver@mcgt.net with your name and preferred mailing address).

AMAZON.COM Funding

The Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented has entered into a fundraising partnership with Amazon.com. Now, whenever you purchase a book, toy, software, or other item from Amazon.com, Amazon will donate back a percentage of the sales to MCGT as long as you follow one easy step.

To get to the Amazon.com site, do NOT type in "www.amazon.com" — instead, go to the MCGT website, www.mcgt.net, and then take the hyperlink and jump to Amazon. On the bottom of every page of the MCGT website is the Amazon.com logo. Click on that logo and you will be taken to the Amazon website.

Once there, proceed as usual and make your purchases. Amazon will know you came from the MCGT website, and will keep track of your purchases.



Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented Membership Form

New Member Renewal Changed Address/Phone Date _____

Names: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____
(Please Print Carefully)

Do you wish to be added to the MCGTdotnet Yahoo email discussion group? Yes No

Telephone: Home: (____) _____ Work Parent 1: (____) _____

Work Parent 2: (____) _____

MCGT Chapter 1: Crow River Region

*MCGT Chapter 2: _____
**add \$16.00 for each extra chapter*

Yes, I would like to volunteer my time and skills to MCGT.

Please list your volunteer interests and unique skills you would like to share.

You can also join MCGT online at www.mcgt.net using Paypal

Type of Membership

- Regular/Family (1 year)\$35.00
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I am including a tax-deductible contribution in the amount of \$_____.

I am including a special tax-deductible donation for student scholarships in the amount of \$_____.

My employer(s) will match my contribution?

Yes No Don't know

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