

AAGC NEWS

Volume 1, Issue 1

April 2009

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT...

In January 2009, the new slate of officers along with other members of the governing board met in Birmingham to discuss upcoming issues with the Alabama Association for Gifted Children (AAGC). These topics included our annual conference, revised and updated AAGC by-laws, and the development of a Gifted Advocacy Council.

The AAGC governing board is comprised of individuals representing large, urban gifted programs and smaller, rural programs from throughout the state of Alabama. This mixture of representation will, hopefully, bring the many facets of gifted education in our state together to better meet the needs of the students whom we serve. Our immense thanks go to Lori Corrigan and her co-workers at Hoover City Schools for the phenomenal job which they have done with our state organization. AAGC has been energized and gained momentum under their guidance as our annual conference in 2008 experienced record attendance. Again, thanks to the Hoover Crew. Our current slate of officers includes:

- President— Becky Sands
- Vice-President— Patti Mizell
- Secretary— Arquetta Howard
- Treasurer— Judy Simpson
- AAGC Newsletter— Susan Seagraves Morrow
- Co-Webmasters— Julie Altmark
Audrey Fine
- Members-at-Large— Jane Newman
Elizabeth Romey
Patti Wood
Shirley Farrell
Nancy Johnson

If you have suggestions or concerns about AAGC, please feel free to contact us.

Over the past several years, our AAGC membership has increased and our annual conference has been well attended with the addition of renowned keynote speakers and useful, informative breakout sessions. While many state conferences have been eliminated this year due to proration and other economic woes, our governing board discussed canceling our annual conference this year; however, the decision was made to scale-back the conference to one day. It is important that we maintain the momentum and strides that our state organization has made over the past several years. **Save the date**—AAGC Conference, September 25, 2009 @ McWane Center in Birmingham, Alabama.

Another important topic that the governing board has been diligently working on is the revision and updating of the AAGC by-laws. After several issues and questions arose, it

Continued on page 3

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Don't Forget!
 AAGC Conference
 Fri., Sept. 25, 2009
 McWane Center
 Birmingham, Alabama

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

BY SHIRLEY FARRELL

Advocacy is one of the easiest and hardest parts of working with gifted students! I was reading a popular teacher blog from www.teachermagazine.org titled *Unwrapping the Gifted* by Tamara Fisher (Feb 10, 2009). She discussed with her gifted students the "Gifted Children's Bill of Rights" written by NAGC President Del Siegle.

Her students wanted to "put into writing" on the blog their feelings about these rights. The feelings they expressed, I have heard from my own students through the years and you probably still hear today. Ms. Fisher's students were most vocal about "You have a right to make mistakes" and "You have a right to not be gifted at everything." Why do most people think that gifted means perfect at everything, ALL the time?

One student told the class, "I feel like any little thing I get wrong is seen by them (parent, teachers and students) as a giant black spot on my soul." Year after year my students had expressed how much pressure they feel from teachers and fellow classmates. I stood in a classroom waiting for my gifted students to gather their materials for my class only to hear the teacher remark loudly, "Well, look who's going to gifted. They are so special they can do all of our class work and go to gifted class, too." Isn't this a form of bullying? It actually has a name- The Poppy Syndrome. It refers to a field of blooming poppies. If a poppy grows above the rest of the field of flowers, you must snip it off. Therefore, the field is even and no flower is sticking out. Every year I would present Characteristics and Special Needs of Gifted to the faculty, but there were always a few teachers I had to meet with one-on-one, every year! Progress was made, but slowly. We must be persistent, because who else will stand up for our students.

During the discussion of the Gifted Bill of Rights, Ms. Fisher thought she should remind her students of her expectations of them. She expresses expectations throughout the school year, as we do in our classes, "Just do your best," "No one is perfect; it's OK," or "We learn from our mistakes."

Ms. Fisher's expectations are

"That you learn how to work hard, that you put forth your *reasonable* best effort at learning and at challenges, and that you maintain a **healthy** perspective on what you can and cannot do in life."

She added that being gifted doesn't equate to having a charmed life; and she knows the students struggle with making friends, being sensitive, or just being different. It is okay not to be perfect, and that they are not alone.

She was overwhelmed by the response from one of her students,

"THANK YOU... **SO**... much... You are my hero for saying that. A huge load has just lifted up off my shoulders."

The rest of the class echoed these same sentiments. She thought her students knew this already!

When was the last time you told your students that you only expect them to do their best, that it's OK not to be perfect, and that they are NOT alone? We forget to remind students of our expectations and should not just assume they know it. These students are still children and need the reinforcement that it is OKAY to be different and we are here to help them. Share the "Gifted Bill of Rights" with them. Ask them which ones do they agree with or disagree with. Have students write their own Gifted Bill of Rights. So, what are your students telling you?

It all boils down to perceptions/ misperceptions of giftedness. As teach-

ers of gifted students, we are the ones to change those misperceptions and to help teachers and administrators understand the complexity of the special needs of giftedness. How can we do this?

- Provide annual professional development to faculties on Characteristics and the Special Needs. Just like our students need reminders about our expectations for them, we need to remind teachers about gifted students.
- Consultative services creates a bridge between general and gifted education. With our "foot in the door," we are constant reminders to the teachers about our gifted students. Granted, those who understand gifted students are the first to ask for help! These are the teachers who will also become advocates for gifted students. HMMM! I see cluster teachers. There will be day(s) when you'll walk away slapping your forehead- but be PERSISTENT! Remember that you are the curriculum leaders for gifted education in your schools.
- Communication with the administrators and teachers is important. Most perceptions of gifted classes are still that they are fluff and fun rather than hard work and active participation! Keep administrators and teachers informed of the rigorous curriculum-concepts, essential understandings, and projects. When newsletters go home with students, share them with the faculty, especially if there are tips for parents of gifted students.

What have you done in your schools to advocate for gifted students? Please share on the AAGC blog or send tips to Susan Morrow, AAGC Newsletter editor, to publish in the newsletter. The more we (gifted teachers) communicate with each other, the better we can advocate for our students.

You can read Tamara's blog at http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/unwrapping_the_gifted/

Gifted Child's Bill of Rights is on p. 8

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT CONTINUED

Continued from page 1

was apparent that our by-laws were somewhat dated and need a facelift. Shirley Farrell, our SDE Gifted Specialist, worked extensively rewording the by-laws. At the January meeting, the group spent several hours going over the by-laws section by section, making deletions and additions as needed. Shirley, again, gave all of us another draft updated with our discussed changes and we voted on these at our February meeting. Our next step is to present these to our AAGC members for a vote. These will be on the AAGC website

<http://www.aagc-alabamagifted.org/> (currently under construction) for each member to review. Please take the time to read these, as they will provide the guidelines for our organization's structure and function.

As we are all aware, the field of gifted education is being impacted by economic woes facing education, businesses, and health care. Budgets and downsizing of the workforce in many economic areas will most likely involve the field of gifted education not only in our state but through-

out the nation. The time is NOW for our membership to stand united and become strong advocates for our gifted children. Our governing board feels strongly that our advocacy efforts can best be conducted through the development of a Gifted Advocacy Council comprised of gifted specialists, parents, college professors, and other major stakeholders. The creation and utilization of such a group can guide the advocacy efforts of all of us as we work toward moving forward with gifted services provided to our gifted children in the state of Alabama. We can all contact our state senators and representatives to make our views known as we advocate for the children whom we serve. If you are interested in serving on this or have parents who are strong advocates for gifted education, please pass this information on to me or Patti Wood.

Recently, I attended a session presented by Sally Reis, who spoke on the impact of mandated standards and testing on the services provided to gifted students. Since the current trend in education is to make research-based, data-driven decisions,

data from Reis' longitudinal research demonstrating the effectiveness of gifted education programs and curricula in raising student achievement, as well as helping students to develop interests, creativity, and productivity and career goals cannot be disregarded. Successful adult students could directly relate Type III investigations done in their gifted education programs as the impetus to their meeting career goals and continued achievement. Data from this research study strengthens, not only the need, but the necessity of gifted programs that provide rich, challenging curriculum to our high-ability learners.

In conclusion, I urge you to start planning to attend the AAGC Conference in September, read and vote on the revised AAGC by-laws, and consider becoming a strong advocate for the children whom you serve each day. I look forward to working with AAGC during 2009 and assisting our state organization to continue with its forward progress. If I can be of assistance to anyone, please e-mail me at bsands@lanettcityschools.org.

Sincerely,

Becky Sands

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION NEWS

Nancy Johnson njohnson@alsde.edu and Shirley Farrell sfarrell@alsde.edu

Just like your school systems are waiting to see how the Stimulus Package money can be spent, we are waiting to see how regional trainings will be conducted in the Fall. They will either be in person or via the computer. Nancy and I have conducted a few Illuminate sessions, and there are still a few bugs to work out. The sessions for the regional trainings are Gifted updates (SETSWeb & Code changes), Gifted and the Law, and concept-based curriculum writing on the Economy. If you have units that you use on economics, entrepreneurship, businesses, etc., keep those handy. If you have those on the computer, would you email them to us?

We now have a page on ALEX. <http://alex.state.al.us/specialed/gifted.html>. We will have essential understandings with guiding questions posted on this page within the next month. We also would like to post concept-based curriculum (with no copyright issues), too. If you have concept-based units that you would like to share, please send them to us for posting. What do you think of our new gifted logo?

Our BIG project this summer, since there is no Mega-Conference, is to create differentiation packets by subject and grade level to share across the state. This will help gifted specialists with consultative services and keep everyone from reinventing the wheel. Any differentiation activities, lessons, centers that you would like to share, please send them to us. We have copies of some EXCELLENT differentiated items that we have seen during monitoring this year. The classroom teachers, as well as the gifted specialists, have been willing to share their ideas. If you would like to contribute your differentiated lessons, activities, and centers, please mail or email them to us. Our mailing address is

Alabama Dept. Of Education
Special Education Services- Gifted
3330 Gordon Persons Building
P.o. Box 302101
Montgomery, AL 36130-2101

If you have not received a FoG (Friends of Gifted) email since January, please email Shirley to have your name added to the list.

Don't Fear the Reaper: Serving Gifted, Saving Money

Elizabeth A. Romey

Under the current economic conditions, educators throughout the state are not only tightening their belts, they're biting their nails— and nowhere more than in gifted education. After all, it's every administrator's (and politician's) favorite area to cut, right? Those kids— *our* kids— don't need help.

What those budget (and image) conscious individuals don't realize is that gifted education is, in fact, in a position to *offer* help during economic hardships. Not only that, but our means of "pitching in" comes via that most maligned of gifted programming options: acceleration.

Right on the face of it, acceleration is cost-effective: it requires no additional curriculum, since the students simply take courses that are already being offered (Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross, 2004). It reduces the amount of money needed for those students who accelerate— and also lowers class sizes, which is good for teachers as well (especially in a budget crunch). And it can benefit teachers, at least at the secondary level, in another way as well: teachers who are qualified to offer dual enrollment courses (where high school courses that meet the standards of a college course can be offered for college credit) can receive a stipend from the cooperating university as well. Dual enrollment and similar options also offer financial advantages for parents and students, as well, in that getting college credit in high school is often less expensive than taking the same courses in the college the students ultimately attend. (For example, I have a good friend whose initial planned program in college would have allowed her to complete a dual-major bachelor's degree and a master's via her four-year scholarship, thanks to acceleration options in high school.) And, despite its unpopularity, acceleration, done right, has a proven track record of over a half-century of supporting research (Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross, 2004). In particular, the frequent critique that acceleration have a negative effect on students' social development has been soundly disproven for those students who are willing participants in the process (Assouline, Colangelo, Lupkowski-Shoplik, Lipscomb, and Forstadt, 2003; Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross, 2004; Gross, 1999, 2002).

Teachers of the gifted play a vital role in the acceleration process. Not only do they help parents, students, and administrators through the acceleration planning process, using tools like the *Iowa Acceleration Scale* (Assouline, Colangelo, Lupkowski-Shoplik, Lipscomb, and Forstadt, 2003), but they also continue to support and monitor students' progress and programming options after acceleration options are implemented. With options like dual enrollment, online accelerated courses and AP or IB classes, which focus on academic progress and can (and should) be made available to all students (not just those identified as gifted), teachers of the gifted provide vital social and emotional support to their students (and to the AP or dual enrollment teacher who's "wrangling" them!). Teachers of the gifted also help with career and college counseling, especially for students whose programs of acceleration send them off to college early. And, of course, teachers of the gifted continue to serve those gifted students for whom accelerated programming is not the right choice, or not the only choice.

Teachers of the gifted in Alabama in particular are ideally situated to provide support for acceleration. Not only have a number of districts implemented programs like Access, which provides online accelerated courses for interested high school students, but our state gifted paperwork also includes acceleration plans for all districts. Teachers of the gifted can help their districts implement acceleration both by providing in-service training to classroom teachers and by coordinating the necessary administrative aspects of the acceleration process, including submitting paperwork to the state so that districts receive credit for their acceleration efforts.

Finally, it's important to remember that in Alabama, gifted education is not just a good idea, it's the law. The State Department of Education Administrative Code (n.d.) mandates the provision of gifted services and, literally, lays down the law for the process of providing them. Failing to provide gifted services in Alabama is against the law; happily, acceleration options give us as advocates for the gifted a means of easing the economic burden of compliance on our districts. It's rare to find a situation in education where districts are actually required to do something that can help save them money, and we should make the most of it.

In short, when looking for places to make budget cuts, the *last* place schools and districts should look is gifted education— because gifted education is one place where serving students *saves* money.

References:

- Alabama State Department of Education Administrative Code (n.d.) Retrieved January 23, 2009, from <http://www.alabamaadministrativecode.state.al.us/docs/ed/index.html>
- Assouline, S., Colangelo, N., Lupkowski-Shoplik, A., Lipscomb, J., and Forstadt, L. (2003). *Iowa acceleration scale manual* (2nd ed.). Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- Colangelo, N., Assouline, S.G., and Gross, M.U.M. (2004). *A nation deceived: How schools hold back America's brightest students*. Iowa City, IA: Belin-Blank Center.
- Gross, M.U.M. (2002) "Play Partner" or "Sure Shelter": What gifted children look for in friendship. *SENG Newsletter*, 2(2), 1-3.
- Gross, M.U.M. (1999). Small poppies: Highly gifted children in the early years. *Roeper Review*, 21, 207-214.

Something to Brag About

Melinda Storey, gifted specialist at Mountain Brook Elementary School, was named one of the State's finalists for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching. The Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST) are the highest recognition bestowed on K-12 mathematics and science teachers for outstanding teaching in the United States. Finalists were honored by the State Board of Education during their monthly K-12 meeting in February, followed by a noon luncheon at the RSA Plaza Terrace. The National Science Foundation sponsored the Awards Luncheon.

In addition to honoring individual achievement, the goal of the PAEMST award program is to exemplify the highest standards of mathematics and science teaching. Awardees serve as models for their colleagues, inspiration to their communities, and leaders in the improvement of mathematics and science education. Each finalist receives the National Science Foundation (NSF) Certificate of Honor in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

"The Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching are a very prestigious national recognition, which our Alabama teachers richly deserve. I am so proud of this year's Presidential Finalists – especially as our state education budget and our nation's economy are struggling. The caliber of our classroom teachers and their dedication to their students brings honor to their profession and to Alabama's public schools," said State Superintendent of Education Joe Morton.

Enacted by Congress in 1983 and administered by NSF on behalf of The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, the PAEMST program identifies eligible K-12 teachers in the 50 states, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, schools of the Department of Defense Education Activity; and U.S. territories.

Melinda will now compete on the national level with selection being announced in April. Usually about 100 teachers are selected nationally. Those winners get an all expense trip to Washington DC for a week where they will be wined and dined and get to meet either the President or the Vice-President plus they receive \$10,000!!! Let's keep our fingers crossed for Melinda!

From the NAGC President.....

Advocating for ALL Gifted Students

By Del Siegle

At no other time in our country's history have we needed to muster all of our resources to meet the challenges that we face. At no other time in our history is developing our nation's talent more important. Unfortunately, the educational policies of the last half decade have resulted in academic mediocrity, rather than excellence. Instead of providing educational opportunities that allow all children to reach their potential, our nation's schools have been forced to concentrate on poor achieving students at the expense of other students. While assistance for struggling students is a noble cause, it should not be at the expense of excellence for all.

Within the field of gifted and talented, no group has suffered more than students from diverse backgrounds. While affluent parents are able to supplement their children's educational opportunities, parents in poverty often lack the necessary resources to promote, or even maintain, their children's academic excellence. When they enter school, gifted children are equally represented across all demographic groups. Unfortunately, as they advance, lower-income students drop further and further behind. Forty-four percent of low-income students who are classified as high achieving when they enter first grade no longer can be classified as such by the time they reach fifth grade.

Additionally, low-income students and students of color are often overlooked for gifted programs. Our nation cannot afford to ignore nearly half of its most talented students. Not serving talented students is not only a waste of a national resource, it is also a personal loss for each child. We can and must do a better job of identifying and serving gifted students from diverse backgrounds. NAGC is working in Congress to provide additional funding for research and services for students from diverse backgrounds. With your continued support, we can make the dream of every child reaching his or her potential a reality.

Reprinted from the February 2009 NAGC Compass Points

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WHY WE NEED TO EDUCATE OUR GIFTED:

- Up to 20% of high school dropouts test in the gifted range (Handbook for Gifted Education, 2003)
- In the fourth grade, U.S. students score above the international average in math and near first in science. At eighth grade, they score below average in math, and only slightly above average in science. By 12th grade, U.S. students are near the bottom of a 49-country survey in both math and science, outscoring only Cyprus and South Africa. (William R. Brody, president of Johns Hopkins University, Congressional testimony 7/05)
- 88% of high school dropouts had passing grades, but dropped out due to boredom. (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation: "The Silent Epidemic" 3/06)

PLEASE CONTACT US!

If you have ideas or information you would like to include in the AAGC News, please contact us:

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Judy Simpson: treasurer
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Susan Seagraves Morrow: Newsletter
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THE IMPORTANCE OF NON-FICTION

📖 Many gifted students prefer non-fiction to fiction.

📖 Non-fiction books are more accurate and more interesting than ever before and are an invaluable resource to use with gifted students.

📖 Non-fiction picture books are not just for primary readers. The vocabulary in many of

these books is advanced, and picture books often go into more detail on a topic than a textbook.

📖 Because they can often be read in one sitting, reading response activities can be developed which demonstrate conceptual understanding.

📖 Take the time to talk with students about

the variety of forms on non-fiction.

📖 Discuss strategies to assess the accuracy of the information.

📖 Non-fiction lends itself to student products such as alphabet books, PowerPoint presentations, advertisements, concept maps, newspaper articles, models, etc.



Team Moon: How 400,000 People Landed Apollo 11 on the Moon by Catherine Thimmesh winner of the 2007 Robert F. Silbert Award

CREDIBLE NON-FICTION AUTHORS BY SUSANNAH RICHARDS, 2008

Science

Caroline Arnold

Jim Arnosky

Melvin Berger

Franklyn M. Branley

Vicki Cobb

Sneed Collard

Joanna Cole

Gail Gibbons

Donna Jackson

Patricia Lauber

Bianca Lavies

Sandra Markle

Sy Montgomery

Dorothy Hinshaw Patent

Millicant Selsam

Seymour Simon

Janice VanCleave

Social Studies

David Adler

Aliki Brandenberg

George Ancona

Brent Ashabranner

Susan Bartoletti

Raymond Bial

Russell Freedman

Jean Fritz

Diane Hoyt-Goldsmith

Jill Kremantz

Jim Haskins

David Macaulay

Milton Meltzer

Jim Murphy

WEB SITES FOR INFORMATION ON BOOKS AND READING

📖 www.ala.org

📖 www.bookadventure.org

📖 www.ed.gov

📖 www.ccbcbooks.org

📖 www.guysread.com

📖 www.hbook.com

📖 www.booksense.com

📖 www.looseleaf.org

📖 www.myhomelibrary.com

📖 www.readingrockets.org

📖 www.richiespicks.com

📖 www.teachingbooks.net

📖 www.trelease-on-reading.com

📖 www.askoxford.com

📖 www.bartleby.com

📖 www.bookbrowser.com

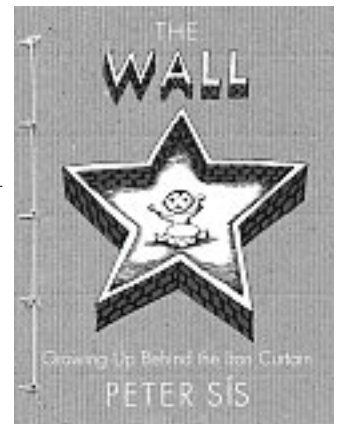
📖 www.fiveowls.com

📖 www.kidnews.com

📖 www.onlinebooks.libraryupenn.edu

📖 Library Pages

📖 www.2nypl.org/home/branch/kids/



The Wall Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain by Peter Sis is a winner of numerous book awards. It is appropriate for upper elementary through high school. A teacher's guide to the book can be downloaded at

<http://media.us.macmillan.com/teachers-guides/9780374347017TG.pdf>

Gifted Children's Bill of Rights

Provided as a service of the

National Association for Gifted Children

Copies of this Bill of Rights are available online at www.nagc.org

You have a right...

- ... to know about your giftedness.*
- ... to learn something new every day.*
- ... to be passionate about your talent area without apologies.*
- ... to have an identity beyond your talent area.*
- ... to feel good about your accomplishments.*
- ... to make mistakes.*
- ... to seek guidance in the development of your talent.*
- ... to have multiple peer groups and a variety of friends.*
- ... to choose which of your talent areas you wish to pursue.*
- ... not to be gifted at everything.*

-Del Siegle,

2007-2009 NAGC President