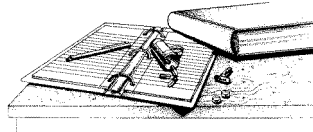


www.bvpage.org

From the President

Ann Ryan

Greetings!



It is my pleasure to encourage you to become involved in Blue Valley PAGE. One of the primary advantages of a parent advocacy group, in my mind, is that we have the opportunity to directly and positively affect the educational lives of our children.

BVPAGE offers valuable programs for parents and opportunities for students. This year we have been privileged to have Dr. Susan Assouline, one of the authors of *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students*, speak to our community. We have hosted a program to highlight the myriad of summer enrichment opportunities within our region and around the nation. Coffee Creek Observatory has hosted star watch nights in the fall and is again welcoming our students this spring. BVPAGE welcomed Dr. Bill Rust, Co-Director of the Kansas Robot League at Kansas State University, who shared his passion for, and the educational possibilities of, robotics. Later this month, we look forward to having Dr. Barbara Kerr, author of *Smart Girls* and *Smart Boys*, give us insight into the social and emotional needs of our children.

In addition to the program and student events committees' work, several other committees have been active this year. Our legislative and advocacy committee has closely followed pending legislation affecting our schools and has built relationships with state and local government

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officials in order to successfully advocate for gifted education and its continued funding. This year our communications committee has overseen the development of a logo for our group, continues to improve our website and has published our first newsletter (which we plan to continue to publish at regular intervals as a benefit of membership). The membership committee has reformed our data base to facilitate more effective communication and has coordinated our group of building representatives (our goal, which we are close to achieving, is to have at least one representative for each school building in the district). BV PAGE officers were invited to present a break-out session during the annual state conference of the Kansas Association for the Gifted, Talented and Creative about the formation, maintenance and benefits of parent advocacy groups.

All of this would not be possible without the active partnership between our district's gifted teachers and coordinating teacher for gifted education, our building representatives and the BVPAGE board. We welcome your participation not only in our programs, but also at our monthly board meetings. We value the help and support of our community as we join in advocating for the needs of gifted children.

DCT's Corner (District Coordinating Teacher)

Dr. Sheri Nowak

How did the school year fly by so quickly? We have accomplished much this year and are already planning for the 2006–2007 school year! Here are some events from this year that we can celebrate:

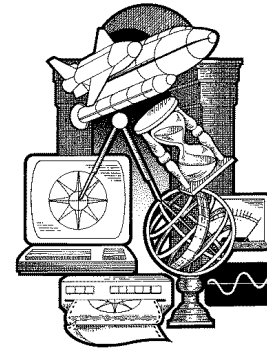
- Six new gifted education teachers joined our Blue Valley staff
- An Acceleration Workshop was given by Dr. Susan Assouline (University of Iowa)
- Successful, wide-spread use of our revised identification system
- Successful internal IEP file review was held both fall and spring
- We are beginning to work on developing even higher quality IEPs
- Our second annual Robotics Share Fair was a great success
- Collaboration with Communication Arts and Math DCTs has been very helpful
- Completion of a revised gifted program information brochure
- Challenging activities for students through the Autonomous Learner Model and IEP goals
- And many individual students' and teachers' accomplishments!

During the 2006–07 school year we are planning:

- To open our new school with a fully functioning gifted program
- To have Dr. George Betts (Autonomous Learner Model) here to consult
- To curriculum map the Autonomous Learner Model
- Continue our successful programming for our gifted students!

I welcome questions and conversations with parents of gifted students at any time. Feel free to call (239–4333) or email

(snowak@bluevalleyk12.org).



If we were TV sets, some of us would only get five channels. Others are wired for cable (the general population) and some of us (the gifted) are hooked up to a satellite dish. That makes these gifted children capable of making connections that others don't even know exist! Teaching those types of voracious minds in a regular classroom without enhancement is like feeding an elephant one blade of grass at time. You'll starve them.

– Elizabeth Meckstroth

Summer Opportunities for Students

BVPAGE recently hosted a program on Enrichment Opportunities available for students to participate in over the summer. Below are copies of the handouts from this program. A listing of various helpful websites is also available on the BVPAGE website at www.bvpage.org.

BVPAGE Summer Enrichment Opportunities Feb 23, 2006
Area Programs Represented Tonight and Contacts

Blue Valley School District Summer Explorations Program
www.bluevalleyk12.org click on "Education Services", then click on
"Summer Programs"
Students currently in 1st-6th grade

JCCC- Johnson County Community College -Summer Youth
Enrichment Program: Adventurers, Talents
www.jccc.edu/youth
Registration begins March 1
All-day available
Grades K-9

Summer at Barstow
www.barstowschool.org Click on "Summer at Barstow"

Cosmosphere
www.cosmo.org
Application for Scholarship for students finishing 6th-7th-8th grades on
KGTC website: www.kgtc.org click on "Student news and opportunities"

Charles McCalla Math
mathcoach4u@hotmail.com

Mathnasium
www.mathnasium.com

Theatre of the Imagination
www.tiarts.com

Theatre for Young America
www.tya.org

Mad Science-KC
www.madsciencekc.org

BVPAGE Summer Enrichment Opportunities Feb 23, 2006
Out of Town/ Residential Programs

Creighton University-Omaha, NE "Ad Astra"
<http://www.creighton.edu/adastra>: Online brochure
An integrated living/learning experience for gifted and talented 7th and 8th grade
students
Session 1 June 11-17 // Session 2 June 18-24

Cybercamps: Nationwide locations
<http://www.cybercamps.com>
Summer Computer Camp at Webster University in St. Louis, MO area

Davidson Institute for Talent Development
<http://www.ditd.org>
This intense three-week residential summer program offers 40 exceptionally gifted
12-15 year-old students the opportunity to experience university courses with
expert professors in a residential environment with their intellectual and age peers.
July 8 - July 29

The Summer Enrichment Program for the Gifted and Talented at the University of
Northern Colorado (SEP)
<http://www.unco.edu/sep>
A two-week residential summer program for gifted and talented children and youth
entering grades 5 through 10
Session 1: July 8 - July 21 // Session 2: July 22 - August 4

Yunasa Summer Camp for the Gifted
a weeklong camp experience for highly gifted youth ages 10-14
<http://www.yunasa.org>
July 30 - August 5, 2006 at Camp Hanes in King, North Carolina.

Belin-Blank Center for Gifted Education at the University of Iowa
<http://www.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank/summer/programs>
Current grades 3rd-11th
Iowa City and Des Moines courses, NOT residential

SCHOOL'S OUT
for the 
SUMMER

Student Showcase

On March 3, the KCATM annual Math contest was held at Olathe East High School. The KCATM Math Contest, sponsored by the Kansas City Area Teachers of Mathematics, is held annually and draws students from 4th through 12th grade from schools, public and private, around the Kansas City metropolitan area, both Missouri and Kansas. Two Blue Valley students finished extremely well. Rebecca Marvin, took 1st place medals in all the individual tests from 6th grade students (geometry, mental math and problem solving) and overall top 6th grade student. Jason Hoffman, took 1st place medals in all of the individual tests for 8th grade students (geometry, mental math, problem solving and probability & statistics) as well as overall top 8th grade student. In addition, at the Kansas state MathCounts competition held March 11th, Jason Hoffman placed 1st (a huge achievement) and will be advancing to the national MathCounts competition to be held in May in Arlington, Va. We are proud of our Blue Valley Enrichment kids!

New Look for BVPAGE

BVPAGE has a new logo! The new logo design was created by Blue Valley High School Senior, Krista Dunleavy. Thanks to Krista, we are moving forward into 2006 with a sleek new image!



Blue Valley Parent Advocates for Gifted Education

Upcoming Events

BVPAGE SPONSORS

The Inner Life of Gifted Children: Social and Emotional Concerns

April 27th, 2006

Prairie Star Middle School
commons
7:00-8:30

Speakers:

Barbara Kerr

Distinguished Professor – Psychology and
Research in Education, Kansas University,
Lawrence

Robyn McKay

Director, CLEO

Kerr is the author of four books: [A Handbook for Counseling Gifted and Talented](#); [Smart Girls](#); [Smart Boys](#); and [Letters to the Medicine Man: The Shaping of Spiritual Intelligence](#). She has written more than 100 articles and papers on the topic of guiding and nurturing talent. Her research ranges from case studies of inventors, artists, writers and architects to large-scale studies of students who attained the highest scores on the ACT college admissions tests.

The [BVPAGE Pages](#) are published quarterly.

If you have any news items for this newsletter, you may contact the editor,

News You Can Use

"Pushy Parents" ... Bad Rap or Necessary Role?

Arlene R. DeVries

(Used with permission by the California Association for the Gifted)

Communicator: Volume 30, No. 3, Summer 1999

From Great Potential Press: Author Articles

www.giftedbooks.com

"My Abigail, who has been grade-skipped to second grade, is in a classroom with a fine teacher whom I respect, but Abbey runs out of things to do ALL THE TIME! She is reading chapter books and there is no one with whom she can discuss them. I'm happy to help in any way, but meanwhile, there's my little petunia in the onion patch, marking time and suffering the slings and arrows of children who are not her intellectual peers and who have not learned respect for others."

This mother's concern is echoed over and over across the country, as parents of bright children are asking, "What can we do?" How much do you speak up for your child and how much do you back off? Are "pushy" parents getting a bad rap, or is this a necessary role?

Schools are a reflection of our society, and parents are a vital part of the culture. Tax-paying parents have more power than educators. Without parent support and advocacy, gifted education would not survive. The universal goal of education is to meet the needs of students. Parents of gifted children, though representing a small percentage of the students, are minority stakeholders in the schools and deserve to have their children's educational needs met. It is vital that parents of gifted speak up for the needs of bright children. How can you effectively do that? Here are some tips.

Establish rapport with the school.

Be a friend to the school. Let teachers and administrators know you appreciate their efforts. When was the last time you wrote a note of appreciation to school personnel? Let them know you recognize their initiatives and the time they spend with your children. Be specific. Early in the year, write an "anticipatory praise" note to your child's teacher telling him or her how you are looking forward to your child being in their classroom because. . . .of the excellent science activities they do; the gerbils they loan to student helpers for the weekend; or the myriad of paperback books available in their classroom. Share information about your child that might be helpful to the teacher. Express your willingness to discuss any concerns the teacher may have about your child, and offer to be of assistance throughout the year.

Parents can aid schools in delivering appropriate education in many ways. Some involve working directly with students. Others are behind-the-scenes activities that send the message to teachers that you care and that you understand the monumental tasks they are facing with limited time and money. Some suggestions are listed here.

- Serve as a mentor to an individual student, perhaps with one who is accelerated in reading or mathematics.
- Serve as a coach for Future Problem Solving, Odyssey of the Mind, Academic Decathlon, Junior Great Books, Math Olympiad, History Day, or Science Fair.
- Organize a lending library of professional materials for parents and educators.
- Assist in compiling, editing, or printing a newspaper or anthology of student work.
- Provide career exploration for students.
- Compile student interest surveys.
- Use the Internet to research a topic being studied in class and share the information and web site with the class.
- Research material for a local music concert, drama production, or art exhibit. Share the information with students and transport them to the performance.
- Judge contests such as science fairs, mock trial competitions, or invention conventions.
- Arrange for a guest speaker, a field trip, or a student shadowing experience.
- Transport students to the public library and assist them in a computer search or the use of the reference room.
- Organize and lead a book discussion group.
- Offer to video tape a school event.
- Make computer mailing labels or computer generated certificates for students.
- Assist in collating and preparing a mailing.
- Donate books or a magazine subscription to the school library.
- Spearhead a schoolground beautification project. Donate time and plantings.
- Organize a fine arts day. Invite local artists and performers.
- Offer to teach an after-school or Saturday class in an area of your expertise or interest.
-

Educators, parents, and community persons are appointed to serve on such district committees as: district advisory committees, textbook selection committees, building parent-teacher committees, financial oversight committees, and building and property committees. Parents who support individual school board members in their campaigns for office, also have their ear when a concern about gifted education arises. Attending school board meetings, or better yet, being a

Pushy Parents from page 3

candidate for the school board, indicates you care about education. A friendly face gets a warmer reception when it's time to discuss a difficult situation.

Be informed.

What do you need to know to be an effective advocate? More than you think! Understand the budget, the educational philosophy, board members' positions, and the organizational hierarchy of your entire school system. What is the district mission statement and what are the board policies? Who has the power and who makes the decisions? Read the board minutes to understand the issues facing the school system. Attend board meetings and observe who speaks, how they dress, what style is effective.

Next, become an expert on gifted education, both in your district and across the country. What is the district policy statement regarding gifted education? What is the funding source? Is it adequate? What are the state regulations and funding guidelines? Who is the coordinator of gifted and who is on the staff? In what talent areas are students served? What assessment methods are used to identify gifted students? What are the program components for serving these children? Learn about gifted children and gifted education in general. Read books, attend conferences, talk to parents in neighboring districts. Visit with teachers and other professionals, with area and state gifted consultants, to discover the acceptable practices in gifted education.

To know yourself and know your children is the most important element of all. Are you comfortable with who you are? Do you understand your children's abilities and short comings? What are your strengths? How can you make them work for you? What are your liabilities? What traits do you have in common with your children? Many parents have found the SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of Gifted) model of guided discussion groups helpful in understanding both themselves and their children. This ten week series based on the book, "Guiding the Gifted Child," provides opportunities to read, discuss, and interact with other parents to better understand the behaviors and parenting skills needed to support these children. To be confident in your own abilities, is the first step to success.

Use effective communication techniques.

School and home share some common goals for the emotional, social, and academic growth of the child. Both want students to acquire some basic knowledge, some thinking and problem solving skills; to develop their gifts, talents, and creativity; to attain social skills, a good self-concept, and a lifelong love of learning. To achieve these goals for your children, it is imperative that parents and educators become partners rather than adversaries. Although the child the school

sees is the same child you send out the door each morning, teachers and parents relate to the child from different perspectives. Each have unique insights into the child's needs, aspirations, interests, and aptitudes. It is this cooperation between school and home that can be powerful in contributing to students' success later in life.

When you wish to communicate with the school, follow the chain of command by talking first to the classroom teacher. He or she has the most knowledge about your student. Teachers are increasingly more informed about gifted children and their educational needs, but are also hampered by the constraints of the educational system in which they work and the demands to meet the diverse needs within their classroom. Many teachers have had no formal pre-service training in gifted education and only limited in-service. Despite these handicaps, most are willing to cooperate with parents in finding appropriate educational solutions.

True communication is hearing what others say; sensing what they are feeling; and responding empathically to both. An attitude of "What can we do together for my child?" receives a more positive response than one of "blaming" or asking, "What are YOU going to do?" Prepare for the conference by discussing with your child his or her feelings about school. Identify specific behaviors or interests in your child. To establish a common understanding, initially ask for the

"True communication is hearing what others say; sensing what they are feeling; and responding empathically to both."

teacher's overall perception about the child. Then build on the positives as shared by the teacher. Be diplomatic, respectful, and tactful. Learning the educational "jargon" and the terms for varied gifted education delivery methods increases your credibility and respect with the teacher. Be aware of your body language and the words you choose. You many want to avoid some "hot button" words such as, "bored, brilliant, always, last year!" Some "softener" phrases might include, "I'm curious about..." "I'm wondering if..." "Can you help me understand..." It is far better to ask questions than make demands. "Have you thought about...?" "I wonder what would happened if...?"

If you take examples of products produced outside the school day, or results from private psychological tests, introduce them in a way that is not threatening to the teacher. Not, "See, I told you she was smart." But rather, "I know you are interested in each individual student, and I thought you might enjoy seeing these examples of Mary's work." Parents can share the child's out of school interests, skills, leisure time

Pushy Parents from page 4

activities, and home responsibilities; things the child especially enjoys about school or experiences the child finds frustrating; any unusual happenings that might affect the emotional well-being of the child. Be specific about concerns. Focus on solutions or problem-solving attempts in small steps and ones that are achievable. Try to come to an agreement on a plan of action. If the suggestion is one you cannot accept, reflect on the possibilities and indicate you will follow-up at a later date. Express a willingness to work together and to be informed. Be positive about the child, the teacher, and the school.

Only after conferring with the child's teacher, should you move on to the next person in command. Even then, it is wise to inform or include the teacher in a conference with the principal. Other persons that might be helpful are the supervisor or director of gifted education, and curriculum supervisors. If you are still experiencing frustration over your child's education, it might be appropriate to talk to the director of elementary or secondary education, an assistant superintendent or a superintendent. Involving the board of education is a last resort! Educators dislike being questioned by the board of directors and this can lead to hostile feelings toward a parent by administrators.

Know what to expect from a gifted program.

- Parents can be effective if they know what questions to ask regarding the gifted program.
- Does the district have a clearly written plan with a philosophy and goals specifically for gifted students?
- Does the identification method use multiple criteria?
- Are teachers who serve the gifted supportive and have they received appropriate training?
- Are there multiple programming components designed to meet individual needs and learning styles, and are they articulated across grade levels?
- Is there an emphasis on problem solving, higher level thinking, and student generated products of high quality?
- Is curriculum presented at an appropriate level and pace?
- Are there opportunities for students to interact with ability-level peers?
- Does the program have a component for parent and community involvement?
- Does the program address the social and emotional needs unique to gifted students?
- In addition to academics which are recognized as part of the total school curriculum, are there after school and Saturday enrichment opportunities in the areas of student interests?
- Does the program have a systematic and on-going evaluation?

Join with other parents.

Parents joining together can speak collectively for the needs of gifted children. A parent support group offers moral support and an opportunity to increase your knowledge about gifted students and appropriate educational opportunities. Meet with a nucleus of other parents who share a concern for the needs of gifted children. Involve the district coordinator. Perhaps he or she will be willing to give you names of other parents, or notify them of a meeting time and place. Establish a minimum structure for the group: officers, by-laws, meeting date, dues structure. You will need some funds for communication, refreshments, and mileage for speakers. Plan interesting and informative programs. At one of the first meetings, school personnel might give an overview of the district's gifted talented program, its structure, personnel, and funding. Communication with members and programs of interest to parents are essential to maintain a successful group. These program ideas have been used: a presentation on the characteristics of gifted children; a parent-child creative writing night; a discussion of state legislative issues; planning, searching and applying for college; creative activities in the home; the social-emotional needs of gifted children; competitions for gifted students; parents as volunteers; a summer opportunities fair; a local librarian sharing the latest books for children and parents; family games night; parenting young gifted children; appropriate computer games and web sites.

Some parent groups reach out to the community by enlisting the mayor to issue a proclamation for Gifted Education Week; providing scholarships to summer programs; organizing Saturday or summer enrichment classes taught by their members; contributing books or magazines to school libraries; honoring gifted students for special awards or achievements.

If parents feel supported, informed, and connected with other parents, they can become a powerful advocacy group. When the president of the parent group addresses the board of education or writes to the administration, it is as a representative of all the gifted children in the district, not just a single person advocating for his or her child. There is power in numbers!

Are pushy parents getting a bad rap? Perhaps. But informed parents who advocate for their gifted children are a necessity if gifted education programs are to survive!

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Barclay, K., Boone, E. (1996). The parent difference: Uniting school, family, and community. Arlington Heights, IL: IRI/SkyLight Training and Publishing Co.

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BVPAGE

BVPAGE strives to increase the quantity and enhance the quality of services, disseminate information to and maintain a support group for parents to benefit all gifted and talented students in the Blue Valley School District.

We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

www.bvpage.org

A MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/ RENEWAL FORM IS AVAILABLE ONLINE

Pushy Parents from page 5

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Webb, J., Meckstroth, B., Tolan, S. (1994). Guiding the gifted child. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press, Inc.

Arlene DeVries, now a private consultant in gifted education, retired after 24 years with the Des Moines Public Schools Gifted/Talented program. She has served as President and member of the Board of Directors of SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of Gifted), Past President and Parent Liaison for the Iowa Talented and Gifted Association, Member of the Board of Directors of the National Association for Gifted, Chair of their Parent-Community Division, and has facilitated more than 70 SENG Model Parent Discussion Groups. She can be reached at arlfred@aol.com

BVPAGE Pages
10013 W. 126th Street
Overland Park, KS 66213

