

*ITAG 2010 Administrator of the Year:
Jill Urich, Principal, Waukee Middle School*

By Mary Schmidt, ITAG Past President



Jill Urich, 2010 ITAG Administrator of the Year (left), nominated by Susan Wouters, Waukee MS ELP teacher (right)

Earlier this year, the ITAG board established the Administrator of the Year Award to recognize a school administrator whose leadership, commitment, and vision further the mission of ITAG and ensure high quality learning opportunities for gifted children. In this inaugural year, the board was pleased to receive four nominees from teachers of gifted across the state. The nominees were Kathy Learn, a central office administrator from Davenport Schools nominated by the district TAG department; Ken Erpelding, principal at Orange Elementary in Waterloo nominated by Carol Boyce; Jill Urich, principal at Waukee Middle School nominated by Susan Wouters; and Melanie Fullmer Shellberg, former principal at Abraham Lincoln High School in Council Bluffs and current principal at Woodrow Wilson Middle School nominated by Chris Schultz. Congratulations to all the nominees.

Several common themes permeated the letters of nomination: understanding the need to present gifted kids with challenge, believing in and supporting collaboration among teachers of gifted and general education teachers, giving teachers of gifted a place on district and

building committees where the voice of gifted can be heard, and supporting the learning of the g/t teacher as well as ensuring that all teachers are developing a better understanding of the ways to serve gifted children.

At the June ITAG board meeting, five members of the ITAG board read the nomination letters and scored each against a rubric. On July 13, Mary Schmidt, ITAG past president, had the privilege of presenting the winner, Jill Urich, at the Waukee Community Schools board meeting. Dr. David Wilkerson, Superintendent of Waukee Schools, joined the board in congratulating Jill and expressing their appreciation for her leadership.

Look for a message from Jill in a future ITAG spotlight and be sure to attend the 2010 ITAG Conference (October 18-19 at the Airport Holiday Inn, Des Moines) where the formal award presentation will be made and Jill will speak on the role of school leaders in gifted education. To access the *Des Moines Register* article about Jill's award, visit <http://tinyurl.com/ITAG-AOTY10>.



Jill Urich, 2010 ITAG Administrator of the Year (left) is congratulated by Mary Schmidt, ITAG past president (right)



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THE MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Iowa Talented and Gifted Association is to recognize, support, and respect the unique and diverse needs of talented and gifted learners through advocacy, education, and networking.

THE ASSOCIATION

ITAG, an affiliate of the National Association for Gifted Children, is a tax exempt, 501C3 organization which was organized more than 25 years ago with a vision that gifted and talented children in the State of Iowa should receive an education commensurate with their abilities and needs. It promotes advocacy at the state and local level, pre-service and in-service training in gifted education, and parent/community awareness, education and involvement. ITAG is comprised of parents, educators, other professionals, and community leaders who share an interest in the growth and development of gifted and talented individuals in Iowa. ITAG annual membership dues are: Member, \$45; Friend, \$100-\$999; or Sponsor, \$1000 or more.

THE BOARD

Meets during the months of November, January, March, May, August, and during the Annual Conference in October. Interested persons are welcome to attend meetings. Please contact a Board Member for the date, time, and location of a meeting if you plan to attend.

THE ITAG NEWS

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CHANGE. How do you handle change? Change is inevitable in every aspect of life. Sometimes we can flow with it and enjoy it, while other times it can paralyze us. A new school year can bring change: in a teaching assignment, in the colleagues with whom we work, in school or district leadership, in responsibilities. Hopefully your summer has recharged you so that you can make the best of any changes you face this school year. Remember that we are here to help and support you. Don't hesitate to contact us with any concerns that you may have.

Change permeates throughout the Iowa Talented and Gifted Association as well.

With fall elections, we will experience a **change** in association leadership.

Please vote!!

We have some truly outstanding candidates running for board positions this year. You can read their profiles in this newsletter and also online via the August Spotlight. They have offered to provide leadership using their diverse talents and experience. Do not fail to vote simply because you don't know any of these wonderful people personally. Please note also, that you're voting for President-Elect, a person who will facilitate the board direction in 2011-2013.

Winds of Change: Generate Challenge, Promise, and Possibilities is the theme for this fall's annual conference October 18 and 19 at the Airport Holiday Inn in Des Moines. You'll not want to miss the outstanding speakers and presentations or the awarding of ITAG Administrator of the Year or Distinguished Service Award. There will also be an opportunity for you to sign up for participation on one of our various committees: Parent Outreach, Educator

Outreach, Newsletter, or Membership. These sign up sheets will be at the ITAG booth in the vendor's hall or at the registration table.

Endorsement requirements are **changing!!** With the goal of a highly qualified teacher in every TAG/ELP classroom, teachers of the gifted must be endorsed by July of 2012. An endorsement includes a total of 15 hours in these five strands: Identification of Gifted; Psychology of Gifted; Administration of Gifted Programs; Curriculum for Gifted Programs; and a Practicum. In Iowa, there are four institutions offering coursework toward a gifted endorsement, and credit may be earned through each of them by attending the fall conference! Come to the conference prepared to choose which requirements best fit your needs.

I experienced a wonderful opportunity for personal growth and **change** this past May when I represented ITAG at the Templeton Summit for the Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration and the Wallace Symposium, both sponsored by the Belin and Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development at the University of Iowa. Getting past the humbling experience of meeting some of the most prominent names in the field of gifted education, I was able to learn from their expertise and develop a stronger commitment to continued advocacy, as there is yet much to do.

We are indebted to them for their research and practice because they have identified ways in which the gifted community needs to continue to **change**: teacher training and professional development must be systemically improved for all teachers; written policy is essential in ensuring equity in opportunities and programming for gifted learners; institutions of higher learning must expand their

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A Harbor From the Storm: Services and Programs for Twice-Exceptional Learners

The authors will be sharing work samples from the two children mentioned in this article in the case study section during their presentation in Iowa.

***I was hiding my tears
Fighting my fears
Living life one day at a time
I was hiding my tears
Fighting my fears
Trying hard to keep my place in line***

(Higgins, 2005 – From the CD: *Swim the Same Sea*, 2008)

As described by poets and sailors alike, the “eye of the storm” is a peacefully calm time within a potentially devastating act of nature. Humans often search for the emotional calm within the storms that cross their paths. These storms are found externally within our environment or internally within the emotions that confront us on a daily basis. The extremes between twice-exceptional students’ strengths and challenges create both internal and external educational storms. As teachers of these fragile students, we have an obligation to create an “eye of the storm” within the four-walled space we call our classrooms.

The Storm Begins – Characteristics of Twice-Exceptional Learners

The unique characteristics of twice-exceptional learners often thrust them into an emotional “storm” upon entrance into school. For the first time, they are expected to acquire specific academic skills. Many basic academic skills require abilities that these students do not possess due to their learning disabilities. Further, within the school setting, students are expected to demonstrate appropriate social skills such as cooperation, positive peer interaction, direction following, and independence. Similar to academic skill acquisition, these social skills require levels of ability beyond the reach of many twice-exceptional children. While it is difficult to generalize about a population that is as diverse as that of the twice-exceptional, over twenty years of research focused on characteristics of these learners can be found in the following works (Baum & Owen, 1988; Coleman, 1992; Hannah & Shore, 1995; Nielsen, 2002; Nielsen, Higgins, Hammond, & Williams, 1993; Nielsen, Higgins, Wilkinson, & Webb, 1994; Reis,

Neu, & McGuire, 1997; Schiff, Kaufman, & Kaufman, 1981; Silverman, 1989; Vespi & Yewchuk, 1992; Waldron, Saphire, & Rosenblum, 1987).

Twice exceptional learners have strengths that frequently appear within lists of characteristics of gifted learners. Missing from this list of positive characteristics are items associated with basic academic and interpersonal skills. However, characteristics that present significant challenge and difficulty for many twice-exceptional students are often found on the list of characteristics. Teachers initially view the high creativity, critical thinking, curiosity, and problem-solving ability of twice-exceptional learners as exciting, challenging and positive. However, teachers’ enthusiasm for these positive characteristics soon becomes overshadowed by their frustration with these students’ inability to demonstrate academic skills and with their often-extreme behavioral difficulties. And thus, the storm begins.

The Storm Identified - Discrepancy between Intelligence and Achievement

Twice-exceptional students’ inability to successfully balance the school’s expectations, their areas of academic or social difficulty, and their areas of giftedness frequently results in a referral for a diagnostic evaluation. In most cases the evaluation is requested due to the student’s low academic performance and/or behavioral problems. Rarely is the evaluation instigated because of the child’s giftedness. Diagnostic Evaluation data generally reveals a clear discrepancy between the child’s intellectual ability (IQ) and academic achievement scores. On measures of intellectual ability (expectancy IQ, verbal IQ, performance IQ, and full scale IQ), twice-exceptional students’ performance is remarkably similar to that of the gifted population. In sharp contrast, the academic performance of twice-exceptional students in the areas reading and written language is more reflective of the students with learning disabilities. Although the twice-exceptional students’ achievement scores were within the “average” range, the degree of difference between intelligence and achievement is of hurricane nature.

Caught in the Storm - Two Case Studies

To illustrate the diverse ability of this population, two case studies are briefly presented. These case studies pres-

ent data for specific twice-exceptional learners; names are deleted to protect the students' identity. Student A was referred for a special education diagnostic evaluation at the end of second grade. The teacher initiated the referral due to Student A's poor academic performance in school. The teacher reported that she was surprised by the student's difficulty in reading and writing since the child demonstrated very high critical thinking and creativity. As part of the evaluation, the teacher was asked to assess the child's performance within the classroom setting based on a series of observations. Student A data is distributed from the "below-average range" to the "very-superior" range. The student's areas of strength include: Performance IQ, creativity, critical thinking, humor, expressive language, and peer interaction. Areas of weakness include: classroom reading skills, spelling, and both visual and auditory processing. This profile is reflective of the characteristics found in the literature. The distribution provides clear evidence that this child is both gifted and learning-disabled.

Student B's teacher initiated a special education referral due to the child's problems with peer interaction, self-control, emotional outbursts, and inability to stay-on-task. However, the teacher reported that his academic skills were quite high. Again the data falls across the spectrum of ability. The areas of giftedness include: Performance and full scale IQ, reading, vocabulary, spelling, as well as critical and creative thinking. This student's areas of challenge involve: attention problems, organizational skills, and behavioral difficulties. This student is gifted with attention deficits, pervasive development disorder (PDD), and possible Asperger Syndrome.

Shelter from the Storm - An Attitude of Empathy

Research evidence and the case studies presented demonstrate the unique characteristics, abilities, and needs of twice-exceptional learners. This uniqueness demands a specialized set of interventions to ensure the success of this population. Schools must provide twice-exceptional students with appropriate services and programs designed to respond to their giftedness as well as their areas of challenge. This approach to collaborative services is assured when the professionals within the district establish and support a deep sense of empathy for the incongruent messages that twice-exceptional students hear both from within and from without. In the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Fitch explains the concept of empathy to his young daughter, Scout, "If you can learn a simple trick...you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person

until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it" (Lee, 1960, p. 103). Effective empathy requires reciprocal thinking, that is, both people try to see things from the other's point of view. However, since social interaction is often a problematic area for twice-exceptional students, educators must serve as models of empathy.

Qualitative research data (e.g., Ferri, Gregg, & Heggoy, 1997; Guyer, 1997; Lovecky, 2004; Reis, Neu, & McGuire, 1995) as well as interactions with hundreds of twice-exceptional children, youth and adults, indicates that an empathic understanding of this population leads to a global focus on four components: competence, choice, connections, and compassion.

• **Competence:**

It is essential that adults who work with twice-exceptional students help them to discover their area(s) of giftedness, talent, and ability. Many gifted students with disabilities view themselves as primarily disabled. So much attention has been focused on the things that they cannot do well, that they find it almost impossible to believe that they are bright, capable learners. Dr. Robert Brooks, author of numerous books about resiliency in children, emphasizes the need for educators to celebrate the competence within children with learning difficulties.

If we are to help children develop self-esteem, we must focus not only on their areas of vulnerability, but also on their strengths. We must learn to identify and reinforce each child's strengths, their "islands of competence," so that a ripple effect may be created, motivating the child to venture forth and confront the tasks that have previously been difficult (2005, www.drrobertbrooks.com).

These words are particularly relevant for twice-exceptional learners, those whose disabilities often mask their giftedness.

• **Choice:**

There is great pressure in school environments for students to follow directions, obey rules, and do as they are told. Yet, twice exceptional children are not easily able to do these things. As time passes, these students learn that if they refuse to perform in a required way, they fail but it

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is an anticipated failure, one they control. Feeling trapped by impossible demands, they fight back. Confrontations ensue and everyone loses. The provision of simple choices frees the students, empowering them to have control over their successes. Allowing a student to choose from several options the way in which he or she would like to present a research project lets the student utilize areas of strength rather than demonstrate areas of weakness.

• Connections:

Twice-exceptional children frequently feel as if they are one-of-a-kind. They feel isolated, strange, and pushed to the side. They may recognize that their ideas are similar to those of gifted students, yet their academic skills are far behind this group. Their areas of challenge may be like those of students with learning and behavioral difficulties, but these populations are puzzled by their creativity, humor, and superior vocabulary. It is vital that schools provide ways for twice-exceptional students to connect with one another. As C. S. Lewis wrote, "Friendship is born at the moment when one person says to another, 'What! You too? I thought I was the only one!'"

• Compassion:

Twice-exceptional children and youth will best learn to respect themselves and others when adults have demonstrated compassion toward them. Compassion can be defined as having sympathy for the pain and trial of another person and a desire to reach out and offer help. The example of compassionate educators will show these students the importance and power of this quality.

Safety Found within the "Eye of the Storm" - Collaborative Services and Programs

For twice-exceptional students, targeted services, programs, and interventions create a safe harbor, an "eye of the storm," where they are protected from "winds of chaos," failures, frustrations, and feelings of isolation. These services and programs help build resiliency and success for gifted students with disabilities. There are four key elements that must be present in successful programming for twice-exceptional learners: (a) implementation of an overarching program model, (b) use of interdisciplinary curricula, (c) intensive support for social, emotional, and

behavioral needs, and (d) utilization of gifted education and special education strategies.

• Overarching Program Model

In the early 1980s, a number of professionals in the field of gifted education began recommending that special programs be created for twice-exceptional students (e.g., Fox, Brody, & Tobin, 1983; Whitmore, 1981). Since that time, other professionals have continued to call for unique services and programming for this population (e.g., Baum, Owen, & Dixon, 1991; Higgins & Nielsen, 2000; Pereles, Baldwin, Baum, Higgins, & Nielsen, 2005; Nielsen, 2002). These experts recommend that districts have a continuum of service options available to twice-exceptional students. At one end of the continuum are services within a general education setting with consultative support provided by both special education and gifted education teachers. At the other end are self-contained programs for twice-exceptional students whose needs are extreme. These self-contained programs must be supported by ancillary personnel (e.g., occupational therapists, speech and language practitioners, school counselors). However, all programs should be based on a well-defined program model. The complex needs of the twice-exceptional population often leads to fragmented services and interventions. A consistent over-arching program model insures that services and interventions are well designed, integrated between special education and gifted education, and consistent from year-to-year. Two specific program models that documented success with this population are the Autonomous Learner Model (Betts & Kercher, 1999) and the School wide Enrichment Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1997). Baum and colleagues have explained the use of Renzulli and Reis' enrichment model with this population (Baum, 1988; Baum, et. al, 1991). Nielsen, Higgins, and Betts have described specific ways in which the Autonomous Learner Model (ALM) can serve as a successful foundation for twice-exceptional learners (e.g., Higgins & Nielsen, 2000; Nielsen, Higgins, & Betts, 2005). The ALM model has been utilized within Albuquerque Public school district classrooms for twice-exceptional students since 1990.

• Interdisciplinary Curricula

In 1996, the *Twice-Exceptional Child Projects* brought together university faculty, public school administrators, and teachers of twice-exceptional students in an effort to exchange ideas for successful interventions. In addition to supporting targeted programs and services, these

professionals unanimously recommended that these students be taught using complex, interdisciplinary curricula. In particular, the teachers who worked on a daily basis insisted that this approach be used. Their interest in the "big picture" and unrelenting sense of curiosity make this type of curriculum a perfect match. These students' high levels of reasoning and problem solving, their penetrating insights into complex issues and their advance ideas contribute to their success with interdisciplinary learning. Within his multi-grade, self-contained classroom for twice-exceptional learners, Higgins and Nielsen (2000) have developed a rotating, three-year cycle of global concepts (i.e., survival, connections, development). Each year a different concept with an associated generalization serves as the thematic-basis of instruction across all discipline areas. The concept, generalization, and key questions are posted throughout the school year. As instruction occurs, students engage in discussions about how the specific lesson, novel, video, field trip, etc. contributes to their understanding of the global concept and generalization. Students are encouraged to use their giftedness to examine complex issues and ideas while acquisition of basic academic and social skills are gently addressed with the process.

• Social, Emotional and Behavioral Supports

The emotional vulnerability of these students is extreme. Thus, it is imperative that targeted services and programs for twice-exceptional students address the intense social and emotional issues that these students face on a daily basis. Central to this is the creation of an emotionally peaceful yet intellectually stimulating classroom environment. Since these students have experienced failure within the typical classroom setting, it is important that a different atmosphere be planned. One way to achieve this is through the use of non-artificial or layered lighting, soft background music (designed to keep students focused and within a zone of effective learning), plants, and comfortable furniture atypical of school (e.g., reading chairs, rockers, beanbag chairs).

Separate areas are needed for direct instruction (e.g., desks, white-boards), for group discussions (e.g., soft furniture, rugs, pillows), for self-reflection and re-centering, and for one-on-one teacher/student interaction. These separate areas decrease and defuse many behavioral issues while responding to students' attention deficit difficulties, sensory-integration needs, and intense need "elbow-room."

Beyond the actual classroom environment, specific social, emotional, and behavioral interventions must be provided. Students must engage in activities designed to help them understand themselves. Self-discovery activities assist them in identifying their specific talents, areas of strength, interests and passions, learning styles, and emotional needs. In the process, they can reframe their belief that they are "stupid" or "failures." They need to be shown how to use their gifts to compensate for their areas of challenge. These students benefit from the study of giftedness, attention deficit disorders, sensory integration, as well as learning-disabilities and other special education exceptionalities. This knowledge empowers students to negotiate assignments, set personal goals, and accept themselves as total persons.

Challenge areas for many twice-exceptional learners are closely related to behavior control and social interaction issues. Problems in these areas contribute greatly to feelings of failure and isolation. Thus, these students must be provided intensive, direct instruction in anger management, self-regulation, and social thinking. Instruction in social thinking is particularly important for twice-exceptional students with non-verbal learning disabilities or Asperger Syndrome. Students with these disabilities cannot read non-verbal social cues. Instruction in social thinking focuses on three areas: how you look (e.g., hygiene, hairstyle), what you say (content of your message), and what you do (i.e., body language and gestures, facial expression, tone of voice, physical proximity, pitch and loudness of voice). Students need to learn the following: I think about you; I think about what you are thinking about me; I regulate my actions to keep you thinking about me in the way that I want you to think about me (Winner, 2002). As students acquire these skills, they become emotionally safer within the classroom, the school, and the larger community.

• Gifted Education and Special Education Strategies/ Interventions

Twice-exceptional services must be designed to allow these learners to reach their full potential. This can best be accomplished through instruction that targets their giftedness while providing individualized special education interventions. These bright and highly capable youth benefit from strategies advocated for gifted populations (e.g., Hilda Taba strategies, creative problem solving,

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problem-based learning). As is true for all gifted learners, these students must have access to sophisticated materials and ideas. Books on tape through *Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic* allow gifted students with reading difficulties to interact with advanced literary works. Technological advances reduce the impact of the disability and allow students to focus on the more complex, creative, and analytical aspects of assignments. They must be encouraged to apply their advanced knowledge, abstract thinking, reasoning skills, and creativity to group discussions, real-world assignments, and challenging projects. Additionally, educators have an obligation to address students' specific areas of challenge. Research from the field of special education must be examined for targeted interventions and strategies. Examples of such interventions include: organizational strategies (webbing, storyboarding), facilitated instruction using graphic organizers, and intensive, structured, multi-sensory reading programs such as Orton Gillingham (Gillingham & Stillman, 1997), *Recipe for Reading* program (Traub & Bloom, 1994), and *Wilson Reading* program (Wilson Language Training, 2004). Twice-exceptional learners' challenges are varied; thus, special education interventions must be designed for each child with input from special educators as well as ancillary support professionals. These unique needs of this population require that school-wide collaboration take place.

Beyond the Storm

The goal of programming for twice-exceptional students is to create a safe haven within the "eye of the educational storm." Within this safe haven, they discover who they are, express their gifts, learn to accept and compensate for challenge areas, and acquire strategies for success. This prepares them to successfully reenter the larger educational world. The following work samples from Students A and B illustrate the power of this approach.

Within the shelter of twice-exceptional services, Student A progressed through elementary and middle school. By high school, she participated in the gifted education program for one period each day. The remainder of her classes were in the general education classroom with support from special education on an "as-needed" basis. Samples of her work over her school career provide evidence that she was able to compensate for her read-

ing problems (especially through the use of computer technology) while maintaining her creativity, humor, and unique problem-solving skills. Within her elementary school twice-exceptional program, she was encouraged to dictate original stories. She dictated parody of the fairytale Cinderella written as part of her 3rd grade independent project on birds. During middle school, she created a segment of a Bloom's Taxonomy learning center created within her middle school general education math class. Support for this center was provided as needed within her daily twice-exceptional classroom. Her learning center focused on the Mathematics system of the Mayans. The center and the individual activity cards were solely by the student. During high school, she required no assistance from the special education or gifted education teachers for this assignment. She had become an autonomous, self-confident learner.

When Student B was placed in the twice-exceptional program, his challenges seemed to outweigh his giftedness. He was an above-average reader displaying high fluency in the reading process. When emotionally upset, he often lost the ability to express his feelings and required space and time to regain composure. His oral reading was intermittently strong and demonstrated good expression. When upset, he demonstrated great difficulty with verbal communication. Although there was good evidence that he possessed the ability to read chapter books, he did not verbally communicate what he read. He displayed very high verbal skills when he was calm and was able to find his voice within the walls of the (his) storm.

Although Student B's ability to write with the traditional pencil/paper method was limited, his ability to create stories and compositions using keyboarding technology was advanced for his age group. When using the computer, his stories and compositions became fluent, organized, and elaborative. He responded well to highly creative assignments – especially those that had a futuristic component. His responses demonstrated his unique spatial abilities as well as his creative and critical thinking skills. When approaching assignments requiring sophisticated thinking about future events, he excelled.

He was provided with an assignment from the Future ME Project (Higgins, 2005) during his 4th grade year. When he approached this assignment, he became immersed in the required components of the unit. He readily demonstrated the ability to react to abstract futuristic situations that seemed to be above that of his age group. He successfully used his computer skills to demonstrate

his unique view of the future. He demonstrated creativity while responding to portions of the unit with poetic sensitivity. Most importantly, he was able to incorporate factual information about the present with originality of expression when describing future events. In short, he acted as a futurist and created a positive and complicated response to a very complex assignment.

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By M. Elizabeth Nielsen, University of New Mexico and L. Dennis Higgins Albuquerque Public Schools - Retired and University of New Mexico

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Continued from Page 3 - President's Message

requirements of study in gifted education to all teaching candidates; accelerating students can have a positive effect economically.

This summer, I have become aware of the **change** in evidence that neuroscientists have accumulated about how the brain thinks, learns, and remembers. Within the ten years since I earned my master's degree, there have been many myths dispelled and many new facts exposed. Reading the text, Teaching with the Brain in Mind by Eric Jensen has caused me to consider changing some instructional strategies to make them more compatible with the ways the brain learns. As teachers, we should be in the "brain business," and I was stunned to learn all of that which I had neglected to remain current! This is not the space for a book review, but among the new discoveries about the brain are: the human brain grows new neurons; the brain responds to extended periods of stress by developing a new, less healthy baseline; genes are not fixed; music and exercise positively affect cognition and new cell growth; and, (I love this one!), teenage behavior cannot be blamed solely on hormones — there are other fast-changing factors! With a section for "practical classroom suggestions" in each chapter and an extensive list of references, I recommend this as an essential read!

While the ITAG leadership may change, one thing that hasn't changed is the support you receive from your membership in ITAG. In addition to this newsletter (one of the best among all NAGC state affiliates), you have access to the ITAG web site and receive monthly Spotlight messages. At the conference you will be able to partner with a more experienced gifted professional if you seek support, or can "mentor" a new teacher of gifted. Your ITAG Board meets four times a year and has held a spring workshop the past two years to focus on committee goals. ITAG has also been your representative at the annual School Administrators of Iowa and Iowa Association of School Board conferences, as well as a national presence at the National Association for Gifted Children in Washington, D.C.



Thanks for all you do on behalf of gifted learners in Iowa. Best wishes as you begin another school year. And please, **don't forget to vote!**

By Diane Pratt, ITAG President

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THE ITAG Teaching Center & Learning

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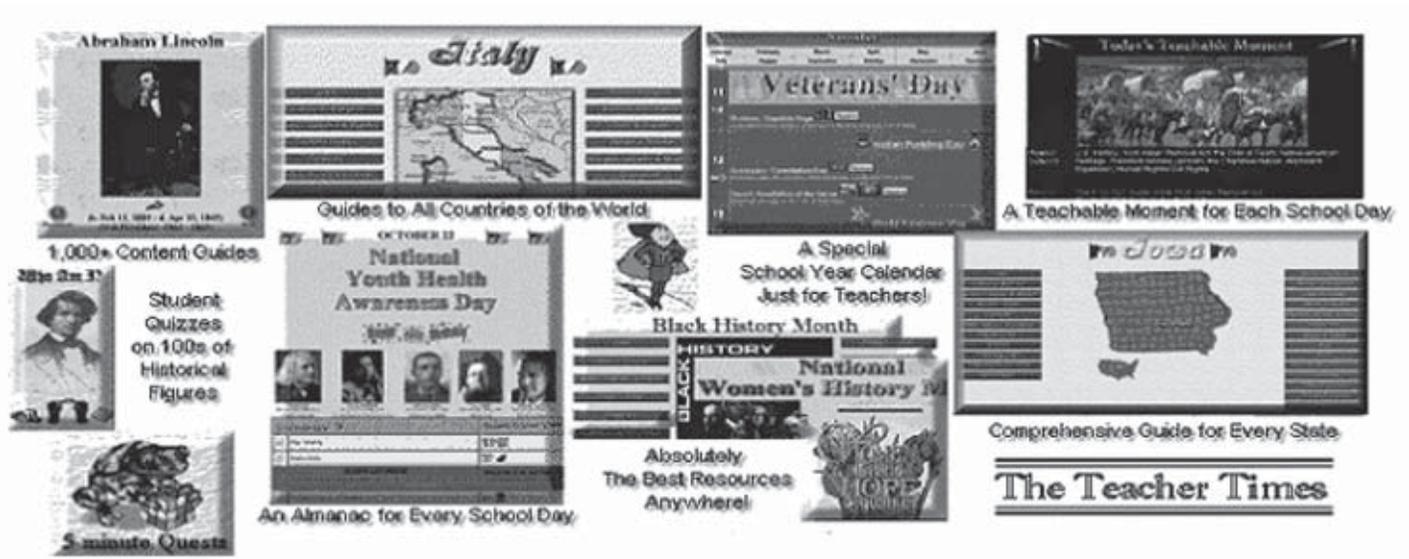
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Candidates for ITAG Board

Use this link to vote: <http://survey.aea.k12.ia.us/survey/93703/1438/>

Voting will be open from August 23 - September 30, 2010. The link will close at 8:00 p.m. September 30th. Each computer will be accepted only once.

Please read the biographies and vote today!

Nominees for President-Elect



Board Member Linda Moehring is a Professional Learning and Leadership Consultant at Heartland AEA 11. She holds a M.A. in Gifted Education and has been involved in the field for 19 years. Linda is a strong advocate and proponent of early programming to meet the needs of young gifted children regardless of "official" identification. She supports gifted education programming that provides appropriate challenge in every classroom every day for all gifted children Pre K-12. She believes that classroom learning opportunities can and should support the authentic learning and critical thinking that excite students to become lifelong learners. Linda advocates for and serves gifted education as a Heartland AEA differentiation team member and facilitator. While in her district, Linda started Odyssey of the Mind, Destination Imagination, Academic Decathlon, GT Retreat for secondary students, and HS courses for credit.



Board Member Jenelle Nisly has worked in the field of education for more than 15 years. She was a talented and gifted facilitator in the Davenport Community School District for 8 years. In addition, she taught robotics to gifted students at the Belin-Blank Center's summer CHESS program for 5 years. Jenelle is the vice president of academic affairs at Shiloh University and holds an Ed.D. in Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning. Her qualitative doctoral research study examined the perceptions of African American middle school students about participation in gifted programs. Jenelle's passion for serving the needs of gifted students includes the application of differentiated learning and best teaching practices on-line at all levels of education including the university level.

Candidates for Board of Directors



Board member Sue Chartier is the Gifted Education Consultant for Northwest Area Education Agency. She has been in education 25 years, 10 years as a middle school teacher in the Sioux City Community School District where she had elementary teams in Odyssey of the Mind and Destination Imagination, and 15 years as a Consultant. She earned her BA from Morningside College and MA from the University of South Dakota. Sue is a member of ITAG, NAGC, ASCD, and NCTM. She has served one term as an ITAG board member.



Ashley Delaney is the Extended Learning Programs Coordinator for Colfax-Mingo Community Schools. She is in her fourth year of teaching gifted education and her seventh year teaching overall. After graduating from Iowa State in 2004, Ashley started her teaching career at an impoverished school on the southside of Chicago. After moving back to Iowa, she started her Masters degree at Drake University where she graduated in 2010 with an emphasis in gifted and talented education. Though Ashley works with all grade levels, her focus is on secondary programming and services as she teaches students in grades 6-12. Over the last three years, Ashley has helped her district evolve to provide services via a variety of mediums including: collaboration, co-teaching, and resource allocation. Ashley has used her district professional development experiences as a presenter for several sessions at ITAG. She is a member of ITAG and NAGC.

Continued on Page 12



Rodney G. Martinez has been an Iowa educator for 17 years. His experiences include teaching in elementary classrooms for 12 years within Des Moines Public Schools (second, third, fourth, fifth, technology, and assistant principal). While teaching at the elementary level in Des Moines, Rodney was also the Gifted and Talented Coordinator for many of his buildings. For the past 5 years, Rodney has been an elementary principal for the Norwalk Community School District and the Administrator for the K-12 Norwalk Gifted and Talented Program. He holds a Masters in Elementary Administration from Drake University.



D. LeAnn Oldenburger was one of the first 40 students of Central Academy in Des Moines. As a young adult, LeAnn served as a community liaison for the Des Moines Gifted program, and was the G/T Program Coordinator for Central Iowa Mensa. After college, LeAnn spent 10 years jet setting while her husband Gary served in the US Air Force. After returning home, she completed her G/T Endorsement from Drake University and taught ELP at Carlisle Middle School half time from 2007-2009 while homeschooling her seven gifted children including one son who is twice exceptional — being deaf and highly creative. In 2009, LeAnn was co-chair for the October ITAG Conference with Linda Moehring, referring to the experience as “a wonderful opportunity to give back to the gifted community.”



Board Member Sally Thorson received her degree and her endorsement for TAG from UNI. She was an adjunct professor of Secondary Social Studies Methods class at Wartburg College. Before retiring in 2008, Sally taught 31 years at Waverly-Shell Rock and was involved in TAG since 1985. Among her contributions to education, Sally developed W-SR 7-12 TAG programming, taught AP US History, authored lessons in collaboration with the Herbert Hoover Library for students in AP US History, and has presented at the national conventions for Teachers of American History in Pittsburgh, PA and San Antonio, TX. Sally was an academic coach for Mock Trial. She has been involved with National History Day, National Oratorical, Iowa Math League and Math Counts, Science Bowl teams, eCybermission, Future Problem Solvers, and many more. The best part of retirement now is the time to be available if TAG teachers need support from the board.



Board Member Kenn Wathen has been an educator for 29 years and an Iowa educator for the past 20 years. His experiences include teaching elementary school, mostly in multi-age primary classrooms, for 7 years and serving as elementary principal for 22 years. In the fall of 2010 he will begin his 14th year as the elementary principal for the Hamburg CSD. He serves on the AEA 13 ELL Advisory Committee. He has served as an adjunct instructor for Buena Vista University teaching Human Relations and Teaching of Reading and worked as a Reading Consultant for curriculum development for Southern Prairie AEA. He is the parent of a gifted student who was involved in Belin-Blank Center programs throughout junior high and high school and who entered the Early Start program at the Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa in the fall semester 2005. Kenn was also a 2006 Belin Fellow at the Belin-Blank Center. Kenn earned his B.S.S. from Cornell College and his M.S.E. from Wayne State College. He is a current member of NCTM, IRA, NAESP, SAI, IAEYC, NAEYC, ITAG and NAGC.

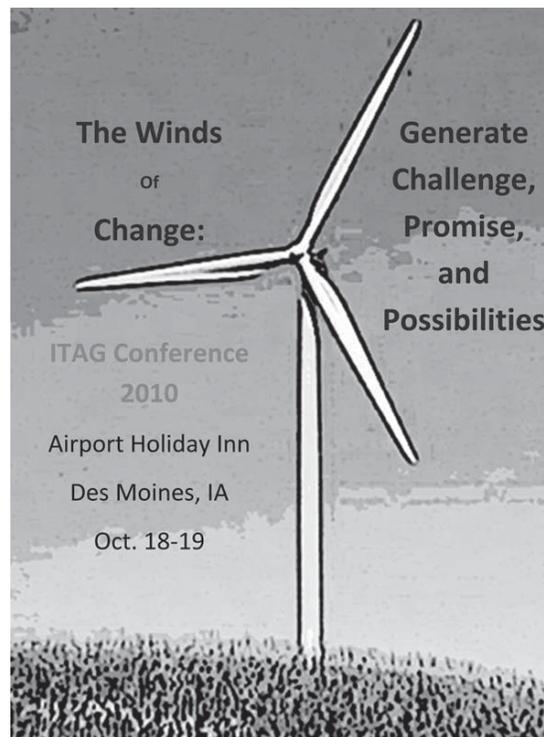


Susan Wouters has been an educator with the Waukee Community School District for 14 years, working with gifted children and their families for 11 of those years as an Extended Learning Program (ELP) teacher. She has taught and facilitated gifted and talented programming at both the elementary and secondary levels and has served as ELP Coordinator for the district. Susan co-founded and led Waukee Academic Boosters for 3 years and has planned and implemented professional development pertaining to gifted education for K-8 staff. She is a member of ITAG, NAGC and ASCD. Susan received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education from Graceland University, TAG endorsement from University of Iowa, and Masters of Science in Education, Curriculum Leadership, from Drake University.

Please remember to use this link to vote: <http://survey.aea.k12.ia.us/survey/93703/1438/>

Come Join ITAG and the Des Moines School District Gifted and Talented Department at the 2010 ITAG State Conference, October 18-19, 2010 at the Airport Holiday Inn, Des Moines, Iowa!

The conference, titled ***The Winds of Change: Generating Challenge, Promise and Possibilities*** hopes to provide gifted and talented administrators, consultants, classroom teachers, school administrators, school counselors and parents with exciting, new use-on-Monday ideas and cutting edge research findings, while at the same time honoring the sage wisdom of long standing visionaries and practitioners in our field. Come be enriched and enlightened by George Betts, Dennis Higgins, Elizabeth Nielsen, Marcia Gentry, and dozens of our Iowa educators and consultants as we come together to learn from each other and celebrate all that is challenging, promising and full of possibilities for gifted education in Iowa!



Hotel Information:

The Airport Holiday Inn is located at 6111 Fleur Drive in Des Moines, Iowa.

**ITAG room block rate is \$85.00 plus 12% tax
Please call 800-248-4013 to make phone reservations.**

Deadline for room block is September 27, 2010.

2010 Conference Registration Form

IOWA TALENTED AND GIFTED ASSOCIATION

ITAG Conference October 18-19, 2010



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CREDIT: Board members, presenters & conference committee members, apply registration credit as detailed below before computing total conference fee. Only one deduction is allowed.

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IOWA TALENTED AND GIFTED ASSOCIATION

Book Review: *Finding April Hollow*

Authors: Jody M. Lewis and Laura Ziggle
Publisher: White Canoe Productions, St. Louis, MO 63011
Contact information:
http://whitecanoeproductions.com
e-mail: admin@whitecanoeproductions.com

Every teacher needs this book. *Finding April Hollow* is one of a kind. Its rich detail and poignant descriptions as students and their teachers interact — or not — give educators an exciting, fresh approach to the art and science of teaching. Both insightful and instructive, this magical book also makes an indispensable resource for new teachers who are learning to distinguish “flat-line (read: ‘lifeless; dead’) instruction” from genuine teaching! For the next graduate or undergraduate class I teach, I shall use *Finding April Hollow* as a required text. It’s simply THAT good!

Finding April Hollow is a unique gem, which I’ve begun to share with colleagues whose teaching I respect. This extraordinary story illustrates how, in unconventional ways, a class of students can be challenged to be the best they can possibly be. Working together in an atmosphere of experimentation and academic rigor, neither of which is mentioned specifically, these youngsters applaud this stimulating learning environment and guard it jealously as a perfect home for their own very personal reasons.

Playful puns, special words reiterated in key places to tether the reader to each child individually, and colorful, descriptive, and frequently humorous references make for the beautifully crafted piece of written art that is *Finding April Hollow*. Passages are compelling, yet gentle and often subtle as they convey the art of effective teaching. I myself have read the story twice and plan to read it again. Its vibrant, refreshing detail is worth multiple reads.



Review submitted by
 By Carolyn R. Cooper, Ph.D.,
 St. Louis, MO

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ITAG Partners

PLEASE HELP!!! We are in need of experienced TAG/ELP educators who could serve as a mentor/partner with a less experienced colleague. This connection may be based on e-mail correspondence, but could develop into whatever relationship the two teachers decide.

We currently need experience at all instructional levels. Please consider guiding a new colleague in uncharted territory! E-mail Kenn Wathen, Educator Outreach, kwathen@hamburg.k12.ia.us if you would be willing to help.

Monthly ITAG Spotlight

Are you receiving the ITAG Spotlight on Gifted Education e-mail? If not, please e-mail your current contact information to the ITAG office at itag@assoc-serv.com.

In addition, please make sure that you add ITAG’s e-mail address as an approved contact in your e-mail program’s address book.

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Back to School for Precocious Readers

Back to school! Back to school! This phrase can have an exciting or an ominous ring for precocious learners. One of the most important opportunities we can give children is the opportunity to learn something new every day. As parents and educators, we shoulder that responsibility for children together. It will take teamwork from the home and the classroom to meet the educational needs of talented learners.

The first day of school can be an extremely memorable experience. Call up that memory for yourself. It is likely to be a rich mixture of people, locations, and events. I can recall attending my first day of school in a large brick building in a small Wyoming town. As is often the case in small towns, my first-grade teacher was my father's first-grade teacher. "What luck!" I thought. "I am going to have Miss Weedow." She was known all over the county for her discipline and imposing presence, but she was my dad's teacher to me. He spoke highly of her, and I was excited to be in her first-grade room.

I can recall desks, books, and a big closet in the back of the room for storing the heavy coats everyone wore during the long and cold Wyoming winters. I also recall the thrill of receiving my first book at school. Inside the front cover, a paper nameplate has been pasted in. I was allowed to print my own name on the first blank line. A new book on the first day! This could only be good. As the time drew closer for reading instruction, I was wiggling in my chair and eager to begin. I didn't know it yet, but I was already a reader – a fluent one. My family haunted the library from the time I was old enough to be taken outside in the cold. My mother read aloud to me several books a day. At night, I sat on my dad's lap as he scanned the newspaper, commented on what he was reading, and gave me the opportunity to ask questions. Given the rich print environment in our home, reading before formal instruction was no surprise.

Quickly, however, my reading skill level became an issue at school. The first reading lesson involved recognizing the word "look." It was slow going and everyone repeated the word in round-robin fashion until Miss Weedow was satisfied. As there were almost 30 children in her class, taking turns to read aloud was a cumbersome business. Nevertheless, the day went well, and we were allowed to take home our first readers to show our parents. I was delighted, went home brandishing the small primer proudly, and sat down in my dad's big easy chair to read. My mother, a sixth-grade teacher, settled herself quietly across the room and listened to me read the first primer cover to cover. "Well," I said. "I'm

finished with that one. Where do I get the next book?" She made no reply.

Back in those days, there would be no new book for an interminable 6 weeks. Reading class became agonizing by the second day of school. I can still recall the frustration of being taught words I already knew, of having to keep my place in a primer that I already finished, and of listening to some classmates stumble over pronunciation and be corrected in front of everyone. I was absolutely mortified for my friends, but did not know what I could do to help. That memory is as fresh today as it was decades ago — for me it was a crystallizing experience.

If you cannot recall a similar experience from your childhood, you will have one from your adult life. If you are a working parent, imagine sitting hour after hour, day after day in a staff or committee meeting in which you already understand what is being discussed. If you are a teacher, imagine sitting hour after hour in an in-service or a required professional development day in which you already know the information. Children are captive to such events every day, and gifted children are particularly vulnerable to intellectual and motivational captivity in the classroom.

As parents and teachers, we must watch for those signs of drooping motivation, angry frustration, or dreamy withdrawal. And we must act with quiet determination. My back-to-school story has a happy ending because my mother and Miss Weedow got together on my behalf. I don't know who made the first move, but it doesn't really matter. My mother was a diplomat, and Miss Weedow was nobody's fool. By the second week of school, my new friend Sherry and I were seated next to one another. We still did the reading worksheets and answered comprehension questions, but the round-robin reading was gone. Other more advanced books appeared like magic in our desks, and Miss Weedow leaned down from her very great height and quietly explained that we could read these books or any that we brought from home during whole-class reading time. "And, by the way, whenever you finish your work, you can read anything you like," she said. Sherry and I took her up on her invitation.

Many primary classrooms have a Miss Weedow, but some do not. The research on precocious readers indicates that these children rarely receive differentiated reading

Continued on Page 20

Caroline's Quest for Calculus

Although most teachers have encountered high-potential students, it is not always easy to know how to provide appropriately challenging learning experiences. The purpose of this case study is to share one student's experience with subject acceleration and to suggest ways that educators might advocate for students like Caroline.

Like many high-potential children, Caroline's educational experience upon entering high school had not been entirely normal. In sixth grade, she was recommended for an advanced math class, which put her on a path to take pre-calculus as a high school sophomore, calculus as a junior, and AP calculus as a senior. Although Caroline did not claim mathematics as her favorite subject, she recognized it as an area of strength and enjoyed the additional challenge. Caroline's parents, an electrical engineer and an elementary teacher, strongly supported Caroline's study of mathematics. Caroline's father often commented to Caroline's teachers that, in his opinion, teachers spent too much time on arithmetic facts and not enough time on "real mathematics." He suggested that teaching arithmetic facts in mathematics was similar to teaching phonics in reading -- a necessary step, but only to provide entry into the real world of reading, or, in this case, "real" mathematics. So, both Caroline and her parents were pleased, and, as a sixth-grader, Caroline was thriving.

Managing Conflicts Created by Acceleration

In Caroline's eighth-grade year, her family moved, and Caroline enrolled in a magnet school for the arts, majoring in her preferred field, creative writing, and her second love, instrumental music. She was able to take courses that were at her grade level, but designated as advanced, in science, English and social studies. But in math she was a year ahead of her grade-level peers in the advanced math class, so she was placed in Geometry as an 8th grader, and Advanced Algebra as a 9th grader. This worked reasonably well, with only minor inconveniences that often accompany taking a course in a different grade level. Events like field trips and state testing meant that Caroline missed some days of math class to be with her grade-level peers. Such trade-offs commonly accompany subject acceleration. Caroline's family expected that Caroline would follow the curriculum, which, in this new school, meant taking pre-calculus in 10th grade, and AP calculus in 11th grade; so Caroline would exhaust the school's mathematics courses before her senior year. They had begun exploring the options for taking a math class at an area college.

Hard Choices

Caroline's family had not anticipated what they encountered on her entry into 10th grade. When they picked up Caroline's schedule at the school picnic on the eve of the first day of school, there was no math class on her schedule. While Caroline spent an empty class period sitting in the auditorium on her first day of 10th grade, Caroline's mother spent a large part of the day in the chaos of the high school counselor's office where she learned that there was only one section of pre-calculus and it was scheduled at the same time as instrumental music. Caroline had already lost out on her first major, creative writing, due to scheduling conflicts and could not stay at this magnet school for the arts without maintaining her instrumental music major. The choice was clear – music or math.

After much discussion, and with a great deal of agony, Caroline and her family ultimately chose to enroll her in the neighborhood school where she could have both math and music, although the music was at a much lower level of challenge. Because the arts magnet school and the neighborhood school operated on different calendars, Caroline entered her new school three weeks into the school year. She was placed in advanced classes within her grade level, and in the 11th grade pre-calculus course. As would be expected, her grades dropped a bit as she acclimated to her new school and caught up on three weeks of missed work, but Caroline ended the year with a strong B average.

Irreconcilable Conflicts

In the neighborhood school, they knew there would also be no math class for Caroline her senior year, but Caroline and her parents were unprepared for the scheduling issues they encountered as she entered her junior year. Caroline had signed up for the dual credit psychology course that was offered by a local college, scheduled for 3rd period. She was also registered for 11th grade AP English, which had two sections, 2nd period and 3rd period. The only section of AP Calculus course was 2nd period. So, once again, Caroline and her family had to choose: Caroline could have psychology and English, or math and English, but could not have all three courses. Caroline had never objected to taking math, but she was really looking forward to the dual credit psychology class, partly for the college-level challenge, and partly because all of her friends were taking it. Caroline's overall response to the situation was to repeat often, "High school is stupid – they won't let me learn anything."

Finding College Options

After much discussion, Caroline's mother proposed a compromise — if the school could give Caroline a study hall instead of one of her non-required afternoon classes, Caroline could take a math class at a local college. Caroline had already been accepted as an early entrance student at this college, as she had taken an anthropology course over the summer just for fun. Caroline's parents were extremely reluctant to consider a year without a math class — especially her junior year, when she would begin taking college entrance exams. The high school counselor agreed with this plan. Now they needed to find out what math classes were offered in the late afternoons when Caroline would be able to get to campus. Searching the class schedule online, Caroline and her mother found a course titled "Applied Calculus" that met in the late afternoon and seemed to be the right level of mathematics. This course required a pre-requisite of college algebra or an ACT score of 23 or higher. Caroline had not yet taken the ACT test, as she was just entering her junior year. She had, however, taken the PSAT and earned a score of 60 in mathematics, which was reported as higher than 91% of her peers, and she had taken a PLAN test, which predicted her ACT score to be between 23-27 (Williams & Noble, 2005).

Caroline's mother contacted the math department at the college to find out how to register Caroline for the course. The first roadblock was Caroline's lack of an ACT score. When Caroline's mother offered Caroline's PSAT score or her PLAN test score, the math department chair responded, "That means nothing to us." Caroline's mother patiently explained the situation, and asked whether there were placement tests available to ascertain whether Caroline was adequately prepared for this class. She was told that placement tests are administered by a testing center on a particular schedule, and the next round of placement tests would not be given until October. Utterly frustrated, Caroline's mother asked the chair of the math department for suggestions. The chair explained that there was a compromise they could offer. Caroline could take an online placement test, and if she scored high enough, they would allow her to take a lower level math class. Later, when she had an ACT score, she would be allowed to take any math courses for which she met the ACT score requirement.

Caroline took the online placement test, scored 23 out of 25, and was allowed to take an Introduction to Probability class, which met in the evenings. Caroline is taking the course, and doing well, but finds it very, easy, and is quite bored. She will take the ACT as soon as possible, and hopes to be allowed into a higher level math course next term.

Is Caroline's situation unique? Unfortunately, it is probably not. Caroline's parents are not bitter, but are dumb-founded that in a country that is falling behind in world competitiveness in math and science fields a student should encounter so many hindrances in the pursuit of mathematics learning. However, we can learn from Caroline's situation, so that we can be better prepared to advocate for high-potential students as they navigate the challenges of finding appropriate services.

First, it is important to recognize that Caroline's acceleration in mathematics was highly appropriate for her. All of the difficulties she encountered were related to school schedules and policies; her performance level in math class was consistently good. In reviewing the curriculum and instruction criterion of the NAGC Pre-K – Grade 12 Gifted Program Standards, it is clear that some of Caroline's schools follow the guiding principle calling for acceleration options, but did not meet the exemplary standard, which states, "Possibilities for partial or full acceleration of content and grade levels should be available to any student presenting such needs" (NAGC, 2002, p. 2).

Planning for Acceleration

How could a school meet such an exemplary standard? Advance planning is key. Although it is true that Caroline did not register for her junior year courses until the spring of her sophomore year, she was, as a sophomore, succeeding in her pre-calculus course. This provided ample evidence that she would need calculus the following year, so there was time for school officials to consider Caroline's needs in the construction of the class schedule. Schedule construction should always begin with those students who have unique needs, with careful planning to avoid the kinds of conflict that Caroline encountered. When the schedule-creating paradigm has shifted to meet the needs of the students (Neubig, 2006), courses that will have only one section will be scheduled with utmost care to avoid as many conflicts as possible (Kubitschek, Hallinan, & Arnett, 2005). In cases where the schedule cannot be constructed to meet a student's educational needs, the student should be notified early, so there is time to consider alternatives. If Caroline's family had known about the potential problem early enough, Caroline could have taken the ACT test in June in order to meet the college course prerequisite.

Not only does the class schedule need careful planning, but also educators who advocate for high-potential students should think ahead and make themselves aware of the op-

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tions available for students who will need acceleration that the high school may be unable to provide. While Caroline's parents were aware of some options, many are not. Educators play an important role in exploring and informing students and parents for learning opportunities beyond the high school walls.

High school educators can help college faculty understand when to use flexibility in applying course entrance policies. The intent of the math department's ACT score requirement was to ensure that college students are prevented from enrolling in a course they are unlikely to pass. To deny access to a high-potential high school student who has not yet taken the ACT test is understandable, but considerations should be made in order that students like Caroline are able to take the test in due time.

Finally, educators should value involved, respectful parents. Throughout this process, Caroline's parents have been careful to not make enemies. They understand that they are interacting with well-meaning people who are trying to do their jobs. However, without assigning blame for the situation, they are quite vocal, making sure that the principal, the counselor, and the college mathematics department are aware of the whole story of Caroline's pursuit of mathematics. By being vocal, they hope that the Carolines of the future will have fewer hurdles to jump. They hope enough of Caroline's educators will join in and that Caroline will ultimately reverse her opinion that "high school is stupid."

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instruction in elementary or middle school. A longitudinal study of children who read before formal instruction indicates that early readers maintained their advantage until age 11, but the researchers speculated that they might have gained more had their reading opportunities been better matched with their skill level. The evidence suggests that homes with rich print environments and regular reading times characterized by a relaxed and playful parent-child interchange foster reading interest and skill. To smooth the way for precocious readers in the first important weeks of school, parents can also let their child's new teacher know if the child has been reading independently at home and can offer to equip their child with a leisure reading book for those spare minutes in the instructional day.

Back to school or the first day – these events can be exciting for young children who are more than ready to learn. We owe it to precocious children to see they have the opportunity to learn something new every day. Let's give our gifted children a happy ending.

By Dr. Ann Robinson, NAGC President

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