



The Star



October 2008

A Publication of the Friends of the Gifted and Talented Inc.

SUPER SATURDAY CLASSES TO START!

FROG's 6-week Super Saturday enrichment classes are right around the corner! Classes begin October 18th and run through November 15th. Super Saturday classes are open to all students in kindergarten through eighth grade – and some classes are for parents too.

Thanks to Kristen Beirne, FROG Super Saturday Coordinator, for arranging a terrific lineup of classes this Fall. This year's selection include offerings as varied as Chinese language, Pilates, bicycle maintenance, airplane-building, and writing workshops, to name a few. Registration ends October 18th, but sign up soon so you don't miss a spot.

Classes are held Saturdays in three separate 50-minute sessions, running from 9:00 a.m. through 11:50 a.m., at O'Neill Middle School, 635 59th Street in Downers Grove. Visit www.dgfrog.org for a complete list of Fall 2008 courses and to sign up. Note that all registration is done via the website this year. Hurry; classes begin soon! ☆

FROG thanks the many individuals who volunteer their time and expertise to teach Super Saturday classes, and is always on the lookout for new teachers and subjects. Please contact Kristen Beirne through the FROG website or phone number if you are interested in teaching next Fall.

IAGC CONVENTION

The Illinois Association for Gifted Children (IAGC) is holding its annual convention February 1-3, 2009 at the Chicago Marriott Downtown. The IAGC was established in 1989 by a group of Illinois educators in order to attempt to better understand and advocate for the educational and social/emotional needs of gifted children. IAGC focuses on advocacy, standard setting, and parent and educator networking. Check IAGC's website, www.iagcgifted.org for information about the Association, including membership and convention details.

Cool Web Sites For Inquisitive Kids and Their Parents

Hoagies' Gifted Education Page, all-things gifted resource: www.hoagiesgifted.org

Prufrock Press, Inc., leading publisher of materials for gifted education and students: www.prufrock.com

Superkids webpage – provides reviews of educational software and fun educational online games: www.superkids.com

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“HARM” AND THE GIFTED STUDENT

The perception that “things could be better, but they're not all that bad” can cause parents to adopt a passive role when planning their gifted child's education.

- Todd McIntyre

** In order to disseminate multiple viewpoints on a wide range of topics involving gifted education, FRoG routinely publishes excerpts from articles that are, in whole or in part, opinions of the authors of such articles. The views expressed by these authors do not necessarily represent those of FRoG. **

An excerpt from an article by Todd McIntyre published on www.hoagiesgifted.org website. The full text of the article may be found at ww.hoagiesgifted.org/harm.htm

The perception that “things could be better, but they're not all that bad” can cause parents to adopt a passive role when planning their gifted child's education. Decisions are often left solely to the school district. In effect, the gifted child just drifts along. This “steady as she drifts” approach leads to educational situations that are unfortunate, foreseeable, and entirely preventable. For example, transitions between buildings, from elementary to middle school, middle school to high school are predictable events. Yet, in many cases, these transitions require a “start from scratch” approach to the creation of the gifted child's educational plan. To provide direction and continuity, direct parental involvement is needed.

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Friends of the Gifted and Talented 2008/2009 Meeting Calendar

FRoG meetings are held on the 4th Tuesday of each month from 7:15 to 9:00 pm in the large conference room on the second floor of the Downers Grove Public Library (near the 2nd floor reference desk). The meeting dates for the remainder of 2008 and first half of 2009 are as follows:

October 28

November 25

December – date to be decided

January 27

February 24

March 24

April 28

May 26

THE STAR

THE STAR IS PUBLISHED 3 TIMES A
YEAR BY THE FRIENDS OF THE
GIFTED AND TALENTED, INC.

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The consequence for the gifted student of a non-involved parent is that the child goes through his elementary and secondary education drifting rather than moving purposefully.

A Left-Handed Analogy

In many ways a child's giftedness is identical to her being left-handed. Each characteristic is part of who the child is. Compared to the overall student population, there are a relative few who fit the description. Also, there are varying degrees of each trait. And, it should be noted, the child will not outgrow the condition.

Giftedness issues can, to an extent, be illustrated more concretely to parents by substituting "left-handedness" for "giftedness" when considering the child's time in school. Think about what long-term harm occurs if your child is left-handed, but is made to use his right hand during classes.

Like gifted students, left-handed children are a distinct minority in the student population. Like gifted students, a child that is left-handed requires accommodation. For example, elementary school teachers differentiate their writing instruction for left-handed students. To be effective in their instruction, teachers must have an understanding of left-handedness. Left-handedness issues can be found in any given classroom at any given grade. Science labs would have safety issues with left-handed students working alongside right-handed students. There are hard dollar costs associated with accommodating left-handed children to consider as well. Separate left-handed desks, separate left-handed scissors, and other separate left-handed items are purchased. Once purchased, these items are inventoried.

Why Accommodate?

One fact is clear: Students who are left-handed can do their work right-handed. Were a teacher to place a pencil in a left-handed child's right hand, tell her to write, and insist that she does, something will be written. The district establishes performance expectations through a rubric. Should the rubric require that only right-handed techniques be appropriate, then right-handed instruction will take place. Since left-handed kids can work right-handed, they will produce work, which can be graded. From the district's perspective, there is no problem. The expectations for the students were clearly set at the beginning of the school year and the standards are being evenly applied. The District Policy is that the students must work using their right hands.

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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**Welcome From the New FROG President**

Welcome! As the incoming President, I'm excited to begin a new year of FROG programs.

FROG is made up of volunteers committed to supporting and enhancing our children's education. Since you are reading the newsletter, you're probably familiar with one of our programs:

Super Saturday - enrichment classes open to all students from Kindergarten through the 8th grade. Subjects include art, acting, robotics, bridge building, cooking and more.

Chess Tournaments – held twice a year, the non-rated 5-round tournaments are open to all chess players in grades K – 8. All levels of players are welcome.

Science Fair – FROG has a long history of working with District 58 on the Science Fair.

Last year, for the first time, we provided scholarships to three District 58 teachers to attend professional development courses on gifted education offered by the Illinois Association for Gifted Children (IAGC). We also hold social events throughout the year for kids, families and parents.

One of our key goals this year is to create even more enrichment opportunities for both children and parents. We would like to add new activities like a geography bee, an art exhibition and special presentations by local scientists and artists for the kids. For adults, we'd like to bring in experts to talk about challenges faced by the parents of gifted children.

What's stopping us? Each one of these ideas will take time and people to get them started.

I ask you to consider volunteering this year. There are lots of opportunities – we need judges for the science fair, coordinators for new activities, and hall monitors for Super Saturday. There are specific needs, but if you have an idea for another way for us to support our children and families let us know. Contact me directly at jhenderson@brightonmanagement.com or send an email to membership@dgfrog.org. Either way, I look forward to hearing from you.

In closing, I'd like to say a special Thank You to Bob & Carol Dunne and Vida Winans. Bob, Carol and Vida have been active board members since before I started participating with FROG six years ago. Their children have graduated from high school, but they have continued to actively support and lead our programs. They've been the backbone of the organization and we thank them for their commitment to gifted education and for leaving us with a solid foundation for the future.

Jamie Henderson

President, Downers Grove Friends of the Gifted and Talented

NUMATS! WHAT IS IT?

What is NUMATS?

It is the new name for Northwestern University's Midwest Academic Talent Search, the same program that has identified and served gifted students in the Midwest for almost 30 years. Many people know NUMATS by its former name, the Midwest Academic Talent Search (MATS).

NUMATS offers above grade-level testing, assessment and counseling to students identified as gifted and the parents of those students. Students who perform in the top 5-10% of grade-level school achievement tests are generally labeled as gifted and/or placed into a school district's gifted and talented program. However, these students tend to vary widely in their abilities and educational needs. An above-grade level test such as one offered by NUMATS is intended to provide much more detailed information about the academic ability and needs of these students.

Receiving and understanding the results of these tests can help students and their parents make wise decisions about courses to take and academic paths to pursue.

Participation guidelines

The NUMATS test option for students in 3rd through 6th grade is the EXPLORE test, created by the American College Testing Service (the same organization that developed the ACT test) normally given to 8th grade students. For 6th through 9th grade students, the ACT and SAT, well-known college admission tests, provide a more accurate gauge of students' mathematical and verbal reasoning abilities.

Registration is going on now for January 2009 testing for qualified students in grades 3-9. For more information, visit: www.ctd.northwestern.edu/mats/index.html

How can my gifted child make more friends?

An excerpt from an article by Dennis O'Brien published on the Gifted Resource Council website, www.giftedresourcecouncil.org

Making friends can be difficult for some gifted children. Often they are not in class with other gifted peers and do not feel comfortable with children who do not share their intellectual focus.

Here are some proactive things parents can do:

- Instead of focusing solely on intellectual prowess and achievement, make being well-rounded a goal for your child.
- Don't fall into the trap of serving as an approving audience for your child's one-dimensional focus on his intellectual abilities. Gifted children tend to seek adult companionship and approval. Adults who respond to this inappropriate approval-seeking unwittingly contribute to the arrested social development of a gifted child.
- Involve your child in activities that promote teamwork and cooperation, such as team sports, theater, or Scouting. Focus on activities that stress cooperation and fair play. Participating on a team in which her performance is average or below average will help a child develop empathy for others who do not excel at school.

“HARM” AND THE GIFTED STUDENT, *continued*

Is There Harm?

From the District's point of view there would be no obvious “harm” to the left-handed child at any given point. The District has provided the instruction it considers appropriate throughout the student's time in public school. In early elementary grades, the child would learn to write according to the district rubric. Moving into the later grades, the practices established in elementary education would be reinforced.

Having spent a significant amount of time being forced to use her right hand, the left-handed child would produce work. Over time with practice that work would improve. The left-handed child would likely meet the minimum standards needed to move on to the next grade, perhaps with extra effort and practice. From a District's point of view, using a curriculum-based standard, there is no harm. The child graduates; the obligation is fulfilled.

Where's the 'Harm'?

Harm, in this case, develops over time. Using the same model, consider what happens

from the perspective of the left-handed child.

Like giftedness, some children are more left-hand dominant than others. The more dominant the child's natural left-handedness, the more difficult it is for her to do tasks using her right hand.

From the left-handed child's point of view, her best efforts at doing her work “right-handed” begin awkwardly and remain so. The more leftie the child, the more difficult the basic tasks of school remain. The awkwardness would never really go away, regardless of the number of years spent doing work using her right hand. The student's natural inclination would be work differently than she was being shown. Yet, given the overall situation, she could not work that way. Such a child would muddle along, doing assignments as best he could, completing work, and, usually, passing on to the next grade.

Eventually, the left-handed child would graduate from high school having met the basic curriculum requirements. However, it should be noted, the child would never have worked to his natural ability. He would not have had the same opportunity to explore his strengths according to his nature as the right-handed kids

did. The harm that occurs to the child lies in the lack of opportunity to develop. Fortunately, some districts recognize the unique needs of left-handed students and are prepared to help them. Some districts might recognize that the needs of its left-handed students are unmet. A district that was particularly progressive might offer a program to its left-handed children.

Assessing the Obvious

Students would need to be assessed for left-handedness. To qualify for the Lefties program, the children suspected of being left-handed would first be screened. Once screening established the potential for left-handedness, the child would be formally tested. Teacher recommendations would factor in the decision as to whether the student was “really” left-handed. Some districts might include parent observations as well. The test results would confirm that the child is, in fact, left-handed. However, the left-handed child would also need to perform his classroom tasks well enough using his right hand to earn a place in the Leftie program.

'HARM' AND THE GIFTED STUDENT, *continued***Down the Hall**

The Pull-Out Lefties program takes those kids identified as being left-handed, pulls them out of their regular classes, has them go down the hall, and allows them to work left-handed for an hour or two each week.

The left-handed child leaves the regular education classroom and works with a teacher of the lefted. The Leftie program has a separate set of objectives, a separate rubric, and separate requirements for the class. Such a program allows the left-handed kids to work “naturally” perhaps for the first time in their time in school. Such students would likely enjoy their time in the Lefties program. For some students who are highly left-hand dominant, that Leftie program would be the highlight of each week. The Lefties program might be the only time during school when the left-handed kid could be considered happy.

But, at the end of the pull-out program time, the left-handed children return to their regular right handed classes. Once back in their normal seats, the left-handed students would not be allowed to work left-handedly

anymore. Further, any work missed due to Leftie pull-out would need to be made up, using their right hands. That is why pull-out programs cause harm.

"Change Hands"

Pull-out programs may be good. They may be fun. Pull-out programs may be the best part of a student's week. But a pull-out program by itself does not prevent harm. To develop their potential, left-handed children need to work according to their natures.

They need to work left-handedly in all subjects throughout the week. Students who have these needs must be with teachers that understand, take those needs into account, plan for them, and help the children develop their skills. Rather than simply allowing a left-handed student the opportunity to do so a few times a week, the student must be allowed to change hands, to do her work in all classes according to her nature.

The same is true for gifted students. To develop, gifted students must work as gifted students during significant parts of the day throughout the week. These students must work with teachers that are knowledgeable in the over-arching issue of

giftedness and have an understanding of each child's unique giftedness and a plan to teach that child.

Conclusion

For a gifted student, harm occurs over time. Parents must understand that their child can be in a “pretty good, not that bad” gifted educational situation which causes harm. Harm may be the unintentional result of a well-intentioned system. To prevent harm parents must participate. They must help plan. They must monitor. They must be involved.

The gifted child needs to be taught day-in/day-out according to his needs. Much as a left-handed student is leftie throughout the day, the gifted student should be in gifted-aware programming throughout the day. Pull-out programs alone will not work. Regular education must be included in a child's Gifted IEP and the parents' role is to see that it is.

Your gifted child's education should have as its purpose the goal of preparing him to meet the challenges that lie ahead according to his nature.

FROG MEMBERSHIP

If you would like to become a
FRoG member, please email
membership@dgfrog.org

Upcoming FRoG Events

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| November 2008 | Wine and cheese (parents only) (date TBA) |
| December 13, 2008 | Chess tournament |
| January 31, 2009 | Science fair |

Visit www.dgfrog.org for more information