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The United Parents Group



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Optimizing Instruction for the Gifted Learner

By Rhonda Feder

Children who are fast learners, or learn more intensely, create educational challenges similar to those all children give their parents and teachers: how best to ensure they gain one full year of academic benefit for each year they are in school. We should approach "gifted" learners as we should all learners – teach them from where they are and keep them moving forward. Of course, individual differences among students pose the biggest test to the promise of an appropriate education for all children.

What constitutes a year's worth of material depends largely on what a child already knows and how quickly she is going to learn new material. There is no one "program" that meets the needs of all children identified as gifted learners. In fact, there is no program that is going to meet the needs of any group of 25 children just because they happen to be all

the same age. Just like all children, each gifted child is unique and has unique needs.

When a parent notices a serious disconnect between his child's capability and the level or quality of the child's school work, the time is ripe for communicating with the teacher. The parent must be open and confident about what he knows of his child, but also must listen and hear what the teacher has to say. Parents should never be shy when it comes to talking about their children. Every child needs an advocate, and every parent can be an advocate for his child. We must also remember that our children's teachers may be their advocates too. We share one goal: teach children from where they are and keep them moving forward. When we do that, their natural love of learning will stay with them for a lifetime.

Making Connections

By Sherry Hanley

New technology gives parents and teachers easy access to one another. But parents still often wonder when they should contact teachers. At November's workshop on parent-teacher communication, cosponsored by United Parents Group and the Cheltenham African American Association, parents, teachers and administrators discussed methods that work.

By contacting teachers early in the school year, parents convey their expectations for their child, says Stacey Walker-Johnson, parent and workshop speaker. Parents can inform teachers about their child's unique interests in the Personal Education Profile, or PEP. LetterGrade, an online resource, helps parents stay on top of their child's

assignments and progress.

Parents and guardians also appreciate receiving email updates from school. Cedarbrook math teacher Sarah Putterman regularly emails her students' parents with news of all sorts, including excellent grades, missing homework, and class trips. According to Ms. Putterman: "Email has changed the way teachers and parents interact. When children know that their parents have an open line of communication with their teachers, they feel supported."

Parent-teacher conferences offer a condensed opportunity to interact in person. They can also trigger feelings of anxiety and intimidation. Parents
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**UPG is a non-profit organization of parents formally recognized by the School District.
The School District has not released your name, address or e-mail address to us, unless previously authorized by you.**

The United Parents Group

Mission Statement

The United Parents Group (UPG), an umbrella organization comprised of parent representatives from all the public schools in the Cheltenham School District, serves as a vehicle to facilitate communication among parents, administration and the school board to ensure the continued excellence of education provided by the District.

Please, check us out on the School District Web Site at:

www.cheltenham.org/upg

If you would like to be placed on our E-mail distribution list or if you have a question or concern you can contact us at:

UPG@Cheltenham.org

Teens, Parents, and Teachers are invited to attend a community conversation

Are Good Grades and High Achievement What It's About?

Whatever Happened to Childhood?

Keynote Speaker Jerry M. Greiner, Ph.D.
President, Arcadia University

Monday, March 14, 2005
7:00-9:30 PM

Cheltenham School District
Administration Building
1000 Ashbourne Road
Elkins Park

For more information
Call Renee Matson-Caringi
at 215-887-5024

Free babysitting available on site by calling in advance to Sandy DiGiulio at (215) 635-7186

Join Us

Wednesday, April 6 at 7:15 p.m. when Jule Anne Henstenburg, Professor at LaSalle University, will present: *Beyond Chicken Fingers and Fries: Food for Thought in a World of Plenty*
Also coming to the April and May UPG meetings: Discussions with high school Department Chairs.
All United Parents Group meetings are held at the School District Administration Building.

Making Connections continued...

can prepare for conferences by emailing specific questions beforehand. Honesty, courtesy, and good listening skills help ensure successful conferences.

Through conferences, email, PEP, LetterGrade, weekly folders, the Daily

Assignment Book, and the telephone, parents and teachers can connect in countless ways. Anything is possible when some of the most important people in a child's life achieve a meeting of the minds.

From the desk of...the Director of Gifted and Support Services

Each issue of the UPG Newsletter features a message from a representative of the Cheltenham School System.

Dear Parents and Guardians,

In the six months since I've become Director of Gifted and Support Programs at The School District of Cheltenham Township, I have already gotten to know many of you and your children. Thank you for welcoming me and for making me feel at home so quickly. I am delighted to be here, and feel fortunate to be working with such a forward thinking community, school board, superintendent and staff. Together we are creating a model gifted program that reflects the high standards of our district.

Gifted education has existed in some form in most Pennsylvania school districts for years. Traditional programming for the gifted amounted to little more than pull-out programs which provided enrichment for only a few of the students it might have benefited. Most districts admit that they are still operating under their old premises, running their old programs.

In Cheltenham we're not only maintaining the many enrichment programs our district has become known for, we're expanding these programs to include all of our students. At the same time, we're using data to select students who can succeed at a faster pace, matching our academic programming to their individual needs. We will neither *leave* nor *keep* any child behind. Students who are ready to advance will have more challenging work, not simply more work.

Our superintendent, assistant superintendent, education directors, principals, challenge consultants and teachers are full participants in our vision, and have the imagination to make the process work. We are developing research-based daily programming which enables all students to move at their own pace in any or all content areas. When any student is ready to advance academically, demonstrating mastery of grade-level material, he or she will move on. Moving on can take the form of in-class curricular extensions created by challenge consultants and administered by teachers; single subject acceleration; whole grade acceleration; and next year, subject area seminars. Whether identified as gifted or not according to state standards, children will have the opportunity to test out of material they have mastered, and to be challenged by new material.

This year our challenge consultants are developing extended curriculum to allow students to demonstrate mastery next year, and test out of redundant lessons. We were recently honored with one of only fifteen grants across the state to establish a Regional Summer School of Excellence for the Performing Arts. This program, a division of the Governor's Schools of Excellence, will run for the month of August 2005 and will enable us to recognize and nurture the gifts and talents of our artistic students as well.

Our plans are too numerous and our enthusiasm too great to be captured in a brief article. I encourage parents to look for details of these and all our programs on our school district website. If you have specific questions, feel free to contact the challenge consultant in your child's school or me with your questions.

Sincerely,
Kim Maguire