



Center for Talent Development  
Northwestern University  
School of Education and Social Policy

# Talent

Spring 2014



NORTHWESTERN  
UNIVERSITY

## Director's Message

### Promise and Possibility

Three cheers for spring! After a winter of polar vortices, at least here in the Midwest, we are all experiencing a little spring fever.

With the end of another school year approaching, the CTD staff is receiving a barrage of questions from parents and teachers: What should I be doing to plan for next year? How can I engage my gifted kids during the summer and prepare them for the challenges of next year? How can I educate my school on gifted education, including for children who also have a disability, without seeming like a know-it-all?

Navigating parent-teacher-school relationships can be tricky, especially for parents of gifted children. At the same time, though, the process is much like spring — full of possibility. When parents, teachers and administrators work cooperatively, gifted children have the best chance of staying engaged, maximizing their potential and fulfilling their academic promise. In this issue, we share tips and resources for collaboration.

And, for parents of twice exceptional children (gifted students who also have a disability), we spoke to school liaison and expert relationship-builder, Barbara Resnick. She shares her significant experience in making legislation — specifically Rtl and IEP plans — work for families.

We also want to remind you that you are not alone in this journey. CTD and the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) are here to help. The NAGC web site, for example, contains countless articles addressing everything from individual parent-teacher conferences to federal-level advocacy for gifted education. And call us — anytime — if you have questions.

Let's take advantage of the lengthening days, work together and embrace the promise of spring!

*Paula Olegowski-Kubilus*



## Working with Schools Advocating for Gifted Children with Learning Disabilities

**In first grade, the boy felt awkward and odd. His schoolwork was mediocre at best. He didn't make friends easily, and he cried a lot. In third grade, the boy's teacher turned his life around. She not only saw his strengths, she capitalized on them. For the first time, he felt comfortable with himself. He was happy, and that made all the difference.**

It is life-changing when a teacher recognizes a child's strengths and talents and creates a safe space in which that child can thrive. But what about the multitudes whose talent goes unrecognized and unsupported? For parents seeking the best education for their gifted children, those great teachers can seem elusive. And school systems, despite being well intentioned, can often seem like the enemy.

For gifted children to maximize their potential, particularly gifted children who also have a learning disability (often termed twice exceptional), parents, school systems, and individual administrators and teachers need to work together. To gain insight into how this is done well, Center for Talent Development spoke with Barbara Resnick, Educational Specialist and School Liaison on staff at Rush NeuroBehavioral Center in Chicago, Illinois. Resnick has worked in education for nearly three decades. In her current position, she has consulted with hundreds of families to ensure that their children — whether gifted, twice-exceptional or challenged by a learning disability — are given the support and services they need to work at their potential.

### **First, why is it harder for gifted children, twice exceptional or not, to receive support services in school systems today?**

One problem is that gifted kids — especially those with a learning disability — are not being identified. Many students with above average IQs have difficulty demonstrating

their ability within the classroom. In the past, school officials compared a child's IQ and his/her academic performance. If there was a discrepancy of at least 15 points, or one standard deviation, then those children were identified with a specific learning disability.

**Many students with above average IQs have difficulty demonstrating their ability within the classroom.**

Today, children are identified through legislation called Response to Intervention, or Rtl. Under Rtl, learning disabilities are identified not by comparing how a child looks in relation to other kids with whom they are being educated. This makes it difficult for gifted students to be identified. Even if they are performing below their ability level, they do not look lower than their peers.

All districts can still consider the discrepancy model and determine a child to be found eligible for services, but it's not usually done. Parents come in and say, "My child has an IQ of 130 but he is reading at 100." That is a significant discrepancy, but

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# Advocating for Gifted Children with Learning Disabilities

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the school will say, "First of all, that's average. Second, he is still performing at the same level or higher than other kids in his local environment."

## What are the benefits of Rtl, and what other support mechanisms exist?

If a child qualifies for services under Rtl, know that she can be given support immediately. There are three tiers of intervention: 1) instruction in a regular classroom; 2) instruction via a slightly different delivery method — often still in the classroom but in small groups; or 3) pull-out services, with instruction by a specialist.

Also, if a child is not making progress with Rtl, parents can — and should — request a case study. Through this process, some students will be found eligible for an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is a legal document with a specific goal. Rtl is not a legal document.

## What is your advice to parents who see a discrepancy between their child's ability and academic performance?

If a school is not identifying your child's needs, consider hiring a private evaluator. Based on the evaluator's recommendation, parents can then request an IEP. This process takes longer than Rtl, as the school district typically meets with you and the evaluator first and then conducts an evaluation of its own and has 60 days to do so. There is also the risk that the school will reject the private evaluation.

The benefit of an IEP, though, is that this legally binding document has a specific goal that is measured and monitored at specific points throughout the year. The parent also has a right to call an IEP review meeting at any time.

## How can parents ensure a successful case study or IEP review meeting?

1. **Bring someone with you to the meeting** — anyone who can be objective and help you stay calm.
2. **Listen first** to what the school has to say. Too often, a quick temper can derail a meeting before it starts.
3. **Document everything**, which focuses the conversation on facts. You may perceive your child is failing when he is really getting mostly Bs and only a few bad grades. Or you may think your child is doing fine when really she is falling behind. Save e-mail and all notes from the teacher. The

school might say, "Everything is fine," but then parents can say, "But here are his math papers this last month — all Fs and a few Cs."

4. **Listen to your child.** Does she not want to go to school? Does he take a nap or put his head down when he comes home? What does she say about school? Document these actions and events.

## Parents will be getting end-of-year MAP and other test scores soon. How can parents use these reports when advocating for their child?

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing is connected to Rtl and is done to measure growth. Students in first through eighth grade are given a test in math and reading in the fall, winter and spring. I have three pieces of advice for parents regarding MAP tests:

1. **Always ask for local norms.** Score reports typically include an individual child's score, the national norm and then the local school norm. Some schools, however, do not include the local norm. I always encourage parents to ask for local norms. If you're in a high-performing district, your child may not look discrepant nationally, but she can be very discrepant



## Plan Ahead for A Great School Year

Though May and June often focus on end of year activities, they are also prime months for planning for the next school year.

Why act now for next fall?

- Parents and educators have a year of achievement and growth data they can use to identify needs and consider next steps.
- There is time to address, proactively, concerns about achievement and to map out the best academic plan.
- There are still opportunities to engage in summer enrichment or accelerative programs and to conduct further assessment, if needed.
- Course schedules and staffing for the following year are often still being determined.

Parents and educators must work collaboratively to ensure the best results. The following tips and resources focus on three keys to success: establish and maintain trust, engage in effective advocacy and define achievement.

### Establish & Maintain Trust

Building positive, trusting relationships between teachers and parents will have a significant impact on what can be accomplished. Here are two excellent articles offering simple, straightforward advice:

- Dr. Christy McGee, "Building Trust at School" in *Parenting for High Potential* from the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC): [www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/PHP/PHP\\_Back\\_Issues/NAGC%20PHP%20Jan2013.pdf](http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/PHP/PHP_Back_Issues/NAGC%20PHP%20Jan2013.pdf)
- Robin M Schader and Rebecca Eckert, "School's Opening. How Do We Start Off on the Right Foot?" in *Connecting for High Potential* from NAGC: [www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/CHP/CHP%20-%2020fall%2005.pdf](http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/CHP/CHP%20-%2020fall%2005.pdf)

### Engage in Effective Advocacy

Making sure your gifted child is getting appropriately challenging curriculum requires ongoing communication. From identifying specific needs to deciding

locally. By having local norms, parents are able to say, "My child improved two points, but the school improved six points. What is the problem?"

**2. Don't be afraid to ask for winter scores.**

MAP scores are sent home in fall and spring, but schools typically do not send them home in winter. Schools administer MAP tests in the winter, so you have a right to those scores. Seeing a child's progression (or lack of it) through the year can be very informative.

**3. Use test scores to guide decision-making.**

While testing gets a lot of negative press, test scores can provide informative data points when determining what school might be best for your child and what amount/type of support a child needs.

Parents can ask themselves, "What district has the best gifted program?" and also, "Where will my child get the best support?" Once they've settled on a school, they can start the ongoing job of working cooperatively with the school to encourage a child's progress and success. ●



*Barbara Resnick, MS, is an educational specialist and a member of the clinical team at Rush NeuroBehavioral Center.*

*Resnick's role as school liaison focuses on supporting her colleagues, as well as the parents of patients, in working with school systems. Resnick supports families by reviewing private evaluations and school documents to develop educational programs, including suggestions for goals, accommodations and teaching strategies. She has knowledge of Response to Intervention, 504 Plans and the IEP process and has presented to her staff, at universities and parent groups on these topics.*

*Note: Resnick will be presenting a session for parents on The Twice Exceptional Gifted Child at CTD's annual Opportunities for the Future Conference on June 28, 2014 in Evanston, IL. For more information and to apply online, visit [www.ctd.northwestern.edu/ctd/outreach/familyconference/](http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/ctd/outreach/familyconference/).*

what is reasonable to ask for, effective advocacy is key. Make sure you can answer the following:

- What information do you have about academic performance (e.g., grade-level and above-grade-level test results, grades, work produced in and out of school)?
- Does your school have a gifted program in place? What is the philosophy and scope of services provided? Who are the contacts?
- What are your goals and expected outcomes for your child?

Ann Lupkowski-Shoplik, Director of the Carnegie Mellon Institute for Talented Elementary and Secondary Students, offers valuable and easy-to-use tips for effective advocacy in *Working with Your Child's School* found on the Davidson Institute website: [www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles\\_id\\_10558.aspx](http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles_id_10558.aspx). NAGC has a comprehensive Advocacy Toolkit online at [www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=36](http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=36).

## Define Achievement

Achievement is more than just grades. It includes building a good foundation for advanced education and learning how to study, persist and strive for excellence. Parents should talk with their children and with educators about what it means to achieve.

Parents need to think about the messages they give to their children both directly and inadvertently. You can learn more about defining achievement from Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, Director of CTD, in an article from *Parenting for High Potential*: [www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/PHP/PHP\\_Back\\_Issues/NAGC\\_PHP\\_Oct%202011.pdf](http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/PHP/PHP_Back_Issues/NAGC_PHP_Oct%202011.pdf).

It is never too early to plan for and support a child's progress and success. Being proactive will provide the best chance for children to develop their talents to the fullest and become bold, creative achievers and contributors.

## CTD's Summer Conference

### Keynote Speaker to Unpack Parent's Role in Gifted Student's Academic Achievement

Why do some gifted children tackle school eagerly and succeed academically while others are reluctant scholars, often disinterested and sometimes defiant? Dr. Sally Cobb Krisel, EdD, will answer this question during her keynote speech, "Parenting for Achievement," at Center for Talent Development's annual **Opportunities for the Future family conference** on Saturday, June 28, 2014.

As director of innovative and advanced programs for Hall County Schools in Georgia, Krisel leads innovative programming initiatives designed to help teachers recognize and develop the creative and cognitive abilities of children from culturally and linguistically diverse groups. Krisel is dedicated to raising academic standards for all students, including those who are gifted and talented.

During her talk, Krisel will examine key traits of high-achieving gifted students and a number of parenting practices that promote an achievement orientation. One factor that consistently distinguishes gifted achievers from gifted under-achievers, she says, is goal valuation.

Krisel says that parents can expect to leave her presentations with a better understanding of:

- the factors that predict gifted students' achievement orientation
- specific steps toward helping children see schoolwork's purpose and benefits — both short- and long-term
- the process for helping children value effort and growth and set realistic expectations for themselves.

Krisel envisions parent attendees being encouraged by the conference and able to say, "Yes, my gifted child's behavior sometimes frustrates me to no end! I can see from my vantage point as an adult how they may be hurting their chances for some opportunities in the future by not achieving like they could. I also know, though, that my child is wonderful and amazing, and we will continue to work on this together."





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## NEWS, DATES & OTHER IMPORTANT CTD INFORMATION

**CTD's 2014 Opportunities for the Future Conference for Gifted Students and Their Families**, June 28, 2014 Keynote Speaker Sally Krisel, EdD. Evanston, Illinois. More information at [www.ctd.northwestern.edu/outreach/familyconference](http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/outreach/familyconference).

**Gifted LearningLinks (GLL)** offers rigorous online courses for all ages. Nine-week enrichment courses for students in K through grade 8 start on June 15. Credit bearing honors, honors elective and AP® courses begin on the 15th of every month. The nine-week Accelerated Summer Option, offering credit-bearing courses for grades 6 through 12, also begins on June 15.

CTD's **Summer Program** provides rigorous, academic adventures that give gifted students the opportunity to delve deep into a subject of intrigue, build upon their strengths and connect with peers. The Summer Program returns to Elmhurst College with more course options for students completing grades 3 through 8. Commuter and residential programs are available for students age 4 through grade 12 at sites across Chicagoland.

The **Civic Education Project** combines service-learning with study and reflection.

Students in grades 7 through 12 engage with social issues first hand. Sessions are held in major urban sites across the country.

**Weekend Enrichment Programs** engage students age 4 through grade 9 in hands-on, in-depth activities. The wide variety of advanced and unique courses range in duration from a single weekend to six consecutive Saturdays.

- The **Saturday Enrichment Program** Fall Session begins on September 27 in locations throughout the Chicago area.

- **Accelerated Weekend Experience** programs explore topics in science, technology or engineering with an expert in the field. Sessions are offered in locations throughout the Midwest.

### **Northwestern University's Midwest Academic Talent Search (NUMATS)**

provides research-based assessments to accurately measure the academic ability and growth of high-achieving students as well as tailored resources for educators and families that support the development of identified talent areas. Registration for the 2014-2015 school year will open in August.

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Center for Talent Development has been accredited as a nonpublic supplementary school by the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) since April 1, 1994. NCA CASI is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and has more than 100 years of experience in improving educational quality.



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