

The Big Picture: Why Gifted Resource Council Programs Are Becoming Even More Important

Consider some of the things academically talented students need.

- ◆ Academic challenges
- ◆ Opportunities to interact with gifted peers
- ◆ Opportunities to communicate and cooperate in group situations
- ◆ Opportunities to discover and pursue their passions

What GRC Offers

GiftedResourceCouncil programs are designed to meet these needs. They combine high-interest curricula with an engaging, hands-on approach. Saturday Learning Labs offer students unique opportunities designed by amazingly talented teachers to sample 40 topics each semester to discover what their interests are. Summer Academies allow children to delve more deeply into an area of special interest ranging from the history and culture of China to the interaction of the economy and ecology. Academic Challenge Cup enables children to stretch their math, language and creative problem-solving skills. Because GRC students are not graded, they may pursue their passions without worrying about getting all A's.

In addition to engaging academic challenges, all GRC programs are designed to help children interact cooperatively with gifted peers. In fact, one of the distinguishing features of GRC programs is its emphasis on helping gifted children develop social skills that they may otherwise fail to develop

because of too much emphasis by adults on their giftedness and too little attention on personal growth.

- ◆ Gifted children often focus on winning approval from parents, teachers and other adults for their academic prowess.
- ◆ Positive relationships with peers may fail to develop,

and the gifted child has difficulty developing age-appropriate social skills and friendships.

- ◆ A desire to excel academically by getting top grades may replace a genuine, lifelong love of learning. This can be crippling.

GRC also offers parents many opportunities to learn to understand the unique challenges they face as parents of a gifted child. GRC offers parenting workshops and provides valuable tips for parents in a variety of articles at www.giftedresourcecouncil.org.

GRC Grandparents Day

Gifted Resource Council is offering a first-time event for children and their grandparents. Children will have the opportunity to show their grandparents what they are doing and how they are benefiting from their participation in GRC's Summer Academies at a special GRC Grandparents Event at the History Museum in Forest Park on Tuesday, July 25, 6-8 p.m.

This is a new intergenerational opportunity sponsored by GRC. Grandparents can pick their child up after camp and drive directly to the History Museum for family fun!

Grandparents can engage in learning activities with their child, meet teachers, learn how GRC benefits bright children, view the Benjamin Franklin exhibit and participate in docent-led tours of Seeking St. Louis exhibits of immigrant life in the area from 1764 to the present.

Families must register in advance. The cost of admission is only \$15 per grandparent and child. For more information, call 314-962-5920.

The School Dilemma

Because they learn more rapidly than their classmates, gifted students often become bored with the pace of school. In order to thrive, they need to be stimulated and challenged much more than they can be in a normal classroom situation.

Some schools do offer programs for gifted students that meet some of their special needs. For example, some schools and teachers "compact" the curriculum so gifted students can skip the rote repetition once they have mastered a skill

Dialogue with the Director

Please support us! Thank you!

How often have you heard those words, either in person or on paper? Perhaps you feel that “please support us” is stated too often. Hopefully, you know the “thank you” is spoken just as sincerely.

To not-for-profit organizations everywhere, and to Gifted Resource Council in particular, the challenge of securing funds to support our work is increasingly daunting. GRC is a totally independent educational organization. Our income is directly received from parents and schools in the form of tuition and fees, as well as from gifts and grants donated by individuals, corporations and foundations.

How important are donations to GRC? Vitally important! Tuition and fees cover only 72% of the cost of GRC’s various programs. Thus, the remainder of the cost of providing exceptional quality enrichment activities for children throughout the metropolitan area must come from the generosity of GRC’s supporters.

Gifted Resource Council has truly been blessed with passionate supporters through the years. Our advocates donate their time and talents as well as their treasure. Many of our donors have been loyal supporters for almost the entire life of the organization – over twenty years!

Indeed, GRC has more recently been blessed with

generous donors who contribute more than the \$250 “Patron” level. Thus, we will soon add \$500 and \$1,000 levels of giving, in order to more adequately recognize those individuals and families who are supporting GRC at a higher level.

Many individual donors are also able to maximize their gift with a match from their employer. For the first time, in this issue of *mindwonders*, we are recognizing the companies that match contributions to Gifted Resource Council. Please review the list, and ask your employer to consider joining those who match donations to GRC.

Thank you! Words sincerely and gratefully spoken by more than 2,500 children who participate in GRC’s programs each year. Thank you! From the scholarship recipients who engage in growth-filled opportunities,

whether in Space Academy or Academy Americana or Learning Labs. Thank you! From the dedicated teachers and staff who enthusiastically share their special talents with children whose gifts must continue to be nurtured, now more than ever. Thank you!



Sue Flesch, GRC executive director



*An Ancient Academy
'Scholar' intently works
on her amphora.*



*A big smile goes with creative
learning at GRC's Summer
Academies.*

A Master Teacher Empowers GRC Students

Arthur Koenig, A.M., foreign language instructor at Dewey (Magnet) International Studies School, St. Louis Public Schools, has previously taught German at Meramec Community College and for the Kirkwood School District. Koenig has taught for Gifted Resource Council for the past nine years. During that period of time he has taught Ancient Academy during the summer and Learning Labs on mythology, German, ancient cultures and Harry Potter.

According to Koenig, teaching gifted students is a challenge. “Their level of basic knowledge is greater, their interest in the subjects is more enthusiastic, and their ability to integrate their newfound knowledge and skills are much more evident than in a regular classroom,” he said.

“How do you make a class interesting for kids who are often voracious readers and try to exhaust the subject before you get to them? I once had a conversation with a second-grader who was beginning to read Herodotus, the Greek historian who traveled the ancient world. Would simple grade-school materials be enough to satisfy such restless intellects? I bet not. What I try to do is use my knowledge of their areas of interest to pique their curiosity and thereby make further exploration possible.”

Koenig is indeed a master at engaging academically gifted students in team projects that challenge them individually and yet depend on cooperation for success. “I am always amazed at the ease with which these students adapt to new information and are able to integrate it almost immediately into their body of knowledge. For example, students in Ancient Academy recreated a pilgrimage to Bubastis, the home of the goddess Bastet in ancient Egypt. With very little guidance, a fourth grader developed a litany to be spoken by priests and devotees upon the return of the image of the goddess to her temple. These kids were able to explore a topic and offer a

three-dimensional rendering of what they learned in the process. They transformed a life-size cardboard boat which did double duty as a barge for the return to Bubastis and, with later modifications, a funeral boat carrying the dear departed to the Afterlife.”

Koenig wants parents to know that “GRC programs are valuable because they tap into interests, needs and experiences which can only be addressed in a more academic manner in regular classes.

We reserve the right to have fun. The classes I teach will be offering children opportunities for growth and information not just for the duration of the class, but for the life span of the lifelong learner.”



Art Koenig, having been crowned and 'feted' by his students.

GRC Teachers Earn Recognition

Gifted Resource Council recruits some of the most experienced and talented teachers in the metropolitan area to inspire and guide our students. In addition, GRC provides in-service training sessions to reinforce its exploratory, hands-on approach to learning. Two GRC science teachers were recently recognized for their outstanding contributions to education in

the metropolitan area.

Kathleen Murphy, M.Ed., was selected for the Shining Star Award by the St. Louis Science Center. Murphy, who also teaches 7th grade science at Ladue Middle School, has a wealth of experiences teaching for Gifted Resource Council over the past nine years. “The students at GRC are excited and eager to learn. There are very few discipline problems, and we can learn a lot in a short amount of time,” she said. “The students’ positive attitudes make our classes quite enjoyable.”

Allen Russell, M.Ed., was recognized as one of the 2006 Lindbergh Leaders and has just recently been selected as Teacher of the Year in the Lindbergh School District. Russell, who also teaches 8th grade science at Sperrerg Middle School, has been teaching space science for eight years for GRC. Once again this summer, he and Kathleen Murphy will both teach Advanced Space Academy as part of Gifted Resource Council’s Summer Academies.

Thanks to...

. . .the following individuals who made financial contributions to Gifted Resource Council from May 2005 through April 2006. We apologize for any names which may have been inadvertently omitted or misspelled.

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I am also interested in helping as a volunteer. Please contact me.

Please mail check to: Gifted Resource Council, 357 Marshall Ave., Suite 6, St. Louis, MO 63119-1827

How can we make sure our gifted child gets the most out of her summer?

By Dennis O'Brien

With so many schools beginning in mid-August and ending mid-May, summer starts and ends earlier than before. Without careful planning by parents, a child's summer may lapse into unproductive idleness punctuated by spurts of chaotic activities or unanticipated demands on parents. None of this takes advantage of the special opportunity summer vacation offers for personal growth and family bonding. The following ideas can help parents make good things happen for their children.

✓ Anticipate your child's needs. Planning for a productive, healthy summer means blending relaxation, structured activities, academics and family time. It may be helpful to identify any special goals you have for your child. For example, learning to socialize more comfortably with peers or work cooperatively with others may be important skills for gifted children—who so often are inclined to see themselves as different from others—to work on.

✓ Balance activities, routines and down time. Children should maintain a regular rhythm of when they rise, when they go to bed, when they do chores and when they can expect to participate in family meals and activities. They also need to be involved in responsible activities.

But healthy structure doesn't mean that children should be busy all the time. Some parents keep their children scheduled nearly all the time. They confuse good parenting with doing their utmost to develop a child's talents, maximizing every opportunity and scheduling the child to the limit. Constant activity is stressful, especially when always focused on improvement rather than recreation. This is a mistake. Downtime must be a part of any healthy mix.

✓ Define limits and responsibilities. Set reasonable daily limits on the amount of time children spend watching television, playing electronic games or amusing themselves on the computer. The time children spend doing chores can be increased over the summer. Some major jobs can be assigned over an extended period of time for older children.

✓ Schedule physical activity into your child's week. In addition to setting limits on sedentary activities, it is important to promote physical activities. Offer suggestions about activities that can be done either individually or with others. Scheduling physical activity makes it much more likely to occur. Be sure your child has the clothing, shoes and athletic equipment she needs. Offer to provide transportation if it is necessary. Make sure you model physical activity yourself, and plan physical activities for your family.

✓ Involve your children in planning family and personal activities. This gives them more ownership of the results, and ensures that all your family's needs will be included.

Brainstorm together, and list all of the activities each family member would like to do over the summer: for example, biking on the Katy Trail, going to a Cardinals game, exploring the Science Center or the History Museum, visiting grandparents,

reading twenty books, vacationing at the lake or enjoying one of the many area parks.

Take a calendar and note when some of these events need to be scheduled and when the rest can be worked in. Post the family "wish list," and check each item off when it has been accomplished. Review and celebrate your accomplishments together at the end of the summer season.

✓ Make academics part of the mix. Three months is too long for an academically talented child to go without intellectual stimulation and skill building.

For starters, expect your child to read for pleasure an hour each day. Keep a record, and set achievable goals for your child's reading. Many libraries hold special summer reading programs for children, with intermittent rewards along the way.

Look for other ways to put fun and structure into learning. For example, Gifted Resource Council offers 11 challenging, hands-on, enrichment day camps.

If your child has an academic weakness, design a plan to overcome it, including structured assignments, regular homework times and supervision throughout the summer. This could be a top priority. If it is a serious deficit, consider tutoring.

✓ Encourage your child to pursue her passions. Gifted children often have strong interests they cannot explore during the regular school year. The summer is an ideal time for a child to explore these interests. This may be done independently, or with some parental guidance, or by enrolling a child in the Summer Academies sponsored by Gifted Resource Council.

A word of caution for stay-at-home moms: be careful that misplaced guilt about not spending "quality time" with your child does not prevent you from sending your child to a structured program where she can benefit from the challenge, stimulation and interaction with others. For example, attending a sleep-away camp or a second two-week Summer Academy may be more valuable for a child than more time at home with mom.

✓ Arrange for community service. Teens who are too young to hold a job can expand their own horizons and benefit others by engaging in community service. They also learn the importance of being punctual and responsible, and how to take direction and cooperate with others while performing some very unglamorous tasks.

Volunteer opportunities are readily available through churches, hospitals and many nonprofit agencies, although you may have to provide transportation to and from the site.

✓ Vacation as a family. Summer is a time for all the family to do things together, not just for mom and the kids. Make sure both parents are involved in recreational activities with the entire family.

✓ Have a great summer. Using these tips will help you, your gifted child and your entire family have a productive, enjoyable and growth-filled summer.

The Big Picture, continued from page 1

or understand the material. Some schools and teachers try to give gifted students additional academic challenges. Some pull academically talented students out of their regular classes for a few hours or even a full day each week so they can work on more challenging materials with other gifted children. This is all good.

But the problem is that not enough schools offer these supportive programs, and most of those that do are unable to offer enough support. And the situation is only getting worse, due in part to federal and state legislation.

Federal Issues

“Gifted education has been underfunded for years. The No Child Left Behind legislation, which is also seriously underfunded, makes it even worse, especially in the elementary schools,” said Dr. Sally Reis, the principal investigator of the federally funded National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented located at the University of Connecticut. “Text books have been ‘dumbed down,’ teachers focus on helping students who need remediation improve their test scores, and grade-level students drift. Many gifted students are bored out of their minds because teachers don’t modify the curriculum to challenge them.”

Academically talented students have the potential to make remarkable contributions to the world community, but without effective support, they may underachieve in school, become behavior problems or drop out of the educational system all together.

“The No Child Left Behind legislation forces educators to focus on what kids do poorly instead of nurturing the strengths and talents of all children,” said Dr. Susan Baum, an international consultant on gifted education and professor at the College of New Rochelle. “Because of this short-sighted focus on raising test scores, teachers are evaluated on their efforts to bring up the bottom and make everyone equal. As a result they don’t ‘waste time’ challenging bright and talented students.”



Captain Gentili demonstrates the Personal Satellite Assistant for Space Academy cadets.

Academy Americana students combine technology and American history.



The Missouri Crisis

Missouri lawmakers recently have made this situation much more perilous. The state currently ranks 16th in the nation in its support for gifted education—a fact that should make all Missourians proud! But new funding guidelines threaten this level of support.

“Instead of \$24.5 million being earmarked for the education of gifted children, these funds will simply be included in the overall state budget for education,” said Kyna Iman, legislative consultant of the Gifted Association of Missouri (GAM). “Beginning in the fall of 2006, the use of these funds will be up to local school boards, and the temptation will be to shift them to other needs.”

There is concern that some school districts might abandon gifted programs altogether.

“Unfortunately, as the percentage of reimbursement has decreased, districts have eliminated their gifted programs. Of the 330 districts in the state that once established gifted programs, only 295 currently remain,” said Michelle Ryder, coordinator of gifted programs in the Lindbergh School District and administrator of the area-wide Program for Exceptionally Gifted Students (PEGS).

“If districts do not see any money directly earmarked for gifted programming, we fear others will follow this course,” she said. “Of the 295 districts with state-assisted programs, 65 percent have only one gifted teacher K-12, and 15 percent have only two teachers. We must do better.”

Iman encourages parents to “write or e-mail your legislators in support of gifted education issues” and to “educate local school boards about the importance of funding education for gifted children.”

GRC’s Role

At the moment, Gifted Resource Council offers 2,500 gifted students per year special opportunities for healthy social and intellectual development that they otherwise may not have an opportunity to experience. However, if funds continue to be drained from gifted education in the public schools, enrichment programs like those sponsored by Gifted Resource Council will become even more important as the place to nurture the gifts of academically talented children.

mindwonders

informs the public about activities of Gifted Resource Council and about issues relevant to the development of bright and talented children and youth.

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Call 314-962-5920

Gifted Resource Council is a not-for-profit education agency serving the greater St. Louis Metropolitan area. Its purpose is to bring together the resources of the community, the schools and parents to help bright and talented children achieve their potential.