

Moving Forward: GRC Draws on 25 Years of Success, Resources to Empower Tomorrow's Gifted Leaders

Having recently celebrated its 25th anniversary with exciting, hands-on, high interest activities featuring ecology and green science, Gifted Resource Council now looks forward to its second quarter century of providing gifted students with the challenging enrichment activities and inspiration they need to become the leaders of tomorrow. The 2009 Summer Academies are the first phase of this new journey.

Summer Academies: From Ancient Times to Space Travel

GRC offers eleven two-week academic day camps in a variety of topics, ranging from ancient times to tomorrow's looming challenges. Students who want to prepare for the future by looking back on history or the evolution of planet earth can reenact life in ancient Egypt, learn about dinosaurs, fossils and continental drift, or in Academy Americana pack their own 'Conestoga wagon' as our forebears did before heading west in the mid-1800s.

Advancing toward their future, students with a love of science can celebrate the 40th anniversary of the original moon walk by joining other young engineers and scientists in Space Academy and Advanced Space Academy. As always, these astronauts will build and launch their own model aircraft and rockets. In addition to designing a space station and trying a 'moon walk,' cadets will consider green ecology in space and try to create recycling systems for living in space. How do you reuse water? Grow your own food using hydroponics? What could be more future-looking—and greener—than that?

Young Economists Prepare for Green Future

ECO Academy also anticipates future needs as our upcoming leaders learn to handle all aspects of growing a business: finance, sales, marketing and production. But that's just part of the challenge. These young entrepreneurs must deal with their economic challenges while also respecting the environment: recycling, reusing and conserving. Can it be done successfully? Of course, because it must be, and these future leaders are acquiring the orientation and some of the skills that will enable them to soon do it for real—to the benefit of us all.

Robotics Enrich Space Academy Experience

GRC has recently purchased nine Lego Robotics kits so that GRC's aeronautical engineers can experiment with building robots. "Students build their own robot from their own ideas," said Dave Gentili, a teacher at Fairmount Elementary in the Francis Howell School District and with GRC's Space Academy. "They will use a computer to program their robot to do a task they have in mind." Using Lego Robotics kits, the students can create 'lunar rovers' and 'space probes.'

It's more than great fun. "Robotics is an excellent medium to teach students about the uses of technology in space,"

said Kathleen Murphy, a science teacher at Ladue Middle School and GRC's Advanced Space Academy. "Most important, students are able to use their creativity to design and engineer a variety of solutions to problems which we haven't discovered yet."

Academic Challenge Cup Inspires Future Leaders

More than 1,700 students attended the 25th annual Academic Challenge Cup (ACC) sponsored by GRC over seven days in January and March 2009. Five-member teams came

to the campus of Washington University for these friendly competitions in creativity (grades 2-3), language arts (grades 4-8) and mathematics (grades 3-8) from 98 schools and 18 districts. Their academic gains are much greater than might be expected of a three-hour event because they worked for months with other academically talented children to master challenging material. Last fall children begin honing their skills during recess or after school under the guidance of volunteer coaches trained by GRC.

"I'm just thrilled she likes math enough to opt for it in a special after-school enrichment class," said Jenny Wolkowitz, mother of a third grader who participated with the Solomon Schechter School team. "I wasn't even aware of the competition when I first signed her up for it. It is my hope that this will foster a life-long confidence in math. I had no idea what to expect from the competition, but I thought it was really inspiring for the kids."

In addition to academic challenges, ACC—like all GRC

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**NEW LOCATION
for
Summer Academies 2009**

**Captain Elementary School
6345 Northwood
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Dialogue with the Director

Is the United States' educational system producing students who can achieve at the highest levels compared with students from other countries? Are our math and science scores continuing to decline? Where will we find the highly educated people to expand our influence in the global economy of the future? Indeed, STEM initiatives are everywhere – in gifted education magazines, the local newspaper and the Web.

STEM issues – developing America's future scientists, technologists, engineers and mathematicians – are really not new concerns. Some would contend that the establishment of West Point in 1802 could be considered a response to STEM issues! Fifty years ago our nation's response to the launch of Sputnik in 1957, galvanized attention on expanded educational opportunities in the fields of math and science.

How does this relate to Gifted Resource Council, you ask? GRC in its first twenty-five years has frequently focused on math and science activities – from Space Academy to Equations competitions and more. The popularity of classes with the word “experiments” in the title cannot be denied! Yes, GRC has offered hundreds of classes for children in the areas of math and science and technology since 1983. These classes are especially exciting for students because of their “hands-on” nature. This is not science read from a book, but science discovered!

It is very clear through the selection of Saturday Learning Lab classes that gifted children and their parents want more science than is typically found in the regular classroom – especially in the early elementary grades. Understandably, their teachers, who have been trained as generalists, sometimes do not have the background which would allow them

to be comfortable with the “hands-on” activities that children relish.

Now Gifted Resource Council is beginning a venture to assist early elementary teachers with science education. Who better to work with teachers in this field than our own Mr. G. (Dennis Grzeczyk)? With more than 15 years' experience teaching with GRC's Saturday Learning Labs, Space Academy and the science component of Math, Marvels & More, Dennis is truly an expert in engaging young minds with scientific principals through “fun” classroom activities. Just ask any parent of a child who has participated in one of Mr. G.'s science-based classes – or observe the face of a child exiting his classroom – and you will see first-hand the joy of science!

Best of all, Dennis has agreed to offer a class for teachers who want to expand their abilities and explore ways to foster that same joy of science in their regular classrooms. Beginning this fall,

GRC will provide the opportunity for as many as 20 teachers to learn from Mr. G. in a workshop setting and then participate in the “hands-on” experience of teaching children during several Saturdays of GRC's Fall 2009 Learning Lab.

Now is the time to consider this opportunity for the beginning of the next school year – and to tell your child's teacher or school's principal. Watch for details of workshop times and locations in GRC's Fall Learning Lab brochure. Support the efforts of your child's teacher to become more comfortable with “hands-on” science and gain some practical tools to do so. And help Gifted Resource Council do its part to encourage future scientists, technologists, engineers and mathematicians for the 21st century....



Sue Flesch, GRC executive director



Mr. G. explains the physics of Eggbert.



Bob Coulter, Chris Dadian and Tom Campbell (GRC's three Equations "gurus") together at GRC's Academic Challenge Cup at Washington University.

Susan C. Flesch

GRC Benefits from Computer Skills, Dedication of Volunteer over 15 Years

Tom Campbell, Senior Technical Architect with the IS Infrastructure Department of Edward Jones, began volunteering with Gifted Resource Council 15 years ago, and his efforts have been a big factor in enabling the Equations and Linguistics portions of Academic Challenge Cup to expand from 30 teams to over 300. His work has given thousands of students the opportunity to enrich their educational experience and skills playing this ever-evolving mathematics game. “We could not be more grateful to Tom for all that he has done expanding our capacity to reach so many more thousands of children,” said Executive Director Susan Flesch. “Though the student participants may not know it, they have been enriched by his efforts.”

Recognized Value as Teaching Aid

In the fall of 1994, Campbell attended a GRC seminar on the Equations game with an eye to helping his third grade son and sixth grade daughter learn the game and possibly play with other teams and schools in the area during Academic Challenge Cup, then in its tenth year. Soon he joined other teachers and parents in the School District of University City working after school and on weekends helping students refine their math skills in order to play the game.

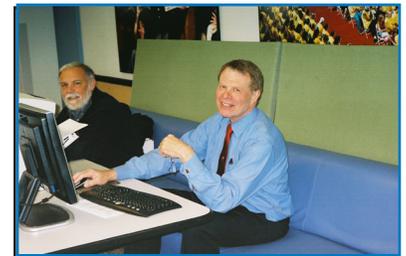
“The value of the game as a teaching aid for multiplication and division tables for third grade and algebraic manipulation for higher grades became readily apparent as our group of kids enthusiastically engaged each other with increasingly more challenging problems and solutions,” Campbell said.

“While attending a GRC refresher course for parents on the game, Chris Dadian (another longtime volunteer and current GRC board member) and I were surprised to learn how few schools and teams from the area were actually involved in GRC’s Academic Challenge Cup, and that administering and scoring of the tournament by hand using a spreadsheet was a major impediment to expanding this growth opportunity to more players,” Tom said.

Volunteers Take Initiative to Improve GRC, Reach More Children

As result, Campbell and Dadian approached Beverly Berla, the executive director of GRC at the time, with the idea of using a database for routing players to tables, for pre-printing table and player sheets, and for entry of the student results to assist in the scoring and tallies.

Together they put in the hours of hard work to create the computer program that forms the basis for the tournament procedures in use today. The process has gone through three major revisions enabling the



Tom Campbell takes a break from his computer scoring work at GRC’s Equations competition in March.

tournament to expand from 30 teams to over 300.

Campbell, Dadian and GRC board member Bob Coulter have continued to work with various school districts to expand the game as a teaching aid to all students and to promote the programs of Gifted Resource Council. “I have also been fortunate enough to be employed by a company (Edward Jones) that also appreciates a long-term investment strategy, and that has supported me by providing computer/printer resources to assist GRC and its volunteers to expand the reach of Academic Challenge Cup,” he said.

Stimulating Young Minds to Grow and Expand

Campbell’s own children have passed through GRC and its Academic Challenge Cup competitions years ago, but he continues to volunteer his time to tally the complicated score sheets of the games five mornings a year. What motivates him? Campbell understands how children benefit from the ACC games, he said.

“The need to teach a child basic arithmetic skills, to help him or her feel comfortable

Computer Skills, continued on page 7

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Parents Ask: How Can We Encourage Our Child's Teacher to Pay More Attention to Giftedness?

By Dennis O'Brien

An effective parent-teacher or parent-counselor partnership can make a significant difference in a gifted child's education. However, it is important to keep in mind that there can be many reasons that a well-intentioned teacher might not be able to meet your child's needs as well as you would like. Teachers have many children demanding their time and attention, not just your child.

Another thing to keep in mind is that most classroom teachers, through no fault of their own, have not been prepared to adapt their teaching style to gifted children. In Missouri, teachers are exposed to only one class—not a course, just one class—on gifted education as part of the Psychology of the Exceptional Child course that is required for certification. Thus, however genuine her concerns for your child, your child's teacher may not be equipped to maximize his learning opportunities.

That said, a good conference can help a busy teacher focus on what your child needs and lay the groundwork for productive teamwork with you. So, if the school does not schedule a conference routinely, go ahead and schedule one yourself. Frame your request this way when you call: *We'd like to check on our child's progress and see what you think we could do to help you.*

Here are some practical suggestions to make the conference as productive as your child needs it to be.

- ☞ Approach the conference with a positive attitude. View it as an opportunity to team-up with the teacher, refine your child's individual learning plan and make sure the roles of teacher, student, and parents are clear, specific and designed to bring out the best in your child.

- ☞ Don't take your child's experience at school for granted. Talk to your child about his experiences on a daily basis.

Asking, "How was your day?" is a good, opened-ended conversation-starter. However, you also need to ask follow-up questions about different aspects of school ranging from your child's social life ("Who did you play with at recess?") to academics ("What did you learn in science today?").

Ask what your child likes and doesn't like about school, and what is and what isn't challenging. Parents who understand school as their child experiences it are in a much better position to coach, encourage or intervene appropriately.

- ☞ Discuss your questions and concerns with your spouse at least a week before the parent-teacher conference. Identify the information you wish to impart to the teacher. Make notes to remind yourselves of key points to cover during the conference. Review reports and check your files to see if they remind you of important topics you may have missed. Be clear in your own mind about your child's strengths, weaknesses and appropriate goals. Identify current challenges and the gains your child seems to be making as a student and as a social person.

- ☞ Make sure you and your spouse are on the same page prior to the conference. Try to resolve significant differences in either your perceptions of what the facts are or in what you would like to see done to help your child improve. Even if you cannot

agree on everything before meeting, just having your questions and differing perceptions clear will make the conference more productive. If you cannot agree, ask for more input at the conference from the teacher to clarify your perceptions.

- ☞ Cultivate a team approach with the teacher. Encourage her to share her perceptions before raising your concerns. Identify areas of agreement and ask clarifying questions about others. Paraphrase frequently and summarize periodically to assure clarity and mutual agreement on key points. Be sure to thank the teacher for meeting with you and for making extra efforts to reach your child.

- ☞ Be sure to stress your interest in your child's social skills and progress developing relationships with peers. Too often parents of gifted students focus narrowly on their child's academic progress—to the detriment of the development of the whole child.

- ☞ Take notes during the conference. Although things seem clear while you are talking about them, good notes will help you remember accurately.

- ☞ Agree to a specific plan for your child. This may be as simple as continuing to do the things that are already working at home and school, or it may involve planning extracurricular activities with peers, creating a special study space at home, arranging for compacting homework or researching some challenging special assignments for your child to do.

Part of a good plan also means scheduling a time to meet again to reassess both the progress that has been made and the plan itself.

- ☞ Offer resources in a tactful way. GRC has a lending library of books and periodicals that you can make available for a teacher. In addition, you might want to inform the teacher about the workshops GRC offers parents and teachers throughout the year. There will be no charge for the teacher if you let GRC know whom to expect in advance.

- ☞ Offer to support the teacher in practical ways. Ask how you can free up some of her time to design special assignments for your child and other gifted students in her class by volunteering. Do some students need tutoring? Can you help with the bulletin board? What else would free up some of her time?

Parents who utilize these simple, common sense strategies will significantly increase the chances that school will be the successful experience they want for their children.

Dennis O'Brien is a licensed clinical social worker, experienced educator and therapist. In addition to writing educational materials for the Washington University School of Medicine Dept. of Psychiatry, he writes weekly columns on parenting for the Suburban Journals, monthly columns for Savvyfamily, and occasional columns for other publications.

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programs—fosters teamwork, cooperation and the friendly aspects of competition in an effort to develop the social skills that gifted children need in order to grow into leadership positions as young adults and parents themselves. “It was wonderful to see kids of every color and from every walk of life in a room of healthy academic competition,” Wolkowitz said. “It reminds me of what is great about the United States of America!”

GRC Expands Financial Commitment

GRC’s commitment to the future of academically talented students extends to helping as many as possible participate in the Summer Academies during this recession period. To do so, GRC has not raised tuition and generated additional resources to offer scholarships ranging from \$100 to \$385. “A \$100 or \$200 scholarship can make a big difference during these challenging economic times for middleclass families that, under normal circumstances, would never consider applying for aid,” said executive director Susan Flesch. “I hope more families will consider taking advantage of this opportunity.”

GRC Fosters Smart Parenting

Because it was started by parents, GRC has a longstanding commitment to helping parents meet the challenges of raising a gifted child. Parenting workshops by educators and psychologists who are experts in working with gifted children are available for little or no cost to parents while their children are participating in GRC events. Every issue of mindwonders contains a thoughtful article full of valuable tips for parents, ranging from how to communicate with a gifted child to dealing with being average in some areas, boredom in school and nurturing healthy self-esteem. These articles by psychologist Dennis O’Brien can be found at www.giftedresourcecouncil.org. The article in this issue contains tips about how to maximize cooperation with your child’s teacher.

In addition, GRC co-sponsors a biennial conference for educators and parents of gifted students with the University of Missouri-St. Louis, the Gifted Association of Missouri and SAGE. GRC also alerts parents and teachers to other educational opportunities in the area, such as the 56th Annual Convention of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) to be held in St. Louis November 5-8. In addition to keynote speaker Howard Gardner, who has authored more than 20 books, the conference will have six mini-keynote addresses and 360 breakout sessions covering a rich spectrum of interesting topics. For more information, visit: www.giftedresourcecouncil.org.

Looking Forward

“GRC is committed to helping young people prepare for the challenges of leadership in the 21st century,” said Flesch. “All our programs are designed to give them the hands-on enriching academic challenges that will stir their curiosity and creativity, while stressing the importance of acquiring the social skills that will enable them to work effectively with others. We also will continue to offer opportunities for both parents and teachers to effectively nurture their growth.”

Computer Skills, continued from page 3

with algebra and potentially higher mathematics will always be with us, especially in this age of automation and computing,” Campbell said. “It is essential to make this learning process both fun and rewarding, to stimulate young minds to grow and expand — to seek the next level. Equations, Computer Skills, LinqiSHTIK, and the other programs of Gifted Resource Council are an important factor in that process.”

Society Benefits

“As a society we need to innovate in new ways, to improve the education of our young, to prepare them for the challenges and opportunities that will face them both locally and globally in future generations,” Campbell continued. “I hope I have contributed, and will continue to contribute, in my own small way, toward that innovative process.”

GRC’s grateful executive director agrees. “Tom has certainly made major contributions both to GRC’s Academic Challenge Cup and to thousands of young people who have participated these past 15 years,” Flesch said. “We look forward to Tom’s continuing involvement with ACC for many years to come.”



Students from throughout the metro area concentrate intently on their next move while participating in GRC’s Equations competition.

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Nov. 5-8**

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**For more information visit:
giftedresourcecouncil.org**

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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Still a few openings!
Visit the GRC Web site at:
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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.