I hope the school year is off to a successful start for everyone. Here at BVPAGE, we are excited to be working on our 2009–2010 programs and activities. If you are a parent of a student with an IEP for gifted in the Blue Valley School District, you are automatically a member of BVPAGE.

BPAGE Board meetings are held monthly and all members are invited. We’re part advocacy, part program planning, and part support group! We’re nearly always joined by Dr. Sheri Stewart, DCT for gifted education. This year we are trying a change in schedule to meet the needs of more members. We plan to meet the first Thursday of each month, odd months in the evenings and even months from 1–3 in the afternoon. See the meeting schedule in the box. I hope our daytime meetings, evening meetings, or both, will fit your schedule and allow you to join us.

Our advocacy efforts have taken many forms over the last several years. We’ve started the school year with a little back-to-school welcome treat for our district teachers the week before school starts. They hit the ground running and we want to remind them how much we appreciate their efforts and enthusiasm all year for our kids. We have met with district officials on many subjects on several occasions over the years. We think we have built constructive relationships with district administrators and they have listened and responded to our concerns. Our members sit on several district-level committees and groups to represent gifted students; we have BVPAGE members who attend the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC), the legislative coalition, and the school board advisory committee on Curriculum and Instruction, to name a few. We have some openings for members to serve on these committees if you are interested.

Each year we present parent programs on various themes of interest to our members, covering a wide variety of topics including the social–emotional aspects of giftedness, college issues, the identification process, summer programs for gifted kids, and new topics all the time. This year we already have two programs scheduled that you’ll want to put on your calendars. On Oct.20 we are planning a program that will focus on the emotional support of gifted students and their families. It will be a small-group format where facilitators will guide groups of parents discussing different topics of interest. This program will be held from 7–8:30 pm at Harmony Middle School, 10101 W. 141st St. Our next scheduled program is planned for 7–8:30 pm on Nov 12, at Prairie Star Middle school at 143rd and Mission. This parent and student program will feature a guest speaker on the topic of Motivation. We’ll hear about the factors that determine success (and it’s not just IQ!), the difference between genius and talent, and the issues of underachievement. Students are welcome; the level of discussion will be geared to age 12 through adult. Parent programs are made possible by BVPAGE members being willing to plan and implement programs. If you'd like to help with parent programs, come to the next board meeting and jump into the discussion.

We have talked about an increased role for BVPAGE in district student programs. For example, the elementary
President’s Letter...Continued

gifted teachers have annually held a robotics fair in the spring. Kids love to bring their robots and see everyone else’s robots. The room is buzzing with excitement and it’s a great opportunity for the students to interact with gifted peers. Last year, BVPAGE was able to assist the teachers with this program, and the 2010 fair offers us the opportunity again. If you would like your volunteer efforts to make a difference for gifted students and teachers in the district, come to one of our meetings and volunteer for the student events committee.

When we made the change to include all parents as BVPAGE members, the idea was that paying dues or returning a form shouldn’t be a barrier between parents and BVPAGE. We want to support and serve our district gifted population including students, parents, and teachers. We send our communication through teachers to all parents; however we do maintain a list of names, addresses, and contact information for those members who have returned that information to us. If you would like to receive communication directly from BVPAGE, please print a form, fill out your information and mail it to our treasurer and membership coordinator, Sally Retz, at the address on the form. Additionally, your financial support allows us to cover costs such as printing handouts, stipends for programs, small extras for student events like the photo mats that were given to each student who participated in the district robotics fair last spring. We hope you are able to support BVPAGE with a financial contribution this year.

I hope to see you at our next board meeting October 1, from 1–3 pm, in the Kansas Room at the Blue Valley Academy.

Sincerely,
Patty Logan
President, BVPAGE

DCT’s Corner (District Coordinating Teacher)
Dr. Sheri Stewart

ATTENTION PARENTS OF GIFTED/TALENTED STUDENTS

You are invited to an evening discussion group for parents of gifted/talented students sponsored by the Blue Valley School District and the Blue Valley Parent Advocates for Gifted Education (BVPAGE). It will be held Tuesday, October 20, 2009, 7 p.m. at Harmony Middle School. This opportunity is an important part of a two-day workshop in which professionals in your area are being trained to conduct guided discussion groups based on the SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of Gifted) model. SENG workshop participants will facilitate the Tuesday evening sessions under the supervision of Dr. James Webb and Mrs. Arlene DeVries who are conducting the training. The presenters, who co-authored the award winning book, “Parent’s Guide to Gifted Children,” will begin the evening by sharing information about gifted children, followed by small parent discussions on topics such as motivation, discipline, stress management, peer relations, sibling rivalry, and tradition breaking, as they relate to parenting gifted children. This will be a wonderful opportunity to meet other parents of gifted, and gain some insights in guiding the development of your child. If you have questions, please contact Patty Logan, president of BVPAGE at VM 404–1924.

See you there!
Dr. Sheri Stewart

Feel free to call (239–4333) or email (sstewart@bluevalleyk12.org).

"Neither a lofty degree of intelligence nor imagination nor both together go to the making of genius. Love, love, love, that is the soul of genius.”

- Wolfgang
Twice-Exceptional/Twice Successful: Back to School Strategies that Work
by Linda E. Collins

The beginning of a new school year is a welcomed time for many parents and students anticipating new learning, new teachers, and new friends. Hearing the familiar sounds of the marching band practicing, and seeing clothing that reflects the rich colors of fall long before they have appeared in nature is all part of our “back to school” culture. But many twice-exceptional students and their parents often experience stress and anxiety at the thought of another school year. One parent of a 2-e child braced herself as her child was asked, “Are you excited about school starting?” The response was, “No. Why would I be?” Parents of twice-exceptional children are cautiously hopeful about the upcoming school year, but unsure of what to expect and what to plan for, so they often feel unprepared.

Concrete plans can be put into place to alleviate some of the anxiety of the unknown aspects of the new school year to ease the transition for 2-e students and parents. Currently, our student population is becoming more diverse and teachers must meet this challenge with innovative resources. To effectively help twice-exceptional students, we must collaborate using both gifted education research and special education research to refine best practices for 2-e through a shared understanding of this uniquely gifted group. How do we, how will we, engage these students in learning in our gifted education and general education classrooms? We must offer support for cognitive and affective growth and development for all students. When appropriate services are in place, all students benefit. Where do we start? Let’s observe some classrooms of twice-exceptional students at the beginning of a school year.

In a Geometry classroom, a student struggles to listen, take notes, and work on problems. He does not like to show his work — it slows him down too much and he does not want to fall behind — but he has not heard most of what the teacher has said. He is gifted and diagnosed with Auditory Processing Disorder and ADHD. In an Anatomy classroom another student tries to order her notes according to teacher’s instructions. It feels confusing to her, and she stops trying to do it, shoving the notes inside her backpack instead. She is gifted and diagnosed with Mood Disorder and OCD. Outside the school, one girl tries to resist the panic attack that is leaving her gasping. She is already late for her first class, and does not want to face her teacher and the class, which makes her more frightened. She is gifted and diagnosed with Anxiety and Depression. Another student walks through the hallway, covering his head and face with his sweatshirt hood because someone at the locker next to his has sprayed on cologne, and it makes him nauseated. His eyes are watering and he begins to cough. He is gifted and diagnosed with sensory disorder and Asperger Syndrome.

A Collaboration of Gifted Education and Special Education

As a co-teacher in a gifted education class of a high profile suburban high school, I have noticed an increase in students who are identified as twice-exceptional, especially those with Asperger Syndrome. In our district, I am hired at the high school level as a Gifted Education Teacher, and our students can take our Academic Enrichment class as an elective for graduation. We have over 100 students enrolled in our classes each semester, teaching it every block/hour of the school day. The structure and design of our gifted education class allows for learning malleability; we have gotten used to diversity being status quo, but other academic classes are not always as flexible, due to the necessity of curricular constructs, and lack of knowledge and experience of working with gifted students.

In the past, students who were identified gifted, but who had a disability as their primary exceptionality, were usually assigned to the caseload of Special Education teachers who work with learning or behavior/emotional disabilities. When I began my graduate work in the Autism/Asperger Program at the University of Kansas, and worked on the Asperger Research team, I suggested that twice-exceptional students, including gifted Asperger students, should be served in our self-contained gifted education classroom, and I was assigned as their caseload manager.

Not every student in this country has the opportunity to receive the depth and breadth of special services that our students receive within our school district. Previously, I worked in inner-city urban school settings with at-risk students who did not have the opportunities available to them that my students have now. I am fortunate to teach in a school district that actively supports gifted education, which is under the umbrella of special education in the state of Kansas. Blue Valley School District is known for its exemplary special education services that extend to our classroom. Our district’s mission statement is Education Beyond Expectations which is something every parent wants for their child and every child deserves. At the elementary level, we have a pull-out program for students identified as gifted. At the middle and high school levels, identified students may enroll in a gifted education class. For Asperger students who need the support of a self-contained classroom, there is a special program at one middle school and one high school. Continuing collaboration between gifted education and special education benefits students, parents, and staff.

Planning Proactively

It is important for families to develop a plan for their 2-e student whether the school year has started or not, and whether or not the student has an IEP or a 504 plan. The
Back to School...Continued

presence and degree of gifted services also varies from school to school and from district to district, so parents must think and plan proactively to initiate a successful school year. “When is the best time to plant a tree? Twenty years ago. When is the second best time to plant a tree? Now.” This Chinese proverb speaks to parents who are feeling regret about not doing something that they realize they might have done, previously, to help their child.

Twiceexceptionality is a youthful research field. Information and research is constantly emerging, and parents should focus on what can be put in place, now, to change the future. Many students and their families are adept at designing their own “gifted education program” (outside the school system), utilizing community resources, and connecting with other parents of 2-e students to find resources for their children. SENG, for example, offers parental support through many of its services.

The best time to put a plan in place is before it is needed, but if it hasn’t been done, then do it now. If possible, work on a plan for the 2-e student prior to the beginning of each school year—this is especially important before the transition into middle school or high school. Parents of 2-e students should consider doing the following things:

- Write a letter to the principal, counselor, case manager, and/or school psychologist introducing your child, sharing insights into his/her strengths and challenges. This letter should be proactive with a positive tone. Ask for an appointment to meet with each of them in person where you can introduce them, personally, to your child. You want them to be able to put your child’s face with your child’s name. Find out if gifted education services are offered for students and what they are exactly, and if staff has training in gifted education, specifically 2-e students. Offer your help in obtaining or presenting 2-e information as staff development. Many administrators are amenable to this if you offer your assistance in organizing this for the staff.

- Schedule a longer appointment with your child’s counselor to work on a class schedule that will foster success. This might include discussing when math or reading would be scheduled to work on a class schedule that will foster success. This might include discussing when math or reading would be scheduled best for your child. My 2-e students often begin and/or end the day in our Gifted Education class to ease the transition to or from school. The time of day and the order of the classes should be considered. Most counselors will tell you that they cannot handpick teachers for a student, but go ahead and ask, explaining what kind of teacher your child needs. Request teachers that are knowledgeable of gifted students, twice-exceptionality, or are known to be student-centered and are willing to learn about and work with your child’s special needs. Ask about any classes that can be tested out of, compacted, or paced. Discuss subject and/or whole grade acceleration. If your child has a case manager assigned to monitor the IEP process, ask him/her to be there to be an advocate.

- Schedule an appointment with the school psychologist, and possibly the school nurse to discuss pertinent medical, psychological, and affective issues, and determine what support and intervention will be used. This might include locker placement, assembly, lunch, fire drill procedures, hall passes, medication, substitutes, and a safe room or place, if there is not a Gifted Education Classroom. Discuss any sensory sensitivities that may cause additional stress for your child.

- Meet and establish a relationship with your child’s case manager, if there is one, who will be your child’s daily advocate at school. If there is a gifted education classroom, visit it with your child, and meet the teacher prior to the opening of school, if possible. Ask if a paraprofessional is available to work with your child if organization and/or study skills need support.

- If your child does not have a case manager, inquire about a staff member who can become a mentor for your student, and who will become an advocate for him or her on an ongoing basis. An administrator or a counselor may be able to suggest an appropriate adult role model.

- During the first week of school send an email to your child’s teachers, similar to the one sent to the principal. Keep the tone positive, and ask what is the best way to communicate with them. If necessary, give them permission to include special instructions about working with your child in the folder that they keep for substitute teachers.

- If your child needs accommodations, but has been served well in the past without an IEP or 504, do not assume that accommodations will always be followed by every teacher, or at every school. If your child has qualified for an IEP or a 504, but does not have one in place, please consider getting one to ensure that your child will receive an education that is tailored to their individual needs. Services can vary from school to school, but the IEP and the 504 are legal documents that are designed to support all children with special needs. Some teachers will make accommodations at the request of students and their parents, whether or not they have an IEP or 504. In a perfect world, we would not need legal documents to ensure that modification and accommodations are implemented, but we do not live in that perfect world, so we must do what we need to do to nurture, preserve, and provide opportunities for these students.

Understanding the Needs of Gifted Students With Learning Disabilities

Disseminating the information about your student to his/her teachers is important. Teachers often misunderstand these students, because they are brilliant and puzzling in tandem. A teacher asked me, “If they are so smart, why can’t they teach themselves to be organized or remember to hand in papers?” This is a question we may often be asked from people who do not know about twice-exceptionality. Routine changes in environmental and/or sensory issues can impact their learning (e.g. loud noises like fire alarms, strong odors from candles or science labs) in a negative way. Because of
this, some teachers may misunderstand the extremes of students will employ to prevent or avoid situations that are uncomfortable or distressing to them. If teachers are unaware of these challenges, they cannot help out, and may need guidance in areas that were not part of their training or experiences.

One teacher came to me distressed that one of my students was “sneaking back into the classroom during lunch.” He said that he had fixed that by locking the door so the student could not go back to work on the computer during lunch. I explained that lunch is a difficult event for this student to negotiate, the lines, the noise, the smells, and the loneliness of finding somewhere to sit. This student comes to our gifted education room during lunch, now, where he can eat or work on the computer. In fact, our room is always open to all of our students any time they need a safe, comfortable place to land.

Another time, one of my students decided to bring a math and science encyclopedia to his Honors Geometry class each day. As his teacher was lecturing, he opened the book to check to make sure that she was correct in what she was saying. If he thought her remarks needed clarification, he did not hesitate to raise his hand and speak to the class. Making sure that the world around him is right and that everyone follows the rules is very important and natural to him, but was not expected by his teacher, and she felt it was distracting to the class. His teacher and I talked about this, and we were able to put some guidelines in place for the student for how often to use his book, but we allowed him to continue to bring it to class and to use it at certain times.

Good basic organization and study skills are often challenges to the twice-exceptional student. One student struggled to organize her Advanced Placement notebook in the way the teacher had asked the class to do it. She told me that the ordering of the papers did not “make sense” to her, and she lost points on each notebook check. After talking to her teacher, we decided to let her organize the notebook in the way it made sense to her while she was studying and doing homework, and then we assisted her in reorganizing the papers when it was time to turn the notebook in to be checked for grading. In both of these situations, the teachers were amenable to putting a plan in place, once they understood why there was a challenge for these students.

Accommodations for 2e Students
Teachers must be made aware of required accommodations, which are necessary for 2e students to maximize their learning opportunities. These accommodations should also be requested for students who do not have an IEP, or a 504 plan, if they need them. One of my friends used to tell me, “Ask for the sun and the stars. You may get the moon.” All of our teachers have a purple folder they receive at the beginning of each semester that contains an “IEP-At-A-Glance,” a shortened form of the IEP that includes required accommodations. Every teacher must sign-off verifying that they have received the IEP-At-A-Glance. The accommodations are individualized according the needs of each student. Depending on those needs, these accommodations might be helpful for students diagnosed with disorders including dysgraphia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, OCD, auditory processing disorder, mood disorder, ADHD, sensory disorder, tourette syndrome, and more.

Some examples of accommodations included in an IEP for a twice-exceptional student might be:
- Access to a computer when needed
- Compact/pace/test-out of curriculum, required classes
- Break assignments into parts with completion check
- Preferential Seating
- Organization checks
- Copies of notes
- Differentiated assignments
- Opt out of daily assignments if tests are at mastery level
- Provide concrete cues
- Test grades weighted higher than daily work
- Extended time on assignments
- Work or test in quiet room

Intentional Support
Twice-exceptional students also need intentional support that personalizes a strategic educational plan in each class. This is not coincidental, accidental, or unintentional support. The IEP/504 fulfills legal obligations for special education services, but teachers may need a more detailed intentional approach to helping a 2e student in a particular content area, a more focused, delineated, plan, especially if the student is attempting an Honors or Advanced Placement class. To help with this, I designed a Snapshot of Learner Characteristics, developed from research from the Asperger Research Team, for secondary students who have been diagnosed with any disabilities. This form highlights the student’s academic and affective needs in each content area class, giving concrete suggestions for interventions. Many 2e students choose to take AP or Honors courses, to support their precious curiosity. Their grades are not always a reflection of their knowledge, often due to a lack of understanding from teachers who do not know how to intervene with appropriate instruction. The Snapshot of Learner Characteristics is a tool that can be used to encourage academic success for all students, and includes personalized information that narrows and defines the interventions to be content-specific.

Remember the 2e students in the classrooms at the beginning of this article? When they are gathered together with their gifted peers something extraordinary happens and we see a beautiful diversity of interests, talents, and hear passionate disparate discussions….we see a freshman, rushing in, her hair still damp from her 5:00 a.m. swim practice for the
**Back To School...Continued**

U.S. National Team; a sophomore composing music using computer software; a freshman writing a geography book for National Geographic; a junior organizing a school-wide blood drive for the Red Cross; a junior working on the Riemann Hypothesis; a sophomore carefully prepping for the Academic Decathlon Team. With appropriate services, it is difficult to distinguish the 2e students from their gifted peers who do not have disabilities. We only see the raw natural potential of those students’ talents, which I believe are our greatest natural resources. So, how do we, how will we, engage these students in learning in our general education classrooms? Educators must daily tweak, revise, update, and out—up change static activities to match the dynamic needs of all learners, ensuring that all students are making gains in their learning. We must offer support for cognitive and affective growth and development to all students. At the beginning of this new school year, educational staff and parents should work together to ensure that every child feels appreciated and valued, and that every child knows that his or her life can and will make a positive difference in our world, both now and in the future.

John F. Kennedy said, "Not every child has an equal talent or an equal ability or equal motivation, but children have the equal right to develop their talent, their ability, and their motivation." I believe it is my responsibility, as a teacher, to provide the opportunities for students to develop their talents, their abilities, and to encourage their motivation.

Linda E. Collins is a Gifted Education Teacher at Blue Valley West High School in Overland Park, KS, with 20 years of teaching experience. She also works with at-risk youth who need to recover English credit for graduation. Linda is married to her high school sweetheart, a teacher, and has four children. She has recently been selected as the Blue Valley School District’s Secondary Teacher of the Year for 2008–2009. In Salt Lake City, Linda presented a pre-conference workshop at SENG: Navigating the 2e challenge: Strategies for Success in Secondary Schools. She will also be presenting at KGTC and NAGC, and is available for consultation. You can contact her at LCOLLINS@bluevalleyk12.org.

**Board Meetings 2009–2010**

The Board of BVPAGE will meet the first Thursday of each month except February when the first Thursday is conference/no school day—in which case we’ll meet second Thursday. We’ll start with Sept being an evening meeting and go every other month evening/day. We’ll have 5 evening meetings and 4 day meetings—as follows:

- **Evening meetings from 7–9 pm in the Marooner room**
  - Sept 3
  - Nov 5
  - Jan 7
  - March 4
  - May 6

- **Day meetings from 1–3 pm in the Kansas room in the Blue Valley Academy**
  - Oct 1
  - Dec 3
  - Feb 11*
  - April 1

*note second Thursday not first

For more information on upcoming meetings, please call Patty Logan at Blue Valley VM 404–1924.

**District Gifted Coordinator Position**

Last spring, the school district announced that a new Special Education Coordinator position had been created; that position would have had responsibilities for gifted education, as well as middle school level special education on the disability side of Special Ed, and would have effectively replaced the position of District Coordinating Teacher (DCT) for gifted, held by Dr. Sheri Stewart. As BVPAGE became aware of the inclusion of middle school disability Spec Ed responsibilities, we met with several district officials to voice our concerns. Briefly, we felt that the 1600 or so gifted students in Blue Valley should be able to have one person at the administrative level devoted solely to their special needs. We were concerned the inclusion of disability special education responsibilities would make it difficult to find a person for the job whose interests and expertise would allow him or her to adequately focus on both ends of the spectrum. We were pleased, on the other hand, with the idea that the district gifted coordinator would be elevated to a Special Education Coordinator position, with a higher level of authority than a DCT position typically has.

I’m pleased to say that our requests for meetings with district officials were quickly met with enthusiasm. We felt that the concerns we voiced on behalf of the gifted students and teachers were considered and appreciated. This all happened very quickly at the end of the 2008–9 school year and I want to thank the busy parents who responded to our urgent request to meet with district officials, as well as the district officials who met with us: Sue Dole, Deputy Superintendent of education Services; Sue Denny, Executive Director of Student Services; and Jim Payne, Executive Director of Human Resource Services. As a result of our conversations, the district has reconsidered, and is revising the position to be focused on gifted education only. We have been told the plan is to post the position of Special Education Coordinator for Gifted Education later this school year.

The BVPAGE Pages are published quarterly. If you have any news items for this newsletter, you may contact the editor, Angela Case, at: bvpage@everestkc.net
SOCIAL EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF FAMILIES WITH GIFTED CHILDREN

Tuesday, October 20, 2009  7:00 – 9:00 pm
Harmony Middle School -- 10101 W 141st Street

To begin the evening, Dr. James Webb and Mrs. Arlene DeVries will be presenting a brief seminar on the social emotional needs of the gifted children. Following the opening presentation, there will be small group discussions facilitated by persons who are preparing for the beginning of the first SENG Model Parent Group in Kansas City. Topics for the small group discussions will include: motivation, discipline, stress management, peer relations, sibling rivalry, and tradition breaking, as they relate to parenting gifted children.

Please join us as we help our new facilitators practice their skills and become certified SENG Model Parent Group leaders, and in the process, you will learn more about dealing with the social emotional needs of your gifted child!

How to Keep Smart Kids Motivated

Thursday, November 12, 2009  7:00 – 9:00 pm
Prairie Star Middle School -- 143rd and Mission

Discover hands-on techniques for fostering intrinsic motivation for smart kids living in an extrinsic world. Learn about new discoveries in brain research for strengthening and conditioning cognitive (learning) skills for more efficient, more attentive and more motivating classroom learning. Appropriate for all families of students K-12, but especially for students who need/want a 'change in direction' in their academic career.

Students aged 12 and up welcome to attend with their families – hands on activities will be provided. Younger students may attend as well, provided the time of day is likely to be conducive to achieving well-mannered behavior. Thank you.

As always, anyone is welcome and your child does not need to have an IEP. These programs will not be videotaped but if there are handouts or links they will be available on our website, www.bvpage.org. If you have questions you may contact Patty Logan, President of BVPAGE, at Blue Valley VM 404-1924.
Questions and Answers with Blue Valley District Math Specialist

Submitted by: Patty Logan
BVPAGE President

Last spring, the BVPAGE Board invited Barb McAleer, Blue Valley’s District Coordinating Teacher (DCT) for math, to join us for a conversation. We solicited input from members and shared those questions with Barb. Of the many responses we received regarding math questions, most concerns could be categorized into a few recurring themes. I have summarized Barb’s answers to these “frequently-asked questions” below.

We are so appreciative of the time Barb McAleer took to talk to us about math. We hope to continue some math discussion this year and we’ll keep you up to date on plans for that.

1. Q: I feel that my gifted child is not challenged in math class.
A: The way math is taught now is not just memorization of facts and formulas. The emphasis is on a deep conceptual understanding of math. Kids should be able to explain what they are doing and how they are doing it. Often, students with high math abilities will be able to perform the problem but may not have this deep understanding of the concept. So if a child enters a unit able to recite the facts, we still want to ensure this student has the concepts behind the facts. Still, the district math team is working on “the fourth question”: “What do we do when they already know it?” The elementary math coaches meet once a quarter and are developing extension activities that will be available to all teachers on a district share folder.

2. Q: I am concerned that even “Math Plus” is not challenging enough for my middle schooler.
A: 2008–9 was the first year for Math Plus classes at the middle school level. Teachers and math specialists planned to meet over the summer to discuss what worked and what didn’t work. It is a work in progress. Math Plus was not designed to cover the material faster, rather more in depth. They are looking at ways the Plus class can accelerate through some concepts, then spend time exploring those concepts in more depth. Although the Plus class is open to all students, Barb anticipates that over time, students who are not ready for the Plus class will separate themselves out.

3. Q: I am interested in the possibility of my student “skipping a grade” in math.
A: The last few years have seen major changes in how acceleration (“skipping a grade”) occurs in the district. Students are screened by teachers using information including MAP scores, State Assessment scores, and classroom performance. This year there is a formal test for students in 3–8th grades. The test is not based on textbooks but rather on math standards. There are four individual tests, each taking 1 to 1 ½ hours to complete, covering four content standards. The tests are hand-graded by the math coaches, and a pass/fail percent or cutoff is not used; rather, they look at each student individually to determine what concepts he or she seems to understand and what gaps exist.

Barb stressed that the ideal situation would be that almost all students could have their needs met at their grade level with the appropriate differentiation. They want to avoid accelerating a student improperly, which would set the student up to fail.

They feel that the tests have been improved over time and are better written and better test the understanding of the standards and concepts. In spring 2009, about 50% of the students who were recommended by teachers and took the test, did qualify for acceleration; compared to about 23% in the past. Teachers in the district are becoming more familiar with the process and the process is being handled more uniformly from school to school. As far as a standardized process, though, this is still relatively new and changes are being made every year based on the previous years’ experience.

4. Q: Why do different schools do math clubs and math competitions differently?
A: These clubs and competitions are school-based decisions. Many factors may influence the way a school handles this decision. If you have questions or concerns you should address those to your school’s math coach or principal. Barb did mention that she is aware of circumstances where a student from one school without a math club has joined an afterschool math club at another school. Some schools use parent volunteers to help and even run these programs so you may be able to help start one at your school if you are interested.

1 “The four questions”: 1) What do we want students to learn? 2) How do we know when they have learned it? 3) What do we do when they haven’t learned it? 4) What do we do when they already know it?
BVPAGE Presents: Keeping Smart Kids Motivated

by Jill Sederstrom

Coming in November: A focus on effort instead of intellect or natural ability can keep smart kids motivated to succeed

It's a common problem. Students sail through elementary school with high grades and little effort. But as they move into middle school, motivation begins to dip and these seemingly smart students begin to lose interest in academics. Throughout life these kids have always been told how smart and gifted they are, but now they seem to be struggling in school. Parents and teachers are left baffled by the sudden change in motivation, but what can they do?

As it turns out, the answer is simple. Thomas Baker, Clinic Director at LearningRx on College Blvd, has been studying the underlying secrets to student motivation for most of his career and has discovered some surprising findings about student success.

He cautions parents and teachers against praising students for their innate abilities such as being “smart” and recommends instead praising them for their effort. “We find that praising children’s intelligence or telling them they are gifted, talented or brilliant when they perform well is negative. It has a negative impact on a child’s motivation and performance. Essentially it puts them in a hard-wired frame of mind,” he said. “A focus on talent and giftedness diverts students from learning to love learning for its own sake. Their goal becomes to look smart above all rather than to stretch themselves and learn.”

Society has become obsessed with worshiping talent and ability, and many believe simply possessing superior abilities or intellect is enough to find success in life. That theory isn’t just wrong, Baker says, but it can also have damaging effects for students in the long-term. “I think there is a pop-culture emphasis on talent and it’s almost always misguided,” he said. “If we look at Tiger Woods or Michael Jordan or Bill Gates, these are people who worked harder than anyone else, who really obsessed over their sport or their science, who really examined their weaknesses and took steps to fix them. Recent books like 'Outliers', "The Talent Code" and "Brain Rules" have exposed the myths of so-called genius, yet many students still act like their weaknesses are permanent and unforgiving. Kids are still inclined to sit back and wait for a parent or teacher to solve their problems, when in many cases, students would be better served learning to fend for themselves”.

Views of Intelligence

Success is not only determined by natural ability; it’s also dependent on how a student views the challenges and setbacks he or she faces in life.

Dr. Carol Dweck, a professor of psychology at Stanford University, has uncovered two very distinct views of intelligence—a “fixed versus growth” mindset.

“In the fixed mindset you think your level of ability is just given. It’s inherent – either you are good at something or you’re not,” she said.

Students with a growth mindset, on the other hand, believe talents and abilities can be developed and think everyone has the potential to improve.

In a study published last year, Dweck and her colleagues studied the mindset of a group of several hundred seventh grade students. They identified each student as having either a growth or fixed mindset by asking a series of questions about each student’s beliefs and motivations. Then, they tracked the students’ grades over the next two years to document their performance in school.

“What we found was that the students with the fixed and the growth mindset lived in different psychological worlds,” she said. “The students with a fixed mindset thought that looking smart was the most important thing, that if you think your intelligence is fixed your main concern is looking smart, feeling smart. But the students who had a growth mindset thought the most important thing was learning. They cared about grades but they really cared about learning.”

The researchers also discovered the two groups had opposite views on effort.

“The students with a fixed mindset thought effort was a negative thing,” Dweck said. “If you had ability you shouldn’t need effort and they said when they worked hard on their schoolwork they felt they were dumb.”

However, students with a growth mindset viewed effort as a positive thing. They realized even geniuses need to use effort, Dweck said, and saw it as a way to ignite their ability and help it grow.

Each view of intelligence also impacted the way students handled setbacks. Students with a fixed mindset weren’t able to recover as well when faced with a setback. For example, if a student got a poor grade on an initial test in a course, they said they would study less in the future, never try to take a similar course again and would even consider cheating on the next exam.

“We found in study after study that students in the fixed mindset do not address their deficiencies, they don’t confront them or take steps to remedy them, but the students in a growth mindset facing the same setback said they would work harder from now on, they’d find new ways of studying,” Dweck said. “They were resilient and proactive.”

The effects of both mindsets can be seen at virtually every student transition, but Dweck and her colleagues have focused much of their research on students entering the seventh grade. She said that’s because it’s often a time when schoolwork gets harder and students who did not need to apply themselves in elementary school may suddenly find
Keeping Smart Kids...Continued

themselves struggling.

“Many students lose confidence at this point or they are losing motivation because they are facing obstacles they may have never faced before,” she said.

Changing Your Mindset

In a society that worships talent over effort, how do we keep kids motivated to learn?

Dweck thinks the key could be teaching students about the brain, its ability to grow and reinforcing their efforts with positive praise.

In one study conducted with a group of seventh grade students whose grades were declining, Dweck discovered just how important the role of education can be in helping students succeed.

She and her colleagues divided the students into two groups. One group received eight sessions of study skill classes, while the other group received information about the growth mindset in addition to the study skill lessons.

The students in the growth mindset group learned the brain is like a muscle and it grows the more you exercise it. The lessons also reinforced the idea that every time students stretched themselves to learn something new, the brain forms new connections, which over time makes them smarter.

“What we found at the end of this workshop was the study skills group continued to show declining grades, because they didn’t have the motivation to put the skills into practice, but the growth mindset group showed a really nice rebound in grades,” Dweck said.

Teachers at the school didn’t know which group each student had been assigned to but were later asked to evaluate the students’ progress in school.

“They singled out three times as many students in the growth mindset group to say that they were working harder, they were doing their homework, they were paying more attention in school and they were showing improved grades,” she said.

After students completed the course, researchers asked them to report anonymously whether they had changed their opinion about how the brain works.

“Virtually every student anonymously said that they learned differently as a result and they had different ideas about how learning takes place,” Dweck said. “What was really striking was many of them said they now have this image in their mind of new connections forming and they find it really motivating that when they are paying attention in class they are picturing the neurons growing connections.”

Learning about the growth mindset changed their engagement in school. Before the workshop, students viewed course work as something they performed for the teacher, who would judge them.

After the course, they were motivated to do the work for themselves because they knew the effort they put forth would help them grow and learn.

“Now it’s I work hard for myself because I want to get smarter,” Dweck said.

It’s no secret trying hard in middle school isn’t always viewed as “cool” among adolescents, but Dweck said that doesn’t mean students aren’t capable of getting excited about learning.

“We saw in our studies a lot of kids actually blossom when they have challenging things to learn,” she said.

Praise with a Purpose

Parents and teachers can help students become energized about learning, by delivering praise for the effort and work they put into their schoolwork instead of making general comments about a student’s intelligence or natural ability.

“What we find is that when kids who have been praised for intelligence hit setbacks they lose their confidence, they lose their motivation and their performance really suffers. But when students who have been praised for their efforts or their strategies… hit up against difficulties they find ways to surmount it, they look for new strategies, they escalate their effort and they remain excited about learning,” Dweck said.

“Praising students for their innate talent doesn’t just make sense from a research standpoint,” Baker said. “When you emphasize a trait they don’t and can’t control, you divert their focus and energy from traits they can control. Praising fixed traits gives students little validation about themselves and their efforts.”

“It’s much more effective to be genuinely appreciative of what they’ve done, rather than just glancing at something, their A or their art work, and saying ‘how brilliant’. You are not really relating to the child behind the work,” he said.

Baker suggests asking questions about the strategies a student used, what they’ve learned or the choices they had to make during the process, and praise that instead. He also recommended comments like “look at how you’ve improved, I can see your studying really paid off,” instead of comments that praise a child’s innate ability like “you’re really smart.”

This is particularly true for parents or educators of gifted children, who may be tempted to focus on a child’s superior intellectual ability and talents.

Dr Dweck explains “I think children could be at risk for developing a fixed mindset if educators and parents make them feel like this is a gift, just an innate or inherent aptitude that they have, and if they make the kids feel that’s what they value them for. It could be then that some students start organizing their lives around playing it safe, not doing anything that could fail and make people feel that they didn’t deserve the gifted label.”

Parents and educators should instead focus on stretching the child’s self, learning and working to fulfill one’s potential. Simply emphasizing a child’s intellectual ability as a “gift” can have negative implications as a student progresses through school.
“You are giving them a false promise that the gift alone is going to ensure them success in the rest of their lives as it has in fourth grade,” Dweck said.

Parents and teachers can also prevent students from slipping into a fixed mindset based on how they handle a child who is struggling or needs extra academic support.

Dweck said traditional tutoring or homework labs can unintentionally have a negative effect on students if they feel they need the extra help because they aren’t smart enough on their own.

Effort vs. Burnout
Placing an emphasis on effort and dedication can lead to positive outcomes for parents and students, but it’s also important to keep a healthy perspective.

Students who have a fixed mindset may be prone to giving up on something too easily, even if it’s something they enjoy doing.

“They may have a new course they love and then they have a disappointing score on their first test and they think ‘I am not good at this’, ” Dweck said.

It’s important to encourage those students to keep trying and continue to work hard to see better results, but it’s also important to recognize each person’s own limitations.

“If you’ve really dedicated yourself to something that you value and you’re not making headway, you’ve gotten help, you’ve applied yourself, then maybe you think ‘gee, maybe my effort would yield more fruit somewhere else’,” Dweck said.

There are different levels to perseverance and no one should work day and night to achieve an academic milestone, but those who view intelligence as a fixed quality tend to give up at the first sign of difficulty.

Focusing on fostering a growth mindset, can not only increase a student’s effort it can also increase their enjoyment of school.

“I am talking about enjoying effort and when you really are passionate about what you’re doing or you enjoy the learning process – you enjoy putting out effort to learn things of value – burnout is much less likely,” Dweck said.

People do differ in natural ability and interests, but Dweck’s research shows students who embrace a fixed mindset may be limiting themselves and ultimately preventing them from ever reaching their full potential.

The effects of a fixed mindset aren’t just apparent during one’s school years. It can continue to have implications for adults later in life and can impact their social lives, work experience and relationships.

Teaching children to value the effort and work they put into academics, athletics and relationships will give them the skills to succeed in school and beyond.

“The way to build a child’s confidence and excitement is to teach them how to learn, how to love challenges, how to embrace mistakes, how to enjoy effort. That’s the gift you are giving them, not a label you put on them that then they are worried about losing,” Baker said.

Thomas A. Baker is the Clinic Director at LearningRx on College Boulevard. He will be hosting the November parenting seminar sponsored by BVPAGE. For information on academic coaching programs for students K–12, he may be reached at 913–362–8777. To view a replay of a channel 9 story on LearningRx students, visit http://www.kmbc.com/video/18726977/index.html (after 15 sec commercial)

Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D., is a professor of psychology at Stanford University and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She is the author of the book “Mindset,” which examines theories in achievement, sports, business and relationships.

Further Reading
Coyle, D "The Talent Code", Bantam, 2009
Dweck, C "Mindset", Random House, 2006
Gladwell, M "Outliers", Little-Brown, 2008
Student News

Blue Valley students earn perfect ACT scores
Submitted by: Michelle Hoffman
BVPAGE Parent

Three Blue Valley students have aced the ACT test. Johnathon Davis from Blue Valley High, Jason Hoffman from Blue Valley North and Chris Ouyang from Blue Valley Northwest each earned perfect scores of 36 on the ACT test. The high achievers will be seniors in the fall. The ACT is a college entrance exam, testing in the areas of English, reading, math and science. About 1.4 million students take the test each year. The proportion of students who earn a perfect score is about 1 in 3,300.

Duke Testing Success
Submitted by: Jim Beaman
BVPAGE Parent

Makenzie Beaman, an 8th grader at Harmony Middle School, and her family traveled to Duke University in Durham, North Carolina in May for her to receive the National Recognition Award for her ACT score. She actually qualified nationally in all four categories in addition to the composite score. She was in the top 1% of all the gifted 7th graders in the country!

37 Blue Valley students named National Merit semifinalists
Submitted by: Michelle Hoffman
BVPAGE Parent

The Blue Valley School District recently received extraordinary news. Thirty-seven high school seniors from Blue Valley have been named National Merit semifinalists. This is the highest number of National Merit semifinalists the district has had in one year. These seniors have an opportunity to continue in the competition for some 8,200 Merit scholarship awards that will be offered next spring. To be considered for a merit scholarship, the semifinalists must fulfill several requirements and advance to the finalist round of competition. Students were named semifinalists after taking the 2008 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT). The semifinalists represent less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors. Semifinalists from Blue Valley are:

Blue Valley High:
Benjamin Cooper, Mary Kennedy, Hunter Kennon, Emily Li, Grant Meyer, Angela Niebergall and Caitlin Wilson.

Blue Valley North:
Furheen Baig, Daniel Baylog, Jeffrey Cooper, Andrea Hinton, Jason Hoffman, Melissa Kornspan, Katherine McClung, Laura McClung, Daniel Muccino, Nikolai Mushhegian, Anish Potnis, Amanda Sevcik, Ryan Smith, Marissa Wizig and Lauren Wolfe.

Blue Valley Northwest:
Rutvik Date, Bethany Hileman, Vamsi Mangena, Chris Ouyang and Derek Sechi.

Blue Valley West:
Meredith Ashley, Gilbert Baltzer, Ritvik Bansal, James Becker, Tyler Dill, Joshua Luthi, Jonathan Park, Matte Peterson, Emily Phillips and Stephen Ropo.

Nicholas Green Award Winner:
Emily Levinson

Please congratulate 7th grader Emily Levinson of Leawood, Kansas who was named the 2009 recipient of the Nicholas Green Distinguished Student Award. The Nicholas Green award was initiated by the Green family in partnership with the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) to recognize young people who are: 1) working hard to make the most of their lives to develop their unique gifts and talents and 2) around the age of their son, Nicholas, at the time of his death.

Emily has been developing her talent in the performing arts while maintaining a high standard of excellence in academics. Her winning essay included the quote: “Life: fleeting, rare, hard, wonderful, harsh, beautiful.” Emily will be presented her award at the Kansas Gifted, Talented, and Creative (KGTC) Conference in Lawrence on Oct. 4th. One child in each state may be named a Nicholas Green Distinguished Student. Each winner receives a $500 U.S. savings bond and an NAGC Certificate of Excellence. Eligible students may be nominated by parents, teachers, students, or community/civic groups.

Register Now Online!

You are invited to attend this year’s KGTC convention with an emphasis on connecting using 21st century tools. We are excited to have parents and educators share keynotes, breakout sessions, model classrooms, a collaboration cafe as well as a Leadership Academy. Please join us for what has been described as “one of the best conferences in Kansas”.

Sunday, October 4: Parent Day
Come listen to national keynoter, Kevin Honeycutt as he talks about Cyber-Learning Safely: What Every-Parent, Teacher, and Community Member Should Know. He shares how this generation learns differently than any other before and what we can do as parents to help our children learn and play safely in this digital playground.

Conference Keynote Speakers:

• Dr. Ann Robinson
Professor, Gifted & Talented Education, Univ. of Arkansas

• Kevin Honeycutt
Technology Integration Specialist, Essdack

• Linda Geiger
Kansas State Dept. of Educ. Gifted Consultant

KGTC & NAGC News
Kansas Association for Gifted, Talented and Creative

KGTC's Annual Convention is Coming October 4th - 6th, 2009

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News From the Community

Destination Imagination is looking to branch out into Kansas

Please read the letter below from Linda Wayne, Director of Partnerships

We want to reach Kansas students to participate in the Destination Imagination Program and learn the 21st Century skills of creativity, problem solving and teamwork. And I am hoping you might be able to help me find a Kansas adult to lead the program there.

While Kansas has had Destination Imagination teams each year, there is no infrastructure in place to continue and grow the program in Kansas. The State Leader will arm the participants with skills for the classroom and boardroom, and impact the lives of hundreds of Kansas students - and adults.

This contract year-round job includes recruiting teams and adult team managers, training adults and students using our established program and processes, and holding a tournament in Spring 2010. Compensation includes a stipend and bonuses based on reaching goals.

In an individual, we are looking for a capable professional (such as an educator [possibly retired], a community leader, or an individual interested/experienced in directing a student program) that has leadership, training and project management skills. We will train this individual about the Destination Imagination program/processes and support him/her throughout the year.

Linda Wayne
Director of Partnerships
Destination ImagiNation, Inc.
5507 Stonebridge Road
Pleasant Garden, North Carolina 27313
Phone: 336-676-7269
Fax: 336-674-2552
Cell: 336-707-3013
lwayne@dihq.org

Destination ImagiNation is the world’s leading nonprofit organization offering real-world experience in creativity, problem solving and teamwork. Our programs, resources and services reach thousands of people of all ages annually in all 50 states and 40+ countries. Join us as we make the world a better place through creativity, problem solving and teamwork.

Member Contact Information

Our membership policy has changed! All parents with an identified gifted child in Blue Valley are now automatic members of BVPAGE. Contact information will only be used by BVPAGE.

Name(s)
Address
City
State Zip
Home phone
Work Phone
E-mail**
Voice Mail

Children:
Name Graduation Year

I would be interested in:
- Providing/assisting with a student program
- Providing/assisting with an adult program
- Helping in the classroom
- Helping with competitions
- Serving as a School Representative/liason
- Helping with the website/newsletter/publicity
- Other:

BVPAGE would appreciate your support.

BRONZE LEVEL: $15.00
SILVER LEVEL: $35.00
GOLD LEVEL: $50.00
Please send all contributions and Member Contact Forms to the Treasurer listed below.

** Please include your e-mail so we may send you a copy of our E-Newsletter the BVPAGE Pages.

BVPAGE Treasurer
Sally Retz
6107 W 156th St
Overland Park, KS 66223
Do You Know About Duke TIP?
The Duke University Talent Identification Program (Duke TIP) is a non-profit educational organization that is recognized as a leader in identifying and serving the educational needs of academically gifted youth. Through identification, recognition, challenging educational programs, information, advocacy and research, Duke TIP provides resources to gifted students, their parents, educators, and schools for the development of the students' optimal educational potential.

For more information read:
4th & 5th Grade EXPLORE testing:
http://www.tip.duke.edu/talent_searches/grades_4-5/explore_test.htm
7th Grade ACT/SAT testing:
http://www.tip.duke.edu/talent_searches/grade_7/
Duke Tip Fact Sheet
http://www.tip.duke.edu/about/fact_sheet.pdf
or check out the DukeTIP website at http://www.tip.duke.edu/

BVPAGE strives to increase the quantity and enhance the quality of services, disseminate information to and maintain a support group for parents to benefit all gifted and talented students in the Blue Valley School District.

We’re on the Web!
Visit us at:
www.bvpage.org

A CONTACT INFORMATION FORM IS AVAILABLE ONLINE

BVPAGE Pages
10013 W. 126th Street
Overland Park, KS  66213