

Tag Line

Issue 3, Mar 2005

A newsletter of the Round Rock Talented And Gifted Association

Calendar of Events

Show your support
for gifted education.
Become a member of
RRTAGA.

Saturday, Apr 16, 2005

RRISD Advanced Academics and Gifted Education Parent Symposium

Organized by RRTAGA in
collaboration with the RRISD
Advanced Academics and
Gifted Education Department
8:30 am to Noon
Cedar Valley Middle School
8139 Racine Trail
Austin, TX 78717

Tuesday, Apr 26, 2005

RRTAGA Board Election and General Meeting

Forest North Elementary
7:00 - 8:30 pm
13414 Broadmeade Avenue
Austin, TX 78729

**Look inside
for more information
on the upcoming
Parent Symposium**

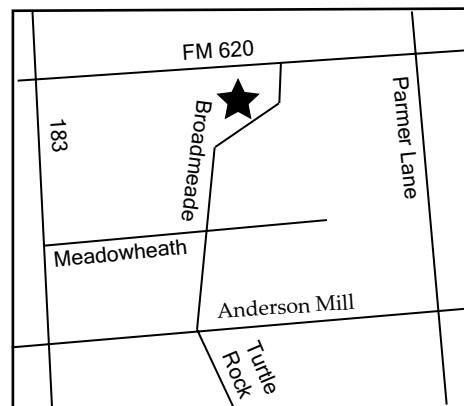
RRTAGA Board Election & General Meeting

Tuesday, April 26, 2005

7:00 - 8:30 pm

**Forest North Elementary School
13414 Broadmeade Avenue
Austin, TX 78729**

This is the last meeting for
2004-05. We will elect a new
Board to serve in 2005-06 and
we are making arrangements
to bring in a special speaker.
All members of RRTAGA are
encouraged to make a special
effort to attend this meeting.



Board Elections

WANTED: A FEW GOOD DADS AND MOMS

Would you consider serving on the Executive Board of the RRTAGA for the 2005-2006 academic year?

We are looking for willing volunteers passionate about gifted education. All positions are open and many have no nominees. Two positions, in particular are key: Director of Advocacy and Director of Education (previously known as Campus Rep Coordinator).

Please contact Dianne Sonnenberg, Secretary, RRTAGA to nominate yourself or someone else. Her email address is DianneS@mac.com.

RRISD TAG 101

by Na-Shuang Freeburg, President, RRTAGA

On Thursday, Mar 3, 2005, the RRTAGA held its first ever Parents' Round Table Discussion. The attendance, unfortunately, was far below expectation. Only 15 parents were present.

The discussion was good though. Because there were so few of us, we were not able to do the horizontal and vertical discussions that we had hoped for. Nevertheless, we were able to get to the heart of issues that most of the parents present were passionate about.

As a first time president of the RRTAGA, this past year has been a steep learning curve for me but I have been blessed by the wisdom, experience and support of other Board members and the TAG Director.

I have learned a lot about giftedness and about gifted education. Listening to all the parents at the Round Table Discussion brought into focus many things.

Generally speaking ... many parents are not satisfied with the quality of their children's TAG program. Few parents know where to channel their thoughts, questions and wishes. Who do they talk to that would make a difference? Few parents connect with other parents of gifted children. They don't know if they are alone in how they feel or if they are, in fact, part of a majority. Many parents assume that everybody (educators, policy makers, parents) appreciates the benefits of gifted education. And finally, many parents do not fully understand what giftedness is.

As a parent, I have barked up the wrong tree many times. Other times, I have found myself not knowing which tree to bark up. Given what many of us have noticed happening to the TAG program in

the last two years, there is a need and, I perceive from parents, a desire to come together to see how we can make a difference for the better. But we have to clearly understand many things before we can collectively address our problems with the right people.

So, fix your coffee, settle into your favorite chair and read on ...

The Pull-Out Program

At the Round Table Discussion, the pull-out program was a hot topic. We took a poll of all the parents present in the room. *How many of you like the pull-out program for language arts and math, and want to see it continue?* The vote was, surprisingly, UNANIMOUS. All in favor.

Unfortunately, as many of you have observed in the past two years, the pull-out program, which is being referred to in some circles as the "old program", is being done away with, school by school.

School by School

One of the things that puzzled a couple of parents was why a change effected in one school did not happen at another.

Round Rock ISD runs on a site-based system. There are four Learning Communities in the district: Westwood, McNeil, Round Rock and Stony Point. Each Learning Community is comprised of a group of elementary schools, middle schools and a high school. Each Learning Community is headed up by an Assistant Superintendent, also known

as a Vertical Team Leader.

The TAG Director makes recommendations to the Vertical Team Leaders and Principals. It is up to them to accept or reject the TAG Director's recommendations.

If the recommendations are accepted, it is the Principals prerogative to determine how those recommendations are implemented in his or her school. That is what site-based means.

The TAG Director's role, therefore, is to make recommendations on best practices, and to provide support in terms of resources and training.

The Curriculum

One parent asked what the curriculum for gifted children is.

The curriculum is the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

However, the Texas Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students calls for differentiated instruction through depth and complexity.

Depth is achieved through learning the language of the discipline, exploring details, patterns, rules, trends, unanswered questions and ethics. Complexity is achieved through the exploration of big ideas/generalizations/principles/techniques, chronology, varying points of view and interdisciplinary connections.

An APPROPRIATE Education

Before I became involved with the RRTAGA, I would always be arguing for my child's right to a BETTER education. To me, better



meant go faster, do more, accelerate, skip a grade. The reason I'm not embarrassed to tell you this is because I know I'm not alone.

I have since learned that, on the surface, that appears to be what my child, like all gifted children, need because gifted children are fast learners and they master the basics very quickly. Depending on their area of giftedness, they might even be voracious in their quest for the breadth.

Many of them are early readers. Notice that I say many, and not all, because some gifted children are born with dyslexia. In fact, it is not unusual for gifted children to struggle with disabilities that people do not normally associate with the very intelligent. Some are born with dyslexia, some are autistic and others need a lot of help with socialization.

Gifted children are different in many other ways. One of these has to do with the way they process information which is very different from regular kids, even the very bright high achievers.

Gifted children are abstract thinkers. Concrete information is easy for them, but once they've mastered that (and they do so very quickly), they have to move on to higher level thinking or they get bored.

In 1956, Benjamin Bloom created a taxonomy of education objectives that illustrates the hierarchy of learning. We start with acquisition of knowledge (facts). We move up to comprehension, followed by application. These are the three lower-level thinking skills. They are followed by three higher-level thinking skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

It is said that eighty percent (80%) of educational instruction is focused on knowledge, comprehension and application i.e., the lower-level thinking skills. Gifted children breeze through these three lower-level thinking skills. And perhaps this is where we make the mistake of believing that they just need to accelerate. But if acceleration

means moving up to higher-grade material, that is taught at the lower-level thinking skills, then gifted children are still not appropriately educated.

Gifted children enjoy thinking at higher levels of abstraction. They stay engaged and they are challenged when they have to analyze, synthesize and evaluate - hence the need for a differentiated curriculum that is modified for depth and complexity. Our children do not need a better education. They need an **APPROPRIATE** education.

Opposition to TAG Education

It might surprise some of us to learn that there are opponents to gifted education among educators and policy makers. I have even met a parent of a gifted child who is opposed to gifted education!!!

The most commonly cited reason is, that there is insufficient funds to support the form of TAG education sought by proponents of gifted education.

This is a very controversial issue. Is the budget a legitimate reason for the limited funding that TAG education gets?

Let me use behavioral psychology to frame the argument put forth by opponents of gifted education. Behavioral psychology has shown that behavior is driven by attitude, and attitude is influenced by knowledge.

What is the attitude that is driving the behavior of not wanting to provide sufficient funding for TAG education? It is one of perceived elitism.

Many opponents of gifted education perceive gifted children as people with more than their fair share of life's advantage, despite study after study that show that without an appropriate education, many gifted children fail, under-achieve and even drop out of school. Just



as many opponents perceive gifted education as a better education. The attitude, therefore, is: Why should the privileged receive a better education? That is elitist, they say.

And if attitude is influenced by knowledge, then it is apparent from the above discussion that we have a problem of misinformation.

Every child deserves a quality education.

Gifted education IS quality education for gifted children.

Therefore, I urge you as parents never to refer to gifted education as a better education. It is the **APPROPRIATE** education.

On being a Bell

We have a problem with the shape of RRISD.

Schools in the district are distributed in the shape of a dumb bell. Many clustered on the west, many clustered on the east and a few straddling the corridor of FM 620. There is no one school or location that the RRTAGA can choose for a meeting place that is convenient for *everybody* to get to.

Perhaps it is for this reason that participation at our meetings is very poor considering that we have about 2,000 children in the gifted program, represented by about 1400 sets of parents.

The association sends out notices of meetings and newsletters, such as this to the entire population of gifted children. The association also sends out email reminders of meetings and other notices to its 80 members. (We only have 80 members!!)

We urge you to sign up as a member of RRTAGA. And we urge you to make the drive to wherever our general meetings are held.

As with any association, RRTAGA is only as strong as its



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membership and the number of parents who volunteer with us. The *legitimacy* of our representation on issues rests on the actual numbers of people we represent.

We had 15 parents vote unanimously that they do not want the pull-out program rescinded. Statistically speaking, that unanimous vote means *nothing*. RRTAGA would like to write to the principals and vertical team leaders about what our parents think. But we will be laughed out of the district if they learn that we are speaking for only 15 parents.

For a parent population of 1400, we need to sample (in this case hear from) at least 250 parents

(5 percent margin of error, 90% level of confidence). Even if we achieve only a slim majority of 55 percent who say they don't want the pull-out program rescinded, it is a legitimate and representative opinion of the entire population of TAG parents.

RRTAGA is, right now, nothing more than a hand bell that can hardly be heard. What we need is to be the Liberty Bell for gifted education in Round Rock. That will happen when all parents of TAG children connect with each other, participate in the RRTAGA, learn from experts and educate ourselves on gifted issues.

Mark your calendars!

First RRISD Advanced Academics And Gifted Education



Parent Symposium
Saturday, April 16
8:30 am to Noon
Cedar Valley Middle School
8139 Racine Trail (off FM 620)
Austin, TX 78717

Look out for the flyer coming home to you soon!

The first Parent Symposium is an RRTAGA event organized in collaboration with the RRISD Advanced Academics And Gifted Education Department. At this Saturday morning conference, experts in gifted education will lead workshops on academic issues, and social and emotional issues related to giftedness. It's a great opportunity for parents to learn from experts and to interact with other parents.

Registration will begin on March 26.

Go to www.rrtaga.com to download registration form.

Conference fee is \$5 for RRTAGA members, and \$10 for non-members.

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here*

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