

Tag Line

Issue 4, May 2005

A newsletter of the Round Rock Talented And Gifted Association

Has it been a year already???? And how has it been for RRTAGA? Relatively speaking, I think this has been a good year.

Given the crisis of leadership we experienced last Spring and the late elections held at the end of September, the new Board, working closely with the new TAG Director, were able to maintain ongoing activities and even add to them.

At the general meetings, our members heard from Michelle Swain on the state of gifted education in Round Rock, and from Tracy Weinberg, interim Executive Director of TAGT on the state of gifted education in Texas.

We published 4 newsletters through which we strived to educate parents on the various aspects of giftedness. In the March issue, we surveyed parents on their feelings about the pull-out program. Eighty parents have responded to date of which 98% were in favor of keeping the pull-out program. The 2 percent who were "not in favor" expressed that the pull-out program was not enough. The responses are being transcribed and will be presented to the Board to decide how best to use them in our advocacy efforts.

The association awarded two scholarships. The winners were Sean Brown from McNeil High School and Natalie Beacham from Stony Point.

Through the TAG Director's initiative, the association organized several new programs this year.

In October, we had an Enrichment Fair which showcased various extra-curricular activities that parents could help introduce to the schools. In January, we organized the first Summer Enrichment Fair where parents were able to explore summer camp options for gifted children. In March, we organized the first Parent Roundtable Discussion. This was

attended by a mere 11 people, but the discussion raised a higher level of awareness of TAG needs.

Two weeks ago, we hosted the first Parent Symposium. Parents had a choice of 6 workshops. About 30 people participated in this symposium, and the feedback was positive.

Our webmaster Blake Freeburg did a complete overhaul of our website. Parents can get information on upcoming events, past issues of the Tag Line newsletter, and more recently, express their views or ask questions on the forum page, and learn about school candidate positions on TAG education. We tested the use of PayPal for the Parent Symposium. You told us that you liked the convenience. We are now working on extending this convenience to membership dues. More features will be added over time.

We recruited a few campus reps this year, but I regret that this was one critical area that we should have paid more attention to. To all campus reps, I want to say that I appreciate your hanging in there with us. Please stay because, we are bringing on board a Director for Education, Shannon Sherwood,

who will spearhead this effort. Campus reps are vital to building connections, to facilitating information and to strengthening advocacy.

If you have read this far and wonder why you didn't know any of this ever happened, there are several possible reasons: you haven't been receiving your copy of the Tag Line, you need to join as a member to receive email notices, and/or you should volunteer as a campus rep for your child's school. If all else fails, write me at nashuang@mrddata.com.

I WISH YOU ALL A GREAT SUMMER!!!!

-- Na-Shuang Freeburg, RRTAGA president

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Commitment to a Cause

Thank you, Steve and Jenn-fung !

Steve Beacham may not be a familiar name to many of our members and that's because Steve has never run for the position of RRTAGA president. But that belies the time and commitment that he has given to the association. Steve has served as Secretary, Treasurer, VP Membership and most recently, First VP Programs.

In appreciation for 5 years of dedicated service to the TAG community in Round Rock, the Executive Board presented Steve with a long-service recognition award this past General Meeting on Tuesday, April 26.

In case you think Steve is going to disappear from the scene, you will be pleased to know that he renewed his membership! Talk about commitment!

The Board also thanks **Jenn-fung Yu** for having served two years -- as campus rep for Pond Springs, and then as Campus Rep Coordinator. In the past year, Jenn-fung recruited 7 campus reps, and it is to her credit that a framework has been set-up, upon which the incoming Director for Education is able to build. We will most certainly welcome her back when time permits her to serve again!

**HAVE A
WONDER-
FILLED
SUMMER**



Scholarship Winners!

Congratulations to Natalie Beacham of Stony Point High School and Sean Brown of McNeil High School for being named the 2005 RRTAGA Scholarship recipients. Each student will receive a \$300 scholarship.

Below are their winning essays, responding to the following hypothetical question, "Due to budget pressures, Round Rock ISD is considering eliminating the TAG program. You've been asked to speak before the Round Rock ISD School Board regarding this matter. Please present your opinion as to why you think the School Board should or should not approve this proposal."

Remember, you must be a member of the RRTAGA as of September 1, 2005 to be eligible for next year's scholarship, so send in your membership application today!

-- Sandra Van Tilburg, Director for Scholarships, 2004-05

Sean Brown McNeil High School



Sean will leave this August to spend 10 months in Chile as an exchange student through Rotary International. He will apply to enter university this Fall and his desire is to get into the McCombs School of Business at UT. His ultimate goal is to work in international business and finance.

Unfortunately, in this time of economic strain for property-wealthy school districts in Texas, fostered by the "Robin Hood" school finance program, it is all too often impossible or exceedingly difficult to apportion precious budget monies to "niche" programs such as RRISD's Talented & Gifted program. While some may applaud this cost-cutting measure, it will only precipitate a long-run deterioration of educational options and thus decreased learning potential for the Round Rock Independent School District's brightest minds -- which are arguably among the most acute in the nation.

As a TAG student since kindergarten, I believe I can offer a rather unique, first-hand perception of the program's positive impact on gifted children. As a precocious 6 year-old, I often found myself bored in "regular" class -- the teacher would not permit me to should an answer the second it popped into my brain, which would inevitably occur about 10 seconds before my peers would tentatively raise their hands and hazard a guess at the answer to "fifteen plus sixteen." The TAG room served as a refuge -- not only was I allowed to perform my quick think-and-respond sequences, but many times other students would actually come by the answer *before myself* (a

Natalie Beacham Stony Point High School



Natalie has been accepted to a number of universities around the country and has chosen to attend Texas A&M Galveston. She will study Marine Biology, a dream she's had from the time she was a 2nd grader. She hopes to attend graduate school in Hawaii after Galveston.

Member of the Board:

I recall vividly and with a hint of nostalgia, my introduction to the district's TAG program. As a shy second-grader new to Texas and to my elementary school, I was amusing myself with a game on the floor of our classroom when my teacher gently placed her hand on my shoulder and asked me if I would go with a new teacher to another class. Though at first unsure why I was being made to leave my normal classroom, I did as instructed and soon found myself in a new class, filled with kids of all ages. Most of them were older than me by two or three years, and being as timid as I was, I was not quick to approach any of them. Instead, in exploring the new classroom, I opened a cabinet drawer and discovered that the cabinet was full of puzzles. This was both odd and exciting to me as we did not have puzzle drawers in my normal classroom, and was my first hint as to 6th the difference between this new class and the one I was used to. I immediately grabbed on of the smaller puzzles and sat down to work on it. The object of this puzzle was to fit all of the odd flat shapes back into the square I had dumped them out of, and within five minutes, I had done just that. As I got up to put the puzzle

Continued on back page.

RRTAGA Membership School Year 2005-2006

Membership dues: \$15 per family per year
Make check payable to RRTAGA
Mail to RRTAGA Membership, 8005 Elkhorn Mtn Tr, Austin, TX 78729

Parent's/Guardian's Name _____ New Renew

Address _____

Home phone _____ Email address _____

Please list school age children enrolled in the TAG program.

Name _____ Grade _____ School _____

Name _____ Grade _____ School _____

Name _____ Grade _____ School _____

**Join the RRTAGA or renew your membership
for 2005-2006 now!**

The Executive Board for 2005-2006

On Tuesday, April 26, 2005, the following people were voted in to serve on the 2005-2006 Executive Board of the RRTAGA:

President -- Na-Shuang Freeburg (nashuang@mrddata.com)
First Vice-President, Programs -- Blake Freeburg(blakef@mrddata.com)
Vice-President, Membership -- Sandra Van Tilburg
(kees.vantilburg@prodigy.net)
Secretary -- Dianne Sonnenberg (dianne@mac.com)
Treasurer -- Ken Fox (kfox24@austin.rr.com)

In addition, Blake Freeburg was re appointed Webmaster, Shannon Sherwood as Director for Education.

Shannon Sherwood is new to our Board and we warmly welcome her. She brings with her many years of professional experience working with educators and school districts. Her main challenge as RRTAGA Director for Education is to facilitate communication among parents within and across learning communities.

If you're interested in serving on the Board, we are looking for someone to fill the role of Director for Ways and Means. This person's job is to secure corporate sponsorship to fund RRTAGA activities and scholarships in 2005-2006. He or she must interacting with people.

This issue of Tag Line is sponsored in part by Gnomenculture Mosaic Studios. If you or your business would like to sponsor future issues of the Tag Line, please contact Na-Shuang Freeburg at nashuang@mrddata.com

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foreign idea to me at the time). This early exposure to other gifted children was useful in forming a peer group that was always "above" the other students in the grade intellectually, if not emotionally: suffice to say, "skipping" a grade would surely have been an option for me as far as learning was concerned, but at age 5, I had not quick developed the social skills requisite in a 2nd grader.

The TAG program was simply an invaluable resource in that it allowed its pupils to transcend the "thinking restrictions" of a regular classroom while serving as a sort of training ground for all sorts of life situations -- AP classes in high school, honors classes at Ivy League colleges, real-world scenarios where lawyers, doctors, scientists, and mathematicians, are forced to solve problems based on logic learned while finding the answers to MENSA puzzles in the 5th grade TAG classroom. In short, TAG has succeeded in helping the cream of RRISD's crop of minds reach their respective full potentials without having to attend a prohibitively expensive private or Montessori school. In doing so, it has also served as a sort of "magnet" drawing families with gifted children into the Round Rock area that may otherwise have settled in Westlake, Pflugerville, Cedar Park, or Austin. Simply retaining a competitive advantage over neighboring districts for future National Merit Scholars and Ivy Leaguers should be reason enough to retain RRISD's crown jewels.

Finally, one must examine the experiences of a "TAG kid" in a "regular" classroom in order to properly glimpse the abyss that gifted students would be forced into if TAG were to end. Because "TAG's sphere in elementary and middle school encompassed only Language Arts and Mathematics, I was forced to endure the daily drudgery of Social Science and Science classes in a "regular" classroom setting. Although these classes included countless numbers of my friends, the work challenged me so little that I can remember reading Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* in second grade while the teacher attempted for the umpteenth time to explain a simple scientific concept to a chattering and uninterested class. I had, of course, finished the science work 30 minutes earlier. The tedium of these types of classes was alleviated only in my daily TAG sessions (I entered the Language Arts program in kindergarten; TAG Mathematics began in 2nd grade). I could simply not endure the lack of intellectual stimulation that I experienced in my non-TAG subjects, which caused much unnecessary quiescence over the years when I should have been (in my opinion) researching foreign countries and learning chemical formulas in a more intense environment that would accept and accommodate my learning needs and, more importantly, direct my insatiable curiosity.

Ending the TAG program in favor of a "one size fits all" classroom environment -- including even the most gifted of children, who represent the future of not only Texas but the entire United States -- would be a wrongheaded move and represent a step in a direction that would lead inexorably to a "dumbing down" of the RRISD education system for the brightest pupils.

away, one older girl expressed interest in the fact that I had completed the puzzle and soon had the entire class's attention. Many of the older kids -- fourth and fifth graders -- came over to talk to me, and express their admiration, for none of them had yet been able to solve the puzzle.

Perhaps if I had been older, this would not have had such an impact on me, but because I was a young, impressionable second-grader, this experience did a great thing for me. As in the case with most second-graders, I thought most highly of the older kids, and very much revered them. I now realized that I had done something that none of them had been able to do, and that furthermore, they admired me for it. This was officially the first dose of the self-confidence that the TAG program would instill in me. Throughout elementary school and middle school, my TAG classes served as a place where I could succeed and was pushed to do so. Each time I did, a little more of that confidence would find its way inside me. Not only did the program help me to assist the self-confidence necessary for me to succeed, but it allowed an outlet for my creativity as well. I recall our teachers explanation as to why my classmates and I were in TAG -- "it's because you think differently than most other students," she would say. The TAG program allowed us all to experiment with new ways of solving problems, rather than being taught the one approach used to solve them in most classrooms. It allowed our creative juices to flow in writing and we were given the chance to read high level material as well. As in all, the program provided a place where students could build the skills necessary to be successful not only in high school, but in whatever else we chose to do.

In high school, TAG classes were very similar to AP classes, in that they consisted of a most rigorous course schedule and were aimed at teaching advanced concepts. To do well in these classes, one had to be motivated, organized, and extremely dedicated. At the high school level, this was essential in preparing students for college as similar skills are needed at any institute of high education. TAG classes go above and beyond regular course schedule, providing a healthy challenge to the students involved, pushing them to go above and beyond as well. For this reason, I beseech you not to let such a program disappear. This program has done great things for many students. It provides an outlet for those students who do think differently, instills self-confidence, and prepares us to meet the ultimate challenge in college. It seems the people who have put so much time and effort into this program have fit all the right pieces together and created something wonderful and essential to the success of this district's students -- something which we cannot afford to let go.