

Enrichment News

Wenatchee School District Enrichment Program

Mission: To find and nurture talent in students by providing and supporting opportunities for them to pursue their interests at an appropriate pace and level of complexity, and regular opportunities to work with students of similar abilities.

Kari DeMarco, Editor, 662-9047 ~ demarco.k@mail.wsd.wednet.edu ~ February 2010



IMPORTANT ENRICHMENT EVENTS

- F., Feb. 5**—6th grade Math is Cool competition, held at Orchard Middle School
T., Feb. 16—“Happily Ever After: A Cinderella Story” for FMS and Pioneer Challenge students
W., Feb. 17—8th grade High Performing Students orientation meeting—WHS Commons, 7-8 pm, for students who are interested in taking advantage of advanced options next year as a freshman
W., Feb. 24—9th graders’ Academic Challenge orientation meeting—WHS Commons, 7-8 pm
F., Mar. 5—5th grade Math is Cool competition, held at Foothills Middle School
M., Mar. 22—Elementary Newsroom culminating event—Young Writers’ Celebration—held at Pioneer Middle school in the evening
W., Mar. 24—Middle school Knowledge Bowl tournament, held at Pioneer M.S., 6:30-8 pm

WENATCHEE SCHOOL DISTRICT ENRICHMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW: A PRIMER

Many families have lived and sent children to school in this district for a long time now. But perhaps it bears repeating just exactly what the big picture looks like for enrichment.

From **kindergarten to grade three**, students may be sent to temporary pull-out groups based on a teacher’s perceptions of a student’s interests and abilities. Such groups might be for students who excel in reading, math, science, or drama, for example. These groups are usually only about ten weeks long.

Fourth and fifth graders may be formally identified as “gifted” by scoring above 95% of their age-mates in the nation on a standardized test of mathematics or reading skill. Other students could be identified by scoring above 90% of their age-mates on the Cognitive Ability Test. Some students are not formally identified, but can still be served in pull-out classes that help students stretch their literacy, math, or other skills.

In **middle school** students may be placed in higher math classes based on ability and readiness, or even be given more challenging work in a cluster core class. Students can also choose to participate in the Challenge program, which will help them develop habits that will lead to success in college.

At **Wenatchee High School**, students can self-select more challenging options such as honors English, a harder science or math track, etc. Academic Challenge is available, too, for those wanting a system to encourage and recognize their strides toward college-readiness. Directed Enrichment Study is a way that students can work with a mentor on developing their own gifts and talents.

Throughout this K-12 system hopefully teachers are differentiating instruction based on student readiness and ability. As much as I value our enrichment programs, this day-to-day, subject-by-subject approach is the hard-to-obtain but worth-seeking ideal. From fourth grade on there are often clubs to join such as Math is Cool, and Knowledge Bowl from middle school on. These culminate in fun competitions that allow students to show off what they have learned.

If you have further questions about any of the broad brush strokes above, feel free to contact Kari DeMarco at 662-9047 or demarco.k@mail.wsd.wednet.edu. Suffice to say the Wenatchee School District cares about trying to meet the needs of *all* learners, even the most capable. *

LINDA SILVERMAN POKES HOLES IN COMMON MYTHS

Linda Kreger Silverman, Ph.D, is one of the foremost experts in the field of gifted education. We have been lucky enough to have her as a speaker here in Wenatchee when we hosted the WAETAG (Washington Association for Educators of the Talented and Gifted) conference, but she speaks around the nation and writes prolifically. What follows is a summary of her observations and rebuttal of common misconceptions society has about academically advanced children.

Myth #1: “Any special ability is compensated for by a disability.” Silverman posits that this misconception developed from “our inability to reconcile our belief in equality with our observations that some individuals are vastly more capable than the rest of us. By giving the gifted person a handicap, we make it less desirable to be gifted, and we can dismiss the inequality.” Are some gifted children nerdy? Awkward? Cocky? Yes, but no more frequently than the general population.

Myth #2: “Gifted children can make it on their own.” The facts are that they do not. Do we expect gifted football players to make it on their own, or do we give them a coach just as we do the JV players? Many drop-outs, juvenile delinquents, and underachievers were under-served gifted students.

Myth #3: “All parents think their children are gifted.” Not necessarily. In fact, in our society we are so opposed to bragging that many parents are reticent to “admit” to noticing that their child is progressing faster than his or her age mates academically. We may all love our children and find them special, but not necessarily do we all see them as ready for curriculum two plus years above grade level.

Myth #4: “Early bloom, early fade.” Aka. “The others will catch up anyway.” This is perhaps another attempt on kind people’s part to believe that all brains are created equal. For myself, I know all too well that all people are not equally physically gifted. For some reason we find that easier to accept, and yet it is no more true. According to research by Martinson, “When educated appropriately, the gap between the gifted and their age-mates widens with age.” Using the sports analogy, Kobe Bryant probably responded better to coaching in basketball than I did, making gains faster than I ever could. The trajectory of development is simply different. According to Silverman, “The only way the average child could appear to ‘catch up’ would be to retard the development of the gifted child.” Perhaps this is why some of us cringe when we hear the phrase “close the achievement gap”—all well and good if we help struggling learners with extra support, but not if we simply neglect the academically advanced children in our midst. They should have a right to learn something new each day, too.

Myth #5: “Special attention to the gifted makes them elitist.” In fact, research shows that “conceit was corrected, rather than fostered, by the experience of daily contact with a large number of equals.” (Hollingworth) Or, as Silverman said, “If we really want to create a young man with elitist attitudes, all we have to do is place him in an unchallenging program for 12 years and allow him to be the smartest one in the class...” Perhaps what we really mean by elitism is being granted special privileges not based on merit, but rather something like your parents’ income level. Giving academically advanced students a curriculum matched to their readiness level is not elitist, it is just good educational practice. Using another analogy, I have big feet. Allowing me to wear size 9 shoes is not elitist, they just fit.

In summary, myths about “gifted” children abound. Even the term raises some hackles. I prefer the term “academically advanced.” A just educational system strives mightily to serve *all* learners where they are. No two children are just alike. “Gifted” students are not *more* deserving of a good, individualized education, but neither are they *less* deserving. Our society was built on the foundation that *everyone* should have the right to grow and bloom and contribute what they can to our democracy. According to Aristotle, “There is nothing unequal as the equal treatment of unequals.” *

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