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The *Middle School* CONNECTION

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DID YOU KNOW?

- ◆ Students can be referred to be evaluated for WINGS in any grade and at any time, even middle school students. Referral forms can be obtained from your counselor or online at: sps.k12.mo.us/phelps
- ◆ The following books can be found in your school's library: *"Why Gifted Kids Get Poor Grades and What You Can Do About It"* by Sylvia Rimm and *"Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnosis of Gifted Children and Adults"* by James Webb

The CONNECTION is a link between WINGS students, the Gifted Program and the classroom teachers in their home schools.

ENCOURAGING ACHIEVEMENT OR, "Turn your work in . . . please?"

One of the most common issues we deal with is the student who can't or won't complete assigned work. Like most issues that pertain to student actions, simple answers are as common as rain in the desert. All situations are different and unique. There are, however, some common threads that weave their way from situation to situation.

Teachers hear hundreds of excuses from these students. Instead of relying on excuses, students need to learn to take responsibility for their own behaviors and work. Many students depend on other students to carry the load to achieve success. Some gifted kids are masters at manipulating the situation and then blaming the other person -- a teacher, parent, classmate, the environment they live in, outside influences, etc. when their work isn't done. Others just assume that their work will be better than most of the class even if they procrastinate until the last minute and then do the minimum required.

Schools, too, send messages that lead students to believe the easiest way is always the best. Students get the impression that mistakes and failures are no-no's rather than opportunities for learning. The message from schools seems to be, you'd better do this correctly and learn these skills and concepts in a set amount of time because we

have so much to cover that there is no time to discover knowledge by learning from your mistakes!

Considering all these factors, how can we encourage students to embrace academic challenges and choose the more demanding learning activities instead of the easiest ones? How do we encourage them to persist through times of failure and take responsibility for their own learning? Some suggestions are listed below. Use this list as a springboard from which to formulate ideas of your own.

- Have high, firm expectations of students which are agreed to by teachers, students and parents.
- Don't allow that highly verbal gifted student to negotiate lesser expectations for himself or herself.
- Show your students real world connections and the long term benefits of acquiring high academic skills. This may include bringing in members of various professions or former students who are now in high school.
- Expose your top students to other top students throughout the district or state via academic competitions, academic fairs, club affiliations, etc.
- Use individual evaluation and assessment for some

tasks and products.

- Be a role model in learning from mistakes, showing that after a failure you can learn more, recover and go on.
- Stress the benefits of trial and error in learning. Most complex problems are solved in this way.
- Guide students to see different perspectives or answers instead of concentrating on the one correct answer.
- Teach and model responsible behavior.
- Encourage parents to assign daily chores for their children to do at home.
- Encourage and reward persistence and effort rather than focusing on how smart or intelligent your gifted students are.
- Assess your students' abilities in organization and study skills, and have a plan for teaching these skills.

Encouraging our children to achieve is not an easy task. It requires attention and persistence on our part in order for it to happen.

-"reprinted from GAMbit, Gifted Association of Missouri, Carolyn Coil, Winter 2000."

(For more information on underachievement, check out the websites on the next page.)



Meet Lori Brock, Counselor at Phelps: Greetings! I love new Beginnings and meeting new People. This is my first year as a school counselor and I am new to Phelps. I have taught at three different school districts over the last 13 years in biology, ecology, general science, and 7-12 gifted classrooms. I graduated in May from Evangel University with a Masters in School Counseling, I also have a Bachelors of Science in Biology Education as well as General Science and Gifted Certificates. I have been married for 26 years, live in Mt. Vernon and have three adult children and one granddaughter on the way.



Meet Janice Hampton, WINGS Middle School Liaison: I plan to be a link between students, parents, Phelps and home schools. My 34 years in education includes teaching students in special education, elementary and secondary students, staff development for teachers and teaching gifted students. We have two sons that we are so proud of. Court is a C130 pilot in the United States Air Force. Michael is an architect for S.A.P., a local firm. Our family also includes three dogs, Pottamus, Mabel and Rubee.

Websites with information about Underachievement of Gifted Students

Overcoming Underachievement

<http://www.penngifted.org/overcome-under.cfm>

Hoagies Gifted Education Page

<http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/underachievement.htm>

Gifted achievers and underachievers: A comparison of patterns found in school files

http://www.gt-cybersource.org/Record.aspx?NavID=2_0&rid=12299

Setting motivation traps

http://www.prufrack.com/client/client_pages/GCT_Readers/Strategies/Ch.14/Motivation_Traps_for_Gifted_Children.cfm

Questions from Teachers. . .

Question: I have a student in my class who has a lot of ability, but doesn't seem to want to try any enrichment activities that I plan for them. How can I make the student more motivated to work on these opportunities.

Answer: Student motivation remains a mystery to all of us. What works well in one instance doesn't seem to work in another. There are some keys to remember. First, ensure that the student has input into planned enrichment activities. Susan Winebrenner once said she had seen a thousand kids who wouldn't do the teachers work but not one student who wouldn't do their work. Second, give the student credit for the regular schoolwork before asking them to do work that is more difficult. Some students will avoid working beyond what is the normal work for the class because of a fear of receiving a lower grade. Teachers can remove this obstacle by giving student credit for work they have mastered before offering them enrichment. Third, try a variety of strategies. As was pointed out earlier, what works is often a matter of trial and error. By using the suggestions listed above, teachers have a better chance to find the right combination for their situation.

Question: I have a student in my class who attends WINGS, yet has a great deal of difficulty reading on grade level. How can this child be gifted but is unable to read at the level of his classmates?

Answer: Researchers have documented that many gifted people do not have equally high ability in all areas. They may be poor spellers or have illegible handwriting. A learning-disabled gifted child is not uncommon. Still, a teacher who lacks proper training may say, "This child can't be gifted. He/she is terrible at spelling (or handwriting, paying attention, following directions, etc.)." Spelling and handwriting (a function of dexterity) are not measurements of thinking skills, creativity, and intellectual talent.