

November 6, 2011

Dear Parents or Guardians:

Thank you for participating in the November Brown Bag Lunch. It is always such a pleasure to meet families face-to-face, to learn from you, and to see how I can be of help to you.

I am currently taking a professional development class through PBS Teacherline called "Connecting Family, Community and Schools." We are reading overwhelming evidence of the correlation between student success and parent involvement.

The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more. (Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002.)

Your attendance at the Brown Bag Lunch sessions is an important way you are involving yourself in your child's education, particularly regarding their special needs as a gifted student.

I'm encouraging you to go a step further today and complete the attached "homework" assignment. I will offer these assignments in connection with our lunches as the year continues. Each assignment packet includes one of the key ideas that comes up each month at the Brown Bag Lunches for you to reflect upon individually and as a family. These assignments are not meant to be completed in one sitting. Pick a day of the week that fits your family's schedule to complete a section of activities/discussion points over the course of the month.

As you talk with your kids, please don't feel limited to the questions here. Adjust, go deeper, go broader, and allow the discussion to lead you into new territories. Adjust these to fit the developmental level of your child (they are written for a secondary audience). The reflection and discussion in these assignments will give you a good working knowledge of the "basics" of what giftedness is and a foundation for advocacy for your child's education. Hopefully it will give you new connections and discussion points at home, and allow you to engage your child in ongoing dialogues about schoolwork and how their giftedness impacts them.

If new questions or concerns arise as a result of these activities, please know that I am available to answer questions and/or to connect you to other people and resources who can be of assistance.

Thank you for being the primary teacher in your child's education. What a powerful life-foundation you're providing your child!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Solt
Gifted and Talented Parent Liaison and Enrichment Coordinator
Thompson School District
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Interactive Family Homework Assignment, November: What is Giftedness?

DEFINING GIFTEDNESS

Work together as a family and brainstorm what it means to be gifted. How can you tell that someone is gifted? If you had to name who in your neighborhood or family was gifted, what criteria would you use? Write your ideas in the space below.

The definition of giftedness has created hurdles for parents, educators, researchers, and lawmakers, because there is not a single defining characteristic that identifies that a person is gifted. Go to the following link and read how our school district defines giftedness (based on state standards and measures):

http://www.thompson.k12.co.us/Divisions/Learning_Services/student_support/gt/gifted.html

(OR go to the www.thompson.k12.co.us homepage and type “gifted and talented” in the search bar. The first option that comes up is the main GT page where this info. is located.)

Do you agree or disagree with this definition? Why? If you/your child is identified as gifted, *how* was this identification made? What measures were used and at what age?

How do each of you feel about this “label” or designation? What advantages does it carry? Disadvantages? Does being gifted make you superior to those around you? Why or why not?

Now go to www.youtube.com. Search for the following videos: “I Am Gifted” by TemoralLobe 29 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Omx_iLtMjZA), and “What Is Gifted?” by rowdi5678 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbXnenCalQo>).

Discuss these videos. What thoughts did you have as you watched them? Do you agree with them? Do you disagree with any parts of them? Do you recognize yourself/your child in them?

Brainstorm someone else in your family (or someone your family knows well) who you would consider to be gifted. What qualities does that person have? How are they the same/different from you? Are their areas of giftedness the same as yours? What challenges does that person face because of his/her abilities? Do they have some areas of weakness of which you are aware?

If you are gifted in one area, is it possible to have disabilities in others?

MYTHS ABOUT GIFTED CHILDREN

Read the chart titled “Some Underlying Myths About Gifted Children” from *Guiding the Gifted Child* by James T. Webb, Elizabeth Meckstroth, and Stephanie Tolan (Ohio Society Publishing Company, 1982, page 9).

Parents: Do you hold any of these beliefs? Were you surprised to see any of these on the list? Are there others you would add to the list?

Students: Pick one of the myths from the list. Why do you think this is a myth? What evidence or examples from your own life helps you know that this is a myth and not something true about gifted children?

Together: You might also want to go to www.youtube.com again and search for “Top 10 Myths in Gifted Education” by GTAMoCo (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDJst-y_ptI). What myths are the same? Which are different? Does this speak to your experiences as a gifted family in the education system? Which of these have you encountered? Which were new to you?

WHAT DOES THE GIFTED CHILD LOOK LIKE?

Answer the following question individually (parents complete a list, kids complete a list). When you’re done, compare your lists.

What characteristics do you (child)/your child (parent) possess that you recognize as giftedness? What do you/they do differently from others?

Compare your lists. Did you list any of the same things? Does anything surprise you about your lists?

After you’ve compared your lists, read the handouts called “A Creed for Gifted Learners” and “Twelve Traits of Giftedness.”

Which of these traits match ones on your lists? What people do you know that fit some of the traits on the list that you do NOT possess?

Why is it important to recognize what traits are common for many gifted kids even though giftedness can look so different from person to person?

BRIGHT VERSUS GIFTED

Attached is a chart outlining the characteristics of “bright” and of “gifted” people. Spend some time examining this chart. Underline the words that stand out to you as being strong descriptors of your child, then complete the adult reflection below. When you have finished, have your child do the same. Look at (or discuss) your reflections together.

1. Adult/Child Reflection: Consider the following questions:

- a. What differences stand out to you between bright and gifted people?
- b. Is one designation “better” than the other?
- c. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a member of either of these categories?
 - i. Add the category “average” and answer the question above.
- d. How are these categories alike?
- e. What are the challenges in determining if a child is bright versus gifted?
- f. In what areas would you consider your child to be bright? gifted? average? below average? disabled?
- g. What impressions do you take away from this?

2. Family reflections:

- a. Where are your similarities in thinking? Differences?
- b. Did anything surprise you about the way the other person responded? Why or why not?
- c. What have you learned about yourself or each other through this reflection and discussion?
- d. What have you learned about giftedness?

SUMMARY PROJECT

Pretend you are asked to be the head of a Giftedness Education Campaign. Create a poster or flyer that will be reproduced and distributed around town that educates the community on what giftedness is or is not (or both). Work together to plan and create this poster or flyer.

Do you want to share your final product? Email a copy to me (see contact information below).

Upcoming “Homework” Assignments:

December: Issues in motivation, overachievement/underachievement, and perfectionism

January: Stress management

February: Relationships (peers and family) and bullying

March: Statistics and realities in gifted education

April: Advocating so no child is left behind

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Email the responses on the next page to me or mail them to: Thompson School District, ATTN: Jennifer Solt at LS/GT, 2890 N. Monroe, Loveland, CO 80538

Dear Families,

Please provide some feedback and reactions to this assignment. Write YES or NO for each statement.

- _____ 1. As a family, we have a more thorough understanding of what giftedness is and what it is not.
- _____ 2. We enjoyed completing the assignment together.
- _____ 3. This assignment engaged us in discussions that helped us gain new insights into one another and/or helped us formulate important questions or discussion points for one another.
- _____ 4. I would like to participate in another interactive family assignment.

Any other comments: _____

Thank you for your feedback and for participating in this family activity.