

30 Years and Counting!! GRC Continues to Empower Gifted Children

Gifted Resource Council was founded 30 years ago with a clear mission of bringing together the resources of the community, schools and parents to help bright and talented children in the greater St. Louis metropolitan area achieve their full potential. Recognizing that gifted children were an underserved population, GRC's founders joined together in 1983 to create an organization that would provide challenging academic opportunities for children outside of the typical school setting.

Since then, GRC has served more than 42,500 students in pre-K through 8th grade, stimulating them, enriching their academic experiences and helping them develop the essential social skills that will enable them to become the leaders of tomorrow.

GRC has accomplished this with a lean but dedicated staff, many talented part-time teachers and hundreds of devoted volunteers who have made this low-budget nonprofit so impactful. Here's how GRC does it.

Academic Challenge Cup engages 1,700+ students each year over seven days in friendly competitions in math, language and creativity games on the campuses of Washington University and the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Students' academic gains are much greater than might be expected of a three-hour event because they practice these critical skills for months before or after school, under the guidance of volunteer coaches trained by GRC.

Learning Labs enable students to take 90-minute high-interest courses on Saturdays during the fall and winter. Children interact with others who are

their intellectual peers while being challenged by an exciting, hands-on enrichment curriculum.

GRC's Summer Academies are eleven two-week academic day camps in a variety of topics that would not be addressed in such depth during the school year. Students who want to prepare for the future by looking back on history or the evolution of planet earth can reenact life in ancient cultures,

learn about dinosaurs, fossils and continental drift. They can create a business and earn a profit while practicing green ecology, or consider the myriad possibilities of space exploration.

GRC nurtures emotional and social development.

In addition to academic challenges, GRC fosters teamwork and cooperation in an effort to improve the social skills that gifted children need in order to grow into leadership positions and achieve successful careers.

GRC fosters smart parenting by offering workshops by educators and counselors who are experts in working with gifted children. Parenting classes are offered in conjunction with Learning Labs and Academic Challenge Cup. Every issue of *mindwonders* also contains an article full of practical tips for parents, ranging from how to communicate with a gifted child to dealing with being average in some areas, boredom in school and nurturing healthy self-esteem. These articles by psychologist Dennis O'Brien can be found at www.giftedresourcecouncil.org. The article in this issue contains tips about how to foster a child's respect for others.



Students in GRC's Fall 2013 Learning Lab class "LEGO® & K'NEX®" admire their transportation constructions.

Dialogue with the Director

As Gifted Resource Council commemorates thirty years of service to gifted children and their families, I realize that it has been my pleasure to have worked with twenty-five years of GRC's Summer Academies! Often as the "busy-ness" of the summer draws to a close, I look forward to traveling with my family to Michigan where we frequently enjoy a relaxing morning of picking blueberries.

More than once I have been reminded of the comparisons between blueberries and children – even between blueberries and gifted children!

Blueberries usually grow in clusters of a dozen or so on a stem – similarly, we at GRC see children in groups of a dozen or more. Occasionally, however, one finds a single berry or two, just as we know how an individual child or two will always stand out in a class. While it is easiest to pick the berries that grow close at hand (just as it is easiest to teach the children who work well together in a group), I often find myself reaching for those berries at the very top of the bush, which appear to be larger or "better" (just as every good teacher stretches for the children who are more difficult to reach, but whose gifts may indeed be exceptionally unique).

But then, easily overlooked, are the clusters of berries that grow closer to the ground, hidden at first beneath green leaves – and how often do we unwittingly pass by the small group of children who don't beg for attention, but yet need it just as much. Once noticed, those berries, like children, are very good.



Sue Flesch, GRC executive director

When picking blueberries, one need only softly touch the palm-sized group of berries, and the ripe ones quickly fall from the stem. Similarly, when working with gifted children, the vast majority of them are eager to be encouraged and inspired by outstanding teachers. But sometimes an individual berry will seem to hold tighter onto the stem, necessitating a more forceful "pull" to release it from the bush – just as GRC teachers work especially hard to reach that child who needs extra encouragement to learn and grow.

Once the bucket is filled with delicious, ripe blueberries, the picker sighs with accomplishment and proceeds to enjoy the results of her labor. Likewise, GRC's outstanding teaching staff should be recognized for the exceptional job that they do inspiring gifted young people.

Let's celebrate the many teachers who nurture gifted children as we look to the next thirty years of Gifted Resource Council's service to the bright young people in our midst....

Susan C. Flesch

How can we convince our child's teacher that she does give others the respect they deserve?

by Dennis O'Brien

This is the wrong question. When a teacher voices concerns that their gifted child does not show respect for others—most likely meaning classmates and the teacher herself—parents need to ask: how can we help our child understand how important respecting others is, learn how to do it, and value it enough to do it consistently.

Parents play a crucial role in helping their children develop appropriate social skills that will help them succeed in school and work and build satisfying social relationships throughout their lives. Doing so requires honesty about what their child needs, honesty about their own behaviors, the courage to make some changes in their own behavior if they need to, and a commitment to persist with their action plan when things don't turn around immediately. Here's how:

- Begin by gathering information. Ask teachers and other adults who are in a position to observe your child interacting with others what they see. Does he listen to others, praise and encourage them? Does he thank them when they offer suggestions or do something thoughtful? Or does he ignore others? Criticize them? Put them down? Knowing the specifics will help you make your intervention more focused and effective.

- Examine your own behavior. Does your child see you gossip about others with your spouse or with friends? What sort of critical things do you say on your cell phone when your child can hear you? Are you phoning or texting friends constantly, even at meals or when driving your child to school? There is a reason the The College School in Webster Groves has a prominent sign saying, "NO CELL PHONES IN PARKING LOTS FOR EVERYONE'S SAFETY." Even if you are not gossiping, ignoring children like this shows disrespect and a lack of awareness of how to use a valuable opportunity to interact positively with your child. Perhaps you need a rule for yourself: "Cell phones not allowed when driving children."

Does any of this describe you? How often has your child heard you put other people down? How often has she seen you so preoccupied with your own agenda that you have not been really present to her? Have you complained that you or your child were not being treated respectfully? Unfortunately, a disproportionate number of parents, much like their gifted children, lack social skills themselves and fail to model healthy social development. Parents like these value the intellectual development of their child above all else, are highly critical of teachers and programs, belittle other children, and insist on getting special advantages for their children.

- Model the respectful behavior you expect of your child. This should include speaking positively about others and praising them. It also includes thanking people, even if they are simply doing their job. Gifted children are observant, and if they see you trying to do the right thing, they will come to value it also. And if you make a mistake, say so. Let your child know that you know you were disrespectful and will try to do better.

- Make your values explicit. Make it clear that people don't have to be smarter than you to deserve your respect. Be sure that you say how much you value your child being able to get along with others, working as a teammate and being well-rounded. Your child, like so many very bright children, may think that what you value most is how quickly she learns. You may have unwittingly contributed to this misperception by praising her too often for doing so and not enough for other positive character traits and behaviors.

If you don't find other qualities of hers to praise, she will begin to believe intellectual prowess is of paramount importance to you. It shouldn't be, and you need to make sure that she understands it is just one of a number of character traits and behaviors you value.

- Explicitly teach your child social skills. Talk about the importance of eye contact, smiling, listening without interrupting, praising someone for having good ideas, taking turns and playing fair, using other children's names, praising them, making intentional efforts to be pleasant, and asking, "How was your weekend?" Roleplay these skills with your child.

- Make it clear you expect your child to learn to get along with all her classmates and to form friendships with some of them. Encourage her to look for opportunities to praise the skills, insights and behaviors of others that show positive character traits such as honesty, kindness, perseverance and cooperation.

- Follow up by asking how she used these behaviors in her daily interactions. Ask about the opportunities she had to show respect, cooperation and good sportsmanship at school. Just asking will communicate the importance you place on these values. Praise her for her efforts. Ask how she thinks her good behavior affected others, and reinforce the positive

Parents who use these strategies will help their gifted child learn to consistently show respect for others. This, in turn, will help them develop invaluable, life-long social skills that will enhance their careers and lead to more satisfying relationships with others. Everybody wins.

Dennis O'Brien is a licensed clinical social worker, experienced educator and therapist. In addition to writing educational materials used by the Washington University School of Medicine Dept. of Psychiatry and weekly columns on parenting for the Suburban Journals, he writes monthly columns for St. Louis Moms and Dads, and regular columns for CHARACTERplus, Family Connection (Mo. Dept of Mental Health) and Gifted Association of Missouri. O'Brien's April 6 column, "Prevent teen suicide by addressing it," won the 2010 Missouri Institute of Mental Health award for outstanding reporting on suicide.

Outstanding Teachers Challenge and Inspire GRC Students

Arthur A. Koenig exemplifies the outstanding educators who enrich the lives of children parents entrust to GRC. For 15 years Art has taught GRC students about ancient cultures, emphasizing crafts, calligraphy, drama, history and a remarkable focus on what individual students would like to learn more about.



*Art Koenig, GRC's
"Renaissance Man"*

Upon retiring after 31 years as a German teacher (he also worked as a Russian language translator), including 27 at Dewey International Studies School, Koenig became a part-time social studies teacher at Salem Lutheran School in Affton. In 1991, he was the subject of a nineNetwork of Public Media broadcast: "Look What They're Learning Now." In 1992, Koenig was honored as the St. Louis Public Schools Teacher of the Year, as well as given the Emerson Electric Excellence in Education Award.

Stoking Students' Interests

"His interest in the subject matter shines through in an unavoidable way," said GRC alum Rebecca Eissenberg, a third year law student at Washington University where she is preparing to practice public interest Immigration Law. "He is so knowledgeable that he can't help but stray from lessons at the slightest hint of tangential interest from a student. He seems to know exactly the things students are most likely to take interest in and comes prepared to stoke those interests with creative projects and reading recommendations.

"He's also well-practiced in encouraging and challenging gifted children, which can involve managing some strong personalities. He somehow makes sure every student feels involved and valuable, I suppose just by listening to them and rejoicing in their new knowledge or realizations of their ideas. His kind, easy-going, and welcoming nature makes him approachable, and when combined with his deep

knowledge, this makes him an exceptional resource for curious children."

Eissenberg participated in GRC's Summer Academies for eight years as well as some Academic Challenge Cup Equations tournaments. Inspired by GRC teachers like Art Koenig, she also returned to GRC to serve as a teaching assistant with GRC's Ancient Academy for four summers while in college.

"The biggest way he impacted me was by showing me an approach to life and learning," she said. "It always seems that the only thing he's more interested to know more about than the topic at hand is what the person he's talking to is thinking and what their ideas on the topic are. Somehow he manages to do this sincerely and in a laid back manner that makes you want to know about him, too. I try to see the joy in learning from books and people the way he does."

Koenig, she said, "is respectful of intelligence, challenging, and child-guided. He seems to start from the point of view that the students are much like adults who have unfamiliarity with the topic (and maybe a little more interest in fantastic, mythical stories and ancient weaponry). So, he speaks to students like adults and reads them abridged versions of major literary works, like the "Odyssey" or "Beowulf." Some kids really thrive from this exposure. Once the basic foundation knowledge is laid and the children have figured out what interests them most about the topic, his method is to listen to the ideas they have and help them figure out how to safely and effectively create what they've imagined."

A Most Unique Individual

Beverly Berla, GRC's second Executive Director and a recently retired gifted teacher in the Ladue school system, has taught Ancient Academy with Koenig for the past 15 years. "Art is a most unique individual who thrives on his passion for ancient history and languages," she said. "He brings this passion to his teaching and ignites the fire in kids. The depth of his interest leads him to fascinating connections between cultures, literature and

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languages of the past, present and future. Art is a renaissance man, a scholar, a gentleman and a great friend. Teaching with him for 15 summers has been an adventure and a delight.”

GRC Speaks to a Need

Art Koenig himself is very positive about GRC. “I feel that GRC speaks to a need in the community for enrichment, and we are able to provide it with wit, imagination, hands-on learning and a depth of knowledge which can usually be found only in higher education,” he said. “The teachers who devote their extra time to the activities of Gifted Resource Council, such as Learning Labs and Summer Academies really feel that they can make a contribution in the inspiration of students who need challenges outside of the regular classroom.

“I love doing this because the kids respond so well to the topics. They will know that the past is indeed a different country, and people do things differently there. They will as well be introduced to stories about people who lived their lives in the various time periods dealt with. Thutmose III, Ramesses II, Pericles, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Hannibal Barca, Mark Antony, Cicero, Marcus Aurelius and many more have stories that need to be passed on to another generation so that they are not relegated to the dustbin of history. They are indeed us, just in an ‘alternate reality’ we call the past. Parents need to know that GRC appeals not just to future historians, but to future scientists, technocrats and social critics as well.

“Gifted children may be smart, but they are still kids and possess energy, intelligence and drive which may not be in everybody. We all attempt to channel those gifts in directions which lead to an expansion of their knowledge base and a desire to pursue the matter as far as their abilities will take them. I believe that GRC is the place where that can and does happen.”

What parent would not want to have a child stimulated and inspired by teachers like Art Koenig!

GRC Alum Gives Back

Eliot Prokop began attending GRC’s Summer Academies as a kindergartener in 1996 when his gifted teacher at Bellerive Elementary in the Parkway School District, Barbara Rea, referred him to GRC. He attended three two-week Summer Academies every summer as well as Saturday Learning Labs for the next eight years. Eliot then returned as a high school volunteer and later served as a teaching assistant while in college and graduate school.

“From the beginning, Eliot felt comfortable and welcome at GRC - he found a place where his intellectual curiosity and non-stop questions (from dinosaurs to construction equipment) were actually encouraged,” said his mother, Laura Bryant.

Family Affair

“GRC became ‘a family affair’ when his younger sister, Ava, began attending GRC Saturday Learning Labs and Summer Academies as well. Gifted Resource Council will always have a special place in our family.

“Space Academy ‘sealed the deal’ for Eliot, as he developed a brand-new, but life-long passion for building and launching rockets. I



Eliot and his sister Ava in 2000 after attending GRC’s Space Academy.

believe that is one of the reasons he came back to volunteer in high school, because he wanted to share what he had learned - he was still launching rockets with his Dad in middle school. And it’s one of the reasons he loves working at GRC now as a teaching assistant. He can share his knowledge and expertise, and pass it along to the next generation.”

The personal attention Eliot received was also important. “Sue (Flesch, GRC’s Executive Director)

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provided the leadership and continuity that made all of the GRC programs work so well,” Bryant said. “Sue always remembered Eliot every time he walked in the door and always made him feel immediately at



Eliot Prokop reconnects with his former GRC's Space Academy "captain", David Linder, after twelve years.

home. Captain David Linder was another great part of the GRC experience, including his special Latin classes.

Why He Returned

“More than anything, Eliot has developed a strong and lasting bond with the GRC community,” Bryant said. “I believe he truly loves the idea that, year after year, intellectual children can come together - with their families - with a sense of purpose and acceptance. Eliot has great empathy for the struggle that some of these kids have socially, and, as a result, he looks for ways to make their experience at GRC just as positive and memorable as his was.”

Eliot, now in graduate school in computer science at the University of Missouri-Columbia after attending Washington University as an undergraduate, wants parents to know that GRC is “an incredible experience. It provides a welcoming atmosphere for children who want to learn new things and surrounds them with students of a similar tack. It’s an opportunity for growth and friendship while having fun and learning amazing things they won’t cover in school.”

“I think GRC offers tremendous benefits,” he said. “It’s a haven of sorts where kids can make friends with people who they share common intellectual interests and be accepted for who they are. It also helps them pursue interests they cannot during the

school year and introduces them to concepts they won’t find in a typical classroom.”

“I had a great time volunteering in high school and thought it would be a fun and rewarding experience for both myself and the students,” he said. “I volunteered to try to give back to the program that made my summers so amazing when I was younger. Hopefully I helped show the kids that it was okay to be smart, okay to dare to pursue their interests, and that they weren’t alone—because it is extremely easy to feel different from all the other kids at school. GRC gave me an environment where I could feel comfortable and was actually surrounded by other kids interested in learning.”

Parent of Alum Lauds GRC

Executive Director Sue Flesch recently received an unexpected letter from Gina Henderson whose son participated in GRC programs more than a dozen years ago. For the past nine years, the Hendersons have lived in the bay area on Stanford University’s campus in California.

“My name is Gina Henderson, and I am writing to express my thanks to you. My son, Ian, benefited so much from GRC that I feel compelled to write to you as he just turned 25 this year. Ian participated in the Summer Academies and the weekend classes during the school year.

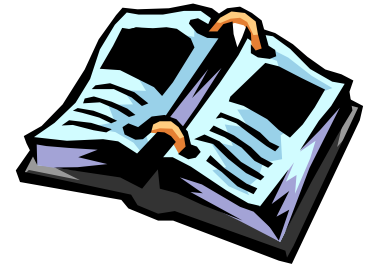
“Now Ian works at Apple Computers in Cupertino, CA. He is a software engineer and writes code.

“He graduated with a double major in math and computer science from UC Berkeley in 2010. Ian’s unique experiences with GRC in St. Louis at the time he was growing up there played a big part in his personal confidence and later successes.

“Thank you for your continued work with gifted children. They are a unique population who need special programs like yours.”

GRC’s Executive Director Sue Flesch remembers Ian as “definitely a child who stood out from the rest - even in a gifted setting. I am very pleased that he is living up to his enormous potential and proud as well, of the part that Gifted Resource Council played in his development - both personal and academic. It is reaffirming when parents like the Hendersons take the time to express their thanks.”

Mark Your Calendar



- February 1, 2014* – Summer Opportunities Fair at MICDS, 101 N. Warson Rd.
February 8-March 15, 2014 (Six Saturdays) – Winter Learning Lab at Wydown Middle School, 6500 Wydown Blvd. Parenting Classes will be offered.
February 25 & 26, 2014 – Academic Challenge Cup’s **Equations** Competitions at University of Missouri-St. Louis. Parenting classes will be offered.
February 27 & 28, 2014 – Academic Challenge Cup’s **Creative Convention** at University of Missouri-St. Louis. Parenting classes will be offered.
March 11, 2014 – Academic Challenge Cup’s **LinguiSHTIK** Competition at Washington University in St. Louis. Parenting classes will be offered.
March 12 & 13, 2014 – Academic Challenge Cup’s **Equations** Competitions at Washington University in St. Louis. Parenting classes will be offered.
June 16-July 25, 2014 – **GRC’s Summer Academies** at Crossroads College Preparatory School, 500 DeBaliviere Ave.

Call GRC at 314-962-5920 for more information on any of these events.

BECOME A MEMBER OF GIFTED RESOURCE COUNCIL

Now *you* can participate in shaping America’s future by becoming a member of **Gifted Resource Council**, a not-for-profit education agency serving bright and talented young people. Your tax-deductible contribution will enable us to improve existing programs, extend offerings and reach more children. Your membership will not only benefit gifted children, but also entitle you to receive the following:

Gifted Member: \$60

- ★ Priority registration for all programs
- ★ *FREE parenting classes (\$160 value)*
- ★ Use of GRC Library

Intelligent Friend: \$100

- ★ All of the above, *plus*
- ★ \$10 discount off two Learning Lab registrations

Sharp Sponsor: \$150

- ★ All of the above, *plus*
- ★ Additional \$25 discount off a Summer Academy

Talented Patron: \$250

- ★ All of the above, *plus*
- ★ Additional \$25 discount off a Summer Academy (\$50 total)

Brilliant Benefactor: \$500

- ★ All of the above, *plus*
- ★ One FREE Learning Lab course *or*
- ★ Learning Lab scholarship in your name at your request

Wise Philanthropist: \$1,000

- ★ All of the above, *plus*
- ★ GRC logo lapel pin
- ★ The undying gratitude of gifted children throughout the metropolitan area

Imaginative Institution: \$100

- ★ For schools and other not-for-profits

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mindwonders

informs the public about activities of Gifted Resource Council and about issues relevant to the development of bright and talented children and youth.

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Fall 2013

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GRC needs your charitable support to continue providing talented children with special enrichment opportunities. Tax-deductible membership gifts keep fees as low as possible and provide scholarship assistance to those who need it.

Please use the enclosed envelope to mail your membership gift today.

Gifted Resource Council is a not-for-profit education agency serving the greater St. Louis Metropolitan area. Its purpose is to bring together the resources of the community, the schools and parents to help bright and talented children achieve their potential.