



Bexley City School District

To provide educational experiences that engage, equip and empower each student.

QUARTER 1 NEWSLETTER for FAMILIES of GIFTED LEARNERS

September 17, 2021

Welcome Back!

Another school year is up and running and moving faster than ever, it seems. We are thrilled to have all of our students in school with us every day and are excited to see what this year brings. Last year we began sending quarterly newsletters and holding quarterly meetings for parents, guardians, and other caregivers of our gifted learners. Based on the feedback and response we received from those offerings, we will continue those into this school year. You can find past newsletters and links to last year's quarterly meetings at www.bexleyschools.org/GiftedEducation.aspx. In this newsletter, we will focus on how we can support the whole gifted child both in and out of school. As we look to set our children up for success with their learning, we need to attend to both their academic and social-emotional needs. It is all about balance. Let's dive in!

Have a great fall!

Sincerely,

Dr. Colleen Boyle, Director of Curriculum and Gifted

Finding Balance for the Whole Gifted Child

When we think of our gifted children in school, we often focus on the academic opportunities that are provided to them or what our students *DO* and how well they do it. Our students have access to a wealth of opportunities in school to nurture academic and artistic talents. And, the older students get, the more options exist - so many that it can be overwhelming to sift through them. As individuals who care and want the best for our children, it can be tempting to have students participate in every gifted service or advanced level course, register them for an athletic team every season, and encourage involvement in an array of extracurricular activities both in and out of school. Sometimes we and our students do this for fear of missing out on an opportunity that will shape them now and provide for future success. Sometimes the motivation is a desire to be the best - either personally or compared to others. Sometimes our gifted learners seek all of these experiences because they have a wide range of diverse interests and talents, so it is hard to narrow the focus.

Seeking involvement, making the most of every opportunity, and engaging in a wide variety of experiences is not a bad thing. But it isn't always a great thing, either. There is a delicate balance of pushing our students (or allowing them to push themselves) to seek challenges and broaden their knowledge and skills while also recognizing the limits of time, mental stamina, physical energy, and emotional resilience. We don't want our children to coast and not strive to reach their potential, but we also do not want to create unhealthy levels of stress or anxiety along the way. Dr. Tracy Cross, a leading expert in that area of social-emotional aspects of giftedness, noted the importance of finding the balance and nurturing the whole child so that one aspect of their person isn't constrained by the other. This means not letting efforts to meet academic needs constrain wellness and development in the social, emotional, physical, or spiritual domains, and also not letting efforts to meet needs in those other areas constrain academic or cognitive development. It is a tricky tightrope walk, for sure.

Rather than focusing on what we want our gifted students to do or experience in life, we need to concentrate on helping them develop who they are as individuals. That would encompass their identity, personality, health and well-being, and talents, among so many other things. That means also considering their other traits, characteristics, and behaviors beyond their academic or cognitive skills. Take a look at the newsletters and recordings from sessions last year (see link above) for more information about the traits and behaviors of gifted individuals.

During a presentation in November 2019, Dr. Kristina Collins, president of SENG, an organization committed to supporting the social-emotional needs of gifted individuals, discussed considerations when striving for balanced support. First, she reminded attendees that a child's social-emotional and safety needs must be met before learning can occur. So, she encouraged all to provide opportunities to have quality social interactions and to nurture mental health and spiritual growth. Second, Dr. Collins indicated we want to provide opportunities to nurture a gifted student's talents, whatever they may be. That includes sometimes pushing them to take courses that may be more challenging than they have experienced before. But it also may mean only taking advanced courses in one or two subject areas of particular strength and balancing those with traditional level courses in other areas.

Dr. Collins also noted that adults can provide inspiration that hopefully leads to motivation, and we do that by helping children see the meaning in what they do during their days. Is the opportunity being pursued just meant to fill time or because that seems to be "what is expected"? Or, is the opportunity, whether a course or extracurricular activity, tied to the child's interests or personal goals? How will those experiences apply to what the *learner* wants to do with their life now and in the future? Do they bring enjoyment to the student? Do they provide the gifted child with a chance to contribute to something bigger than themselves or solve problems? Do they validate who the gifted individual is as a person? It may mean allowing the child to take a cooking class outside of school because of their interest and knack for food sciences and letting them stop taking piano lessons because they no longer find joy in the music. Or, it may mean taking fewer elective courses to allow space in the schedule for an internship or other non-traditional learning experience.

In the end, it is about valuing the individual child's development, strengths, goals, and interests. As a result, the path each gifted learner takes through their school years will look different from everyone else. Families and students, with the input of educators, should work together to determine the right array of opportunities in and out of school to help nurture the whole child as a person. By focusing on who the gifted learner is rather than what they do, the student will develop confidence and a willingness to face challenges in all areas of their life.

The September family session via Zoom will explore this topic in more depth. Information about that is toward the end of this newsletter.

Quick Strategies to Find Balance

Here are just a few ideas to find balance and meet the needs of the gifted learner as a whole child.

- Take time for fun and silliness.
- Discuss and document realistic academic and personal goals for the current year and for the future.
- Identify an area of passion and prioritize experiences that nurture that interest.
- Limit extracurricular activities to two at a time - one long term interest and one new area to explore.
- Protect family time, such as dinner together or game nights.
- Take advanced courses and programs in areas of particular strength while ensuring the load is not so significant it limits other opportunities and experiences outside of the school day. The idea is to be challenged, not overwhelmed.
- Make space in the academic schedule for unique electives and non-traditional course opportunities.
- Leave some time unscheduled each day and weekend to allow the child to do what is needed or desired in the moment and to foster creativity.
- Spend time with friends and time alone just doing what you love to do.
- Practice strategies for stress management (meditation, breathing exercises, physical movement, etc.)
- Tune out others opinions and expectations and focus on who your gifted learner is and wants to become.

Upcoming Family Engagement Opportunities

We will once again hold quarterly sessions for parents and guardians to come together and learn a little about how to further support their gifted learners. Mark your calendars and join us for the events listed below. Slides and recordings of previous sessions will be posted on the district's [gifted website](#).

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- *September 28* - Supporting the Whole Gifted Child - 6:00-7:00pm - [Join via Zoom](#)
 - We will have an opportunity for group discussion. Attendees are encouraged (but not required) to review [this TIP sheet from the National Association of Gifted Children](#) before the session.
 - *November 30* - Developing Grit in the Gifted Child - 6:00-7:00pm, Virtual
 - *January 25* - Topic TBD - 6:00-7:00pm, Virtual
 - *March 29* - Gifted Family Support and Collaboration - 6:00-7:00pm, Location TBD

We also will be conducting a gifted program review this fall. The goals of the review are to consider the effectiveness of our existing services and to ensure there is a match between the services and supports available in Bexley City Schools and the needs of our gifted learners within the context of best practice research and state rules. To allow many voices to be heard, a survey will be sent in the next few weeks for parents/guardians of gifted learners to complete. This will coincide with a survey that will be available to students and one for teachers. Once the program review is underway, all meeting notes and materials and an opportunity for feedback will be available on [our website](#).

OAGC Parent Day

The Ohio Association for Gifted Children is once again holding their annual conference in October. The kickoff to that event is a Parent Day open to parents and guardians, educators, and community members with an interest in understanding and supporting gifted children. This event will be held virtually on October 17 from 2-5pm and is FREE. For more information, [download the flier](#). Interested participants can register using the [paper form](#) or [electronically](#).