

Connecting

for high potential ● ● ● ● ● September 2011



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
Gifted Children

NAGC receives similar questions from teachers and parents; however, rarely is there an opportunity to explore how the “other side” might be facing the issue. Interestingly, both groups benefit from the same information even though they look at it from different perspectives and have different roles to play in helping gifted children reach their potential. Our ongoing goal is for teachers and parents to develop a broader understanding of children’s potential and thus create stimulating learning environments.

Topic for this month: “Back to School”

A Teacher’s View

It’s usually around this time of year that I become a little apprehensive about the career I’ve chosen. Maybe it’s the schedule, for I’ve grown so accustomed to sleeping in a little. There have been no papers to grade, and I can even recall a few nights where thoughts of my students didn’t even enter my mind. When I do think of my future students, I wonder if I will be able to appeal to their many interests, learning styles and different learning paces. It’s tough sometimes to offer classes that appeal to the great variety of those sitting before me. My desk at home is a mess. At least my desk is clean at school. Should I get a new computer bag? Will I need some new pens? Whew, it sure is going to be a long year. I just have to remember what someone once said. One day at a time... One day at a time...

A Parent’s View

It is a few weeks before the beginning of the school year, and I am starting to see signs of resistance from my 10-year-old daughter. Summer vacation was a welcome period of relaxation and down time, but she is already beginning to express frustration about returning to school. Admittedly, the relaxed pace of summer has resulted in us all being a little lax in bedtimes, chores, and responsibilities. In fact, she’s not the only one who is feeling reluctant about the school year starting. As the parent of a gifted child, I always wonder how to best help her negotiate school. She does well with the academic challenges, but seems at a loss as to how to manage work, materials, and due dates for school and activities without a great deal of frustration and drama about everything from getting enough sleep to having everything she needs and getting things done in a timely manner. That doesn’t even take a new teacher and class into account! I wish we could both look forward to school rather than approach it with apprehension.

Change, whether positive or negative, challenges us. Similar to Newton’s first law of motion: A summer time “body at rest” will now have to become a school year “body in motion” and that might require some external pressure. As parents and educators, we can help gifted children prepare for this transition by first setting our own frame of mind. Dr. Haim Ginott noted, “I have come to a frightening conclusion. I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather.” This is just as true for parents at home. Children perceive adult biases and beliefs, whether spoken or unspoken. In adopting a positive and proactive approach, we can set a tone of practical resiliency for the year to come. Rather than wait for the year to unfold, we can look ahead so that we can put plans in place and empower gifted learners to do the same.



Please copy and share this with other parents and teachers in your community who may find this useful.

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1. Organize

AT SCHOOL

Creating an environment conducive to learning should be at the forefront of every educators “plan” for the year. Organization of materials and space is a great way to start.

- Get a hold of some folders, binders, and utilize bookcase, cabinet and drawer space. Find links to the Teacher Vision website and more at <http://www.nagc.org/CHP.aspx>.
- Bulletin, wipe, and smart: three boards intended to flood your students with information! Gifted students love to be surrounded by materials related to what they are learning. Be sure to utilize all space, creating an atmosphere that stimulates thought and mix it up as often as possible.
- Tables, sills, the ceiling, and the floor: creating an enriching environment. I recently learned of the Reggio Emilia Approach and I encourage you to access information on their website. You will certainly find it exciting. www.nagc.org/CHP.aspx

AT HOME

Organization is an important component for stress-free success, but it doesn't necessarily come naturally. There are steps you can take to help your child develop organizational strategies.

- First, it is helpful to address possible causes for disorganization in order to come up with an action plan. NAGC offers many strategies for review: www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=968
- Next, there are considerations about organization as it relates to the gifted mind <http://www.nagc.org/CHP.aspx>, as well as ways you can support your child in developing organizational skills. <http://www.nagc.org/CHP.aspx>
- It is important to involve your child in getting organized to allow her to intellectualize and take ownership of the process. <http://www.nagc.org/CHP.aspx> Finally, in addition to general organizational strategies, it is helpful to incorporate those that are specific to getting back into the routine of school. <http://www.nagc.org/CHP.aspx>

2. Schedule

AT SCHOOL

The daily schedule, while providing a foundation for the days and weeks ahead, can at times be exhausting, not only for you, but for your students as well, and so it is important to keep a few things in mind.

- Many teachers find a planning book helpful or even a three ring binder and loose-leaf can work nicely. It's important to establish goals while at the same time trying to be flexible. Links to The Inspiring Teachers website can be found at <http://www.nagc.org/CHP.aspx>
- Be sure to allow for breaks and reflection. Giving students as little as one minute to clear their heads is sometimes all that is needed. You could also introduce brain teasers, jokes, a short read-aloud, stretching and exercise during this time as well.
- Don't go too fast! Sometimes educators are so worried about where they are supposed to “end up” that they forget to teach in the moment, often skipping opportunities for important student questions.
- Make sure that you've allowed some time for your own grading, planning, reflection, and some down time.

AT HOME

Although the very word ‘schedule’ can cause a sinking feeling, it helps to embrace scheduling as an approach that will allow time for work as well as play.

- The foundation of any schedule is a good night's sleep. Start now to help your child gradually transition from the more relaxed summer bedtimes to the school year schedule. <http://www.nagc.org/CHP.aspx>
- Merge school and family calendars to plan for testing, days off, vacations, special programs, etc. Also, look ahead to lesson, activity, and sport sign-ups and schedules, including materials necessary for each.
- Transitions can be difficult even with the best scheduling. Experiment with your child to find out which transitional cues are the most helpful for him. <http://www.nagc.org/CHP.aspx>
- Time management is important for gifted children who often have a wide variety of interests and opportunities. Use critical thinking and creative problem solving strategies to help prioritize and manage them, making sure to leave unstructured time for relaxation and creativity. <http://www.nagc.org/CHP.aspx>

3. Communicate in a Variety of Ways

- Good communication will set a solid foundation for a great year, especially when children realize that their parents and teachers are on the same page.
- Although you may have questions or concerns, it is helpful to make your first parent/teacher communication a personal, positive chat. This is a chance to get things off on the right foot, establish a team approach, and set a preferred means of communicating moving forward. Arrange a time to speak more in depth if warranted.
- Keep the medium in mind when communicating. Conversations allow for tone of voice that convey a nuance of meaning that written communication does not. Use written communication for perfunctory questions and messages, but set time for a conversation if it involves something more sensitive.
- A lot of important communication concerns homework. There are strategies for teachers, parents, and students to talk about homework at <http://www.nagc.org/CHP.aspx>.
- Language is another important consideration. You can find suggestions available when a different language is spoken in the home at <http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3749733>.

Even with the best planning in place, life is sure to throw some unexpected curve balls. However, by carefully planning ahead, we should have enough structure in place to help gifted children more easily handle surprises as they learn how to navigate through the unexpected in life.

For additional information concerning the return to school, be sure to access the Fall 2005 *Connecting for High Potential*, School's opening. How do we start off on the right foot? Find link at <http://www.nagc.org/CHP.aspx>

***The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates.
The great teacher inspires.***

-- William Arthur Ward

This issue of *Connecting for High Potential* was compiled by Jeff Danielian, NAGC Teacher Resource Specialist, and Susan Dulong Langley, Parent Representative to the NAGC Board of Directors.



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