WINTER 2025

The GAMbit

An official publication of the Gifted Association of Missouri

IN THIS ISSUE

A Letter from the President

by Heather Tomicich

As winter settles in and another calendar year comes to a close, we take time to reflect on the incredible work being done across our state to support and inspire gifted learners. From innovative classroom practices to statewide advocacy and collaboration, your dedication continues to move gifted education forward—ensuring that every advanced learner has the opportunity to thrive.

President's Letter

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Celebrating Accomplishments Across the State

Attending the annual GAM conference was both inspiring and invigorating. This conference at Missouri State University brought together educators, parents, and advocates who share a common goal: to better understand and support the unique needs of gifted children. Throughout the sessions, it was clear that the field of gifted education continues to evolve, emphasizing not only academic enrichment but also the social and emotional well-being of advanced learners.

One of the most impactful aspects of the conference was learning new strategies and techniques that can be applied immediately in classrooms and at home. Presenters highlighted the importance of differentiation—not just in curriculum depth and complexity, but in how we approach creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Sessions on topics such as inquiry-based learning, acceleration, and compacting provided practical tools for challenging gifted students at their appropriate level. It was such a great learning experience for all who attended.

Attending the NAGC Conference

In mid-November, I will attend the National Association for Gifted Children Conference in Pennsylvania. This is a premier event that brings together educators, researchers, and advocates from across the country who are dedicated to advancing gifted education. The conference provides an invaluable opportunity to engage with national leaders in the field, explore the latest research, and refine best practices for supporting gifted and talented learners.

Through collaborative sessions and professional learning opportunities, we will renew strategies and opportunities to gather innovative approaches to bring back to our classrooms. Our goal is to enhance the learning experiences of our gifted students by applying evidence-based techniques and fresh insights gained from this professional exchange. Also, I look forward to collaborating at the Affiliates Meeting with other state leaders to bring back ideas that they use in their state gifted organizations.

President's Letter

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Looking Ahead to 2026

As we move into the new year, we are filled with optimism and purpose. In the months ahead, we'll continue to:

- **Advocate for equity and access** in gifted education, ensuring every district has the resources and support to meet the needs of advanced learners.
- **Foster professional connections** through statewide conferences, workshops, and regional networks that empower educators to share best practices.
- **Engage families and communities** in understanding the social and emotional needs of gifted students, helping them find balance, belonging, and joy in learning.

Staying Connected

Winter offers a natural pause—a moment to recharge and reconnect. We encourage you to reach out to one another, share ideas, and celebrate successes big and small. Whether you're a gifted teacher experimenting with a new curriculum, a parent navigating advocacy, or a student leading a project that makes a difference, your efforts strengthen our entire community.

A Note of Appreciation

To everyone across the state who champions gifted education—thank you. Your commitment, creativity, and compassion make a lasting difference. Together, we are shaping a future where gifted learners are not just challenged, but truly understood and supported.

Wishing you a peaceful winter season and an inspiring start to the new year.

With gratitude,
Heather Tomicich
Executive President
Gifted Association of MO

Creativity and Innovation—A Framework for Learning that Matters

GAMbit Featured Writer

By Kathryn Fishman-Weaver, PhD.

"We must learn from our past achievements and failures, and their consequences, in order to ensure a more sustainable, just and equitable world for present and future generations, and understanding the interconnectedness of past, present and future."
-United Nations Declaration on Future Generations (2024)

How would you define work that matters? What about learning that matters? For me, at the heart of both questions is a commitment to peace, sustainability, and community impact. This is the art of praxis, design thinking, and action research. Through each of these frameworks, student leaders move through cycles of observation, ideation, prototyping, action, and reflection. This process gives dimensionality and meaning to our curriculum. It also requires us to prioritize creativity and innovation not as auxiliary to the core content, but as essential skills to develop in their own right.

Creativity & Innovation

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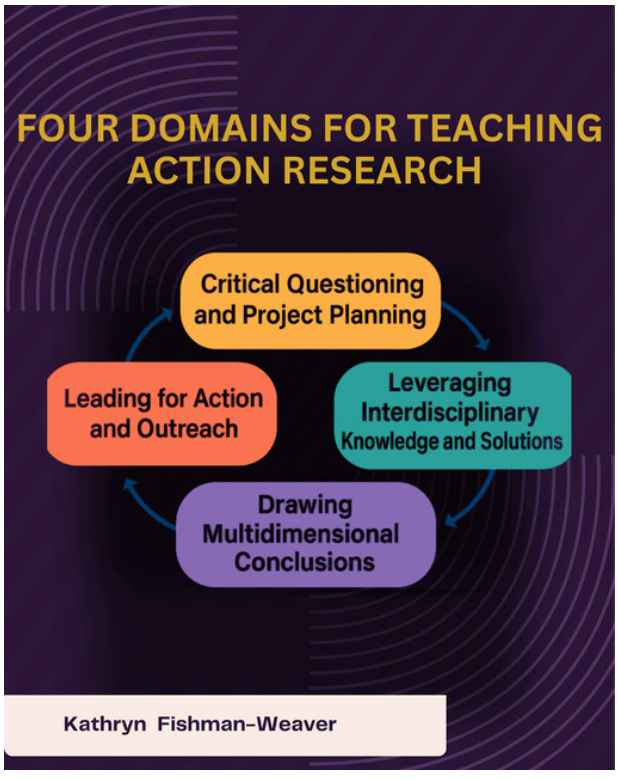
I am currently writing a new book series on the power of action research in the high school classroom, and many of the examples I share in this piece come from that work. Through student-led action research projects, I have seen a bagel shop transformed into a mental health art gallery. I have sung songs with mothers and young teens in the basement of a free housing shelter for families who are receiving treatment for cancer. I have heard the various tenors that bravery can take when sharing difficult stories to an auditorium of your peers. I have listened to presentations on bioethics that challenged my beliefs and helped me grow. I have seen telehealth solutions that started with a student programming something on his cell phone and then grew into expanded access to care. I have learned from young leaders addressing bullying in their school community.

Are these projects part of language arts, social studies, or science? The answer, of course, is "Yes! And!"

These projects, and so many more, conducted by students have had a powerful and lasting influence on the ways I understand teaching, learning, and leadership. Action research offers an alternative approach to exploring and making change within our local and global contexts. Much like changemaking, learning, and gifted education, action research is interdisciplinary. Work that matters in the gifted classroom is work that centers creativity and innovation, not only for the products these skills enable, but also for the process thinking they support.



To assist educators in teaching action research in the classroom, I have developed four action research domains. These build on the interdisciplinary work of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Inquiry Arc and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)

Creativity & Innovation

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Crosscutting Concepts. The action research domains I write into my curriculum include (1) Critical Questioning and Project Planning, (2) Leveraging Interdisciplinary Knowledge and Solutions, (3) Drawing Multidimensional Conclusions, and (4) Leading for Action and Outreach.

Action research asks students to plan for the future, to create sustainable systems, and to prepare for a time that none of us have yet experienced. Right now at our high school, my students are doing this by developing projects for an action research showcase focused on the United Nations' Declaration on Future Generations (2024). They are working on projects related to water scarcity, access to health care, and mental health support. Creativity and innovation are the vehicles I see them using to navigate cycles of observation, action, and reflection. As they prototype, question, and experiment, I get to learn right alongside them. What am I learning? Lessons in hope, humanity, and possibility.

Kathryn Fishman-Weaver, PhD, is the Gifted Association of Missouri featured writer for 2025. She serves as the executive director of Mizzou Academy and as an associate teaching professor in school leadership and community engagement. She is a sought-after international speaker and the author of several books on education and inclusive practices in schools.

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* Offered first 8-week session
** Offered second 8-week session
^ Full semester

SUMMER 2026

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ED 605 G – Psychology of Exceptional Children (1st or 2nd, 5-weeks)
ED 626 G – Creativity*
ED 650 G – Identification of Gifted**
ED 652 G – Affective Needs of Gifted*
ED 653 G – Programming and Administration of Gifted (1st or 2nd, 5-weeks)

* Offered first 5-week session
** Offered second5-week session

FALL 2026

ED 550 G – IntrotoGifted*
ED 604 G – Professional Learning: Gifted Policy, Practice, & Research**
ED 605 G – Psychology of Exceptional Children^
ED 619 G – Gifted Internship^
ED 633 G – Research in Gifted Education^
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2025-26 Gifted Association of Missouri Upcoming Virtual Speaker Series

MOST Monday Nights 7-8 pm Central Time & one Thursday Night!

Monday, January 12–What The Heck is Executive Functioning? with Nancy Bonn-Winkler, M.Ed., LPC.

A long time ago, I asked that same question! Within our hour we will break down this complex sounding topic by defining, naming, and exploring individual executive functioning skills. Special attention will be given to how these skills relate to the gifted child, and those with ADHD and/or ASD. If you are asking yourself if this topic is really that important, the answer is YES! Why? These brain based skills are required to execute and perform all tasks!

Register **HERE**

Monday, February 9–AI with Colin Davitt (Lindbergh Schools Director of Innovation)

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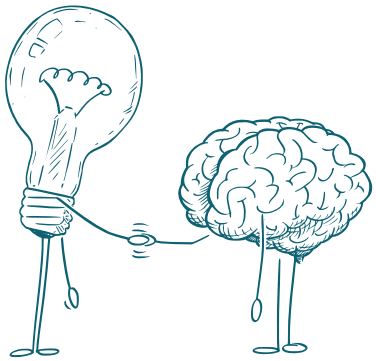
FREE PD!

Register **HERE**

THURSDAY! April 16–Hippos Teeth Have Awful Odors (Neuroanatomy Mnemonics for Understanding the Emotional Needs of Gifted Learners) with Dr. Kathryn Fishman-Weaver ("Dr. KFW")

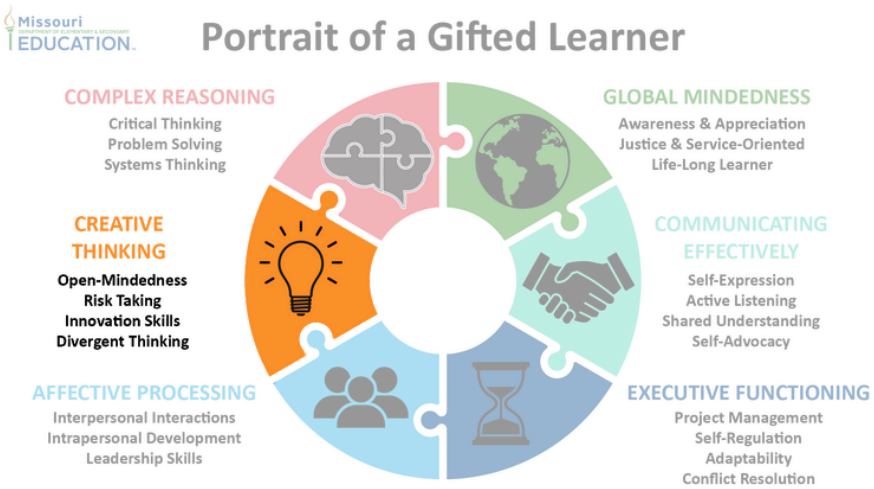
A wholehearted, story-rich session on supporting the social-emotional development of gifted learners. Building on her research and school-based practice, Dr. KFW uses memorable mnemonics and stories to teach about neuroanatomy and its connection to emotions, relationships, and learning. Participants will leave with a deeper understanding of brain-based learning and practical tools to help gifted learners navigate challenges with confidence, purpose, and even laughter.
Session Objectives: (1) Examine brain-based research on the emotional needs of gifted learners, (2) Apply practical strategies to support social-emotional development, (3) Leverage story, gratitude, and humor to foster connection and resilience.

Register **HERE**



Creativity and Innovation in Gifted Education

Creativity and innovation are cornerstones of gifted education, empowering bright students to move beyond simple mastery and become true contributors. It is important that we cultivate environments where gifted learners feel safe to take intellectual risks, embrace ambiguity, and explore novel solutions to complex problems. By intentionally integrating critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills, we help them develop the innovative mindset essential for future leadership and meaningful societal impact.



While the Missouri DESE Portrait of the Gifted Learner provides the framework, this issue of GAMbit offers the roadmap. Featuring experts from both inside and outside gifted education, we explore how to systematically develop these skills and spark creativity in the classroom. We also discuss culturally responsive creativity and the vital role of gifted educator creativity, ensuring we model the very innovation we seek to inspire.

Helpful Links:

- What Does Creativity Look Like In the Brain? (video grades 6-12)
- Generative Ai Enhances Creativity but Reduces the Diversity of Novel Content (article)
- Beghetto Bots (Ai tool that can be used to support creativity)

What We Believe, We Build: Simple Ways to Spark Creativity in Students

By: Kristen N. Lamb, PhD. (Department of Special Education, The University of Alabama)

What We Value Impacts Practice

In general, teachers view creativity as valuable and beneficial. This is promising because when we value creativity (personally and societally), we are more likely to support our students' creativity (Lamb, 2022; Kettler et al., 2018). But, where we get our information from also impacts our practice. In a recent study, my colleague and I surveyed practicing teachers about their creativity knowledge—whether they endorsed some popular creativity myths or creativity facts (those supported by research)—and where they turned to for information. We found some surprising (and some not so surprising) results, but the one that I want to highlight here is that when teachers hold beliefs that are supported by research, they are more likely to support creativity as essential in education (Puryear & Lamb, 2024). In short, our information sources and our beliefs about creativity matter.

So, What Do We Do Now?

The good news: we don't have to completely overhaul our curricula or pedagogical practices to foster creativity in our students. In addition to checking our own beliefs about creativity, integrating creativity in the classroom begins with small, manageable changes made by the teacher (Beghetto, 2013). These changes can include a simple exercise worked into a lesson plan, physical arrangement of a classroom, or how we model and talk about creativity with our students. The secret to meaningful, enduring change lies in reflection, research, and intentional practice. Below are five simple strategies to get you started (adapted from Kettler et al., 2018):

1. Establish an environment that supports creativity: Provide students with a space that encourages idea generating, collaboration, and creative risk-taking. Creative classrooms make time to incorporate various techniques to generate ideas (e.g., brainstorming, "I wonder…" thinking), and encourage students to evaluate, refine, and reflect on their own ideas to improve their creativity (P21, n.d.). Creative classrooms also encourage students to collaborate creatively, support openness to diverse perspectives and peer feedback, engage with real-world constraints, and normalize failure as part of the creative process and an opportunity to learn and improve (P21, n.d.; Kettler et al., 2018).

What We Believe We Build

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2

Identify and eliminate creativity suppressors: Creativity suppressors can include behaviors such as dismissing ideas or curiosities, conveying narrow expectations, or enforcing rigid project criteria. These suppressors can be eliminated through counter behaviors such as acknowledging and creating space for students' ideas (implementing idea notebooks or an idea "word wall" can help limit interruptions), broadening our expectations, and co-creating criteria with students.

3

Model the creative process and talk about creativity: Students need to see their teachers modeling the creative process including domain-specific creative behaviors (e.g., scientists and inquiry, attorneys and debate), experiencing trial and error, designing a product or putting on a performance, and reflecting on our creativity. Talk often and openly about creativity, using key terms (e.g., flexibility, elaboration). When our students see us modeling creativity, they learn how to think and produce creatively, and they even learn that mistakes are just a normal part of the creative process.

4

Highlight creative people: Highlighting creative people is one of my favorite strategies, and here's why: Our students need to see themselves in the examples and role models we highlight in class. When we highlight creative people, we need to do so with intention. First, consider the broad array of student backgrounds (e.g., life experiences, cultures) represented in the classroom. Next, consider the approach; for instance, present a creative individual (historical, famous, or local examples, etc.) for a particular subject area/topic or provide resources (e.g., books, media) on creative individuals in the classroom.

5

Use assessment to foster communication and growth in the creative process: The most important part of assessment is the feedback we provide to our students. Although assessment is frequently associated with a completed product, assessment should also apply to processes. When we view assessment as an opportunity for growth, we transform how students engage with creative tasks. The following principles should guide why and how we use assessment to support students' creativity:

What We Believe We Build

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- affirm students' creative strengths,
- enhance students' creative self-beliefs,
- support students' self-reflection throughout the creative process,
- plan instruction that responds to students' creative needs,
- develop creativity skills within a subject area (e.g., flexibility with problem-solving in science, fluency while brainstorming, elaboration in creative writing)
- provide feedback on the creative process, and
- provide feedback on a creative product or performance.

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Kristen Lamb, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at The University of Alabama and the co-author of Developing Creativity in the Classroom: Learning and Innovation for 21st-Century Schools. She uses her prior experience as a middle school science teacher in a Title 1 school to inform her research in the areas of creativity and equity issues in advanced academics. Her work has received scholarly recognition, including awards from the Mensa Foundation, NAGC, Gifted Child Quarterly, and Journal for the Education of the Gifted.

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The 5 W's of Culturally Responsive Creativity

By: Corey J. Gray, Ph.D.

It is no secret that teaching for creativity leads to academic achievement (Gajda et al., 2017; Sternberg, 2010). But what if it also nurtured students' cultural identities and creative capacities? That's where Culturally Responsive Creativity (CRC) comes in. This article explores the "what," "why," "who," "where," and "when" of CRC, and offers practical guidance on "how" to bring this approach to life in every learning environment.

What: Culturally Responsive Creativity is "the pedagogical amalgamation of culture and creativity as one concept, grounding teaching for creativity in students' cultural and historical identities (Gray, 2025, p. 74). It is an instructional practice that encourages educators to cultivate students' creative potential through the lens of their unique cultural and historical backgrounds.

Why: CRC is essential because it recognizes that while creativity is subjective, it can be taught and nurtured (Simonton, 2012). Traditional definitions of creativity emphasize novelty, originality, and usefulness (Plucker et al., 2004; Runco & Jaeger, 2012) but rarely consider how culture influences these processes. Creativity transcends cultural boundaries (Shao et al., 2019; Sternberg, 2023) and has long been central to gifted education (Sternberg, 2010; Torrance, 1987). However, creativity has and does manifest differently across cultures; thus, educators must shift from simply teaching for creativity to teaching for culturally responsive creativity.

Who: CRC is a practice for all children, regardless of cultural, linguistic, or ethnic background. It honors each student's identity, positioning creativity as a vehicle for academic achievement and cultural affirmation.

The 5 W's of CRC

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WHERE ?

Where: CRC belongs in every classroom and across all content areas. Too often, creativity is confined to enrichment or arts-based classes, yet creative thinking is integral to solving real-world problems. CRC empowers students to design solutions to issues that matter to them, merging social action with creative problem-solving (Banks, 1989; Treffinger et al., 2023).

WHEN ?

When: CRC should occur consistently, not just during instructional downtime or designated cultural months such as Black History, Hispanic Heritage, or Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. Embedding CRC into instructional design enables students to achieve academically through creating, rather than through rote memorization or repetitive drills.

HOW ?

How: Effective CRC implementation requires three shifts in instructional practice:

1. Address biases about who is creative and capable of creativity.
2. Intentionally plan for CRC across lessons and learning goals.
3. Teach for creativity through culturally affirming and inclusive methods.

When educators believe that every child possesses creative potential, they can begin to plan and teach accordingly. The following table (see next page) outlines key components of CRC with practical classroom applications.

continued on Page 16

Dr. Corey Gray is a creativity advocate, equity champion, and educational philosopher based in Atlanta, Georgia. He currently serves as the Co-Chair for the Diversity and Equity Committee in the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) and has taught at the elementary, middle school, and university level in traditional public, independent, and public charter schools.

The 5 W's of CRC

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Table 1. Planning and Teaching for Culturally Responsive Creativity

Foundational Aspect	Aspect in Action
Diverse Programming: adapting gifted programming models to be utilized in the classroom and responsive to the cultures in the room	• Use Creative Problem-Solving frameworks to address school or community issues. • Integrate dramatic arts strategies from Odyssey of the Mind or Future Problem Solving into all content areas; such as acting out literary scenes, modeling mathematical problems, or dramatizing the real-world impact of scientific phenomena relevant to students' communities.
Diverse Perspectives: addressing biases about students' intellectual and creative potential	• Recognize that all children have the capacity and desire to be creative. • Understand that educators play a pivotal role in student success (Kafele, 2016). • Reflect continuously on how personal biases shape the learning environment.
Culturally Affirming and Historically Accurate Curricula: revising curriculum to be responsive, reflective, and respectful to the cultures of those in the room	• Go beyond surface-level inclusion (e.g., using diverse names in problems) to integrate authentic historical and cultural contexts. For example, rather than discussing how "Tommy went to the store and purchased three bags of candy, each possessing 10 skittles. How many skittles does Tommy have in total?," shift to "O.W. Gurley was one of the pivotal founders of Black Wall Street, a community thriving with local Black-owned business and wealth in the early 1900s. One of the stores had a sale for 10 pieces of candy for 5 cents. How much did each piece of candy cost back then?" • Evaluate instructional materials to ensure they present accurate, developmentally appropriate, and culturally relevant histories.
Culturally Affirming Instructional Practices: teaching content ways that honor, uplift, and engage the cultures of those in the room	• Integrate music with content, including teaching students about historical figures, scientific facts, mathematical algorithms, and English-based concepts through rap, hip-hop, or pop music, and other forms of media that are relevant to the students. • Replace guide reading groups with literary societies, requiring students to not just read and summarize texts, but debate, discuss, and reinterpret the text. • Utilize arts- and STEAM-based learning to allow students to question and uncover concepts that are relevant to both the content area and their culture, rather than merely cover and memorize information in class.

The 5 W's of CRC

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Culturally Responsive Creativity may seem ambitious, but it begins by shifting one's mindset from teaching for achievement with creativity as a by product, to teaching for creativity as the pathway to achievement and cultural engagement. Children hold the power to create the world they wish to see; our task is to equip them by teaching for culturally responsive creativity.

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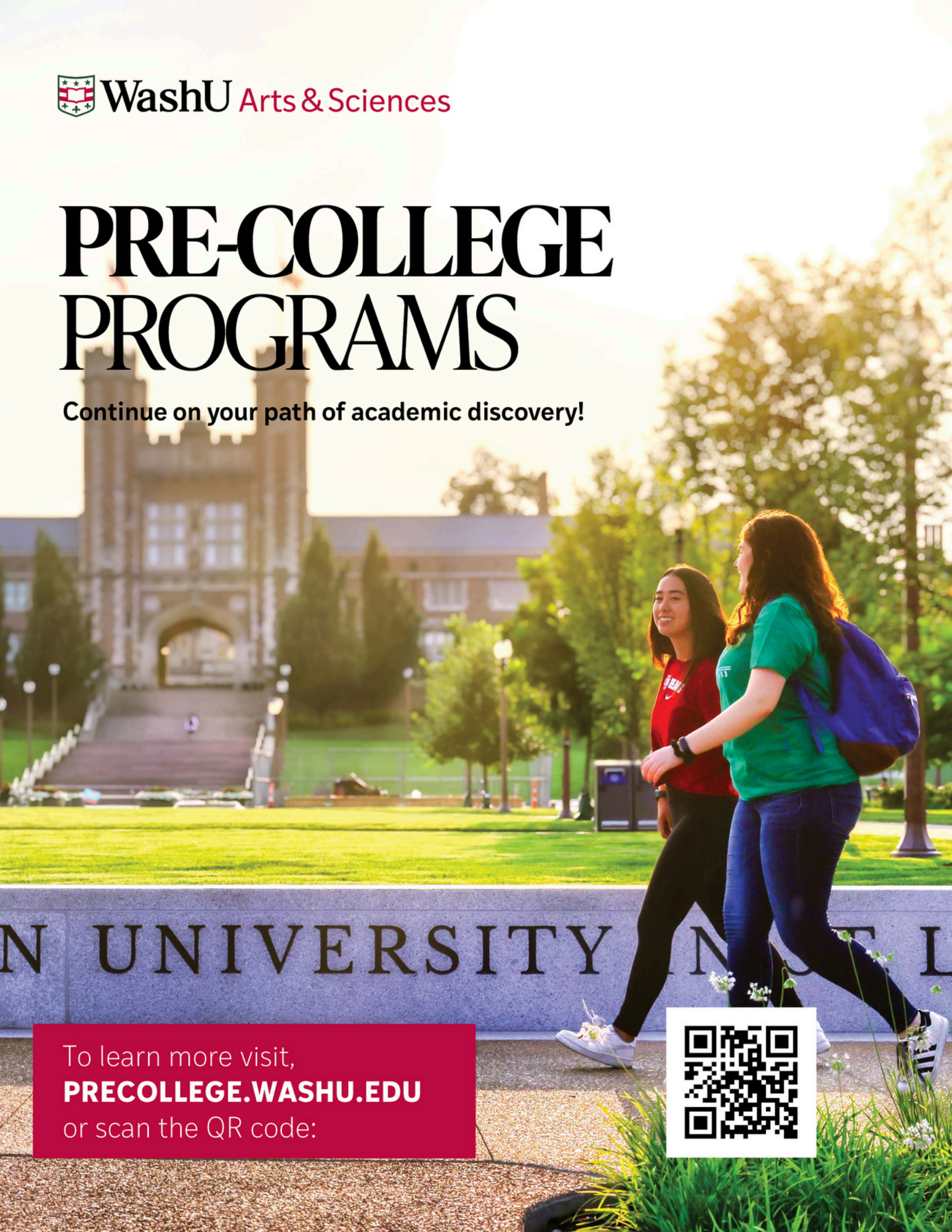

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Nurturing the Creativity of the Gifted Educator

By: Cyndi Burnett, Ed.D

What do you geek out about? It could be something as simple as discovering new ways to organize your home, learning to play pickleball, propagating plants, or collecting unusual words. You usually know when it happens because you find yourself saying, “OOOOOOhhhhh, that’s interesting!” and then falling down a rabbit hole of inquiry. That spark of curiosity, joy, and learning is where creativity begins.

When we interviewed educator **Bea Leiderman** on the Fueling Creativity in Education podcast, she told us a story that beautifully captures this idea. One day, while Bea was waiting for a video to finish exporting, she came across a blog post about placing a single drop of water on her iPhone's lens to magnify small objects. She grabbed a straw, and a glass of water, and tried out the technique. "FUN!" Soon, she bought a macro attachment for her phone and began photographing objects around her house. Then, she moved outside to capture grasshoppers, butterflies, and even slime molds. One drop of water opened a world she had never noticed before.

Psychologists **James Kaufman** and **Ron Beghetto** describe creativity as unfolding across what they call the *Four C’s*: *Mini-C*, *Little-C*, *Pro-C*, and *Big-C* creativity. Bea’s story beautifully illustrates how these levels build on one another. The first moment of fascination was her **Mini-C creativity**, a personal spark of curiosity that ignited a sense of wonder and learning. As she began sharing her photos online and asking others to help identify what she found, Bea’s curiosity grew into **Little-C creativity**, the everyday creativity that lives in connection and collaboration. She was not only learning about macro photography, but also learning about the tiny creatures she was capturing. When she couldn't identify the bugs, she would visit online groups, share her discoveries, and ask questions. This led to conversations with a global community of "bug nerds" who fueled her learning and inspired her to explore even more.

Nuturing Creativity

continued from Page 19

Eventually, Bea found people encouraging her to write a book about what she discovered, which led her to **Pro-C creativity**. She wrote several books pairing her macro photographs with educational stories, met the legendary biologist E. O. Wilson, and even had him sketch an ant on her iPad. What began as play reshaped how she worked with her students. Being a novice again reminded Bea what it felt like to be uncertain, curious, and vulnerable, a perspective that helped her better understand and support the teachers and students she coaches.

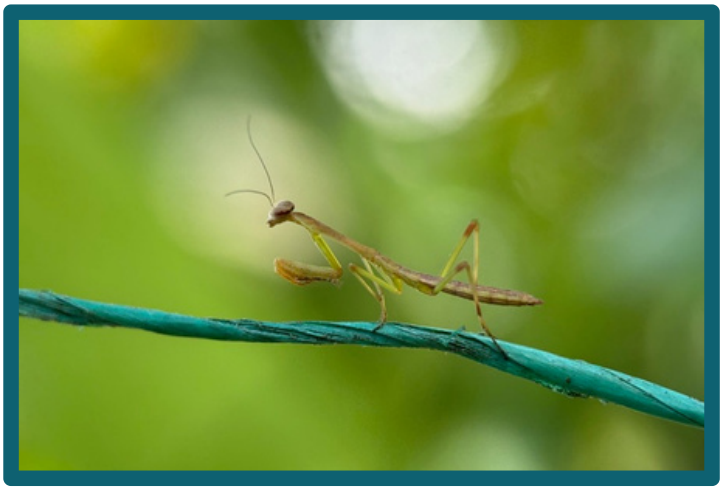

Photo credit Bea Leiderman. Follow her creative journey on Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/bealeiderman/

Nuturing Creativity

continued from Page 20

Bea's journey demonstrates how small sparks can evolve into significant professional impact. As gifted educators, we often spend a great deal of time helping our students be more creative, but the process truly begins when we model creativity ourselves. When we show our openness to trying new things, taking risks, and following our curiosity, we allow our students to do the same. After all, our gifted students geek out too—over coding, Beyblades, volcanoes, or even building out of boxes—and when they see us geeking out alongside them, it validates that curiosity as a vital part of the learning process.

Our example tells them that creativity is not about being perfect but about being brave enough to explore the unknown. So, what do you geek out about? Whatever it is, lean into it. Your next drop of water might reveal a whole new way of seeing the world, and in doing so, inspire your students to view their own world differently, too.

Cyndi Burnett, Ed.D., is the Director of Possibilities at Creativity and Education, an organization devoted to helping educators integrate creative thinking into their teaching. She co-hosts the Fueling Creativity in Education podcast and is the co-author of four books focused on practical ways to cultivate creativity in the classroom and at home.

2026

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SUMMERSCAPE **July 12 – 19, 2026**

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Grades 9th –12th classes and residential

Registration & details at: **www.drury.edu/giftededucation**

Hoping to see you in 2026! Financial need scholarships available. Please contact me with any questions.

Mary Pottho , Director
Center for Gifted Education
mpotthof@drur y.edu

Giant Steps: Developing Creative Ability Through a Systematic Trajectory

By: Anthony M. Washington, Ph.D.

When I began studying expert jazz improvisers, I expected to find natural prodigies with exceptional gifts for creative production. Instead, I discovered something remarkable: 80% of these musicians came to jazz through chance encounters—a radio playing, a concert stumbled upon, a friend's invitation (Washington, 2019). Many described themselves as less naturally gifted than their peers, yet all achieved mastery through a remarkably similar developmental process that I named the Giant Steps Framework, after John Coltrane's composition that serves as a milestone in improvisational ability.

Heard This Sound

Many participants recalled a pivotal encounter with jazz that sparked their interest, followed by someone who guided them into deeper exposure within the domain. These were often chance encounters that created lasting engagement, whether through family, church, or school. The key was authentic exposure to domain experts performing real work, not casual background music.

Going to the Woodshed

After exposure and introductory experiences, participants decided to engage in deliberate practice (Ericsson, 2008). As one master explained, "I only practice when I'm working on something specific." This phase involves practicing which is commonly referred to as "shedding." To shed means to engage in focused work on harmonic knowledge, transcribing expert solos to understand their approach, learning the standard repertoire, and developing technical facility on their instrument. Participants described this as "learning the language of jazz" through studying patterns, expert performance, and jazz vocabulary. This isn't mindless repetition but targeted development with the goal of mastery.

Saying What You Want

This phase represents achieving mastery that allows musicians to play without technical limitations. Critically, musicians begin performing professionally while still developing rather than attempting to achieve perfection in advance. They gain experience with authentic audiences who understand the domain's standards. At this level, musicians "know their horn" and enter Flow states (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) where, as one participant described, "you're not thinking about the fundamental things... they just become part of the whole thing." Technical concerns fade, allowing creativity to emerge.

Giant Steps

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Having Something to Say

Musicians move from reproducing expert solos to creating original melodies that reflect their individual perspective. This is where a musician's playing becomes recognizable and experts can identify them by their sound and approach to improvisation alone. This represents the distinction between technical expertise and eminence: developing a unique "voice" that honors tradition while contributing something genuinely new to the art form.

Implications for Talent Development

This developmental trajectory offers insights for any field valuing creativity, innovation, or discovery. The musicians didn't achieve mastery through innate talent alone but through systematic exposure, deliberate practice during authentic performance contexts, and creative contribution.

The framework challenges fixed identification practices that assume talent announces itself regardless of circumstance. Instead, it demonstrates that creativity can be developed through structured yet flexible pathways, offering hope for systematic talent development across domains. What matters most is not the starting point but the systematic support provided once interest emerges.

References

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- Ericsson, K. A. (2008). Deliberate practice and acquisition of expert performance: A general overview. Academic Emergency Medicine, 15(11), 988–994.
- Washington, A. M. (2019). Giant steps: Toward a developmental trajectory of creative talent [Doctoral dissertation, College of William & Mary].

Anthony M. Washington, Ph.D., is Principal Consultant at Creative Intelligence Partners. His research focuses on creativity, talent development, and educational equity. He has served in leadership roles at Arizona State University's Herberger Young Scholars Academy, Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth, Richmond Public Schools, and Alexandria City Public Schools.

DESE Gifted Education Update
November 3, 2025

Christine Nobbe
Director of Gifted Education
Christine.Nobbe@dese.mo.gov

Core Data/MOSIS

An important Core Data/MOSIS submission was due on October 31st. Districts and charter schools reported student information including if students are identified as gifted and served (GS) or identified as gifted and not served (GN). If you identify students in elementary school but do not provide services at the secondary level it is important to mark the students as GN once they no longer receive services. The gifted resource teacher (GRT) model may be used at the high school level and then all high school gifted identified students will be coded as GS. Changes can be made after the submission date; please confirm that your gifted students were appropriately marked as GS or GN.

I review the submitted data for completion of Screen 25 (the identification process), the number of students served and if there is a decrease of 20% or more, and teacher certification in districts with ADA above 350.

If I notice concerns, I will email the district-identified gifted contact. If that is you, please "stay calm and reply" so we can figure out the problem and work on a solution.

Powerful Learning Conference

If you missed the GAM conference in October, I have a back-up plan! You are invited to the 2026 Powerful Learning Conference on February 2-3. Each of the five concurrent sessions will include gifted education options. Two keynote speakers, a What We Do Matters celebration, and networking opportunities round out the conference. If several gifted educators attend, I will add a special networking opportunity.

Registration opens mid-November. Feel free to reach out and ask me about the details.

MO School Funding Modernization Task Force

The Task Force, established by Governor Kehoe's Executive Order 25-14, is developing recommendations to modernize K-12 school funding. A final report will be submitted to the Governor by December 1, 2026.

The task force met four times as a group and four working groups are meeting through early December. Please visit the task force webpage for more information, including agendas, presentation slides, a list of members, and an email address to contact the task force. Members of the public are invited to listen to the virtual working group meetings. Slide shows and recordings are available on the task force webpage under the "Meeting Timeline" and the "Working Groups" sections. (Click on the green bars to expand each section.)

MSA and MFAA – Time to Nominate/Apply!

Faculty and staff at the University of Missouri-Columbia and Missouri State University are preparing for the 2026 Missouri Scholars and Fine Arts Academies, to be held in June. Please review both websites and begin identifying students eligible to apply. Both academies are looking for faculty and staff! If you are interested in a summer position, visit the websites linked above.

Please Join the Gifted-Ed Listserv!

The DESE Gifted Education Update is published quarterly, but you can stay current by subscribing to the Gifted-Ed listserv! **Please watch for an upcoming announcement about a special toolbox.**

Happy Almost Winter!

"Autumn is a season followed immediately by looking forward to spring." – Doug Larson

I like winter, but this quote made me smile. Enjoy the remainder of the fall and make the most of the upcoming winter holidays!

-Christine

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Missouri State Capital Report

By Kyna Iman (GAM Governmental Affairs Consultant)

GIFTED ASSOCIATION OF MISSOURI

2026 State Advocacy Agenda

The Gifted Association of Missouri requests your advocacy on the following issues:

PROTECTING GIFTED EDUCATION LEGISLATION

In 2022, GAM was successful in passing their priority legislation, that will require all school districts in Missouri to offer programs and services to students identified as gifted and talented. GAM continues to advocate for these programs, and continues to work with DESE and all school districts to implement these programs and any rules and regulations governing implementation.

PURSUE "WEIGHT" FOR GIFTED EDUCATION FUNDING

GAM supports adding a "weight" in the foundation formula that would include funding specifically for schools with gifted education.

MISSOURI SCHOLARS ACADEMY & MISSOURI FINE ARTS ACADEMY

Support $1 million in state funding for the Missouri Scholars Academy and Missouri Fine Arts Academy for June, 2027, in House Bill 2002.

- The Missouri Scholars Academy is a three-week residential program at MU for 330 rising high school juniors who are academically gifted;
- The Missouri Fine Arts Academy is a two-week residential program at MSU for 150 rising high school juniors and seniors who are gifted in the arts.

MISSOURI SCHOOL FOUNDATION FORMULA FUNDING

Support increased funding for the Missouri School Foundation Formula. Support fully funding the formula in House Bill 2002 for the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education.

MO State Capital Report

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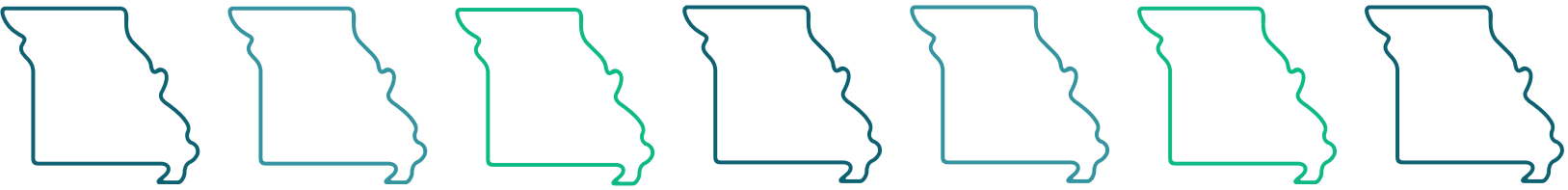
2026 GAM DAY AT THE CAPITOL IS WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, AT 10 AM

You can find your legislators by visiting the Missouri Senate website.
Legislative Look-Up: senate.mo.gov
It will give you contact information and a webpage on your Legislators.
If you have questions, please contact GAM's Governmental Consultant, Kyna Iman, at kynaiman@earthlink.net



October 22, 2025

Missouri School Funding Modernization Task Force

Dear Task Force Member,
We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the need for sustained and equitable funding for gifted and talented education in our state. Gifted students have unique academic and social-emotional needs that require specialized support, yet they are too often overlooked in budget priorities. We respectfully urge you to consider the following points as you shape educational policy and funding decisions:

MO State Capital Report

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1. Gifted Students Have Unique Learning Needs

Gifted and talented students frequently require accelerated, in-depth, or more complex instruction to remain engaged and challenged. Without appropriate academic support, they may become bored, disengaged, or even misidentified as having behavioral issues. Adequate funding ensures schools can offer differentiated instruction, advanced coursework, project-based learning, and flexible pathways such as dual enrollment to meet these needs.

2. Specialized Teachers and Training Require Investment

Educating gifted learners effectively involves more than traditional teaching approaches. It requires educators with specialized training and ongoing professional development. Public funding is critical to hiring and preparing teachers who can support the academic and emotional needs of advanced learners.

3. Access and Opportunity for All Gifted Learners.

The goal is to identify and serve all students who could benefit from advanced learning opportunities, including students who are from low-income communities, students who are twice exceptional, students who are under-represented populations, and English language learners. With proper funding, schools can implement universal screening tools, use a wide variety of assessment practices, and ensure all students—regardless of background—have equitable access to gifted programs.

4. Enrichment Programs Depend on Dedicated Funding

Gifted education includes enrichment opportunities such as STEM competitions, arts programs, mentorships, field trips, and independent study. These experiences help students explore and develop their talents. Without dedicated funding, these vital programs are often the first to disappear, leaving gifted students without the stimulation they need to thrive.

MO State Capital Report

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5. Gifted Programs Are Vulnerable to Budget Cuts

Because gifted education is not federally mandated, it is often considered "optional" and thus among the first programs to be reduced or eliminated during budget shortfalls. This disproportionately affects under-resourced districts, exacerbating opportunity gaps and denying gifted students the support they require.

6. Investing in Talent Benefits Everyone

Gifted students are tomorrow's innovators, leaders, scientists, and artists. Investing in their potential yields long-term social and economic benefits. Supporting these students early in their academic journeys promotes not only individual success but also contributes to the greater good of our communities and state.

In closing, I urge you and your colleagues on the Missouri School Funding Modernization Task Force to prioritize equitable and consistent funding for gifted education. Every child deserves an education that meets their needs—including those whose abilities exceed the standard curriculum.

Thank you for your time and for your service to our state's students.

Sincerely,
Heather Tomicich, Executive President, Gifted Association of Missouri
Dr. Beth Winton, Chairperson, Advisory Council for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children of Missouri


MISSOURI
FINE ARTS ACADEMY

Missouri Advisory Council on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children: Update by Dr. Beth Winton, Chairperson

The Missouri Advisory Council on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children continues to advance its mission of supporting high-achieving and high-ability learners across the state of Missouri. Thanks to the diligence and dedication of these gifted leaders, representing a diverse cross-section of the population of the state, the Council has made significant progress this year. I am proud to represent the dedicated professionals who serve on the Council.

- **Dr. Beth Winton (Chair)** – Principal/Program Administrator, CPS Online, Columbia Public Schools
- **Ms. Ginger Beaird** – ECSE and Gifted Teacher, Bernie R-XIII School District
- **Dr. Lenae Lazzelle** – Gifted Education Director (ret.), Springfield Public Schools
- **Mr. Karl McKimmey** – Gifted Teacher, Lebanon R-3 School District
- **Dr. Dennis Rhodes** – Director of Gifted Education, Rockwood School District
- **Ms. Amanda Sauerwein** – ELA Teacher, Missouri Virtual Academy
- **Ms. Carol Toney** – Gifted Resource Teacher, North Kansas City Schools
- **Dr. DeShonda Payton (Alternate)** – Principal, Jennings School District
- **Dr. Heather Van Otterloo (Alternate)** – Gifted Education Teacher, Joplin Public Schools

Newest Published Council Documents

This past year, the Council unanimously approved two subcommittee reports that address critical areas in gifted education:

1. **Documenting Individual Student Growth for High-Ability Students**
This report outlines strategies and tools for tracking academic and personal development among gifted learners, ensuring that their unique trajectories are recognized and supported. The recommendations emphasize flexible assessment models and longitudinal data collection to better reflect student progress. In this current political atmosphere, it is important to document the direct and positive impact that gifted education programs have on students.

2. **Incorporating Artificial Intelligence into the Classroom**
Recognizing the transformative potential of AI, this report explores how educators can use AI tools to extend and enhance learning opportunities for gifted students. It includes guidance on ethical implementation, curriculum integration, and professional development to empower teachers in leveraging AI effectively.

MO Advisory Council

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Advocacy for Equitable Placement Pathways

With the collaboration and support of the Gifted Association of Missouri (GAM) Board of Directors, the Council is actively working with the Missouri Attorney General's Office to approve common language for alternative pathways to placement. This initiative aims to improve access for specific student demographics in gifted education programs by clarifying and expanding criteria beyond traditional measures. The goal is to ensure that all students with exceptional potential have equitable opportunities to be identified and served.

Legislative Action: Closing the Loophole

The Council, in continued partnership with GAM, is taking steps to eliminate a loophole in the new state law that some districts are using to justify the elimination of their gifted programs. Specifically, the law allows districts to opt out of gifted services if they do not identify 3% or more of the district population - effectively creating a legal pathway for non-compliance. Last year, the Council was concerned with this possibility and published a document entitled Compliance with SB681, in which it states:

"It is **expected** that all school districts will universally screen and have a defensible identification plan to meet the needs of gifted students at all grade levels. It is **inappropriate and unethical** to avoid implementing a defensible identification plan (universal screening and equitable evaluation) and then indicate no obligation to serve gifted students."

This loophole undermines the intent of the legislation and jeopardizes access to appropriate services for gifted learners. The Council and GAM are advocating for revisions that will require districts to maintain defensible identification procedures and uphold their responsibility to serve gifted students.

Honoring Excellence in Gifted Education

At the annual GAM conference in October, two Council members were recognized for their outstanding contributions to gifted education in Missouri:

- Ms. Ginger Beaird, ECSE and Gifted Teacher in the Bernie R-XIII School District, received the Delma Johnson Outstanding Educator of Gifted Award. This award is given by nomination to a classroom teacher who has made significant contributions to the field of gifted education in Missouri. It honors the legacy of Delma Johnson, one of the founders of the Gifted Association of Missouri and a recipient of the DESE Pioneer in Education Award in 1988.

MO Advisory Council

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- Dr. Beth Winton, Chair of the Council and Principal/Program Administrator for CPS Online, was awarded the Dede Smith Friend of Gifted Award. This award is given by nomination and recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the field of gifted education in Missouri. It celebrates the spirit of advocacy and support exemplified by Dede Smith, a longtime champion of gifted learners.

Supporting the Whole Child: Social and Emotional Needs of Gifted Students

Gifted students often experience unique social and emotional challenges that require intentional support. These learners, defined by their asynchronous development, may struggle with perfectionism, heightened sensitivity, and difficulty finding intellectual peers. Without appropriate services, gifted students can experience anxiety, underachievement, social isolation, and even depression.

The Council continues to advocate for comprehensive gifted programming for all learners in Missouri that addresses not only academic needs but also the emotional well-being of students. Our goal is to ensure access to the differentiated instruction essential to nurturing the whole child.

The Council remains committed to fostering innovation, equity, and excellence in gifted education across Missouri. We thank our members for their service and GAM and DESE for continuously partnering with us and look forward to taking more steps to improve the lives of gifted students in the future.

Over look ed!

MHS
Beyond Assessments

Naglieri
General Ability Tests™
Verbal
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Quantitative

See who you've been missing in gifted education

The Naglieri General Ability Tests™: Verbal, Nonverbal and Quantitative were explicitly designed to equitably identify gifted students regardless of their cultural, racial, ethnic, linguistic, or socioeconomic background.

EXCELLENCE IN EQUITY
ace-ed.org
INDUSTRY IMPACT AWARDS
2024

Dr. Jack Naglieri, Dr. Dina Brulles, and Dr. Kimberly Lansdowne
Winner - Author, Speaker, or Consultant of the Year

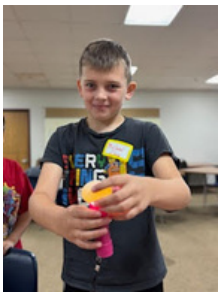
EXCELLENCE IN EQUITY
ace-ed.org
INDUSTRY IMPACT AWARDS
2024

Naglieri General Ability Tests
Winner - Diversity and Inclusion Solution

LEARN MORE

Drury's Pre-College Programs Fallscape Event

By Mary Potthoff (Director of the Center for Gifted Education)



What program inspires students to explore classic subjects in new and exciting ways? Drury Pre-College Programs!

On Saturday, October 11, **PK–6th grade students** spent the day in Lay Hall on the Drury University campus, **engaging in hands-on learning and discovery**.
Younger grades enjoyed creative and age-appropriate experiments—

- PK–K: explored colors and textures through fun science activities
- 2nd grade: built mini models to learn about balance and motion

Older students participated in interactive chemistry lessons, where seasoned educators made abstract concepts come to life. They studied liquids, solids, and gases.

They even made ice cream and butter! Students also explored physical properties such as color, density, melting point, hardness, boiling point, and conductivity through hands-on experiments.

The kids were so engaged in the process—mixing, building, observing, and experimenting—that most didn't even realize how much they were learning along the way.

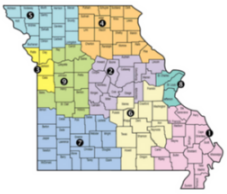
After a morning full of discovery, everyone enjoyed lunch at the Findlay Student Center, sharing the cafeteria experience with current college students—it was truly inspiring to see our youngest learners exploring a university setting!

At the end of the day, students proudly showcased what they learned and shared their projects with parents.

Each Drury Pre-College event features a new theme. The next one, Winterscape, will be held on Saturday, February 28, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The theme this time is Winter Olympics!
Registration opens in January—sign up early before spots fill up!

This gifted education opportunity/event is made possible by Drury University and The Schneider Foundation.

GAM District Regional Directors



CLICK NAME TO EMAIL!

Region 1 is located in southeast Missouri and includes the following counties: Carter, Ripley, Ste. Genevieve, St. Francois, Perry, Madison, Wayne, Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Butler, Stoddard, Scott, Mississippi, New Madrid, Dunklin & Pemiscot.	Region 1 Director	Tara Pruett
	Region 1 Assistant Director	Hallie Henry
Region 2 is the central/east region of the state, covering Audrain, Boone, Callaway, Camden, Cole, Cooper, Gasconade, Howard, Lincoln, Miller, Moniteau, Montgomery, Morgan, Osage, and Warren counties.	Region 2 Director	Brownyn MacFarlane
	Region 2 Assistant Director	Eric Gunter
Region 3 is located on the west side of Missouri and includes Platte, Clay, Jackson and Cass counties.	Region 3 Director	Jody Brison-Molina
	Region 3 Assistant Director	Tiffany Strezoski
Region 4 is located in northeast Missouri and includes the following counties: Putnam, Schuyler, Clark, Sullivan, Adair, Knox, Lewis, Linn, Macon, Shelby, Marion, Chariton, Randolph, Monroe, Ralls, Scotland, and Pike.	Region 4 Director	Angie Cochran
	Region 4 Assistant Director	Emily Woodall
Region 5 is located in the northwest corner of Missouri and includes the following counties: Atchison, Nodaway, Holt, Andrew, Buchanan, Clinton, Dekalb, Gentry, Worth, Harrison, Daviess, Caldwell, Mercer, Grundy, and Livingston.	Region 5 Director	Ashley Zeiler
	Region 5 Assistant Director	Sarah Mason
Region 6 is located in the middle of the southern region of Missouri and includes the following counties: Franklin, Washington, Crawford, Maries, Phelps, Pulaski, Texas, Dent, Iron, Reynolds, Shannon, Howell, and Oregon.	Region 6 Director	Caitlin Selle
	Region 6 Assistant Director	Christina Wallace
Region 7 is located in the southwest region of Missouri and includes the following counties: Vernon, Barton, Jasper, Newton, McDonald, Cedar, Dade, Lawrence, Barry, Stone, Taney, Ozark, Douglas, Christian, Wright, Webster, Greene, Polk, Dallas, and Laclede.	Region 7 Director	Arielle Lee
	Region 7 Assistant Director	Cassandra Carnahan
Region 8 is located in the eastern portion of Missouri and includes the following counties: St. Charles, St. Louis, and Jefferson.	Region 8 Co-Director	Jennifer Blank
	Region 8 Co-Director	Alex Dzurick
Region 9 includes the following counties: Bates, Benton, Carroll, Cass, Henry, Hickory, Johnson, Lafayette, Morgan, Pettis, Ray, St. Clair, Saline, and Vernon.	Region 9 Co-Director	Kristine Torres
	Region 9 Co-Director	Jodi Blumhorst