



NMAG

New Mexico Association for the Gifted

October
2010

NMAG is a non-profit organization of gifted education professionals who are joined together to advocate for gifted education in New Mexico to address the unique social, emotional and intellectual needs of gifted students. Visit the NMAG website at: <http://nmgifted.org/> NMAG is a state affiliate of the [National Association For Gifted Children](#) (NAGC).

Published by New Mexico Association for the Gifted

President, Geoffrey Moon ftapnm@gmail.com; Newsletter Editor, Scott Gullett, Ph.D. scottgullett@comcast.net



LEGISLATIVE ALERT:

The NM Legislative Education Study Committee has recommended aligning New Mexico special education law with IDEA, **a move that could remove protections for gifted students in our state.** This, coming at a time of financial trouble for public education, could lead to further cuts in gifted education programming. Contact your legislators and urge them to support Individual Education Plans for gifted students. Let them know that gifted students have special needs not met in general education. Help them understand that gifted students are New Mexico's future.

Geoffrey Moon, President

New Mexico Association for the Gifted

To Serve the Gifted: *NMAG Honors New Mexico's Best*

Several esteemed teachers, administrators, and politicians were honored for their decades of support to gifted education in New Mexico during the NMAG 2010 Summer Institute. The honorees included:

- NMAG Advocate of the Year Karen Giannini, a legislator from New Mexico House District 30, who navigated the political waters to help New Mexico reinstate gifted endorsement legislation.
- Dennis Higgins, recently retired from Albuquerque Public Schools after nearly three decades of service and distinction for his work with Twice-Exceptional students, was named Gifted Educator of the Year.
- Mary Reeve was named NMAG Administrator of the Year for her work as a Gifted advocate. Reeve is the director of Services for Exceptional Students in Gallup McKinley County Schools.

Karen Giannini, NMAG Gifted Advocate of the Year:

“I have two gifted kids, myself, who are both Twice-Exceptional, and I had to advocate for them. I have a physics degree, not an education degree, so I had to learn to advocate for them and learn what they needed as gifted students. Both of them are now in college. I want to thank all of you teachers for what you do because you are preparing our gifted kids for the future. We need to keep putting money into this program because it will benefit our future.”

(Continued on Page 2)

NMAG Honors New Mexico's Best

Dennis Higgins, NMAG Gifted Educator of the Year.

“In 1990 I heard a statement that for 2010 information would double every 28 days, and I think we see that today. I think the best thing we can do as educators is to sample the content and teach our students the very best of what we can offer to our kids.”

“A few years ago I heard a term, which I like to use in my teaching now: unconditional positive regard – you make the client feel worthy even when the client does not feel worthy. These twice-exceptional children make me feel worthy even when I do not feel worthy.

Dennis also thanked his daughters and his wife, UNM Professor Elizabeth Nielsen.

Mary Reeve, NMAG Administrator of the Year.

“Thank you. I really appreciate this. However, we didn't do this by ourselves. We came up with ways in our district to identify and validate students of cultural difference, and we found ways to find resources when resources were tight. I'd like to thank my staff in Gallup because they always find ways to make things work; they pull off an impossible task because gifted education in our state is profoundly underfunded. All of you are underfunded, but because you believe in what you do with all your hearts, you find a way to get it done, so thank you to all of you.”

Send us your news!

We welcome information about gifted education and gifted students to share in the NMAG Newsletter. Is your district doing something interesting? Do you have students who should receive recognition? Send feedback and information to Scott Gullett at scottgullett@comcast.net.



Outgoing NMAG President John Frazzini honors N.M. Rep. Karen Giannini.



Outgoing President Frazzini honors retired APS teacher Dennis Higgins.



Incoming NMAG President Geoffrey Moon honors Mary Reeve, Director of Services for Exceptional Students in Gallup McKinley County Schools.

Their Future Is Now:

Gifted Students Reflect on College and Their Recent High School Years

Gifted students from around New Mexico joined NMAG members for a panel discussion during the 2010 Summer Institute's final-day luncheon. The discussion, moderated by NMAG Historian Pamela Sutcliffe, centered on the key questions of why gifted education is essential, and how students can use their skills once they move on. The five students included Christina Chavez, a student at New Mexico State University; Alicia Chavez, from the University of New Mexico; Alba Aguilar, of New Mexico Tech; and Jessie O'Hara, of NMSU.

What was your Gifted Program/Service like in Public School, and what was the stand out event during your time in Gifted Education?

Robbie: I was in a pullout program, and it was a good experience to interact with other gifted students at that young age. We had multiple hands-on experiences in Math and Science, which was great.

Alba: I received a variety of services in different schools (complete pull-out, partial pull-out, and inclusion). We enjoyed art, engineering, sign language, and many other activities.

Alicia: In elementary we had a pull-out program, and then in middle school we had seminar with gifted students of similar interests, which was great. We got to do a lot of projects. It was the first time a teacher actually let us work on our own and explore our future professions.

Christina: My first year of gifted was my sophomore year in high school, and it was wonderful because we were given our independence and got to do a lot of technology-based projects. We even went to a tech boot camp where we got a camera, laptop, and video software, and I also did AVID. I learned a lot for that, and I loved it.

Jessie: I had a weekly pullout in elementary with other gifted peers where I honed my skills, and I

learned to think outside the box. We were taught to direct our thought processes in a productive manner. In middle school we also met on an individual basis with our facilitators where we receive counseling on how to implement our skills and talents into a future-driven education with specific career goals. In high school our teachers had expectations, which we could not possibly have even known to expect for ourselves. They provided social, intellectual, and emotional support, and they provided us with the knowledge of how to apply for the schools and scholarships we needed.

What would you do away with in a gifted program?

Jessie: I would do away with the notion among parents and general educators that gifted students are merely a bunch of loud, crazy people. I would change our educational climate so we could all accept one another, embrace one another's differences, and work together in collaboration so we could learn from one another's strengths. We should do away with anything, which does not foster the nurturing of all students' talents.

Alba: I would do away with the rudeness. I would also provide more educational opportunities and knowledge of furthered education for general education students. If I could wave a magic wand, I would completely change the way we teach math. We should teach Algebra in elementary. I would have liked to see more programs, like academic decathlon, robotics, etc.

Christina: I would like to say that Elementary Math is changing as an education major, and I wish I had learned that way. I would also change the priority of Gifted Education. My gifted class had one computer in a closet, and I wish it had been a priority because not all kids are the same; some are two steps ahead, and people should recognize that. **(Continued on Page 4)**

Their Future Is Now

Gifted Students Reflect on College and Their Recent High School Years

(Continued From Page 3)

You spent several hours in your IEP (Individual Education Program) meetings while in school; were those hours useful to you, and were you heard as you got older, being allowed to craft your own Program?

Alicia: My IEP's were one of my most helpful times in education because I was so shy in elementary school, and my IEP addressed helping me to develop leadership skills. That IEP made my teachers encourage me and teach me how to take a role of leadership, which has helped me so much to become the person I am today.

Robbie: In elementary the IEP was more my mom and my gifted teacher, and I was sort of in the corner letting them talk while I was bored. But as I got older, the meetings helped a lot because my gifted teacher helped me to look at my interests and activities so I could focus on areas of interest and areas, which would help me prepare for my career. They were able to guide and advise me about what clubs or programs would hone my skill set.

Jessie: I had a similar experience to Robbie. I didn't understand the purpose in elementary; the meetings helped my parents to understand my strengths and to advocate for me. The meetings became important during my 8th grade year because I learned to become my own advocate. I learned to evaluate the decisions I had made the previous year and see if I had met them; then I could decide what direction I wanted to move for the next year and become more self-motivated.

Alba: I learned during 7th and 8th grade year that I needed an advocate and an IEP because I skipped grades in the middle of the year. I also became pregnant during my senior year, and I had a team of advocates, who sat with me for over six hours in my IEP where we explored all of my options, and no one could have been more helpful when I needed help preserving my future education.

What would you like teachers and educators in this room to know about what gifted kids need, and how would you like them to convey that information to people, who are not hear?

Robbie: Motivate your students; they need it. They have talent, but they may not know how to use it. I failed over and over again, but they continued to motivate me to be the best I could be, and not only in the classroom.

Alba: If you're a gifted person it's easy to become mediocre, and I think educators have to raise the bar because what is acceptable for some is not acceptable for "you." We need motivation to want more even when we're doing well.

Alicia: I agree. We can made excuses because we know how to work the system, but if teachers push students to complete their projects and meet challenges, they will benefit in the long run as they see what they're truly capable of—what is possible. The challenges made me believe in myself, and now I'm going to pursue a degree in chemical engineering."