

New Mexico Association of the Gifted



Spring 2018

Newsletter

NMAG discusses proposed changes to State's Technical Assistance Manual

New Mexico Association for the Gifted had a March 3rd open meeting regarding the updating of the state's gifted Technical Assistance Manual. Some 14 gifted educators and advocates from the across the state attended the session at the Rio Rancho branch of New Mexico Highlands University. During the meeting, NMAG President-elect Geoffrey Moon presented on the identification section of the manual, which he worked on updating with a group of gifted educators.

The more than four-hour discussion covered a number of topics in the manual including the definition of giftedness in the state and how giftedness compares to disabilities under IDEA,

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NMAG Leadership Updates Membership on issues and projects

An advocate is someone who speaks up and defends the rights of certain individuals. "All of us are advocates for the gifted," NMAG Past-President Dr. P.J. Sedillo told the attendees at the 39th annual AAGTS Conference on Jan. 27th at Albuquerque Academy. He introduced the acronym, ACES, or Advocate Communicate Educate Support.

Sedillo said it can be difficult to advocate for gifted students in New Mexico, because "no one knows how the system works. Each school district is different. We need to come up with a common language together."

Sedillo pointed out that not everyone knows what gifted is, so assumptions even in education should not be made that gifted education is understood. He stated that when he was teaching in the public school system he cut out quotes with gifted facts on them. He would put those in teachers' boxes. "Communicate - stay on message - repetition, repetition, respect your audience, as you respect yourself," he said.

At this time, the National Association for Gifted Children is doing an advertising campaign on giftedness. It includes billboards, newspaper and radio advertisements. This is to build awareness across the country about giftedness.

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the diversity of students being identified for gifted, as well as what is required in order to be identified as gifted in the state.

Moon stated there is no pre-referral or Response to Intervention for gifted education in the state of New Mexico, instead, each school district has made up “a screening and referral process.”

The manual states that each district is required to set up a referral and screening procedure, it also states that “they (school districts) don’t have to find every gifted child.”

When a student is referred for gifted screening, the student must be in the top 2% and show giftedness in one or more of a number of categories. Some students might fall into the to 10% and according to Moon, “we shouldn’t be saying they are not gifted, we should be saying they don’t meet the state’s criteria for gifted services.”

These students also should be receiving “a tier 2 intervention at least to help them increase their giftedness,” he said.

With regards to identification of diverse students, “we have regressed in the identification of Black and Native American students” since 2009, Moon said.

In addition to covering the identification portion of the manual, there was a brief overview of what the committee working on the Individualized Education Plan portion of the manual would be looking at as the process continues. A survey about IEP’s will be on the NMAG website beginning Monday, and the next open meeting for to discuss the TAM will be 10:30 a.m. May 19 at NMHU Rio Rancho Campus.

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In addition to this national effort, NAGC will have its 2019 national conference in New Mexico. “We have a lot to be proud of here in the state of New Mexico,” Sedillo said. The conference will be in Albuquerque and it is up to NMAG to have 1,000 people in attendance in order to get a financial boost of \$22,000 in the state organization’s bank account.

The conference will be Nov. 7th through Nov. 10th with some 350 different topics and presenters focusing on gifted education. Sedillo said there also will be parent day, for parent volunteers, who might want to assist with the conference.

“We beat out Seattle for this, which is kind of nice,” he said.

In order to assist those interested in attending the conference, NMAG is working to set up a payment plan for the conference. More details will be available on that in the near future.

NMAG also has been active in working with the New Mexico Legislature and the Department of Education to introduce legislation to support gifted education. One of the bills had to do with an acceleration policy for gifted students. “What we wanted to tackle first was early entrance to kindergarten at 4,” Sedillo said. “We also want gifted children to have access to occupational therapy and physical therapy services.

NMAG also is working to update the Gifted Technical Assistance Manual, which President J Ortiz, said is a “good jumping off point,” for the organization. She added that there already are a number of “good resources in it.”

The plan is to complete the updates by the end of summer. “We’re trying to update it as much as we can,” Sedillo said, adding that because of this the NMAG Fall Institute will change this year.

“We decided to do a one-day fall institute,” Ortiz said. “It will be the TAM celebratory roll out. One day of professional development and an afternoon of celebrating the TAM. It will be a really great day for gifted ed.”

Ortiz also spoke to gifted education programming and advocating for gifted students. She reminded everyone that gifted should not be thought of an “elite program,” but as providing services to “a certain sector of our population,” she said.

She pointed out that gifted students are just as far away from the norm as those receiving services on the opposite end. “In the classroom we want general education teachers to understand that,” Ortiz said, adding that it is important to differentiate curriculum to keep gifted students engaged. “When you see a star athlete, would you be training them without a highly qualified coach? The same goes for our gifted students.”

Ortiz would like to see general education teachers trained in gifted education, because “it is really important for these teachers to know these students need support,” she said. “Gifted students are bored and frustrated, because they come to class knowing everything. They’re not underachieving. They’re under-challenged.”



Amend speaks advocacy, and twice- exceptionality at AAGTS conference

Licensed psychologist and author Dr. Edward R. Amend spoke at the 39th annual Albuquerque Association for Gifted and Talented Students conference Jan. 27th at Albuquerque Academy. Amend co-authored with Dr. James Webb the books *Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults* and *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children*.

Amend, who practices in Lexington, Ky., specializes in comprehensive psychological services for gifted children. He met Webb, while he was studying psychology in Ohio, and it was Webb, who asked him to work with gifted children. From this study, Webb wrote *Guiding the Gifted Child*.

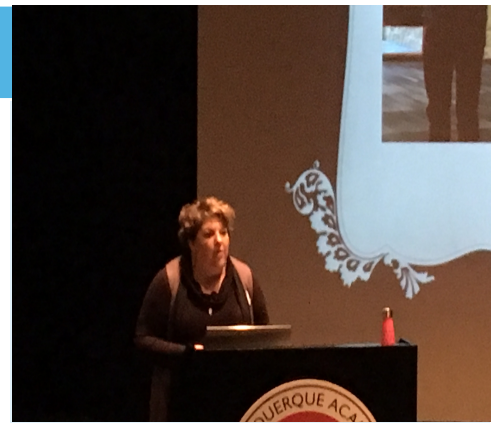
"It made sense to me," Amend said. "I was the smart one in my family. I was pigeonholed into that label. Being gifted comes with a lot of myths."

He shared some characteristics of gifted children. "They see humor where others don't see humor. They can persist on tasks and will do it. They feel things, they see things," he explained. "They have a wide range of interests. They are very good at evaluating themselves and evaluating others."

Gifted children are known to be overexcitable. They have "heightened responses of a different stimuli," Amend said. There are five different overexcitabilities:

- Psychomotor - they "move a lot, lick pencils."
- Sensual – they are oversensitive to tactile stimuli. They want tags cut out of clothing and they are able to taste and smell things with great intensity.
- Intellectual – "They want to know everything about everything," he said. "What is interesting is when you get that gifted kid who is an introvert, who has all of these questions but can't ask them. Now, we have an answer in 2018 – the Internet."
- Imaginational – they pretend – "all of their stuffed animals are named."

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San Juan Gifted Association Working on Advocacy

San Juan Gifted Association, an affiliate of the New Mexico Gifted Association, has been working to build its chapter and return to its original focus of supporting educators and parents of the gifted by providing educational opportunities, outreach, and professional development.

Members are working to develop a Facebook page as well as reach out to the local school districts to build relationships.

SJC-NMAG President Debra Mayeux also spoke at the AAGTS Conference in January, addressing the issue of parent advocacy.

Mayeux began her talk by giving her own gifted story - about her experience as a child and the experiences of her own gifted children.

"As a parent of gifted children I want what is best for them," Mayeux said. "One of the most important things for our gifted children is that we allow them to be who they are and pursue avenues of study that they desire."

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SCNMAG building for gifted education

South Central New Mexico Association for the Gifted received its Non-Profit articles of incorporation from the state, and since that time its members have been working diligently with the state to build education and support for gifted education.

President Andres Melendez has been working to assist in the revision of the Individualized Education Plan worksheet, in which a template would be created as a starting point on which members could make comments.

The organization also made contact with the New Mexico Public Education Department to establish a contact point for all aspects of the PED. Since the association is new, its members have questions about gifted education. "We felt reaching out to the PED directly would facilitate in getting us the correct person with the PED, depending on the nature of the question," Andres said. "We will be putting together a PED committee to coordinate with our PED contact. This committee will be a joint effort with NMAG as well as the IEP worksheet committee."

Melendez also made contact with State Rep. Nathan Small, who authored House Memorial 46, which deals with dual credit and early college for high students in the state. "I voiced our support for his memorial and also inquired about the task force that will be assembled to look into the matter," Melendez said. "I stated we had an interest in being on that task force and reserving two spots for SCNMAG and NMAG."

SCNMAG welcomed Melissa Otto, of Carlsbad, to its board. Otto is a parent of gifted child, and she is working on a master's degree in gifted education. She will assist in coordinating the eastern half of the state's southern portion.

Finally the organization is setting up a PayPal account with the assistance of Lisa Ehler McCuller and Mary Garcia.

SCNMAG will have a quarterly public meeting May 17th at the Arrowhead Early College Campus in Las Cruces.

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Mayeux shared some characteristics and traits of parent advocates as was presented by Robinson and Moon in a 2003 article. Those traits included being "motivated, strong, persistent and committed to creating change." These parents also pursue and educate themselves in gifted education best practices as well as develop leadership skills, while learning to better communicate their needs as well as pursuing work for the cause in public relations.

Mayeux also stated that parents need to allow and encourage their children to advocate for themselves by following advice from Galbraith and Delisle: "Be informed and know your rights. Identify your needs and ideas, and prioritize your needs and interests, choosing the top two or three to plan your strategy around."

Mayeux and the rest of the San Juan County New Mexico Gifted Association board attended the AAGTS conference to learn more about building advocacy through parent organizations.

Amend cont. from p. 3

- Emotional Sensitivity – "a response to minor stimuli seems way out of proportion - they are experiencing those intense feelings at that deep level," Amend explained. "It is not a bad thing. It is an it thing."

Amend is an advocate for meeting the needs of gifted children in everyway possible. He recognizes their potential and believes that it should be built upon, so as not to allow that potential to be lost. "Potential, while it's great and opens doors, does end at some point.

We've got to recognize that," he said. "These kids at the highest end of the spectrum need a whole lot more. We often do a better job of meeting needs at the lower end of the spectrum."

Their needs become even greater if the child is gifted and has a disability, which is what his book *Misdiagnosis* is about. "You can be gifted and underachieving," he explained. "It doesn't mean you have to show what you know. The child's behavior is interpreted in one way but not necessarily described by the giftedness. We have misdiagnosis."

Amend cont. on p. 5



NMAG Board
sets up shop at
AAGTS
conference
on Jan. 27th at
Albuquerque
Academy.

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A wrong diagnosis can lead to psychologists and educators giving “inappropriate advice” to parents. Sometimes without properly identifying a gifted or twice-exceptional student, behaviors might get in the way of their learning and their potential. “I’m a big fan, huge fan of using giftedness to explain why certain things might happen,” Amend said. “I’m not a big fan of excusing behaviors because they’re gifted.”

Many behaviors in gifted students are the results of the students not being engaged in their education. Amend said not to use the word “bored - it doesn’t really mean anything and it seems to be taken personally.”

Instead he challenges parents and teachers to “raise the bar until we engage them.” He also wants it to be recognized that those twice-exceptional students might not know how to be successful in a classroom.

“Recognize skills that are necessary and help that student recognize them as well,” Amend said. “We just need to know where our strengths are and where our weaknesses are. Provide specific concrete interventions and accommodations - start small with one idea and avoid overwhelming or sweeping attempts.”

He further suggests monitoring and reinforcing progress or perfection and “using small successes as stepping stones.”

