The American Association for Gifted Children, Duke University
Historical Perspective

1946 – Organized – New York - The American Association for Gifted Children

On September 6, 1946 The American Association for Gifted Children (AAGC) was founded because two friends, Dr. Ruth Strang and Miss Pauline Williamson believed that "the gifted were the most neglected children in our democracy." These two pioneer educational leaders incorporated the first voluntary non-profit organization in the United States devoted exclusively to the needs of gifted, talented and creative children. Established in New York, Dr. Harold Clark, an educational leader and economist, was elected President and led the Association during the first twenty-five years. Charles Coburn, Actor, was named Honorary President. Steve Allen and Dr. Jonas Salk were among the distinguished advisors for AAGC. AAGC incorporated in New York and was located at University of the State of New York. Stated purposes included:

- To recognize, appreciate, and stimulate creative work among gifted children.
- To review what is being done for gifted children.
- To organize a junior committee of gifted children.
- To visit schools and observe gifted children at work.
- To correspond with leaders in different fields, schools and industry, and to press for opportunities for gifted children.
- To foster the development of a clearer appreciation of the possibilities and capabilities of gifted children and to promote plans to further their interests.
- To encourage public sentiment in favor of plans to recognize gifted children at an early stage and to promote their welfare as individuals of a distinctive class.
- To publish writings, papers, books, pamphlets, periodicals and other publications for cultivating and fostering the purposes of the organization.

1951 -- The Gifted Child, a first book in the field, was published by D. C. Heath & Co. It was authored by members of the Association and edited by the Vice-President of AAGC, Dr. Paul Witty.

1958 -- Four Guideposts for the Education of the Gifted were published and delivered to State Directors of Special Education for parents, teachers, administrators, and gifted students. These publications, written by Dr. Ruth Strang, provided practical strategies for the development of gifted children.

1959 -- Creativity of Gifted and Talented Children was published, which included the speeches by Paul Witty, James B. Conant, and Ruth Strang delivered to The American Association of School Administrators' annual meeting. In addition, during the 1950's, AAGC's leaders were active in promoting information about gifted children through radio and television, conferences, and through a number of prestigious publications.

1974 -- A meeting was held at the National Arts Club in New York City to pursue ways of assisting gifted young persons in the art field. Among the groups represented were the American Association for Gifted Children, the National Arts Club, and the U. S. Office of Education. As a result of this meeting, a Fine Arts Committee was established which resulted in providing scholarships for short-term studies for three artistically gifted children.

1975 – Mary Jane and Jerome A. Straka Scholarship established to provide a scholarship for a student to study math, science or economics in college.

1979 - Dr. William Melville, one of AAGC's leaders and Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at Wisconsin State University in Platteville, presented a proposal to the American Library Association at their annual conference. The proposal outlined specific strategies for helping interested people learn more about gifted children. As a result of this meeting AAGC developed a project with the American Library Association, to help librarians work more effectively with gifted children.


February 15, 1985 – Meeting with the National Association for Gifted Children - Savannah
The meeting was held to discuss the merger of the two organizations. Memorandum Report, April, 1985.


1986 - 1989 - Wright State University – Dayton, Ohio - Dr. James T. Webb, President
The American Association for Gifted Children moved to Wright State University School of Professional Psychology in Dayton, Ohio in 1986. The identified purposes in state corporate papers were: "AAGC’s programs include research, offering grants, conducting seminars and workshops and publishing to stimulate and recognize efforts regarding gifted children. It works with the White House Office of Gifted and related associations in the field. Current efforts are in the areas of minority gifted and health care professionals, “to assist in nurturing the emotional and social development of gifted Black children.” A conference is held to focus on this group in 1987. The Association’s programs are designed to:

- Assist families in identifying and nurturing gifted and talented families;
- Engage others from the community to work on behalf of the gifted and talented;
- Emphasize special populations, most notably, underachievers, minority gifted and handicapped gifted;
- Support efforts of others to assure effective school programs; and
- Promote in-service education for professionals in various fields.

August 7-9, 1986 - Conference on “The Future is in Our Minds.” Stouffer Dayton Plaza Hotel, Dayton, Ohio. Themes: Motivation – Minority Gifted – Vocational Planning – Gifted Adults

1987 – Developing a Project for Minority Gifted Children
AAGC developed a Strategic Plan for A Project on Minority Gifted, primarily to focus on gifted Black Children and to develop programs that could be replicated for other minority children. “It is necessary to increase local programs encouraging and helping family and community leaders to meet the needs of gifted Black children, and for developing national awareness of local efforts on behalf of these children.”

1989 - Duke University, Durham, NC —Dr. Robert Sawyer, Director – TIP Affiliation
The American Association for Gifted Children incorporated in 1989 as a non-profit in North Carolina, without members or capital stock, and was located at Duke University, Durham, N. C. Identified purposes included:

To foster a better understanding of the needs and capabilities of gifted children, to encourage research in the field of education and nurturing of gifted children, to recognize, appreciate, and stimulate creative work among gifted children, and to accomplish and encourage other related work relating to gifted children.

To support, both directly and indirectly, the work and operations of public charities qualified under the
United States Internal Revenue Code of 1986 or the corresponding provisions of any future United States Internal Revenue Law.

1991 - Mary Jane and Jerome A. Straka Scholarship Fund assets were transferred to TIP from the New York Office. Selection criteria for the Fund were then reviewed and changed. The Straka Scholarship Fund now provides college scholarships to outstanding high school seniors who want to pursue mathematics, economics or science studies. A number of scholarships have been awarded through the Talent Identification Program at Duke University for their summer residential programs.

1995 - Dr. Irving Alexander was installed as President of AAGC. Dr. Alexander's goals included: re-defining the mission, services and goals of AAGC and raising funds to make the organization independent, with a full time Executive Director.

1996 - Dr. Irving Alexander organized a very successful panel discussion for the 1995 National Recognition Week; Presidential Scholars Program. AAGC, through a grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation awarded 141 scholarships to outstanding graduating seniors across the nation. AAGC was the 1995 winner of the Jimmy Carter Award for Outstanding Contribution by an Organization. A Strategic Plan was developed by the Board, with assistance of Margaret Gayle, consultant.

1996 – Margaret Gayle was appointed Executive Director. Margaret Gayle and Dr. Vicki Stocking, TIP published a report on Gifted Preschoolers. A Preschool Brochure and Fact sheets were developed by Gayle and 90,000 were mailed out to all stakeholders in North Carolina, with the help of TIP interns. Fact sheets were mailed, based on requests from the brochure.

AAGC’s mission and goals were aligned to support the focus on at risk populations.

January 1999 – AAGC Transferred at the request of Stephen Pfeiffer, Director, TIP at Duke to the Center for Child and Family Policy. Dr. Ken Dodge, Director, Irving Alexander, President.

June 16, 2000 – Planning Retreat – 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., Red Mill Building, Duke University. Andy Smith, Chair of Planning Committee and Margaret Gayle, Facilitator. Feedback on Major Issues from a variety of groups included: 1) lack of a program for gifted K-2 students; lack of support for precocious preschoolers; under-representation of minority students and children of poverty in advanced programs; and the number of students in alternative programs without service. Other professionals cited the lack of research or evaluation of the impact of the Governor’s Schools or other programs that specifically target gifted and talented students. A business plan was projected for years 2001-2003.

December 2001 – Geraldine R. Dodge Funds approved for Bright IDEA Pilot in collaboration with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction: Exceptional Children and Closing the Gap Divisions. Bright IDEA focused on the under-representation of children from Minority and Title 1 populations in gifted programs.

April 2001 – Submitted a Draft Three Year Strategic Business Plan to the AAGC Board.

2004-2010 - US Department of Education, through the Javits Education Program, funded Bright IDEA for $2.5 Million. The fiscal agent was the Exceptional Children Division, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Valorie Hargett and Mary Watson were Principal Investigators and Margaret Gayle was the Project Manager. Dr. Ron Tzur served as Outside Evaluator and Dr. Rachel Kenney served as the Research Assistant. A final report was submitted to the US Department of Education, September 2010.

September 2006 – Dr. Seymour Mauskopf elected to serve as President, AAGC. Billy Peebles served as President from 2004-2006.
2011 – AAGC and The Research Network of Racial and Ethnic Inequality Signed a Memorandum of Understanding. AAGC was provided an office in SSRI. Gayle was appointed as a Visiting Research Fellow to work with AAGC and The Research Network.

2011-2012 – Dissemination of Project Bright IDEA to the Scale-Up Version- Bright Tomorrow Continuation of Bright IDEA as Project Bright Tomorrow, K-5 in Title 1 schools in 5 school districts.

April 26-27, 2012 – AAGC and The Research Network of Racial and Ethnic Inequality, SSRI, held a Closing the Opportunity Gap Conference in collaboration with the Exceptional Children Division of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction on the Duke Campus.

July 9-20, 2012 – Participated in Young Scholar’s Writing Camp with The Research Network of Racial and Ethnic Inequality, SSRI – Duke Campus. Margaret Gayle developed Microbiology lessons for the Middle School Scholars with Dr. Lola Reid as the lead scientist teaching the labs on cells and DNA. Danielle Groselcose, a Bright Tomorrow teacher serving as an Intern in the Research Network, assisted with the lessons.

July 18, 2012 – Dr. Joy Lawson Davis, Institute on Gifted Minority Learners, with The Research Network of Racial and Ethnic Inequality, SSRI – Duke Campus. A Training Workshop for Educators during the day, and an Evening Dinner Presentation with Parents and Educators.

July 24, 2012 – Dr. Laura Bottomley, Professor, North Carolina State University held an Institute on North Carolina Engineering Standards for Educators, with The Research Network of Racial and Ethnic Inequality and AAGC, SSRI on the Duke Campus.

July 23-25 – AAGC and The Research Network held a Curriculum Institute on Task Rotations