

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

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Realizing the Promise of Gifted Children

America's richest resource is its children and youth. In a few short years, they will lead us to a better tomorrow.

Yet our chances of making the most of tomorrow's future stands threatened today...unless we help. Gifted children -- the 3 to 5 million bright youngsters most capable of enriching our future -- are among those most neglected today.

Gifted and creative children are indeed a most precious human resource. Approximately 3% of children are gifted, although very few of them are prodigies. They come from all walks of life economically, socially, and geographically. They are found in the inner city, rural areas, and migrant camps. Typically gifted children have an advanced vocabulary, strong feelings, exceptional memory, talent for the arts, great abilities in sports, a natural ability to lead, and more. Their academic performance is often, but clearly not always, high. Their motivation is usually intense, although it may be sporadic or focused on unusual topics. Ironically, their exceptional characteristics can lead to difficulties in that their brightness and creativity may be viewed as a liability rather than an asset.

Identification of giftedness is essential, for only when gifted are provided with specialized support can they develop their unique capabilities to the fullest. Yet, only half of all gifted children have been identified, and seldom prior to third grade. Many people underestimate these children's abilities. They may have difficulty accepting that a child is "different" from his or her brothers, sisters, and friends. Or they may feel that a child must be a genius to be considered gifted. Or they may be distracted by a barrier to identification, as too often happens with minority gifted or those with learning disabilities, health problems, or physical handicaps.

Other people believe that gifted children do not need help, that they can make it on their own. They come to this conclusion based on inaccurate stereotypes or by looking only at those children who are high achievers, and forget the majority of the gifted child population who have not reached their potential.

Social and Emotional Needs

Today, the most overlooked, but yet most basic, need of gifted children is their social and emotional development. A great gap remains between educating gifted children and helping them to believe in themselves, feel that what they do is important, and know that, while they are different, they fit wonderfully well into the world.

Too often, gifted children, particularly those not yet formally identified, are underachievers. When their special needs are overlooked, gifted children often feel bored with school and uncomfortable with their classmates. They may develop a low self-concept, poor peer relationships, and feelings of depression and alienation from others. This was sharply emphasized by the Marland Report, which observed that the majority of gifted children perform 2 to 4 grade levels below their potential.

The devastating impact of neglecting the social and emotional needs of gifted children is demonstrated by a number of studies. Dr. Joanne Whitmore has shown that some 6-9% of school dropouts are gifted, double the representation of gifted children in the population at large. Also, there is convincing evidence that children who are unusually creative or have better-than-average grades attempt suicide more frequently than other children. And various studies have shown that society too often suffers a double loss from the gifted child who turns talent to destructive ends; one study found that 5-6% of the juvenile delinquents and prison population are gifted.

For some gifted children, the solution lies in more stimulating, challenging and responsive education. But schooling is a resource with limitations and is only part of each child's day. **Much of each child's development depends on those outside the school system -- in the broader community.**

The American Association for Gifted Children

The American Association for Gifted Children is the only national organization that focuses on the social and emotional needs of young children.

The AAGC has a 40-year record of achievement that dates from its founding in 1946 by Dr. Ruth Strang, a world-renowned child psychologist, and Pauline Brooks Williamson, a noted school health educator and administrator. The first comprehensive book about these children, "The Gifted Child", was edited by the Association's Vice-President, Dr. Paul Witty, in 1950. Volunteers themselves, these visionary men and women inspired other community leaders to be interested in these special children.

As the first organization established to help gifted children, the AAGC has been the stimulus and catalyst for much that has been done in the field. Since its founding, other organizations have been established - most notably the NAGC (the National Association for Gifted Children) and TAG (The Association for the Gifted, an affiliate of the Council for Exceptional Children). Through the participation in the Coalition of Organizations for the Advancement of Gifted Education, the AAGC keeps informed about the work of others and seeks to avoid unproductive duplication. For the most part, other organizations concentrate on school-based educational programs, and their membership consists almost entirely

of professionals in education and child development, predominantly in higher education.

In 1986, the AAGC consolidated with Supporting Emotional Needs of Gifted (SENG), a program sponsored by the School of Professional Psychology of Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, making the AAGC an even more powerful force. SENNG brings to the Association the talents of Dr. James T. Webb, a child psychologist recognized nationally for his leadership in the field. Under Dr. Webb's direction, SENNG developed a highly effective program of guided discussion workshops for parents of gifted children. Since 1981, Dr. Webb has organized national conferences for parents and teachers of the gifted; the 1986 conference was co-sponsored by the Association. And the outstanding book, "Guiding the Gifted Child", co-authored by Dr. Webb, was awarded the 1983 "Book of the Year Award" by the American Psychological Association.

As part of its special strength, the AAGC has always drawn its leadership from varied walks of life -- business, entertainment, the arts, health, law, and libraries, as well as psychology and education. Further, its membership and programs are predominantly for parents and those not specializing in the gifted, though many professionals in the field also participate. A long standing and unique feature of AAGC is the deep involvement of volunteers who continue to carry much administrative and program responsibility.

The AAGC Mission

The fundamental goals are to benefit society by strengthening leadership in a wide range of endeavors, to reduce family problems, and to enable highly promising individuals to fully recognize their potential. The AAGC has pinpointed its mission for the future: to focus on the social and emotional needs of gifted children and the roles of the family and the community in meeting these needs. The Association's strategy is to develop, stimulate, and support efforts which assist gifted and talented children to develop a strong self-concept and fully realize their potential.

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
- Promote in-service education for professionals in various fields

Carrying Out The Mission: The AAGC In Action

The AAGC uses various approaches in carrying out its mission. The AAGC works both independently and in cooperation with others and seeks to encourage widespread dissemination and implementation of positive practices and replication of model programs. Current programs include:

Books

- Guiding the Gifted Child, a practical source for parents and teachers
- On Being Gifted, the first book by and for gifted young people
- The Gifted Child, the Family, and the Community, a useful overview of issues and resources

Other Publications

- Horizons, the newsletter for AAGC members
- Guideposts, a series for the child, parents, grand parents, the teacher, and school administrator
- Reaching Out to the Gifted Child: Roles for the Health Care Professions
- Cassette tapes of conference presentations

Annual Conference

- Held each August, with a simultaneous Children's Program. The Sixth annual conference on "The Gifted Child, the Family, and the Community" will be held July 30-31 and August 1, 1987, in Chicago, Illinois

Cooperative Action

- Joint activities with the American Library Association including the leaflet "The Library Is My Best Friend", soon to be revised and reissued

- Health Care Professionals Project. The Task Force Report published in 1986 identifies appropriate roles and sets forth future agenda

Presidential Scholars Program

- In cooperation with the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the AAGC administers awards for 141 remarkable young people who are recognized each June in Washington, D.C. The AAGC also conducts related research and a parent program, and is developing alumni relations with scholars from previous years

Jerome A. and Mary Jane Straka Scholarships

- For students in science, math, and economics who are nominated by AAGC members

Office Operations

- A skeleton staff, together with volunteers, handles the organization's programs. In addition, as further evidence of the need, the office handles some 50 letters of inquiry per day from parents and professionals across the country.

Priorities for the Future

To maximize its impact, the AAGC has selected three priorities for the immediate future:

1. Working with health care professionals to involve them in identifying and assisting gifted children.

In its report, the AAGC's Task Force concluded that health care professionals are major potential resources for gifted children and their families because of their special perspective and because they have contact with children long before educators do. Practitioners can help identify the "hidden" gifted, such as children who perform poorly in school or those who are ignored or who suffer from discrimination. They can diagnose conditions such as visual handicaps and learning disabilities which might mask the gifted child's potential. They can be consulted about medical and behavioral problems in which giftedness may be a factor.

2. Developing programs to assist minority gifted children

In 1987, the AAGC plans to convene a Task Force to address the needs of gifted Black children, and to develop programs that could be replicated for other minority children. Many gifted Black children feel they are out of place because they are smart and have nowhere to go in a white-dominated society with few trailblazers, role models or mentors to guide them. It is necessary to increase local programs encouraging and helping family and community leaders meet the needs of gifted Black children, and for national awareness of local efforts on behalf of these children.

3. Establishing a computerized resource service. Programs, resources, organizations, publications, and contact persons in gifted education and related areas are diverse, scattered, and continually changing. Parents and professionals throughout the country seeking specific resources need up-to-date information. To help meet this critical need for accessible and timely information, the AAGC is developing a computerized data base that will be continually updated and refined.

The Future is in Our Minds

The AAGC's challenge as we near the 21st century is to increase the likelihood that today's gifted children will develop tomorrow into leaders in every field of endeavor who are caring and courageous as well as creative.

The future is in our minds -

those of our **gifted young people** who have great potential for future contributions to society

those of the **members and supporters of the AAGC** who understand that we have neglected the social and emotional needs of our gifted children, and are willing to contribute to the AAGC's efforts.

Will you help?

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

Minority Gifted Project

The Needs of Gifted Black Children

Out of the entire school population in the U.S., between 3 and 5 million children are thought to be gifted. It appears that only half of these children have been identified as gifted by parents or professionals. Even those who are identified often do not realize their potential. Surprisingly, many parents underestimate their children's abilities and may have difficulty accepting that their child is "gifted" rather than "just bright;" they often feel that "one must be a genius to be considered gifted." Even teachers often overlook gifted children. As a result, too few of our gifted children are being provided with suitable opportunities to develop their unique capacities.

There is every reason to conclude that Black children in particular are among the most underserved of all gifted children. The observation made in 1972 by the Marland Report (Mr. Marland was the United States Commissioner for Education) remains true today: "We are increasingly being stripped of the comfortable notion that a bright mind will make its own way. Intellectual and creative talent cannot survive educational neglect...This loss is particularly evident in the minority groups, who have in both social and educational environments every configuration calculated to stifle potential talent."

Many gifted Black children feel out of place because they are smart and have nowhere to go in a white-dominated society, with few trailblazers, role models or mentors to guide them. While the sense of being different is common to many young people, particularly those who are gifted and creative, it is especially acute for minority group children, particularly. There is a major need to increase local programs that help family and community leaders meet the needs of these bright children, and to help those engaged in local programs, and the nation as a whole, become aware of programs for gifted Black children offered across the country.

Few national groups have taken a role in sponsoring the development of programs for gifted Black children. Whatever has been done no longer seems to claim national attention. True, these children have attracted genuine interest in a number of states, but discussions with educators in Chicago, New York, Philadelphia and San Francisco show that these efforts are very localized. The community-based or school-based programs that do exist seem to have been tailor-made for a minority population in the immediate vicinity without the benefit of advice from others who have done similar things elsewhere.

What Can Be Done for Gifted Black Children?

The American Association for Gifted Children has concluded that efforts targeted at gifted Black children must be given the highest priority. Now that it is affiliated with Supporting Emotional Needs of Gifted (SENG), the Association proposes to explore ways in which the earlier efforts of both organizations on behalf of the general gifted child population can serve as models for efforts addressed specifically to the needs of gifted Black children and their families.

Harkening to the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, the Association has a dream for gifted Black children, which would be realized by achieving five goals:

- Develop a positive self-image, motivation and role models for youngsters who are gifted and Black but whose identification and growth may be stymied by their environment.
- Realize the potential of gifted Black children.
- Engage parents and community members in this effort.
- Alert the broader American community to the fact that a pool of highly talented, motivated youth exists within the Black community.
- Motivate other organizations devoted to the needs of Black children or gifted children to devote more resources to this important effort.

To meet these goals, a Task Force on Gifted Black Children will meet in Chicago and consist of professionals and others familiar with unique problems of identifying and nurturing gifted Black children and qualified to propose and help implement solutions. Programs will be reviewed, selected and developed under the guidance of this Task Force. The Task Force will focus on programs that can be implemented in the Greater Chicago Area to serve Black youth in Chicago and yet be replicated elsewhere. Approximately one-fourth of the Task Force members will come from Chicago.

The Task Force will consider, develop and implement the following approaches as appropriate:

Parental Guidance. A support group model patterned after the parental guidance workshops developed by SENNG over the past five years. This "Chicago Model" would enable Black parents in that area to help each other provide emotional support to their children and guide them

toward the best possible opportunities. Through such a specialized minority parent group, parents would also learn how to relate most effectively with their gifted children and with school programs. Past experience has shown that parents of gifted and creative children feel particularly alone, frustrated and uninformed without such support groups.

Conferences. Workshops addressing the special needs of gifted Black children to be presented in national and local conferences. The Association and SENG already co-sponsor a highly successful conference concerned with the needs of the broader gifted population, which includes sessions focusing on gifted Black youngsters.

Mentoring. The Association may seek to use the Task Force's contacts within the Black communities of Chicago to create mentoring programs. Under these programs, successful Black members of the community would, with the Association's assistance, make themselves available one-to-one to serve as role models and a source of guidance to gifted children.

Publications. To draw attention to the minority gifted experience and be a reference tool for the guidance of gifted Black children and their families:

- a) a publication that would be the minority group version of the Association's immensely popular On Being Gifted.
- b) a resource book for families, listing and evaluating available services, key resource people, eligibility criteria, etc.
- c) a collection of impressions about successful Americans who were minority group gifted in their youth by people who knew them (e.g., teachers, parents, religious leaders).
- d) an addition to the Association's well-received Guideposts series, specifically highlighting the needs of minority gifted children.

Funding

Funding is requested in the amount of \$50,000. This amount would provide for a full-time Project Director and part-time Research Assistant, reimburse expenses incurred by Task Force members and fund dissemination of the Task Force Report. The duties of the Project Director will be to provide the Task Force with much needed staff leadership and such services as report preparation and the compilation of current program data from around the country.

Our plans call for the Task Force to complete its work within one year after commencement.

INFORMATION ON BOARD OF DIRECTORS

From By-Laws of the American Association for Gifted Children

ARTICLE III

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

SECTION 3.1 Number; Term; Powers. The business, property, funds and affairs of the Association shall be governed by the Board of Directors. The authorized number of Directors shall be such number, not less than 10 nor more than 25, as may be determined from time to time by a majority of the entire Board. The term of office of each Director shall from the time of election and qualification until the annual meeting of members next succeeding election or until his or her successor shall have been duly elected and shall have qualified, or until death, resignation or removal. The Board shall determine the policies of the Association and shall exercise all powers not conferred upon the members by law, the Certificate of Incorporation or these By-Laws.