

SPAN Meeting Minutes  
January 13, 2015

Welcome

Apryl Henry (Co-President) welcomed everyone and announced the next two meetings. On Thursday February 12th, we will have a round-table discussion about intensities and on Tuesday March 24, Katy Halleberg will speak on underachievement. For the February meeting, we suggest reading articles posted on our website (<http://mcgt.net/priorlake/about>).

Speaker

Apryl introduced our speaker Kathy Geary. Kathy has served on the MCGT Board of Directors since 2011, is active in MCGT's Rosemount/Apple Valley/Eagan (RAVE) chapter, and has been on the MITY (Minnesota Institute for Talented Youth) Board of Directors since 2011.

Kathy reminded us that we may attend any MCGT event hosted by any chapter. February's CHAT Night on summer programs may be of interest (Feb 5 in Brooklyn Park, see <http://mcgt.net/calendar> for more information). Kathy also encouraged those who haven't joined MCGT yet to do so.

Kathy has a background in special education and is the parent of two gifted adults. She distributed a handout on advocacy, which outlined steps to advocating, including the worst case scenarios parents might face.

She began by outlining some of the obstacles faced when advocating. Parents can have a lack of information about best practices or about their child's school. They might approach the school without planning, with a laundry list of desires, or with emotions running high. They also might give up prematurely.

Obstacles from the school or teachers include a lack of gifted training, bureaucracy, or hesitation to make exceptions to policy. Teachers or schools might be willing to make a single accommodation without understanding that multiple tries might be needed.

Parents need to view themselves as their child's education coordinator or project manager. Kathy recommends the book "Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy" by Pamela and Peter Wright. The Wrights also maintain a website with useful forms and documents.

Schools are data-driven and parents need to have the data, too. Parents should document all contacts, outside testing, and other evaluations.

To overcome the lack of gifted training, parents can buy teachers a subscription to MCGT's newsletter Outlook (\$19 / year) or 2E newsletters (Hoagies, \$13). Chapters can also send teachers to the annual MCGT conference at a reduced rate. Other books that families or teachers might find useful are the Free Spirit Publishing books (for kids) or Karen Rogers' book "Reforming Gifted Education."

The first step to advocating is to gather information, including test scores and grades and the child's present level of performance. Parents should build on the child's strengths and be realistic about interests and passions. Parents should note motivation and underachievement concerns, as well as executive function concerns and perfectionism concerns.

Once they have data, parents should develop a plan with 1-2 priority items and supporting materials. If their child has done projects or classes outside of school, parents should help their child write a resume and include it.

As conferences can be intimidating, parents should rehearse the meetings prior to attending. Kathy recommends the book "Difficult Conversations" by Stone and Patton. Practicing how to respond to possible objections will make you feel more comfortable in the meeting.

Face-to-face meetings are better than telephone or email conversations. Consider bringing someone to take notes. Dress should be business casual and one should be prompt. Begin with a story to give a personal connection. Then state the facts in a neutral, data-sharing manner. Be careful not to use absolute words or to make inflammatory statements. Once the facts are shared, state your priorities. Extend an invitation to work together for a solution. Letting the teacher speak first and listening carefully to the teacher's concerns will help you and the teacher work together.

Once you and the teacher have brainstormed, document ideas suggested and follow up with an email summary. Set up check in times to assess whether the plan is working. Be sure to thank the teacher for helping.

The talk ended with questions and answers.

One attendee asked about middle school advocacy. Kathy said that middle school is often a black hole. Parents in the audience had had mixed experience using the TOMS/HOMS counselors as liaisons between families and teachers.

A parent also asked about test scores versus rigor. Kathy suggested concrete ways to connect test scores with capabilities, including outside testing (IQ, Explore, ACT) and developing a portfolio, including work done outside of school to demonstrate a child's abilities.

In a follow-up question about rigors differences when transitioning from 5th grade SAGE to 6th grade advanced course work at TOMS/HOMS, Apryl shared that she and Anne had met with Middle School Synergy teacher Missy Short and Missy said she might want to visit SAGE. Pam will extend an invitation.