

# Gray Matters

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Gray Matters is free and available online at <http://bvsd.org/tag/>

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## Update on Early Access

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Last year, HB 1021 was passed by the Colorado state legislature paving the way, once again, for school districts to receive funding for some children who do not meet the enrollment criteria of being five years old by September 30th for kindergarten entrance and six years old by September 30th for first grade.

The state was quite specific, however, about who should benefit from this opportunity. According to the Colorado Department of Education Fast Facts document (June, 2008), the intent of HB 1021 is “to meet the unique needs of the “highly advanced gifted” child. It does not permit early access to all gifted 4 or 5 year olds. Quality preschool programs will meet the needs of most gifted children.”

Colorado districts implementing Early Access were given guidelines by the state that ensure only identification of “highly advanced gifted” children, not just underage children who would be “fine” and do “okay” in kindergarten or first grade.

BVSD Office of Advanced Academic Services worked with the Talented and Gifted (TAG) District Advisory Committee and a focus group of stakeholders to create a plan that adheres to the CDE guidelines but also honors the unique community of Boulder Valley. The plan was submitted to CDE and approved paving the way for BVSD to allow some highly advanced gifted children to enter kindergarten or first grade early.

Early in 2009, information regarding the process for applying for Early Access was disseminated through a variety of avenues. Schools were encouraged to make it known in their communities through school newsletters, a link to the documents was placed on the BVSD Home Page and the TAG website, preschools and licensed child care providers

continued on page 2

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## TAG Educational Advisor Meetings

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All TAG Educational Advisors are expected to attend the monthly TEA meetings. These will be held on the second Monday of the month from 8:30-11:00 a.m. in the Black Diamond Room of the Ed Center. Substitutes for teachers will be provided by the Office of Advanced Academic Services.

**There is no meeting in March.**

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## Enrichment Activities

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Science Fair - Grades 6-12	Feb. 23, 2010
	CU Glenn Miller Ballroom
	Awards at Ed Center on Wednesday evening
History Day - Grades 6-12	March 6, 2010
	Front Range Community College
Destination Imagination - Grades K-12	March 13, 2010
	Monarch HS
Literary Magazine - Grades K-12	February 22, 2010
	(submissions due)

These are district sponsored enrichment activities.

Additional student enrichment opportunities and competitions can be found on the website at <http://bvsd.org/tag/Pages/enrichmentopportunities.aspx>

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## Professional Development

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TAG Study Groups available throughout the year

See article on page 4 for additional information or go to <http://bvsd.org/tag/Pages/EducatorInformation.aspx>

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## In This Issue

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Enrichment Calendar	Page 1
TEA Meeting Schedule	Page 1
An Update on Early Access	Page 1
New Resources	Page 2
Impact of the Economy on Gifted Education	Page 3
Advanced Academic Services TAG Grants	Page 4
CSAP and TAG Students	Page 4

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## *New Resources*

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*The Highly Sensitive Child* by Elaine Aaron (2002). This book suggests that 15-20% of children are highly sensitive. They are sensitive to scratchy clothes, funny tastes and textures, loud noises, and changes in routine. Often these children seem easily overwhelmed. The same qualities that make them smart, conscientious and creative can also result in shyness, fussiness and acting out. Sometimes these children are erroneously suspected of Attention Deficit Disorder or Asperger's Syndrome rather than highly sensitive. The author gives tips on how to raise these children into happy, healthy and well-adjusted adults. This book is sent to all BVSD schools receiving TAG funding.

*The Highly Sensitive Person Workbook* while not provided to every school is available for check-out from the Office of Advanced Academic Services.

*Different Minds: Gifted Children with AD/HD, Asperger's Syndrome and other Learning Deficits* by Deirdre Lovecky (2004). This book provides insights into the challenges specific to gifted children with attention difficulties. She advises on how best to nurture individual needs, create positive environments, and promote positive behavior and relationships at home and at school. This book is sent to all BVSD schools receiving TAG funding and further supports our twice exceptional student focus.

*Social-Emotional Curriculum with Gifted and Talented Students* edited by Van Tassel-Baska, Cross and Olenchak (2009). This is an NAGC (National Association for Gifted Children) publication that provides a thorough introduction to methods for developing social-emotional curricula for gifted students to use in the school setting. The book includes the special needs of diverse populations and provides strategies to promote social-emotional health and well-being in gifted students. This book is sent to all BVSD schools receiving TAG funding.

*College Planning for Gifted Students* by Sandra Berger (2006). Once again, this leader in college planning for gifted students shares college planning information specific to the unique needs of this student population. Included are choosing one's goal, planning one's education, success strategies that work, picking the best colleges, practical tips and directions, timelines and checklists. This book is sent to all BVSD high schools receiving TAG funding.

continued on page 3

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## *Early Access* continued from page 1

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throughout the community received notice of the opportunity in English and Spanish through their regular communication avenues (mailings, e-mail, website), and notice was included in the *Boulder Daily Camera* newspaper. An evening parent meeting with interpreters was held at the Ed Center to answer questions and help with the application process. Application packets were made available in English and Spanish. Other languages were available upon request. Application portfolios were submitted that included home language information, surveys of skills and readiness from parents and other adults who know the children, and children's work samples.

By the deadline of April first, thirty-five portfolio applications had been submitted. Applicants were a diverse group of four and five year old boys and girls from many different cultures and ethnicities. Several were English Language Learners or bilingual. A committee consisting of people from Advanced Academic Services, Early Childhood Education, school administration and the Literacy and Mathematics Departments designed an assessment day that would allow children to demonstrate their academic and abstract reasoning abilities, social skills and emotional readiness. Time was built into the day for snack and play giving committee members additional opportunity for observation during unstructured activities.

The Early Access committee chose Early Access assessments that are familiar to teachers and meaningful within the context of BVSD curriculum. It was important to the committee that the assessments provide teachers with data they could interpret and use without needing extensive training or additional professional development.

A second assessment window was provided for families who moved into the district after April first and three additional children were assessed in August.

The children assessed were a bright and inquisitive group. They were engaging and willing to attempt challenging tasks. They interacted well with one another and adults. The committee members were delighted by each individual child and unanimously agreed on the children recommended for Early Access who stood out as highly advanced gifted based on the totality of the Body of Evidence. In the end, BVSD is

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## *New Resources* continued from page 2

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*Challenging Highly Gifted Learners* by Barbara Gilman (Practical Strategies Series, 2008). This book briefly covers the nuts and bolts of piecing together appropriate resources and experiences that are responsive to the unique needs of the highly gifted child. The author addresses the ceiling effect common in typical assessments, the necessity for parents and teachers to work together and the importance of normalizing the school experience for the unusual highly gifted student. This additional resource is given to each teacher of an Early Access student.

*Questioning Strategies for Teaching the Gifted* by Elizabeth Shaunessy (Practical Strategies Series, 2005). In order to stimulate creative development, the use of questioning techniques has proven to be a successful strategy for encouraging purposeful inquiry. They encourage active engagement, exploration, and inquiry to further student achievement. This volume provides teachers with knowledge of the various types, purposes and intended outcomes of different questioning strategies. This additional resource is given to each teacher of an Early Access student.

*Social and Emotional Teaching Strategies* by Stephanie Ferguson (Practical Strategies Series, 2005). Elements associated with social/emotional education include a wide range of personal attributes, including value systems, attitudes, interests, feelings and emotions, interpersonal relations, character and leadership. The author believes in the importance of social/emotional education in nurturing the development of gifted students before crises or at risk behaviors are apparent. This additional resource is given to each teacher of an Early Access student.

*Developing the Gifted and Talented Young Learner* by Margaret Sutherland (2008). This book is a teacher friendly, practical approach to supporting the development of young gifted children through specific kinds of feedback, appropriate activities, creating a challenging environment and developing citizenship. This additional resource is given to each teacher of an Early Access student.

*Essential of WISC-IV Assessment 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* by Flanagan & Kaufman (2009). This book and CD is designed as a quick reference for psychologists and covers administration, scoring, interpretation and reporting; and provides guidance on avoiding common assessment challenges. It includes infor-

mation on assessing and interpreting the WISC-IV of special populations including gifted children.

*2e Newsletter*. This electronic newsletter looks at all aspects of twice exceptionality, that is students who are both gifted and have a disability. Online resources, online professional development, webinars and news updates are included. Staff may duplicate as it wishes for in-school use and share printed copies of articles with parents. This subscription is given to each school receiving TAG funding.

All publications and materials are available for check-out from school and the Advanced Academic Services libraries.

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## *Impact of the Economy on Gifted Education*

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At a time when people's sensitivity to budget issues is heightened and rumors sometimes promulgate erroneous information, the Office of Advanced Academic Services has been able to continue funding levels to schools without any decrease. Funding for gifted education in BVSD comes from both the state and district and supports advanced students in a wide variety of ways. Unless a school's overall population has declined, its TAG allocation has remained constant. The new BVSD program, Early Access (see article page 1), has not negatively impacted existing programming and offerings. Early Access instead broadens our services to advanced students and brings new children into the Boulder Valley School District. People with questions about gifted education funding in BVSD are invited to contact Jennifer Barr in the Office of Advanced Academic Services.

Rocky Mountain School for the Gifted and Creative has been a fellow provider of gifted education in Boulder for the past eighteen years. The impact of the current U.S. economy on personal discretionary income has caused some families to make difficult decisions regarding educational choices for their children. As a result, Rocky Mountain School has closed its doors. Although some of its students will be going to home schooling and others to different private schools, still other students from Rocky Mountain School are giving public education a try for the first time or are coming back. BVSD is being given the opportunity to step up and demonstrate that the needs of gifted children are being met in our district. We extend a warm welcome to these students and their families. Although Rocky Mountain School is closed, its former director will retain her board

continued on page 4

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## *Early Access*

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welcoming four Early Access kindergarteners and five Early Access first graders for the 2009-2010 school year. These children are enrolled in various schools across the district. The office of Advanced Academic Services provided teachers of Early Access children with resources and met with principals and most teachers of Early Access children prior to the first day of school. They also are providing free professional development specifically designed for teachers of highly advanced gifted young children. The office of Advanced Academic Services will closely monitor the achievement and social/emotional development of these children throughout the year and provide teachers with any needed support. Based on feedback received, any suggested modifications of the process will be addressed by the committee prior to the next Early Access window early in 2010. The collaboration between the Math and Literacy departments, the Early Childhood office and Advanced Academic Services was essential to the successful completion of the first selection process for children admitted to school through Early Access.

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## *TAG Grants*

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The office of Advanced Academic Services is pleased to once again be able to provide grants to schools that respond to the needs of advanced students and their teachers. These are available as long as funds are available.

### **Advanced Placement College Board Teacher Training**

These grants allow AP teachers the opportunity to attend teacher trainings in their AP curriculum and are required for AP teachers in their various disciplines. Contact Jennifer Barr at x5087 or by e-mail to [jennifer.barr@bvsd.org](mailto:jennifer.barr@bvsd.org) for applications or additional information.

### **TAG Study Group Grants**

These are grants of an unspecified amount that support professional development specific to the needs of advanced students. These grants provide resources for each participant, payment for up to three hours work outside contract hours, and facilitation assistance as needed. Provisions for professional development support during the workday is also available. For more information, go to the BVSDTAG website, ask your building TAG Advisor, e-mail [becky.whittenburg@bvsd.org](mailto:becky.whittenburg@bvsd.org) or call Becky in Advanced Academic Services at x5067.

### **Super Saturdays and Sometimes Grants**

These are grants for up to \$300 to provide students with enrichment activities outside of the regular school day. These enrichment activities may be for all students, not just TAG students and do not need to be academic in focus. For more information and sample activities from previous school recipients, go to the BVSD TAG website, ask your building TAG Advisor, e-mail [becky.whittenburg@bvsd.org](mailto:becky.whittenburg@bvsd.org) or call Becky in Advanced Academic Services at x5067.

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## *Impact of the Economy*

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position in the local CAGT (Colorado Association for the Gifted and Talented) affiliate, BVGT (Boulder Valley Gifted and Talented) thus making sure the BVGT remains inclusive and represents all gifted children in the greater Boulder Valley region, not only those in public schools.

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## *CSAP and TAG Students*

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TAG students' weighted index scores continue to be significantly higher than other disaggregated groups. The Colorado Department of Education's Weighted Index is an average of performance levels when valued as follows:

Advanced = 150  
Proficient = 100  
Partially Proficient = 50  
Unsatisfactory, Not Tested = -50

The 2009 Weighted Index Scores:

	TAG students	All BVSD students
Reading	121	92
Writing	117	89
Math	134	92
Science	121	77

When looking at the weighted index scores for TAG students over the past six years, their scores are flat in Reading, lower in Writing, higher in Math. They are also higher in Science than last year, the first time the weighted index for TAG students in science was available. Schools are encouraged to look at and pose questions about their TAG students' achievement in their TIES work. Parents are encouraged to look at their own children's achievement as demonstrated in class work as well as CSAP. There is no disputing that TAG students do very well as a group, which is as expected, but we must not become complacent about their achievement. We do not want to see the achievement gap close because advanced students are not making gains that reflect their advanced abilities.