

# ALPHA Bits

Southwest Allen County Schools ALPHA Parent Group



Helping our children to  
unleash the power of  
their minds.

Fall 2015  
Issue 1

## ALPHA Parent Group President Erin Heck:

### HIGH ABILITY EDUCATION AND EDUCATED PARENTS

**“Effective parents stay involved in their children’s education and informed about gifted education in general.” \***

It is true that “parents are the first and best teachers.” Therefore, it follows that if high ability kids require differentiated teaching, they also require differentiated parenting. This differentiated parenting includes how we are effectively informed about and involved with our children’s high ability education.

I knew coming onto the ALPHA Parent Group Board that our parents are committed and involved. I am increasingly realizing the depth of that commitment and passion for involvement. We are fortunate to be part of a community of parents that cares strongly about education.



This year, we have received many questions from parents that vary based on the school, age of the student, and length of time the family has been involved in the ALPHA program. However, I see two common themes: (1) how do I get involved and stay involved in my child’s education and (2) how do I become better informed about what is going on with my child’s education.

Communication has changed, is changing and is a challenge. So how do we, as parents, effectively become involved and informed? I am far from being an expert, but here are the two key ways I have been effectively guided by high ability parents with more experience:

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## SACS Assistant Superintendent Dr. Lynn Simmers: WHAT IS DIFFERENTIATION?

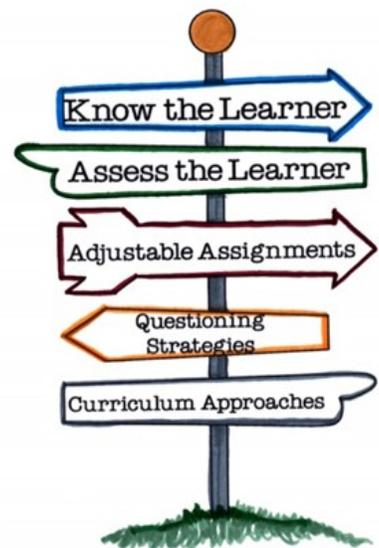
Diversity is everywhere and all students are extremely complex individuals. Moreover, high ability students can be gifted learners, high achievers and/or creative thinkers. As educators, we have discovered that teaching such diverse types of students doesn’t work using the traditional “one size fits all” approach. Therefore, Southwest Allen County Schools has embraced the practice of differentiated instruction as a means of allowing each student to learn at the depth, complexity and pace that is most beneficial to him or her.

The concept of differentiation actually began with researchers who were looking for ways to meet the needs of gifted students within the classroom. In fact, brain research conducted within the past decade provides yet another reason for differentiating instruction.

Learning occurs when the brain seeks connections to what it already knows. These connections form differently for each student because each student’s experiences are different. They individualize our brains so our learning experiences need to be too.

Differentiation is an approach to teaching that acknowledges differences in students and provides them with a variety of ways to learn. This means structuring classrooms so there are options for different ways to take in, work with, and learn information; differing amounts of time to complete work; different levels of thinking, readiness and ability; different assignments for students in the same classroom; and different ways to assess what students have learned. Differentiation for high ability students can be

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**What is differentiation?**



## ALPHA PARENT GROUP WELCOMES YOU...

### GENERAL BUSINESS MEETINGS

- Wednesday, January 13
  - Wednesday, May 11
- at 12:30 p.m. in the  
**SACS' Administration Building**

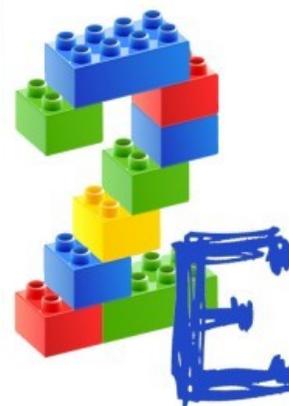
Join the APG board and Dr. Lynn Simmers at our general business meetings to learn more about gifted/high ability education, SACS' ALPHA program, and the ALPHA Parent Group. Bring your questions and concerns, and add your voice to the conversation.

## The Social and Emotional Characteristics and Needs of High Ability Students, Including Twice Exceptional Children

Wednesday, March 9  
at 6 p.m.

Location: TBA

Join us for a discussion with Sherry Hamstra, M.Ed., an instructor in the Department of Education Psychology at Ball State University. She is a former teacher of over 25 years and a Pre-Kindergarten through 8th Grade School Administrator. She has worked with gifted students, teachers, and parents throughout Indiana for the last 10 years as a field coach and presenter. She is currently consulting with schools in Indiana in the areas of curriculum, differentiation and meeting the needs of gifted students. She'll address social and emotional needs, including high ability children with learning disabilities.



### STEM SHOWCASE

March 2016

Location: TBA

Celebrate the work of SACS' elementary, middle, and high school Regional Science Fair contestants,

Homestead's Rube Goldberg team, Woodside's Future City teams, and Summit and Woodside robotics

### SENIOR WRITERS SHOWCASE

April 2016

Homestead IMC Library

2016 marks the 8th annual literary showcase. Treat yourself to a remarkable evening as AP Language and Composition students read from their work.



### ALPHA PROGRAM ON THE WEB

Visit the Southwest Allen County Schools website for information about the [High Ability ALPHA Program](#).

(Hint: If you don't have the above link handy, you can find the page by going to [www.sacs.k12.in.us](http://www.sacs.k12.in.us). From the yellow menu bar, select "Departments." Then in the left column you'll find "High Ability ALPHA Program.")

Other resources from the SACS website:

- Dr. Lynn Simmers' PowerPoint from the October APG Meeting on the [SACS' High Ability Program - Continuum of Services](#).
- [Bright Child Vs. Gifted Learner](#)
- [Explanation of Behaviors - Kingore Observation Inventory](#)
- [ALPHA Parent Group Info](#)
- [APG Membership Form](#)



We welcome your  
involvement in  
**ALPHA Parent Group!**



## ALPHA: A RETROSPECTIVE FRAMEWORK

Southwest Allen County Schools initiated the ALPHA program in 1980. Prior to 2000, the program was a blend of pull-out classes, cluster grouping and self-contained classes at the six elementary schools.

Beginning with the 2000-2001 school year, the program adopted the self-contained classroom model with multiple elementary school locations. In some cases, classes include multiple grades.

### 2004-2005

- Begin one-site self-contained elementary ALPHA classes at Aboite Elementary School

### 2005-2006

- New Woodside Middle School opens – middle school redistricting – discussions of middle school rigor

### 2006-2007

- SACS' ALPHA Audit with Dr. Tracy Cross, Ball State University
- Homestead 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 10<sup>th</sup> grade Block classes – transition discussions (district adopts AP World History to replace AP European History to align with IN state standards)
- June 2007 – Indiana Legislature passes High Ability Mandate, requiring school corporation to identify and serve high ability students, K-12.

### 2007-2008

- High School Weighted Grades – task force proposal rejected (issue last reviewed in 1990)

### 2008-2009

- Weighted Grades – discussion continues
- Homestead 10<sup>th</sup> grade Block class transition

### 2009-2010

- New Superintendent – Steve Yager
- Homestead 10<sup>th</sup> grade Block class transition

### 2010-2011

- New Assistant Superintendent – Philip Downs
- Advanced Placement Grading Scale implemented
- Dr. Daryl Yost conducts SACS District Audit – findings include recommendation for an internal ALPHA audit
- Pursue discussion of middle school rigor and possible pre-AP program
- Studies and Science. Focus on vertical alignment K-12.
- Significant increase in Dual Credit classes at Homestead.

### 2011-2012

- Begin internal ALPHA audit

### 2012-2013

- Continue internal ALPHA audit. Focus: comply with state requirements to identify Global High Ability (HA-GT) as well as High Ability Math (HA-M) and High Ability Language Arts (HA-LA) students.
- Refine testing and identification process.
- Begin testing ALL 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students
- Honors English 9 transition (to begin Fall of 2013)

### 2013-2014

- Identification of HA-GT, High Ability Math and High Ability

### 2013-2014

- Identification of HA-GT, High Ability Math and High Ability Language Arts students. HA-GT students will continue to be served in Aboite's self-contained program; HA Math and HA Language Arts students will be served in their neighborhood school. Neighborhood school services to begin Fall 2014.
- SACS initiates Coordinator of Curriculum & Instruction positions for English, Math, Social Studies and Science. Focus on vertical alignment K-12.

- Significant increase in Dual Credit classes at Homestead.

### 2014-2015

- New Superintendent – Philip Downs
- New Assistant Superintendent – Lynn Simmers

*ALPHA Parent Group President Emeritus Carla Overdahl shared this history of the ALPHA program with parents at the October 8, 2015 APG Meeting.*

**ALPHA = Actualizing Learning Potential  
Through Heightened Awareness**

## RESOURCES FOR ALPHA PARENTS

- Indiana Association for the Gifted Parent Guide to High Ability Education and Advocacy

<http://www.iag-online.org/resources/IAG-Parent-Guide-12-11.pdf>

- IDOE Identifying Students with High Abilities in Indiana, 4th Edition

[http://www.salemschools.com/uploads/file/Jackie%20links/Identification\\_Flip\\_Chart\\_in\\_pdf\[1\].pdf](http://www.salemschools.com/uploads/file/Jackie%20links/Identification_Flip_Chart_in_pdf[1].pdf)

- National Association for Gifted Children Gifted Programming Standards

<http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/standards/K-12%20programming%20standards.pdf>

- Indiana DOE High Ability Resources and Publications.

<http://www.doe.in.gov/highability/resources-and-publications>

- High Ability Resource Guide for the Indiana Academic Standards for English/Language Arts and Mathematics (2014). <http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/standards/highability-resource-guide-20140905.pdf>

### **Helpful websites and journals:**

- Feel like you need “Gifted Children 101”? Visit the Hoagies’ Gifted Education Page:

[www.hoagiesgifted.org/gifted\\_101.htm](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/gifted_101.htm).

- National Association for Gifted Children, [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org). NACG publishes *Parenting for High Potential* quarterly.

- Indiana Association for the Gifted, [www.iag-online.org](http://www.iag-online.org). IAG publishes *IMAGES* quarterly.

- SENG: Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted, [www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org).

- For help understanding and nurturing your visual-spatial learner, go to [www.gifteddevelopment.com](http://www.gifteddevelopment.com).

- Twice Exceptional Newsletter, [www.2enewsletter.com](http://www.2enewsletter.com). This is an award-winning on-line newsletter for parents whose gifted child(ren) also deal with ADD, ADHD, Asperger’s Syndrome, autism, or other forms of LD.

- *Imagine* magazine, <http://cty.jhu.edu/imagine/>. Written for gifted middle and high school students, each issue of *Imagine* features a particular topic (i.e. robotics, political science, mathematics, performing arts, brain science, archaeology and paleontology, engineering, writing, history) and profiles careers, academic paths and pursuits, and summer opportunities within that domain. Each issue also includes college planning tips and school reviews.

- Eight-to-eighteen-year-olds who love math, science, and technology will also want to explore Cogito.org at [www.cogito.org](http://www.cogito.org)

- [http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/browse\\_by\\_topic\\_articles.aspx](http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/browse_by_topic_articles.aspx), The Davidson Institute’s extensive GT library

- The Duke Gifted Letter, a free online quarterly newsletter for parents of gifted children,

[www.dukegiftedletter.com](http://www.dukegiftedletter.com).

### **Books:**

- ✦ *A Parent’s Guide to Gifted Children* by James T. Webb, Ph.D., Janet L. Gore, M.Ed., Edward R. Amend, Psy.D, Arlene R. DeVries, M.S.E, Great Potential Press
- ✦ *Guiding the Gifted Child: A Practical Source for Parents and Teachers* by James T. Webb, Ph.D., Elizabeth A Meckstroth, M.S.W., and Stephanie S. Tolan, M.A., Great Potential Press
- ✦ *Parenting Gifted Kids: Tips for Raising Happy and Successful Children* by James R. Delisle, Ph.D., Prufrock Press, Inc.
- ✦ *Some of My Best Friends Are Books, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.* by Judith Wynn Halsted, Great Potential Press.
- ✦ *The Art of Learning: A Journey In the Pursuit of Excellence* by Josh Waitzkin, Free Press
- ✦ *A Whole New Mind* by Daniel H. Pink, Riverhead Books
- ✦ *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking* by Susan Cain, Broadway Paperbacks.
- ✦ *Mindset* by Carol S. Dweck, Ballantine Books.



**ALPHA Parent Group President Emeritus Carla Overdahl shared these resources with parents at the APG Meeting on October 8, 2015.**

**More Resources On Page 5**

## Erin Heck: High Ability Education and Parents

*Continued from Page 1*

**ASK.** It may sound obvious, but it is often easier to discuss something among our peer group than to take the next step of going to the source. Part of this is making sure that we, as parents, are going to the right source. Communicate with your child's teachers. They interact with your child on a daily basis and they are the best resource for what is going on in your child's education. Sometimes it is necessary to direct a question to someone other than your child's teacher.



In those situations, contact the school's principal or assistant principal. They are the individuals who have the best knowledge of what is happening at your child's school. If your questions are not adequately answered, you should not be afraid to direct them to the appropriate person in the District's Administration. However, we all need to remember that there are over 7,000 kids in our District, so these individuals may not be in the best position to address individualized concerns.

Regardless of whether you are contacting a teacher, assistant principal, or a District Administrator, I have found that e-mail is the best way to communicate with them. This gives them the ability to provide you with a thoughtful response to your question. Also, when communicating with teachers and administrators, I treat them as I do other professionals, meaning be prepared, choose your words carefully, and respect that education is fluid and that there is not an immediate fix for all things.

**READ.** In my experience, there is a huge learning curve for non-educator parents. Become informed about the characteristics of high ability students, the components of high ability education, and the language and terminology used in the high ability realm such as differentiation and acceleration. Carla Overdahl provides an excellent list of resources in this newsletter.



We all have greater credibility and are more effective if we are educated about what high ability education encompasses, how it looks and how it should look in the classroom. Every time I read a suggested article, blog or book about high ability children and education, I realize that there is so much more to learn.

I look forward to working with you, our ALPHA parents, and our dedicated and involved ALPHA Parent Group Board of volunteers as we transition into a new school year. Again, the success and effectiveness of the ALPHA Parent Group depends on each of us being informed and getting involved. We look forward to seeing you at the APG meetings and working with you throughout the year.

*\* ["How Parents Can Support Gifted Children" by Linda Kreger Silverman](#)*

*APG President Erin Heck has two daughters: Anna is in 4th grade ALPHA at Aboite and Amanda is in 2nd grade at Lafayette Meadows.*



### MORE RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

Continued from Page 4

- "Developing Your Child's Habits of Success in School, Life, and Work," Arthur L. Costa (Habits of Mind) <http://www.leb.k12.in.us/pdf/district/Curriculum/highability/DevelopingYourChildsHabitsOfSuccess.pdf>
- "How Not to Talk to Your Kids – the Inverse Power of Praise" by Po Bronson, *New York Magazine* 2/17/07, <http://nymag.com/news/features/27840/>
- Midwest Academic Talent Search, <http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/>.
- Gifted Education Resource Institute, Purdue University – programs for youth and educators, <http://www.geri.education.purdue.edu>

## PANTHER PRESS PROVES POPULAR PROJECT AT ABOITE



Due to popular demand, Panther Press is back this year for not one, but two editions! Students in third through fifth grade have an opportunity to practice their journalism skills and write about events that are happening at Aboite Elementary and SACS schools.

The Panther Press is under new leadership this year. Stacie Gass and Jessica Clupper, both third grade teachers at Aboite, are excited to have the opportunity to continue the Panther Press. The program is funded by the ALPHA Parent Group and open to ALPHA students.

This year students received their own journalism folder complete with guides to help during the writing process and interview process. Students also had an opportunity to work with journalists from Taylor University. Chris Yingling,

Co-Editor-In-Chief of The Echo, and Lindsay Robinson, Life & Times editor of The Echo shared information on features and hard news.

They also talked about the 5-W's and I-H (Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How) and how to use those answers to help write an article. Students had a chance to ask questions and work with these journalists during their second Panther Press meeting. The fall edition of Panther Press is coming out at the end of December!



### Contact the APG Board

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Open Position

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## Dr. Lynn Simmers on Differentiation

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based upon acceleration, enrichment, student-driven inquiry/extensions, flexible grouping, leveled reading groups, cluster grouping, curriculum compacting, independent learning, guided math and technology. While this list not exhaustive, it does provide an overview of the many differentiated activities taking place in classrooms across the district to support the learning of our high ability students.

Please remember these are instructional approaches that can be utilized by teachers and not all of these differentiated strategies have to be used in order for individual student needs to be met.

- Acceleration allows the student to study the curriculum at a faster pace and/or higher grade level than would normally be the case.
- Enrichment activities focus on studying areas or topics that are typically not included in the regular curriculum. These activities broaden students' knowledge and understanding on a wide range of subjects.
- Student-driven inquiry/extensions use the regular curriculum as a starting point and allow students to delve into a subject more deeply or look at aspects of topic from a different point of view.
- Flexible grouping means organizing students for instruction depending upon the classroom activity and desired learning outcomes. This can be done as a whole class, a small group, or with a partner. Flexible grouping creates temporary groups that can last an hour, a week, or even a month. It's not permanent, but it is a temporary way for students to work together in a variety of ways within the classroom.
- Curriculum compacting is a process by which students are pre-assessed to determine what parts of the curriculum they have already mastered. When those areas of knowledge and skills are identified, students are not required to complete the grade-level work. Instead, they work on alternate activities that enrich and extend their learning.
- Cluster grouping allows teachers to work with students of similar ability, readiness, learning style or interest within the classroom. Cluster grouping for a specific content area allows high ability students to learn from one another, do extensions of typical classroom work and/or collaborate on suitably challenging tasks.
- Independent learning allows teachers to individualize and personalize instruction for students by giving them an opportunity to engage in independent study or an in-depth inquiry into an area of interest or topic that extends the curriculum. It gives students an opportunity

to develop their individual talents, expand their research skills and explore special interests. Other factors that students engage in during independent learning can include developing research skills, determining the reliability of sources, planning long range projects, developing organizational skills and choosing products to demonstrate learning.

- Leveled reading groups give teachers the opportunity to provide small-group reading instruction within the classroom. This instructional approach is often referred to as guided reading. Research continues to support the use of this instructional approach as being foundational to the literacy achievement of all students. For students, guided reading gives them opportunities to interact, read, talk and write about fiction and nonfiction texts organized along a gradient of difficulty to meet the unique learning needs of each child.
- Guided math is an instructional approach in which the teacher can support each student's mathematical proficiency at increasing levels of difficulty within the context of a small group in the classroom. In guided math groups, students engage in standards-based, rigorous, engaging and hands-on lessons. Guided math allows teachers to re-teach, reinforce and expand concepts, strategies and skills in an effort to meet each student's needs. It also gives students an opportunity to talk with their peers, ask questions and justify their mathematical thinking in a small group setting.
- Technology can easily be used to personalize, individualize and differentiate instruction. Web 2.0 tools, apps and educational software programs are utilized in classrooms across the district to meet the unique learning needs of all students. In addition, technology is a great tool that allows students to create, produce, communicate and collaborate with their peers and teachers.

As we continue to prepare today's learners for tomorrow's opportunities, our teachers are very adept at providing opportunities for continuous learning and growth in their classrooms through the appropriate differentiation of curriculum and instruction for all students. We also recognize the important role parents play in the education of their children. Our continued goal is to work in concert with parents and students to understand and nurture the gifts of each individual child. Should you have specific questions regarding the learning experiences of your child, we would encourage you to contact your student's teacher.

# Support Gifted & High Ability Education in Southwest Allen County Schools

## Join the ALPHA Parent Group!

Aboite — Covington — Deer Ridge — Haverhill

Lafayette Meadows — Whispering Meadows

Summit — Woodside — Homestead

Your Annual Membership Dues help make the following possible:

- **Scholarships:** Senior Scholarship for graduating HHS senior and Summer Scholarships for elementary, middle, and high school students
- **Professional Development Scholarships** for teachers
- **Grants to teachers to support curriculum development and class activities,** such as Panther Press
- **Grant** Support for the Homestead ALPHA Mentor program
- **Advocacy** for gifted/high ability education
- **Programs, information, and networking opportunities** to support and celebrate students and parents

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**Become a member of ALPHA Parent Group!**

***Please Indicate your tax deductible contribution level***

***\$15 – \$25 – \$50***

*Please send this form and check  
(payable to ALPHA Parent Group) to:*

Erin Heck, 11322 Dell Loch Way,  
Fort Wayne, IN 46814.

**Parent(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**ALPHA Student(s)**

**School**

**Grade**

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