Recently, I had an opportunity to attend a principals meeting that focused on Young Scholars (YS) in our elementary and middle schools with 6th graders. I was, throughout the presentation, struck by the enthusiasm and commitment that the principals had around what were referred to as the 3 A’s: Advocates, Access, and Affirmation. These ideals for YS schools are terrific touchstones for the important work that we do to collectively increase rigor and access for traditionally underrepresented populations of students.

This is the “right” work because we have an obligation to close the “opportunity gap” by identifying potential in students and helping those with that potential meet and exceed their expectations. It continues to become more evident to me that students are under-represented/underachieving often because we have not asked them to achieve. The only way we become “world class” is by ensuring that we ask with conviction and support that scaffolds their experience.

The language, and precision of language, is vital to our efforts. I spoke of YS as a “program” and it is not. Instead, it is a model that provides the appropriate flexibility from school to school to allow for the needs of each student to be met. That flexibility also allows schools to push the model and become even more inclusive in our (FCPS’) efforts. As Dr. Horn said so eloquently in the meeting, “It is vital that we err on the side of inclusion.” I couldn’t agree more and support this great model with continued resources in an effort to have every child reach their full potential.

What’s New in GT Programs and Young Scholars

- New YS Handbook for 2007
  Our YS Handbook has become a more comprehensive guide for teachers and administrators to utilize when implementing the YS Model in their schools.
- Tools to assist teachers identify Young Scholar students
  The YS Handbooks include additional tools that will help specialists and classroom teachers collect data on all students. These tools include a Gifted Behaviors Continuum (Blue Card) and Young Scholar Behavioral Identification Card to aid in the identification of Young Scholars.
- Curriculum Frameworks for Grades K-2
  Now it is easier and more convenient for teachers to access suggested interventions in each core curricular subject for K—2 Young Scholars.
- Revised K-2 Response and Model Thinking Lessons
  Marzano connections are clearly labeled on each lesson for both the Response and Model Thinking Lessons. Also, all of the K-2 Response lessons have been reformatted to align with the LEARN Model.
- Project Clarion Science Units
  The Clarion Science Units for Primary Grades are designed to provide a hands-on, inquiry-based approach that allows children to build their knowledge base and their skills as they explore science topics through play and planned investigations. Copies of the units may be found on FCPS 24/7 in Level III grade level science folders.

A Word From Peter Noonan
Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services
Spotlight on YS Summer School 2007

Thanks to everyone's efforts we completed another very successful Young Scholars summer school session during 2007. Approximately 1,600 children from across Fairfax County participated in the program this summer. Through the efforts of many generous people and organizations, the children were able take home two books of their choice at the end of summer school to add to their home book collection.

Throughout the three week summer session the children participated in field trips throughout Fairfax County and in DC where they were able to make real world connections to their units of study. As we visited Young Scholars classrooms we saw children engaged in powerful learning experiences designed to strengthen background knowledge and challenge their thinking.

Thank you to all administrators, teachers, parents, and volunteers, who participated in the summer program and who made it another successful experience for the Young Scholars.

A special thanks to the summer school office and the Department of Facilities and Transportation for their outstanding support!

Department of Accountability Completes Its Second Interim YS Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation was to provide information for annual decisions about Young Scholars funding, policy, and improvements. The evaluation covered the school year of 05–06 and a partial year 06-07. It indicated that over 3,200 students were identified as Young Scholars in kindergarten through eighth grade across 61 schools. Some of the major findings of the evaluation are listed below:

- The YS Model is clearly defined with specific objectives and meaningful outcomes tied to increasing the proportion of YS students assigned to center or school-based GT programs.
- Principals and parents understand the YS model and were periodically engaged in dialogue concerning the model.
- Staff development is well organized and scheduled to support student outcomes.
- There was an increased number of YS students in the Center and school-based GT programs and an increased number of YS students enrolling in the YS curriculum in summer school between 2005-06 and 2006-07.
The girls are coming back to the GEMS Club and this time they are bringing their friends. Interest in the Girls Excelling in Math and Science Club has increased because membership in the Dogwood Elementary club has risen from 23 girls to 41 in just one short year. What is making the difference? Once the word was out that science and math explored together is a fun and hands-on way to learn, the girls got excited. Guest speakers from professional fields brought to life the concepts and the experiments to make the learning memorable and meaningful. The goal is to make a lasting impression on the students so that they can excel in higher level classes in math and science and feel competent, confident and courageous enough to succeed at whatever they choose.

This year, Dogwood Elementary is expanding the program through grant money. Teacher, Michael Dennis, and GT Resource Teacher, Linda Martin wrote and received a grant of $6,580 to enrich the experiences for the girls by adding field studies. The first one is to the Walker Nature Center to learn first hand from naturalists in the field about natural resources. For the next meeting, a master naturalist will come and present an environmental exploration on the causes for the pollution in the Potomac River.

Not only is interest increasing among the girls, but adults are showing an interest in bringing the GEMS Club to other schools as well. GT Resource Teacher, Heather Jewell, and Linda Martin presented their experiences with the GEMS Club to GT Resource Teachers last spring and then to Young Scholar schools’ principals. On September 24, they hosted a focus group meeting for individuals who were ready to know more about organizing and running a club. Twenty-six elementary schools have shown an interest and they are getting more inquiries daily. The pair created a GEMS Club Handbook and website that is proving to be the key to helping others get started. “Our goal is to make this as easy as possible for you. We pulled together everything we had developed or researched so that it could be at your fingertips,” said Martin. When participants in the adult workshop discovered Jewell had already enrolled them in the 24/7 website, they were delighted. One emailed, “The site is gorgeous, I love the photos, and I can already tell there is a lot of useful information there.” They are all listed as teacher’s assistants, so that as they create and find new material, they too will be able to add to the site. It’s a joint effort.

If you are interested in bringing GEMS to your school, there are many options possible. You may want to consider a girls’ lunch bunch group to try out some hands-on experiments, or even to learn more about famous women in the fields of math and science. Or you may want to host a before school or after school club. An hour every two weeks can make a big difference in building the knowledge base and confidence of a young girl. Many people are willing to share their knowledge with the girls—doctors, veterinarians, architects, engineers, and even your local high school staff or students can serve as great presenters. The ideas are endless and cost little or nothing. But in the long run, whether you start big or small, your belief in girls may be what lifts and inspires them to do something great. The difference you’ll be making is worth the effort.

For more information, please contact Linda Martin, lmartin@fpcs.edu or Heather Jewell, Heather.Jewell@fcps.edu.

GEMS Club members show off their self-made Women of Change t-shirts.
In this sensitive and inspiring book, the author tells the stories of various famous people in poems, biographical notes, and their own words. Each of the eight intelligences is addressed in this book.

- barnes and noble .com -

“Smart Kids With Learning Difficulties” By Rich Weinfeld

Smart Kids With Learning Difficulties: Overcoming Obstacles and Realizing Potential is an engaging must-read for any parent, educator, or counselor of smart kids who face learning difficulties. The authors provide useful, practical advice for helping smart kids with learning challenges succeed in school.

“Teacher Leadership” by Charlotte Danielson

Teacher Leadership That Strengthens Professional Practice is designed to be a resource not only for prospective teacher leaders but also for administrators who want to better support the development of outstanding teacher leaders.

This book gives individuals and schools a practical framework for tapping teachers’ leadership potential and marshaling their efforts to better educate students and create a stronger learning community.