

# NDAGC Quarterly Newsletter



## NDAGC TURNS FIVE! PART II – PLANNING FOR CHANGE

By Ann Davidson

NDAGC President

As I mentioned in the April 2023 Newsletter, NDAGC turns five this August. I have had the great pleasure of working with the Board and Officers of NDAGC for all of these five years. Without question, the evolution and growth of the organization has been because of the shared vision of its Board, Officers, and members. NDAGC has become stronger in this short time and will continue to do so. But one thing that always remains constant is change. While the organization strengthens, the Board and Officers doing the work will shift over time. As an example, NDAGC will hold its annual Board meeting in August and with that, some Board positions will see newly elected individuals to those roles – the President and Treasurer.

The shifting is a good thing, though. An organization, or any system really, is only as strong as its leadership, and the leadership should be –quite literally– strong across the Board, and strong across the Officers too. Our organization should be strong enough so that when movement occurs and leadership moves in and out, the organization continues to function and grow without hiccups.

We, the Board and Officers, want our membership to know how much we care about protecting the advances the organization has made, as well as, being able to purposefully hand off the work to new leadership so that our growth strides continue. This year especially, one way we have accomplished this is by creating subcommittee groups that come together to work on NDAGC outcomes apart from our meetings. These subgroups work on NDAGC's strategic plan, webinars, the newsletter, the website, marketing, as well as, the needs of parents and educators. Then when the Board and Officers come together every three weeks, the subcommittees share the work they have accomplished, discuss decisions made, and ask for feedback. Delegating the work out to smaller groups has helped NDAGC more efficiently advance toward achieving its goals.

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NDAGC is also preparing for transitioning the role of President. As I transition out of the role of President in August, I will move into a Board member / Past President position so that I may support the incoming President for this next year. NDAGC will see some changes in August but we are prepared to support the leadership well so that the good work that we have begun can continue.

And with that, we welcome you to read on through this July 2023 newsletter and especially note the theme – preparing for change.

## PARENT CORNER: AN OPEN LETTER TO NDAGC FAMILIES

By Beth Ustanko

Dear NDAGC families,

I must begin this letter with some sobering trends when considering Gifted Education in North Dakota. Many are not aware that a nationwide study of Gifted Education conducted by researchers at Purdue University gave North Dakota a failing grade. Contributing to this grade are the statistics that, "...only about 30% of children from North Dakota even attend a school where they could be identified." The study concludes that, "Clear policy changes are needed to give access to, and equitably identify and serve, students with gifts and talents in North Dakota" (Gentry and others, 2019).

Since this study's publication, two of the state's largest school districts have experienced major changes within their gifted programming. In 2021, budget cuts at Grand Forks Public Schools included a restructuring of the district's Schoolwide Enrichment Program and resulted in the removal of three of its Enrichment specialists and retaining one to oversee GT or Enrichment programming for the entire district. As a result, classroom teachers assumed responsibility for differentiating instruction for GT students after receiving professional development.

This spring the Gifted Services program in Fargo Public Schools lost its longtime champion and leader with Ann Duchscher's retirement. As NDAGC's Past President Yee Han Chu has so aptly stated Ann's expertise and voice for Gifted Education cannot be replaced.

## A Sneak Peek at the 2023-2024 Webinar Series



### August Focus

Setting your room up for success with leveled stations and resources to make them work.

### September Focus

Designing pre-assessments to help identify high potential learners and ways to advocate in big and small districts.

### October Focus

Incorporating flexible grouping and designing tiered assignments to differentiate for our high potential learners.

Watch for full descriptions and registration details!



My reason for beginning with these discouraging developments is to allow us to consider the work that is before us. Gifted Education has always needed strong advocates, and I believe now more than ever advocates for the needs of Gifted Children in North Dakota must make efforts to come together.

The lack of services outlined by the Purdue study and recent trends may lead you to ask:

-Are there programs at your child's school that meet their intellectual, academic, and social/emotional needs?

-If there are programs at your child's school, are they aligned with best practices?

And finally, most importantly:

-Does your child learn something new every day while attending school?

I write to you as the parent of a child with gifts and talents. Parents, we must remember that we have a voice. We bring a unique point of view that has tracked the growth of our children every moment, every day, across many years. In the end, parents are responsible for finding solutions that bring nurturance and growth to our children. If your answer to some (or all) of the above questions is NO, and you are moved to make a positive difference, please allow me to suggest two places to begin.

First, at the start of this school year I encourage you to make efforts to develop a collaborative relationship with your child's educator. J.F. Smutny's article "Communicating Effectively with Your Gifted Child's School," originally published in 2002 with an update in 2015, has stood the test of time due to its valuable advice. The full article is a worthwhile read, however her criteria for a successful conference (and one could argue all family and teacher communications) is worth noting for families:

- Your child [is] the main focus, not the opinions or agenda of you or the teacher.
- Both you and the teacher [listen] to each other and [consider] each other's point of view.
- You [negotiate] for solutions that will meet your child's needs without disregarding the teacher's responsibilities or your knowledge of your child.
- You [come] to an understanding even if you had different opinions.
- You both [agree] to work on a solution that will help your child and to continue working together.
- You both [make] commitments and scheduled actions. (Smutny)

I would like to add, please also allow your child's educator (especially classroom teachers) the space to acknowledge the demands of differentiation for gifted children may be overwhelming.

## 2023 Learning Opportunities for Bright Students



If you are looking for enrichment opportunities both for the summer and during the school year, visit NDAGC's website (provided below) as well as a curated document (linked below) for a list of opportunities throughout North Dakota!

<https://ndagc.org/summer-learning>

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1V3SYn4Ar\\_20eV4oMYCUNdIlhrNErg9C8c2qVqNujuY/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1V3SYn4Ar_20eV4oMYCUNdIlhrNErg9C8c2qVqNujuY/edit)

This is the reason why gifted education is needed! If your school does not have a gifted program, a positive relationship with your child’s educators provides you the opportunity to ask, “Why not?” with a voice that will be heard.

The second suggestion I have is to make efforts to seek out other parents of gifted individuals. Or, as Dr. Julia Link Roberts and Tracy Ford Inman put it, find your kindred spirits. I believe we are all stronger when we are able to make connections with individuals who share our experiences. In the world of education, a network of committed individuals can make a difference!

Roberts and Inman’s article from their Effective Advocate’s (2006) series provides insightful analysis:

Here’s how schools might look at the number of people raising objections:

- 1 Advocate = A Fruit Cake
- 2 Advocates = Fruit Cake and Friend
- 3 Advocates = Troublemakers
- 5 Advocates = Let’s Have a Meeting
- 10 Advocates = We’d Better Listen
- 25 Advocates = Our Dear Friends
- 50 Advocates = A Powerful Organization

If you live in the Fargo and surrounding area an exciting opportunity is currently being planned which will provide NDAGC families the opportunity to find their kindred spirits. Our NDAGC Family Subcommittee is diligently organizing its first GIFTed (Guiding Individuals and Families Together) Gathering! Our hope is to provide an event the entire family can enjoy, while providing parents the opportunity to meet and connect with each other. By beginning to build a network of support we can take steps towards becoming a collective and powerful voice for the needs of our children.

Sincerely,  
Beth Ustanko

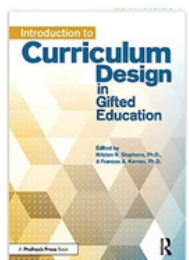
References: [https://ndagc.org/resources/References%20for%20Parent%20Corner\\_An%20Open%20Letter\\_.pdf](https://ndagc.org/resources/References%20for%20Parent%20Corner_An%20Open%20Letter_.pdf)

## TEACHER CORNER: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BOOKS

### Introduction to Curriculum Design in Gifted Education

Edited by Kristen R. Stephens, Ph.D. and Frances A. Karnes, Ph.D.

**Why you should read it:** Whether your district has a gifted program with purchased curriculum, a gifted program without a set curriculum, or no gifted program at all, this text is essential for understanding quality curriculum design for high-ability learners. Each chapter is written by different leaders in the field of gifted education and gives a deep look into best practices in advanced curriculum theory, aligning curriculum to standards, differentiating curriculum, and curriculum for various core subjects as well as how to incorporate creativity, technology, affective development, and cultural responsiveness. While this text is longer, educators can choose areas of interest to read first and reflect on how they can take their next best step forward in their instruction.

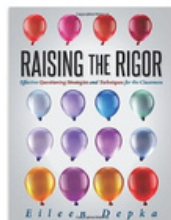


where to find: <https://a.co/d/f6qdgHL>

### Raising the Rigor: Effective Questioning Strategies and Techniques for the Classroom: Teach Students to Write and Ask their own Meaningful Questions

Eileen Depka

**Why you should read it:** This is shorter educational text that is packed with frameworks and examples for designing rigorous, standards-based instruction. Resources for the text are also available online for integration and immediate use. This text takes you through a step-by-step process for breaking down a standard, aligning it to Bloom’s Taxonomy, designing effective, standards-based assessments, and creating standards-based questions and tasks. Additionally, it dives into increasing student involvement in their learning. As North Dakota moves towards standards-based instruction and personalized learning, this is a valuable resource for all educators!

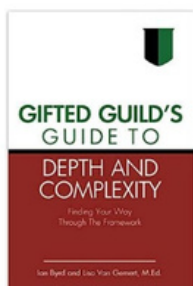


where to find: <https://a.co/d/arivnvF>

### Gifted Guild’s Guide to Depth and Complexity

Ian Byrd and Lisa Van Gemert

**Why you should read it:** This is a quick, easy read for teachers looking to incorporate more depth and complexity into their teaching. It is appropriate for novice and veteran educators and is filled with question stems that can be implemented immediately in the classroom. The chapters move through Sandra Kaplan’s depth and complexity icons, dives into her lesser-known content imperatives, and moves into classroom application ideas, including how to use the framework in an early elementary setting. It is a must have for any classroom looking to move beyond content recall!



where to find: <https://a.co/d/4EeSzBi>

# ANN DAVIDSON HAS BEEN A CHAMPION FOR THE GIFTED PROGRAM IN FARGO SCHOOLS

By Yee Han Chu

Gifted education in North Dakota lost one of its champions. Ann Davidson, who served the Fargo Public Schools as its coordinator of gifted services for 23 years, recently announced her retirement. While the Fargo Gifted Services team has a deep pool of talented teachers, Davidson cannot be replaced.

Davidson received her gifted and talented (GT) credential from the powerhouse program at the University of Connecticut and maintains deep connections with gifted education scholars. Davidson's program provides gifted services to 10% of the student population in Fargo Public Schools' elementary and middle school students. That's 17 schools. This means that she has influenced the lives of over 18,000 students during her tenure.

Davidson has a national reputation. Her 2005 NAGC "Compass Points" article titled "How one district made it work: Matching student needs with gifted services" put Fargo on the national stage as a premiere gifted program. In this article, Davidson described how the Fargo Public Schools changed its gifted and talented program structure to an inclusive model using individualized learning plans.

This transformation overcame multiple obstacles. First, federal legislation does not recognize the rights of and needs of gifted students. Second, little national support for gifted programming exists since misperceptions persist that serving high-ability students is somehow elitist. Third, federal mandates placed added pressure to prioritize other students with unique needs over gifted students. Finally, North Dakota did not (and still does not) mandate programs for gifted students. Despite these challenges, Davidson created a high-quality program and provided a service to a much-neglected student population.

Susan Clark, GT specialist at Ed Clapp Elementary, shared, "Over the many years Ann served in the Fargo Public Schools, she worked diligently toward the Fargo Public Schools' mission of 'Educating and Empowering All Students to Succeed.' In the past five years, she led her team to ensure that barriers are removed so that students from all walks of life may work toward their highest potential."

The gifted program in Fargo remains the exemplar of quality gifted education in North Dakota and perhaps even the nation. Stacy Anderson, the GT specialist in Lewis and Clark Elementary, echoes these sentiments. "In my 32 years in the field of education I have never worked with a more knowledgeable, passionate, and caring leader," Anderson said. "She always kept what was in the students' best interests in the forefront of everything she did. Thanks to Ann's unwavering vision and commitment to gifted education, Fargo Schools hands down has the strongest gifted program in the state if not the country!"

At the heart of Davidson's administrative success is her exceptional leadership. Exceptional leaders understand how to work with people and help them grow in their positions. "Ann made our work meaningful and purposeful under her leadership. She was so open minded and willing to allow each of us to shine within our gifted services team," said Anderson. Exceptional leaders also set high standards of conduct. Davidson insisted that all her GT specialists be trained and credentialed in gifted education.





While serving Fargo, Davidson also found time to help co-found the North Dakota Association for Gifted Children in 2018 and currently serves as its president. As part of NDAGC's leadership team, she helped the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction craft the ND Best Practices for Gifted Education.

Davidson is a gifted leader and administrator. She models high standards, high performance, and high empathy. May North Dakota's K12 education find inspiration in her work and continue to build on her great momentum advocating for gifted students. She will be deeply missed.

### Julia Warner, Gifted Services Teacher, Bennett Elementary

"I have worked for Ann for the past eight years. Prior to this, I worked as a Talented and Gifted Teacher in a different school district. As I was acquiring my gifted endorsement, I saw flaws in our program. I began to research gifted programs around the nation. Through this research I happened upon Fargo Public Schools Gifted Services and Ann Duchscher. As I dug deeper, I knew that I wanted to work for her and only her. My husband encouraged me to apply for other districts, but I refused, knowing the quality that I yearned to work for and grow from. I have learned so much from Ann and have always felt comfortable asking her any questions. She leads with a caring, guiding nature, one that anyone would be lucky to learn from. I feel very blessed to have worked under Ann for eight years. Do I wish it was 80 years? Yes. But now it is our job to carry on her legacy."

### Beth Ustanko, Gifted Services Teacher, Kennedy Elementary

"The excellence of Fargo's Gifted Services Program is known throughout the state and beyond. A number of families and educators, myself included, have moved to Fargo because of the quality of the program. Services of this caliber can only be the result of outstanding leadership. Ann is a dedicated leader who is committed to continuous improvement in order to align student services with best practices. She is a humble, servant leader who has welcomed diversity in thought, fostered leadership amongst her team, and placed trust in the professional abilities in her team of teachers. I believe her leadership has had a direct impact in creating learning environments within Fargo Public Schools which allow students with gifts and talents to grow and thrive. Her leadership will be greatly missed!"

## 13 a lucky number for bright UND scholars



See the linked article below to read about what gifted students are achieving at the University of North Dakota with the help of NDAGC's immediate past president Yee Han Chu:

<https://blogs.und.edu/und-today/2023/05/13-a-lucky-number-for-bright-und-scholars/>