The world needs effective leaders; people who make it possible for a group to achieve a common goal. Leaders do not need to hold titles or formal positions of authority but they do need vision and skills. Since many gifted students are passionate about big ideas and see ways to improve the world, they are primed to be leaders. Educational systems can help students develop their ability to lead.

The mission of the Radnor Township School District is to inspire in all students the love of learning and creating, and to empower them to discover and pursue their individual passions with knowledge, confidence, and caring to shape the future. When students develop a love of learning and pursue their passions, they often identify a purpose for themselves. In doing so, they are formulating a vision. If they are going to shape the future, they will need to share their vision and develop the skills to lead other people towards that vision.

Some gifted students demonstrate traits that could serve them well in leadership roles at an earlier age than their classmates. For example, they can make sense of complex information; they know how to learn; they can plan ahead and predict the effects of their decisions; they are articulate and persuasive; they are comfortable with diverse points of view; and they enjoy and are adept at generating creative solutions to difficult problems. However, students need guidance and opportunities to develop their skills to become effective leaders.

In this issue of the RTSD Gifted Newsletter, you will read about leadership at Radnor High School, Radnor Middle School, and our elementary schools. If you have questions or would like more information, please reach out to the Teacher of Gifted Learners in your child’s school or Mr. Jim Kearney at the Administration Building.
Giftedness can be identified in many areas outside of the academic subjects. When many people consider the term “gifted”, they automatically might envision high academic achievement; acceleration; voracious reading or deep knowledge of a subject or subjects; the ability to retain information quickly and precisely; the list goes on.

There are, undoubtedly, other areas of giftedness as well. One of these areas is leadership. We have seen great and successful leaders throughout all of history. Today, there are more books on leadership than anyone could ever read, and even if they did manage to read them all, the differing approaches to leadership are numerous. How do students with giftedness in leadership find opportunities to hone those skills?

Despite the already rigorous academic endeavors of our students at Radnor High School inside the classroom and through extracurricular activities, leadership opportunities present themselves. Some examples of these opportunities include student government positions, Model United Nations, Model Congress, Ethics Bowl, Hi-Q, RAD-TV, the Lower Merion Pep Rally, and the Young Republicans and Young Democrats, to name a few. These clubs and activities present numerous and rich leadership opportunities for students.

Athletics also provide an ample amount of leadership training. Teams have captains and athletes need to work together to achieve the goals of the team. Theatrical and musical performances also provide leadership training. Students have opportunities to serve in leadership positions such as drum major for band, lead chair(s) in orchestra, stage manager for theater, and dance captain for the musical, to name a few.

Outside of school, students engage in other activities as well that can develop leadership. Whether it is through church or synagogue programs, a part time job, athletic clubs or activities, Boy or Girl Scouts, or volunteer opportunities, students are engaged and learning as leaders.
Attending to Self and Others in Gifted Education: Leadership, Mentorship, and Community

In their book *The Leader in Me* (2014), Covey and his colleagues provide a set of directives that they deem essential to the development of a highly effective leadership culture in schools (e.g. “Be Proactive”, “Begin with the End in Mind”, “Put First Things First”, etc.) (pp. 68-69). One way to imagine how those directives could then be applied to successful leadership education might be to recast them into seven interconnected qualities (*proactivity, purpose, prioritization, empathy, inquiry, synergy, and optimism and community*). A brief review of recent research on gifted education indicates two areas in which these qualities emerge as significant: first, in mentoring programs aimed to develop leadership traits essential to personal and academic success (Besnoy and McDaniel, 2016) and second, in initiatives for identifying and supporting gifted students from underrepresented groups through responsiveness to those students’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds and by developing leadership opportunities that foster the positive *self-concept* needed for academic success (Bonner et al, 2008).

**Prioritization and Purpose.** Besnoy and McDaniel (2016) tout the benefits of involving gifted students in peer mentoring programs that create opportunities for developing “a greater commitment to community and stewardship” and argue that immersion in positive, community-based experiences aimed to build on their personal strengths can maximize potential and develop positive future orientations (p. 19). They note that outcomes of mentoring programs and the necessary goal setting fundamental to that work foster both “pride in being able to make a difference in a younger student’s life and satisfaction in developing their own leadership abilities” (p. 28). This heightened pride and satisfaction connects to the impact of Rites of Passage programs for African American males that Bonner, Jennings, Marbey and Brown (2008) cite in their research. They point to “improvement of self-concept as one of the major indicators of success” (p. 98) in those programs and observe that self-knowledge is crucial for these young men as they transition into adulthood. Finally, they argue that attending to the federal definition of giftedness, which includes *leadership ability* as a criterion, should be a consideration even in states (like Pennsylvania) where it is not explicitly included since it can impact academic success and aid the local education agency (LEA) in its identification responsibilities.

**Inquiry and Synergy.** Covey et al note that leaders must diagnose problems prior to prescribing solutions, seek out the ideas of others, and value diversity, teamwork, creativity, and unconventional thinking. All of this requires that we develop in gifted students the capacity for establishing shared, collaborative visions as they work towards established goals among a diverse set of peers. Bonner et al (2008) insist that we look to the larger cultural context of school and seek to better align the connected areas of “cultural, gender, racial, and academic identity development” by considering the interplay between students’ visions of self and the cultures of their school and home communities. Their research indicates that it is vital for the LEA to take into account the cultural norms and worldviews of underrepresented groups in gifted education through the creation of leadership opportunities that foster the kinds of work embedded in the concepts of inquiry and synergy. When considered alongside Besnoy and McDaniel’s (2016) observations that the success of a cross-age mentoring model was the expectation that mentors would not only teach mentees how to set personal and academic goals but would also build social relationships, establishing mentorship programs for gifted students from a stance that intentionally accounts for issues of diversity and cultural inclusion might aid in attending to these aspects of Covey et al’s leadership directives.

Covey and his co-authors provide a useful framework for conceptualizing ways to make leadership ability an aspect of gifted support and programming (e.g. through the development of cross-grade mentoring opportunities) and for considering the potential benefits it can have on the child find process, especially with regard to underrepresented student groups.

**References:**

The article in this newsletter focused on four of the seven qualities from *The Leader in Me*. A full version of this article can be found by visiting [http://www.rtsd.org/Page/19862](http://www.rtsd.org/Page/19862)
From the National Association for Gifted Children:

Some gifted children may be perceived as bossy or domineering, when they are enthusiastic about a new idea or invention. They may be so intensely involved they do not notice the other children’s reactions or lack of interest. Gifted children can learn the difference between leadership and being bossy.

Tips:
• Help your child understand that a good leader lets others have ideas and input and does not always make all the decisions.
• Share with them these aspects of leadership—delegating, assisting, helping, facilitating.
• Talk about differences between bossiness and cooperation.

Our Future Leaders

Today’s children will be tomorrow’s leaders. It is important to recognize leadership potential in children and work with them to develop positive leadership skills and become effective leaders in the future. “Like talent in visual arts or in athletics, children who display talent in leadership need to have their leadership talents developed,” explains Julia Link Roberts, EdD in *Gifted Child Today*. She goes on to share that, “Leadership is more than having a position to which one is elected or appointed. The key ingredient in a “real” leadership opportunity is setting a goal and devising a plan to work with others in reaching it. Leadership is about making things happen. Children and young people can create opportunities to build their leadership potential by identifying situations within their neighborhoods, schools, places of worship, or in other settings in which they can lead.”

Developing leaders in our schools:

How do we help children develop their leadership skills at the elementary level? Children learn about leaders in history and focus on the skills that helped them to be positive and effective leaders. Teachers support children in learning to plan, make decisions, and solve problems. There are also real-life opportunities to practice these skills that they are developing. How do they practice? Here are some activities in our elementary schools:
• Buddy classes will often work together on a monthly basis, pairing students in an upper elementary class with a younger class. Together, they work on projects with the older student acting as a mentor for the younger student.
• Reading to younger students
• Helping younger students practice math facts or playing games to practice math concepts
• Leading younger grades through activities like Field Day

How can you help your child develop leadership at home?  (from www.kidsource.com)

Offer an enriched environment that offers opportunities at home and in the community for children to acquire broad interests and build self-esteem. Provide support and encouragement.

Encourage children to be involved in the selection and planning of activities. These activities can range from a day trip to a vacation or planning to volunteer in an area service project. Provide opportunities for decision making and remember that they can learn from inappropriate decisions. Help them to reflect on what they would do differently.

Discuss and debate current events by listening openly (without pressing children to embrace your point of view) to foster independent thinking.