



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Rachel Smethers-Winters

WE are deep in a time of transition, a time of change, and I don't know about you, but change makes me uncomfortable. When I'm uncomfortable, I seek somewhere more comfortable. That often means taking stock of where I am so that I can figure out how to get out of there and go somewhere more comfortable, if possible, or to make the best of an uncomfortable situation.

In Ohio educational circles, in the past year or two, we've met the 3rd-grade guarantee, the Common Core standards, the new Ohio Learning Standards, the new Local Report Card, OTES and OPES, the revision of the Operating Standards for Gifted ("the Rule"), and a new state budget—not to mention a slowly recovering state economy and shrinking local school district budgets.

No wonder we flinch when we think about change. I've seen more stressed-out teachers and administrators this year than I have in the past ten years put together, and the sheer volume of high-stakes changes taking place doesn't always bring out the best in us.

Then why do we stay? I mean, let's face it: gifted education isn't easy.

To say that I stay because I can make a difference to even one child may sound trite, but it's true. I love gifted education and my place in it, and I love the challenges and rewards of working with gifted students, parents, teachers, and administrators. I hold dear the role models I've met in the OAGC, especially when looking to those who have done this longer to see how and why they stay.

I take great comfort in knowing that I'm not alone in my commitment to improving experiences for gifted students. In addition to the support available in both my local districts, my regional OAGC affiliate, and my OAGC friends across the state, I have discovered many resources in other states. One of the best is from Tamara Fisher, past president of the Montana Association of Gifted and Talented Education; she has some great advice for us on her Education Week blog, *Unwrapping the Gifted* (http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/unwrapping_the_gifted/). In her January 14, 2013, post, "Advice for New Gifted Education Specialists," she gives some sage advice that I have found priceless for times of change, and not just when I was a new gifted educator. Here are a few of the highlights:

1. "Connect with others who do what you do." Getting more involved with the OAGC, with your local affiliates, or just with the gifted teacher in the district next door if there's not another in your district, attending conferences, or finding gifted friends on the internet (the OAGC has a local networking page here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/OAGClocalnetworks/>) can help all of us prop each other up during difficult times.
2. "Start small" and celebrate even the small successes. My son and I share "three good things that happened at school today" every day. Even when it's hard to think of three, we always manage to do it, and we celebrate them together. Even the little celebrations help.
3. "Be okay with not being popular. . . . [M]odel for your students how to be okay with doing the right thing even when it means you're not popular for doing it." Sound familiar?
4. "Embrace your inner geek."
5. "Nurture and support positive working relationships with your administrators and school board members" and "Be proactive." The OAGC is committed to building and maintaining positive relationships with other stakeholders, and an integral piece of this process is educating other stakeholders about gifted education. When was the last time you spoke to your school board about gifted education and your gifted students? To your superintendent? There's no time like the present, and the OAGC is here to help: contact any member of the governing board to hear more about, and to join, one of our new committees working on resources to assist all of us in "being proactive."

I'm delighted that you have decided, as I and many of us have, to stay in the field of gifted education. Our students need each and every one of us. Any time you need support, reach out. You may be surprised how many hands reach back. 🐙