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Wisconsin Center for Academically Talented Youth

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**Wisconsin Celebrates Gifted Education Week Oct. 14-20;
WCATY Alumni Share Their Successes**

MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction praises the efforts of the Wisconsin Center for Academically Talented Youth (WCATY) in its proclamation naming Oct. 14-20 as Gifted Education Week in the Badger State.

In the proclamation State Superintendent of Public Instruction Elizabeth Burmaster recognizes WCATY for its efforts to “encourage, support, and challenge the abilities of Wisconsin’s children identified as gifted and talented.” Since 1991, WCATY has worked with educators and advocates to offer services and programs to meet the needs of the state’s gifted and talented students on a year-round basis.

The proclamation notes it is “important that giftedness and high potential in youth are recognized, universally valued, actively supported, and developed.” It stresses that the talents and creativity of gifted children are “nurtured and fostered through the efforts of parents and educators who work together to promote awareness of the needs of gifted children and to develop programs that respond to these unique needs.” It also recognizes that gifted and talented students come from all segments of society regardless of social or economic factors, race, sexual orientation or religion.

“Leadership and advocacy are the cornerstones for ensuring quality teachers and programs for gifted education,” Burmaster notes, naming two traits central to the WCATY philosophy. School budget constraints — and the common misconception that gifted students “don’t need any help” because they are already smart enough — mean academically talented students aren’t always adequately challenged in school. It is only with dedicated leadership and advocacy from teachers, parents and those within the gifted and talented community that the state’s most advanced students receive the appropriate education they require, WCATY says.

The proclamation coincides with the annual convention of the Wisconsin Association of Talented and Gifted, held this year at Wisconsin Dells.

Catching up: Gifted Education week is a natural time for WCATY to look back at its 16 years of service and the thousands of students, having participated in its programs that WCATY counts as alumni. Here are just a few examples of where former WCATY students have ended up, and where they are going:

- **Beth Bejcek** is a veteran of WCATY having taken four programs, the most recent being this past summer. As one of the organization’s newest alumni she is putting her WCATY experiences behind her and looking toward college. She says WCATY has helped her recognize responsibility for her own actions and make her own decisions when it comes to her academic career. “Looking back I feel that if I had never attended WCATY I would really be missing out on something in my life.”

- Since his last WCATY program, the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) in 2002 **Austin O’Brion** has made designs on a career in — design management. Austin graduated from Wisconsin Rapids’ Lincoln High School in 2004 and was awarded first place in a national graphic design competition. He enrolled in The Art Institutes Design Minnesota, Minneapolis, and will graduate this winter with a degree in Design Management with focuses in Graphic Design and Innovation. He would like to work for a multinational advertising agency. “When I was in ALP I was stimulated to a new level that I had not yet been exposed to. Until that time, I had not been challenged in many of my courses and became disinterested in the mundane busy work of high school,” he says. “ALP gave me a glance at the things I could achieve if I pushed myself and that mentality followed me throughout my life.”
- **Sara Siegmann** is another longtime veteran of WCATY also having attended four programs. A 2004 graduate of McFarland High School, she is in her senior year at Williams College with a double major in English and Mathematics. For her career plans she looks more toward the pen than the protractor. “As much as I love math, I think my career path lies with English. I’d jump at the chance to go back to Oxford (University in England, where she studied abroad last year) for graduate work,” she says. “I would love to become a professional novelist, and lately I’ve become interested in screen writing for television.” Sara says the most important thing WCATY taught her was “not to be satisfied with showing up to school at eight and leaving at three ... In the end I had a much richer high school experience than I would have if I had simply accepted a conventional course load.”
- **Ariane Strombom**, originally from Middleton, Wis., is a WCATY alumna and has continued her involvement in WCATY in a variety of ways, including serving on the WCATY Advisory Board from 1999 until 2007. Now working in Doha, Qatar, she is Vice President for External Relations for the Qatar division of AIESEC, the world's largest student-based organization present in over 100 countries and focused on exchange and leadership development of university students.
- **Skylar Thompson** last participated in a WCATY program in 2000. When we last heard from him he had gone straight across the country to pursue his career. After graduating from Appleton North High School, he matriculated at Earlham College in Richmond, Ind., earning a computer science degree. He moved to Seattle to be a systems administrator for the University of Washington Genome Sciences Department. Skylar says his experience with WCATY was as valuable or more valuable for its social context as it was for its course content. “I wasn't really comfortable being away from home before WCATY, so it made the transition to college a lot easier. It made me a lot more comfortable dealing with people, especially my peers,” he says.

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About WCATY:

The Wisconsin Center for Academically Talented Youth (WCATY) is proud to offer many opportunities for talented students in Wisconsin. These include on-line programs during the school year, and accelerated courses through residential programs during the summer months. WCATY is an accredited organization through the [NCA-CASI](#). In addition, WCATY is affiliated with Northwestern University’s Center for Talent Development through which 3rd – 9th grade students who score in the 95th percentile and above on standardized tests can participate in [Midwest Academic Talent Search \(MATS\)](#). For more information on WCATY, visit www.wcatv.org.