

Get to Know Mitch Morken, Kelsey Karcher, and Jennifer Sallee, giftED18 presenters from Dallas ISD

Tell us more about your session topic and why educators should attend.

High quality, dynamic professional development is a cornerstone of preparing and supporting teachers for the ever-evolving world of gifted education. As awareness of the unique facets of giftedness increases, professional development must deepen teachers' understanding while utilizing innovative platforms and structures.

Why does your district encourage educators to engage with TAGT?

Engaging with TAGT allows our teachers to collaborate with colleagues across the state, gain valuable information to support our district's diverse population, and stay up to date on new developments.

What's the greatest challenge facing G/T educators today?

As advocates for gifted children, we constantly seek more and better ways to identify students from diverse backgrounds and with unique needs. We strive to eliminate bias and support all students and families experiencing all that living with giftedness means. Additionally, with the current focus on high-stakes, minimum-standard testing, we constantly look for ways to provide challenging curriculum rich in acceleration, enrichment, depth, and complexity.

How did you start in gifted education/what's your passion around G/T?

Kelsey: I had three stellar teachers who exemplified the patience, compassion, drive, and wit teachers of the gifted should have. When the district where I began my career adopted a gifted cluster model, I saw my opportunity to hopefully become that type of teacher. Through training and experience, I became particularly passionate about servicing gifted learners via cross-curricular teaching, arts integration, student choice and creativity, and honest conversations that help kids understand their own giftedness.

Mitch: I began teaching eighth-grade gifted and talented students in Dallas ISD more than 18 years ago. Giving students the opportunities to explore, challenging their thinking, and engaging their minds in ways they can grow and thrive fuels my passion toward gifted and talented instruction. These students continually surprise me, teach me, and inspire me to become a better educator.

Jennifer: It was Mrs. Tanaka in the REACH program at a young age that ignited the passion for this style of education, and that enchantment only increased when I had gifted students of my own in Academic Decathlon. Now in professional development, my passion is to approach educators with the same mindset of reaching all learners, and tailoring PD to the individual; after all—gifted students can become gifted teachers. Learning should always provide the

diversity for the different needs of the audience; and provide special opportunities and challenges for those with a gifted mindset.

Tell us about a student who has impacted you.

Kelsey: I'll never forget my sweet student who, in a class discussion after the tragedy in Sandy Hook, offered wisdom and empathy many adults struggle to process. She raised her hand and simply said, "I can't imagine those parents walking by their Christmas trees and seeing presents they've bought that their kids will never open." The class stopped. I cried. It was then I realized how much power the brains and hearts of our students contain.

Mitch: Early in my teaching career, I had a young, Hispanic student. Being twice-exceptional, he struggled with social norms, verbal communications, and had an intense impulsivity. Around mid-semester, his mother shared with me that in their country he was identified as mentally retarded during his elementary years and no one ever considered he could be gifted. Watching him thrive in hands-on, science building competitions is one of many gifted students' memories I cherish.

Jennifer: In my first few years, a young man breezed his way through Algebra 2 without trying, without thinking, sometimes even without being fully awake. I knew he was gifted in math, but his shyness masked anything else. At the end of the year he brought a handmade, wood crafted puzzle with a piece for each person in our class. When the class could see his passion for art, and he could share his different gifted talents, it really opened my (and their) eyes to the many facets of giftedness. It was a wonder to experience with my whole class, and he was such an amazing student, returning often to meet my new classes.