Nurturing Potential Inspiring Excellence

Belin-Blank Center
25 Years of Inspiration & Excellence

The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development
The University of Iowa College of Education
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### Dedication

Dedicated to the vision of our founders and benefactors: Myron and Jacqueline N. Blank
David and Connie Belin

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"Vision is the art of seeing things invisible."

—Jonathan Swift

25 Years of Inspiration and Excellence
Hannah Shows was a junior at Bellbrook High School in Sugarcreek, Ohio, for the Belin-Blank Center’s Secondary Student Training Program, joining other gifted high school students doing graduate-level research in biochemistry. Back home, she had taken all of the Advanced Placement courses at her high school and, as a gifted student, had already skipped one grade. She was looking at a senior year where she would make a French course and have three study halls.

After she and her parents interviewed at the Belin-Blank Center, she entered The University of Iowa in the fall of 2012, at age sixteen, as one of eight gifted students in The National Academy of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering, which supports and mentors young teens who demonstrate they’re ready for college. She is majoring in epidemiology.

“We don’t just look at student scores,” says Jan Warren, Belin-Blank Center’s administrator for university-level programs. “Parents and the student have to be ready.”

Yeltsin Rodriguez, the son of immigrants, was determined to excel when he was selected to attend Central Academy in Des Moines, Iowa, a high school for talented and gifted students. He wanted to “get my picture on the wall.” He says it was Dr. Nicholas Colangelo, director of the Belin-Blank Center at The University of Iowa, who convinced him he could do more than be pictured with the school’s academic all-stars.

Yeltsin took nine Advanced Placement tests in high school, which earned him the rare designation of AP Scholar. In addition to AP coursework, for which he earned UI credit, he took several college-level classes while in high school and was able to enter the UI as a first-year student with seventeen hours of transfer credit. Because he is a part of a specialized Belin-Blank Center program, Yeltsin has a mentor at the UI. He is on his way to a career in international and environmental studies. And, yes, his picture hangs on the wall at Central Academy.

In another instance, the parents of a “twice-exceptional” student came to the Belin-Blank Center’s Assessment & Counseling Clinic when their gifted thirteen-year-old son was having extreme behavioral problems in school and at home. After six hours of testing and conversation with Dr. Alissa Doobay, a licensed psychologist at the center, the parents left with recommendations to take back to their school and their son’s doctor — recommendations that promise to help the boy adapt and excel.

Three lives enhanced — perhaps even saved — by the work of the Belin-Blank Center. These stories — and thousands of others — could have had different outcomes had it not been for an idea that took root twenty-five years ago: The need to create a center and programs that would help teachers better teach bright students and that would serve as an advocate for gifted and talented students.

It’s the silver anniversary for The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, a part of The University of Iowa College of Education in Iowa City. It’s the anniversary of an idea and a mission, an anniversary of lives transformed.
A Salute to the Past 25 Years

In looking back over the twenty-five year history of the Belin-Blank Center, the feeling elicited is not nostalgia, but pride, which stems from the recognition that the Belin-Blank Center story is a very unique and personal one. We started small, actually, with a Xerox box, that held seventeen handouts for the first seventeen teachers selected for a special fellowship program. This box became the beautiful Blank Honors Center and those initial handouts have become electronic PDFs for thousands of teachers and students around the globe. The smallness of the box belies the bigness of the hearts and dreams of our founders, Mike and Jackie and David and Connie. These were grand people: strong of character, big in vision, generously backing their commitments to gifted students, their teachers, and their families. It was my privilege to work with them and help them shape their dreams into the programs and structure that has become the world-renowned Belin-Blank Center.

Yes, we did start in 1980 with seventeen teachers from Des Moines and West Des Moines and thus began an experiment that led to the founding of the Belin-Blank Center in 1988 and the $1 million dollar endowment of the Blank Endowed Chair in Gifted Education which I hold. The great generosity of the Blank and Belin families has inspired other major donors, including H.B. and Jocelyn Wallace and Mary Bucksbaum Scanlan. The private support from individuals and family foundations has had tremendous impact on the lives of countless thousands in Iowa, the nation, and the world. And they have inspired so many others who have given financially and have shared their talents and dedication so that the Center was nourished in its growth.

This commemorative book captures the legacy of the Blank and Belin families and the many friends who support us by serving on our Advisory Board, on staff, as financial supporters, advocates, and champions for the work we do. I have been honored and, frankly, my #1 commitment to the legacy of the Blank-Blank Center is to serve as its Director for its first twenty-five years. And now it is my honor, as Director Emeritus, to support and applaud Susan Assouline, the Center staff, and families and friends of the Center who will guide its future. It will be an exciting next twenty-five.

Nicholas Colangelo, Ph.D.
Director Emeritus, Belin-Blank Center
Myron and Jacqueline Blank Professor of Gifted Education
Interim Dean, College of Education, The University of Iowa

A Vision of the Next 25 Years

At the Belin-Blank Center, we look to the coming years, excited to embrace the changes that come with future growth and new opportunities. We have the freedom to think about the future because generous philanthropists gave us a foundation upon which we turned a box into a building. The walls of this building do not contain us: Indeed, we are defined by the windows that look out to the horizon and realize the infinite possibilities.

Those possibilities remain grounded in our early efforts that focused on professional development and student programming, which have since expanded to include clinical services, conferences and competitions, and research-based advocacy. The immediate future, the 2013-2014 academic year, will see even greater growth in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) initiatives for students and teachers.

The first students and teachers we served were from Iowa; now they come from all over the world, and we know that international representation will continue to expand. Much of the center’s expansion of services will be connected to enhanced technology that connects us to the worldwide gifted and talented community.

For example, starting next year, the Wallace Research Symposium, which has been held at The University of Iowa campus since its inception in the early 90s, will move to Washington, D.C. This move will allow us to partner with the national organization for gifted children and to broaden our scope to include policy as well as research. At the symposium, we will feature new, and revised publications from our Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration (IRPA), which has impacted the lives of millions around the world.

None of this would have happened without the commitment of our founders and the countless hours of work from previous and current staff and faculty. I offer my profound gratitude to founding director and director emeritus, Nicholas Colangelo, who worked so closely with our co-founders and benefactors, Mike and Jackie Blank and David and Connie Belin. We move forward into the future with the support of our Advisory Board and dedication and loyalty of the staff and faculty who make the center the active and vibrant — or, as co-founder Jackie Blank used to say, “happy” — place it is.

Susan G. Assouline, Ph.D.
Director, Belin-Blank Center
Professor, Psychological and Quantitative Foundations, School Psychology Program, The University of Iowa
1. Visioning & Building

It started with an idea — to nurture and support teachers of talented and gifted students — that grew into a movement.

“We tossed a small pebble, and it made a big splash.”

Jacqueline N. Blank
The Belin-Blank Center is a true crucible of education excellence. It has been a beacon of hope for gifted students and the educators who teach them. The center has grown exponentially since its inception, and its impact is felt far beyond the campus of The University of Iowa. The Belin-Blank Center is a testament to the power of education and the importance of nurturing the talents of our brightest young minds.
The Belin-Blank founders were such incredible people. Connie Belin served on the Board of Regents for the State of Iowa, and David Belin was a distinguished Iowa attorney and a personal friend of mine. Mike and Jackie Blank were outstanding citizens of our state, and there are many significant landmarks that bear their names.” – TERRY BRANSTAD, Governor of the State of Iowa

The center is internationally known for its advocacy, research, and innovative programming for gifted and talented students. The center provides counseling for families of gifted children and has broadened its programming to include “twice-exceptional” children who are gifted and disabled. The center’s name evolved as its scope widened.

The Belin National Center for Gifted Education was officially established in 1988 by the Iowa State Board of Regents. The Blanks donated a million dollars to begin the center, then housed in the College of Education’s Lindquist Center building.

In 1990, the Belin Center was renamed The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development.

With assistance from Henry B. and Jocelyn Wallace and the Wallace family foundation in the 1990s, the center began organizing national conferences to explore developments in gifted education, talent development, and creativity, further solidifying the center’s growing reputation in gifted education research.

In 1993, the Blanks pledged $5 million to build the Myron and Jacqueline N. Blank Honors Center on the UI campus—$3 million as a matching grant for the building and $2 million to support programs.

In 2004, the six-story building opened in the heart of the UI campus. It provides an uplifting, beautiful space for the center’s programs, offices, and services. Built next to Daum Hall, an honors residence hall, it offers space for those students to study and socialize during the school year. During the summer, the center houses enrichment classes and experiences for hundreds of talented and gifted elementary, middle, and high school students from around the world. The building also has “fast” elevators — the one request from benefactor Jackie Blank.
Founders Myron & Jacqueline Blank

Myron and Jacqueline N. Blank of Des Moines provided phenomenal financial support for the Belin-Blank Center over the years. The gifts included funding for the Blank Summer Institute for students; the Belin-Blank Advanced Technology Program; the endowment of a professorship in gifted education; and the primary pledge for building the Blank Honors Center. Together, Mike and Jackie were president and vice president of Central States Theatre Corp., which in the 1950s was the largest operator of drive-in theaters in the country. Mike, who died in 2005, was president of the Greater Des Moines Chamber of Commerce. Jackie, who died in 2002, was a trustee for the Des Moines Art Center and served on the boards of the Blank Park Zoo and Blank Children’s Hospital.

Mike and Jackie had two sons and one daughter, Beverly Blank Perry, whose son, Jeffrey Perry, serves on the center’s advisory board today.

Jeffrey Perry, grandson of Myron and Jacqueline N. Blank Member of the Belin-Blank Center Advisory Board

Jeff says Japan’s economic resurgence after World War II was at least partially responsible for his grandparents’ decision to support programs for gifted and talented students.

“The Japanese innovate as a result of their gifted students — they’re generally ground-breaking. The Kamakura and Heian periods are built on the work of genius innovators.”

Colangelo to have done what she’s done is inspirational — she’s been selfless and tireless in making the vision set forth by my grandparents and the Belins an astonishingly successful reality. It’s something that I will never forget. “Nick is not doing it for the money. I come from the financial world where most everyone is motivated primarily by how much they are paid, going from one job to another with very little sense of loyalty. Yet all these people have been here at Belin-Blank for so long and clearly and rightfully take enormous pride in what they’ve accomplished — and what they plan to accomplish going forward. It’s so impressive. And I and my entire family could not be more grateful.”
Founders David & Connie Belin

David Belin was a founder, senior adviser, and primary fundraiser of the Belin-Blank Center. An attorney, he headed a major law firm in Des Moines and was one of America’s most influential lawyers. Notably, he served as counsel to the President’s Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, an experience that led him to write two books. Eloquent and respected, he was indefatigable in his quest to increase the role and spending of the federal government in gifted education. He served on the advisory board of the National Association for Gifted Children. He died in 1999.

Connie Belin was a teacher, dedicated to the education of our youth. She served on the West Des Moines school board and was on the State Board of Regents from 1977 until her death in 1980. She also served on the Iowa Talented and Gifted board and on the Iowa State Department of Public Instruction Advisory Committee on Programs for the Gifted and Talented.

David and Connie Belin had five children, with son Tom Belin now serving as president of the center’s Advisory Board. Through the Cole-Belin Education Foundation, which was established by Des Moines furniture entrepreneur Marlin Cole to honor Connie’s memory, the Belin Family Professional Development Program of the Belin-Blank Center has received more than $1.5 million in support.

A letter from Tom Belin

When I think of our mother’s service on the Iowa Board of Regents, one of the first images that come to mind is lined with countless numbers of blue three-ring binders piled high on our formal dining room table. There couldn’t have been more than a few formal dinner parties held in that room, but as our mother’s home office, the room became an engine, with the binders serving as fuel and our mother’s engagement, attention to detail, and vision serving as renewable energy sources. In one of those binders, she read about a new assistant professor by the name of Nick Colangelo who came to The University of Iowa with a background in educational psychology and a focus on gifted education and talent development, and she saw an opportunity. We all love hearing Nick tell the rest of the story, and as we reflect on the thousands of people whose lives have been touched by the BelinBlank Center, we know our parents would be overjoyed.

When I think of our nation as a beacon of light and hope to other nations because of the freedoms we enjoy, let us hope that, in our desire to maintain our freedom and our desire to help those in greatest need, we have the wisdom to make certain that we support those who have the greatest potential to provide that help.

– DAVID BELIN

LAUREN AND TOM BELIN (far left above) are two of David and Connie Belin’s five children. Tom is the current president of the Belin-Blank Center Advisory Board.
2. Teaching & Inspiring

How better to reach out to talented and gifted students than through their teachers?

“Good things are not going to happen without top-notch teachers engaging students, helping students learn things that they didn’t even know they could learn.”

Dr. Nicholas Colangelo,
Founder and Director Emeritus of the Belin-Blank Center
“Who could have guessed,” says retired teacher Pat Ballou, “that from Connie Belin’s dream, and her perfect choice of a leader — Nicholas Colangelo, with his little box of ideas — that this jewel in gifted education would grow to shine so brightly?”

Indeed.

Ballou, who lives in Urbandale, Iowa, was in the first group of teachers that, in 1981, attended The University of Iowa’s groundbreaking course in gifted education. That course — its contents fit in a cardboard box under Dr. Colangelo’s arm — provided the first building block in what would become an international center devoted to the education of gifted and talented students and their teachers.

The training grew out of a conversation the Belin and Blank founders had with Dr. Colangelo in 1980. They agreed: The first step in teaching talented and gifted students had to be training their teachers.

The Belin-Blank Fellowship Program in 1981

The contents for the Belin-Blank Center’s first teacher training in gifted education fit into a single cardboard box.
“Often, gifted and talented education is looked upon as somehow ‘extra,’ something you do if you have time and money left over. In reality, the educational needs of gifted students are no less important than those of any other student. In fact, the loss to society of not encouraging our most promising students is enormous. Gifted and talented students have tremendous potential, but they must be appropriately challenged to reach that potential. We have a responsibility to ensure that all students reach their potential.”

– U.S. SENATOR CHARLES GRASSLEY, R-Iowa

**Helping schools start from scratch**

Ballou recalls that before that training program began, “there were very few resources to identify or provide help for gifted students.” Dr. Colangelo helped this first small group of teachers develop a philosophy and a plan to best help students, teachers, and parents once they returned to their respective schools.

“Our school district developed a department based on the concepts of the Belin-Blank pioneers.”

**We thank the Belin and Blank families, the State of Iowa, and our private benefactors for their generous and ongoing support.”**

– Dr. SALLY MASON, President of The University of Iowa
Center to aid the gifted community,” Ballou says. “As a classroom teacher, I was allowed to spend time working with or identifying gifted students.”

She recalls a fundamental shift in thinking, as more teachers were encouraged to recommend advanced work for gifted students. In the same way, school leaders felt more free to set up classes so students could work with other students closer to their ability level, sometimes mixing several grade levels. Parent groups were formed and mentor relationships developed as schools increasingly took students out into the world to participate in mind-challenging events and programs. Pat Ballou’s experience in her school district was repeated in countless other communities.

As pioneers in the field, those trained teachers became advocates for gifted education, inspiring school districts in other states and other countries to help gifted students achieve their potential in ways that didn’t exist before 1980.

Now offering a wealth of teacher resources

The content of that original cardboard box has mushroomed into more than forty courses in gifted education at The University of Iowa. Since 1992, the state of Iowa has offered Talented and Gifted Endorsement for educators completing 12 semester hours of coursework in gifted education. In addition, the Belin-Blank Center offers fellowships to teachers nominated by their districts for training in gifted education. Courses also are offered in leading Advanced Placement classes. Online classes have been added, as well as workshops and summer seminars.

Since 1988, more than 600 educators have completed 7,155 academic credits in talented and gifted education at The University of Iowa and at the Belin-Blank Center, a testament to the power of an idea whose time had come.

“Talent doesn’t thrive in a vacuum. It needs guidance and encouragement from caring parents, extraordinary teachers, and a comprehensive resource like the Belin-Blank Center.”

– TOM VILSACK,
   Former Governor of Iowa, Secretary of U.S. Department of Agriculture
“Now, education can mean different things in different cultures, but one common thread is that education provides one with the tools and the knowledge base to move between and among cultures so that differences become less significant.”

– Dr. GEORGINA DODGE, Chief Diversity Officer and Associate Vice President, The University of Iowa

How has the Belin-Blank Center helped you as a new teacher?

“I used my multi-faceted experiences in the Belin-Blank Center, I have become a more effective and dynamic educator,” says Ian Spangenberg, a native of Council Bluffs, Iowa, and a recent graduate of The University of Iowa.

Spangenberg took a series of Talented and Gifted Endorsement coursework through the Belin-Blank Center. “I knew that, to be the most effective educator I could be, I needed to be able to meet each and every individual’s cognitive and emotional needs. The TAG endorsement advanced this understanding because the courses are philosophical; they require reflection, meta-understanding, and a developing perspective that is unmatched in any other program.”

Several years ago, Spangenberg became involved in the Belin-Blank Center’s Challenge Saturday program. “That was three years ago, but I’m still an active member. I fell in love with these programs, because they are so engaging for both the students and for myself.”

He notes that instead of learning material just to learn it, students in Belin-Blank programs are encouraged to make claims based on evidence, discover knowledge for themselves, and most importantly, notice the world around them. He also appreciates the focus on interdisciplinary instruction, feeling he is better prepared to collaborate with other teachers in other fields.

“The Belin-Blank Center thoroughly prepared me for my future profession. I feel that I am a better educator because of my experiences at the Belin-Blank Center, and I know that my future students will have a more meaningful and engaged educational experience because of the Belin-Blank Center’s influence on me.”

IAN SPANGENBERG 2013 UNIVERSITY OF IOWA GRADUATE B.S. IN SECONDARY SCIENCE EDUCATION, HONORS IN EDUCATION, AND B.A. IN PHYSICS

What Belin-Blank Means to Me
3. Advocating & Innovating

The Belin-Blank Center’s A Nation Deceived report captured the nation’s attention and prompted action for advancing the education of highly capable students.

“What do we gain by boring these students? What do we gain by ignoring legitimate educational needs?”

DR. SUSAN ASSOULINE,
Director of the Belin-Blank Center
Its assertion — that the most effective way to help bright students is to accelerate their education — prompted a national discussion and exploded myths about letting students skip grades.

The report’s lead authors were Dr. Nicholas Colangelo and Dr. Susan Assouline of the Belin-Blank Center and Dr. Miraca Gross of The University of New South Wales in Australia, with costs underwritten by the John Templeton Foundation.

The report brought together research on grade acceleration from experts at twelve universities, with information presented in bold, straightforward, accessible language. Topics included entering school early, grade-skipping, high school challenges, Advanced Placement courses, and how adults who were accelerated in school felt about their experiences.

The conclusion: Acceleration is, overall, the most effective intervention for highly capable students. This is true academically, emotionally, and socially.

The report questioned why schools, teachers, and parents hadn’t already accepted the idea of acceleration. It presented several reasons why schools hold back America’s brightest students:

• An unfamiliarity with research on the benefits of acceleration.
• The feeling that children must be kept with children their own age.
• The belief that acceleration “hurries” children out of childhood.
• The myth that acceleration could hurt students socially.
• Political concerns about “equity” for all.
• The worry that other students will be offended if gifted students are accelerated.

At the time, Colangelo said the report’s authors were “speaking on behalf of countless experiences in the field when we say: Enough of the inconsistencies. Enough of treating the education needs of gifted students as if they are dispensable. This report takes all of us to task. The title may be provocative, but it is, first and foremost, accurate.”

One of the watershed moments in the Belin-Blank Center’s history came in September 2004 with the publication of A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America’s Brightest Students.
The first cousin of acceleration is Advanced Placement® — college preparatory courses offered to academically talented high school students. Students completing the courses take nationally administered tests that measure their understanding of subject matter and can lead to college credits.

In 2001, the U.S. Department of Education awarded $1.6 million to the Belin-Blank Center to increase student participation in AP courses and exams in Iowa high schools.

Since 2002, the U.S. Department of Education has awarded almost $5 million to the center’s Iowa Online Advanced Placement Academy, which opens challenging classes to students throughout the state, particularly in rural districts which sometimes lack enough students to support advanced classwork.

In addition, the Belin-Blank Center each year releases the Iowa Advanced Placement Index, which tracks the number of students taking AP classes in high school. The Index has raised awareness of college preparatory classes and spurred Iowa high schools to offer more to college-bound students. Iowa, for example, had one of the lowest totals in AP test-taking twenty years ago and is now among the nation’s leaders.

The report garnered exceptional national media coverage, including a story in Time magazine. More than fifty thousand copies of the report were distributed, with more than one hundred and fifty thousand copies downloaded from the website, www.nationdeceived.org. The website had more than two million visits in the three years after the report’s publication. It continues to merit comments from teachers and educators today, almost a decade after publication. An online survey in 2007 indicated that seventy-three percent of respondents said the report had a positive impact on their attitudes about grade acceleration. Almost one hundred percent thought the report would have a long-term positive effect on the field of gifted education.

Most importantly, numerous educators and parents reported the acceleration of high-ability, highly motivated, and academically gifted students was directly tied to the report. The report has been translated into nine languages and remains available, for free, to guide those interested in accelerating the education of gifted students. A revision will be available in 2014, for the
At Belin-Blank, we are very much committed to schools offering advanced work so students with high ability and high commitment can really stretch themselves while they’re in high school.”

– Dr. NICHOLAS COLANGELO, Founder and Director Emeritus of the Belin-Blank Center

“Think how much it helps to have someone say, ‘Yes, you can do it.’ A great teacher does a thousand things each day that go beyond passing on information or drilling students on facts. A great teacher inspires an enthusiasm for learning; a great teacher finds ways to open up possibilities for his or her students so that they can find their own way to grow as scholars and as creative artists and as human beings.”

– JON WHITMORE, Chief Executive Officer of ACT, Inc., Former Provost at The University of Iowa
“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

– WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS
4. DISCOVERING & DEVELOPING

Often, the first step in helping bright students develop their talent is to help them discover their gifts.

“Lighting a tiny fire and nurturing it as it becomes a bright lamp is the greatest gift one generation can give the next.”

DR. TOM ROCKLIN,
Vice President for Student Life, The University of Iowa
Shafer, who now works for Johnson County Public Health in Iowa City, was speaking at the Belin-Blank Recognition Ceremony at The University of Iowa. The annual ceremony, held since 1993, recognizes elementary, middle school, and high school students who score in the top one percent of the Belin Elementary Student Talent Search (BESTS), or who have received a scholarship for a summer program or recognition for performance in one of the Center’s competitions.

Shafer, who grew up in Wapello, Iowa, had been at the same ceremony only a few years before. He said the experience changed his life.

“I would no longer have to hide in the library, hold back my questions, or feel ashamed. With the support of these wonderful people, I spread my wings and finally began to truly revel in my nerdiness.”

Shafer added that the path hadn’t been easy. He’d been teased about being smart, he’d annoyed some teachers by constantly asking “why?”

“I began to withdraw from my own interests to better assimilate into the social groups around me,” he said.

“My lack of engagement led to boredom, which, in turn, led to lower grades.”

Then his talented and gifted teacher nominated him for a summer program at the Belin-Blank Center.

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“Several years ago, Cody Shafer, a former Belin-Blank student, stood in front of hundreds of elementary, middle school, and high school students and said: “Never turn your back in shame or embarrassment on your need to learn because you have a gift. To squander that gift is to possibly deprive the world of the greatness only you have the ability to contribute.”

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“Since 1993, the annual Belin-Blank Recognition Ceremony honors students of the top students in Iowa and their teachers. In past years, members of the Belin and Blank families have participated in the ceremony, including David Belin (pictured above left). A different slate of prominent speakers share institutional remarks each year, including Sally Mason, president of The University of Iowa (pictured above right).
“The assumption seems to be that gifted and talented students will do just fine, no matter what. Others seem to think that gifted and talented programs are somehow elitist or undemocratic. I couldn’t disagree more strongly. When we say ‘leave no child behind,’ we’re not talking only about disadvantaged children. We mean all children. In my book, this means ensuring that children with special talents and intellectual gifts are given every opportunity to develop their abilities at an accelerated pace.”

– U.S. SENATOR TOM HARKIN, D-Iowa

“The most significant educational opportunity I have ever had was given to me by the Belin-Blank Center.”

– EILEEN LEE, M.D., Instructor in Medicine, Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, Missouri
The tests offered through BESTS differ from grade-level tests in that they reveal what bright students are ready to learn. Since 1992, nearly 100,000 gifted students have been identified and encouraged by the annual Talent Search.

Dr. Susan Assouline, associate director of the Belin-Blank Center for twenty-two years and now its director, said participating in BESTS helps parents better understand their child’s educational needs.

“It gives parents objective information that can be extremely useful in working with their child’s teachers as they plan challenging curriculum that meets the needs of that child,” Assouline says. “Advocating for a student takes a lot of time. However, it is well worth it. Parents are the best advocates for their children because they know their children.”

As is the case with the many talent search programs across the country, BESTS relies on tests developed by major testing companies, such as ACT. BESTS elementary students take an eighth-grade test, EXPLORE. Students in grades seven through nine take the ACT or SAT college-entrance exams. Those doing extremely well, compared to their peers, are invited to the annual recognition program and also can invite a teacher who has inspired them. For some children, the Belin-Blank recognition ceremony is their first opportunity to see their giftedness as true gifts and not burdens. “The ceremony is our effort to let the students know that the development of their talents and their commitment to curiosity

“In a world that often emphasizes the non-academic, the heart of a child is warmed by the ceremony of accomplishment.”

– CHRIS BERGMAN,
Principal, South Middle School, Waukee Community School District, Waukee, Iowa
“A teacher’s job, above all, is to help our students discover what they’re capable of.”

– Dr. P. BARRY BUTLER, Executive Vice President and Provost, The University of Iowa

education will be rewarded,” said Dr. Nicholas Colangelo, Founder and Direc-
tor Emeritus of the Belin-Blank Center. “It’s also a chance to let teachers
know that their dedication is not only vital to the education of students but
also has a major impact in the lives of students.”

The testing and talent searches serve another purpose — discovering
students who would benefit from Belin-Blank Center residential academic
programs, summer institutes, and weekend enrichment programs.

The tests also provide researchers with pools of information about academi-
cally gifted students.

But perhaps the greatest legacy of BESTS comes in the encouragement and
the recognition of talented and gifted students.

“You may help lead the next green revolution, may help close the achieve-
ment gap in education, may pioneer the next initiative in law, physics, chemis-
try, cinema, art, or writing,” University of Iowa student and Belin-Blank scholar
Julia Zalenski told BESTS honorees in 2009.
What Belin-Blank Means to Me

How did you get involved with the Belin-Blank Center?

“I attended the AP Academy during the summer of 1991 at The University of Iowa while I was a student in Wisconsin. This program offered courses in U.S. history, English, biology, and calculus, and I chose to study U.S. history.” Vacca says during the six-week residential program he earned AP college credit. “I went back to my school district, which did not at the time offer AP and talked up the rigor of the courses and the benefit of the exams. I ended up meeting with the superintendent and members of the school board to make my case, and in two years my district began offering AP classes.”

What impact did it have on your life?

Vacca says he felt a tremendous boost in his self-confidence. “While still in high school, I discovered that I could handle college-level work; indeed, I discovered that I loved college-level work.” He said his time at Belin-Blank also gave him a far more nuanced understanding of history. “While standard history is a collection of names and dates, the way that I learned history from Mr. Jim Daniel, our instructor, was as a set of potential causes and effects. One had to know the events, of course, but one truly grouped history when you could tie these disparate events together into a causal narrative. Grasping ideas that underpin rival historical narratives has become the theme of my professional life. I did my dissertation on the topic, I have published on the topic, and I spend much of my working life trying to explain and predict how events will be interpreted.”

Strictly academics?

Even though Belin-Blank is all about education, Vacca says people should realize how important it is for talented and gifted kids to socialize together, to just hang out.

“During the program, I met a diverse group of people who all were gifted. Gifted no longer meant one or two students in a corner of a classroom with extra homework. In the AP Academy, there were actors, painters, math whizzes, writers, card players, athletes, and, yes, there were pretty girls at the AP Academy. For a high school boy just turning seventeen, this was all good to know. Being gifted was not an identity in and of itself. Rather, having an academic gift is just one element of a multifaceted and well-developed personality. The social aspects of the AP Academy really crystallized my own sense of self, and for that I am eternally grateful to Nick, Susan, and all of those who support the Belin-Blank Center.”

An idea takes root and grows

A copper beech tree, the only one on The University of Iowa campus, proudly stands outside the Belin-Blank Center. Estimated to be 100 years old, the tree’s leaves are a deep purple in the spring, changing to a copper hue in the fall. Before the Belin-Blank Center was built, the building was actually redesigned to be taller and narrower in order to save the tree. Today, staff members say the tree stands as a symbol of the center’s caring and excellence.
The annual Invent Iowa program encourages students to think creatively and solve problems through the invention process. Now in its twenty-fifth year as part of the Belin-Blank Center, Invent Iowa has celebrated the work of more than thirty-thousand students. The program is designed to allow students in kindergarten through twelfth grade to experience the excitement of designing and building their own inventions. The program is open to students throughout Iowa who have shown an interest in invention and who have been nominated by a teacher. The Belin-Blank Center has partnered with Scholastic to host the Invent Iowa Scholastic Art Awards, which recognize original designs. Awards are given in thirty-five categories, including animation, poetry, sculpture, fashion design, journalism, photography, writing, and video game design.

The Junior Science and Humanities Symposium (JSHS) program recognizes original research and experimentation by gifted high school students in the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The Academy of Applied Science distributes cash awards for the top three research projects in the Iowa region, and The University of Iowa awards scholarships to the top five finalists.

Graduates 9 to 12

The National Scholars Institute (NSI) is a one-week residential summer program at The University of Iowa. NSI features coursework in physics, writing, engineering, health sciences, visual arts studio, advanced leadership seminar, Asian and Pacific studies, and evolutionary developmental biology.

Senior Student Training Program

The Secondary Student Training Program (SSTP) is a six-week residential summer research program at The University of Iowa. Students in grades 10 and 11 who nominate themselves — conduct scientific research in university laboratories under the guidance of a faculty mentor.

For younger students

Grades 2 to 12

Invent Iowa

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Graduates 9 to 12

Invent Iowa

For younger students

Grades 2 to 6

Challenges for Elementary School Students (CHiNESS)

These half-day classes are taught at a faster pace than in traditional schools; higher-order thinking skills are emphasized.

Grades 4 to 6

Blank Summer Institute

Schools nominate seventh and eighth-grade students for the Blank Summer Institute for the Arts & Sciences (BSS) at The University of Iowa. The one-week, residential summer program provides 120 of Iowa’s gifted students with an intensive and advanced intellectual experience.

Finances and Technology

The Honors Opportunity Program offers additional opportunities for students abroad.

Grades 8 to 12

• Junior Scholars Institute

Students in grades 6 through 8 may nominate themselves for one of eight classes offered through the Junior Scholars Institute (JSI), a six-week residential summer program at The University of Iowa.

For older students

Grades 7 to 12

• Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

Students throughout the nation are encouraged to submit their best work to the annual Scholastic Art & Writing competition, coordinated in Iowa and the Midwest region by the Belin-Blank Center. Winners are recognized in the spring during a ceremony at The University of Iowa. Students compete in more than thirty categories, including animation, poetry, sculpture, fashion design, journalism, photography, writing, and video game design.

• Junior Science & Humanities Symposium

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Graduates 9 to 12

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University of Iowa

• Honors Opportunity Program

The Honors Opportunity Program offers additional

opportunities for students abroad.

Grades 8 to 12

• Invent Iowa

The annual Invent Iowa program encourages students to think creatively and solve problems through the invention process. Now in its twenty-fifth year as part of the Belin-Blank Center, Invent Iowa has celebrated the work of thousands of students. Selected students receive scholarships to The University of Iowa or Iowa State University and to Belin-Blank summer programs. Enrichment opportunities also are offered in the Des Moines metro area.

Invent Iowa

For both younger and older students

Grades K to 12

For younger students

Grades 2 to 12

Challenges for Elementary School Students (CHiNESS)

These half-day classes are taught at a faster pace than in traditional schools; higher-order thinking skills are emphasized.

Grades 4 to 6

Blank Summer Institute

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University of Iowa

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5. **Counseling & Empowering**

Some bright students, “twice-exceptional students,” experience learning, behavioral, social, or emotional difficulties. The H.B. and Jocelyn Wallace Assessment and Counseling Clinic at the Belin-Blank Center stands ready to help them reach their full potential.

“**These children are potentially one of the most crucial generations of Americans in our history. They rival the founding generations and the post-Civil War generation in terms of the work being asked of them… We need them not to fail, so we cannot possibly afford to fail them.**”

**Jorie Graham**, Professor, Iowa Writers’ Workshop and Harvard University; Winner of 1996 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry
It would be easy to assume that life is easy for all talented and gifted children. Take the case of two junior high girls, Hannah and Carrie, both exceptionally bright at eleven and twelve years of age. Yet they were both having social difficulties at school. Their respective parents brought them each to the Counseling and Assessment Clinic at the Belin-Blank Center. Two days of comprehensive testing and interviews followed. Both girls scored high on academic ability — reading, math, memory — and fine-motor skills. But further testing found Carrie less attentive, less able to recognize faces and emotions, more impulsive, and less adaptive to social situations. The conclusion: Carrie demonstrated autism spectrum disorder; Hannah did not. The psychologists — Dr. Susan Assouline, Dr. Megan Foley Nicpon, and Dr. Alissa Doobay — reported, in a later journal article, how limited testing could have missed the “nuances and subtleties” that were revealed in a comprehensive evaluation. The case study demonstrates what happens, and the level of expertise available, at the H.B. and Jocelyn Wallace Assessment and Counseling Clinic at the Belin-Blank Center. Twice-exceptional students may need extra support.

“It’s kind of a myth that gifted kids will be fine, and we should leave them alone,” says Dr. Megan Foley Nicpon, associate professor of counseling psychology at The University of Iowa. “Research shows that gifted children can and do experience social and emotional difficulties.” Since its opening, the clinic has assisted almost 1,000 families.

The clinic is nationally known for its research, identification, and counseling of “twice-exceptional” students — individuals who are intellectually gifted but with a behavioral or emotional disorder, autism spectrum disorder, learning disorder, or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.
The research on twice-exceptionality received a boost with a Jacob K. Javits grant from the federal government. The award funded assessments of seventy-seven gifted students. Analysis continues even today on those assessments, but a follow-up study by Foley Nicpon found that almost all the parents and students found the experience a positive one. The children and their parents reported fewer psycho-social problems and improved social interactions. The students’ coping skills also improved.

"Not a lot of people are doing research on twice-exceptionality," Foley Nicpon says. "I don’t know how many times I’ve had parents say, ‘You’re the first person to understand.’"

Providing individual assessment and counseling
Dr. Alissa Doobay, who is now the clinic’s licensed psychologist, said parents usually contact the clinic for assessments of their children, though schools and doctors also make referrals.

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– SARVJEET SIDHU, Global Head, Emerging Markets at AEGON Asset Management, member of the Belin-Blank Advisory Board

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Typically, Doobay says, an assessment takes six to eight hours over a two-day period. Parents come prepared with the child’s developmental history and medical background, the family’s medical and psychiatric history, and completed checklists of behavioral issues.

Doobay gives the child educational and psychological tests. She talks with the child about his or her interests, activities, hopes, and dreams. She interviews the parents about the child’s social interactions, what teachers have said over the years, and any stressors in the home.

The end result is a comprehensive written report and diagnosis, which parents can share, if they choose, with a school or family doctor. The results can help parents and educators determine a child’s classroom needs. Doobay also will recommend services and areas for further assessment. Some families continue coming to the clinic for therapy, consultation, or reassessment.

The clinic also offers training to counseling and school psychology students in the assessment and counseling of talented and gifted students. In addition, clinic results and experiences are continuously used in research.

Doobay says the work is very rewarding. “You see what a huge difference an accurate diagnosis can make when very bright students finally have an answer to the challenges they face and are given the tools to achieve their potential. It’s reflected in heightened self-esteem, and it helps them move forward in ways they didn’t think possible.”

“Each student’s experience is different, but I have five words of advice: You’re going to be fine.”

– JULIA ZALENSKI, UI honors student in the Belin-Blank Center’s National Academy of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering (NAASE)
“On behalf of the Board of Regents, I’d like to say how proud we are of the Belin-Blank Center. No star shines brighter in the University sky than the Belin-Blank Center, which has built a world-class program.”

– JACK EVANS, President of Hall-Perrine Foundation, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Iowa Board of Regents

H.B. AND JOCELYN WALLACE AND THE WALLACE SYMPOSIUM:
Advancing the latest research in gifted education

The late Henry B. and Jocelyn Wallace were strong supporters of gifted education and the Belin-Blank Center, donating $2.7 million to support research symposia, scholarships, and programs for gifted students and teachers in rural areas.

The center’s Assessment and Counseling Clinic bears their name, demonstrating their financial gift and commitment to the educational and social-emotional needs of gifted students.

H.B., as he preferred to be called, was the son of famed Iowan Henry A. Wallace, who was U.S. Secretary of Agriculture from 1933 to 1940 and vice president during Franklin D. Roosevelt’s third term. An Iowa State University graduate, H.B. Wallace parlayed a childhood interest in chickens into one of the world’s largest producers of eggs, Hy-Line International.

Gifts from H.B. and Jocelyn Wallace, and the Wallace Research Foundation, made possible the Wallace Research Symposium on Talent Development. The scholarly conferences have attracted hundreds of educators, researchers, and administrators from around the world to learn about the latest research in gifted education. The first symposium was held in 1991, the most recent one in 2020. The next one is scheduled for 2014 in Washington, D.C.

“The Wallace Symposium has built a very strong reputation both nationally and internationally as being the premier research symposium on gifted education and talent development,” Dr. Nicholas Colangelo says. “We have people from sociology, psychology, and psychiatry and so it gives us very strong and diverse dimensions. It’s one of our trademarks. And we have the Wallaces to thank for this continuing impact.”
6. RESEARCHING & INFLUENCING

The Belin-Blank Center has advocated for talented and gifted children for twenty-five years, and it has the research to back it up.

“The center continues to pioneer and champion the truly worthy cause of gifted and talented education.”

JAMES HOFFMAN, Former President of Alliant Energy Resources and Executive Vice President of Business Development for Alliant Energy, Cedar Rapids; member of the Belin-Blank Advisory Board
The research conducted at the Belin-Blank Center doesn’t merely gather dust on a shelf: it positively impacts the lives of thousands of students around the country, indeed the world.

Parents in Altoona, Iowa, share their story. “We were given copies of A Nation Deceived a few years ago when our daughter’s school brought up the idea of her skipping a grade. We were reluctant at first, but after reading the information, we made the choice to have her skip fifth grade. Our daughter is well-rounded and has only excelled beyond our expectations. She is still getting all A’s and continues to have lots of friends. She is in several clubs and continues to take accelerated classes. We are now looking into having her take college classes in eighth grade.”

This is just one of scores of parent testimonials received by the Belin-Blank staff. They almost all cite Belin-Blank research in helping them advocate for the academic acceleration of their gifted children.

Research backs up advocacy

That advocacy is grounded, fast and foremost, in research, notes Dr. Susan Assouline, director of the Belin-Blank Center.

“We thought we were jumping on the bandwagon, but we became the engine,” she says in summarizing the impact the center’s research has had on gifted and talented education, particularly in the areas of academic acceleration and twice-exceptionality.

Dr. Assouline has had a front-row seat to that impact. She joined the center as a certified school psychologist in 1988 and then served as the center’s associate director for twenty-two years before being named its director in December 2012.

A Nation Deceived, published in 2004 (see Chapter 3), compiled five decades of research on acceleration — the practice of moving gifted students ahead in school to a point where they are academically challenged.

“The impact was tremendous. It’s known throughout the world,” Dr. Assouline says of the report, noting more than four million visits to the report’s web site and its translation into nine languages.

The report, in turn, gave birth to the center’s Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration, the first of its kind in the world, where research into giftedness continues today.

“We thought we were jumping on the bandwagon, but we became the engine.”

–Dr. SUSAN ASSOULINE, Director of the Belin-Blank Center
Another watershed moment in the Belin-Blank Center’s history came in 2005, when the center received a federal grant to investigate twice-exceptionality — students who are intellectually gifted as well as having a behavioral, learning, or emotional disorder.

The grant supported research into gifted students with autism spectrum disorders, learning disabilities, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The research and counseling led to increased accommodations for twice-exceptional students, as well as improved understanding of their academic and psycho-social needs.

“It’s been tremendously rewarding and important, impactful work,” Dr. Assouline says.

Recognizing the best & brightest

A third area of research arose from the Belin-Blank Center’s annual Talent Search, where academically talented students are identified and recognized. Aggregate information about the students has been studied by a number of organizations. And the center’s use of the Talent Search model provides a framework for schools throughout the world wishing to identify and recognize their brightest students.

But acceleration of academically talented students remains the Belin-Blank Center’s cornerstone intervention for bright students.

The Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration, founded in 2006, is dedicated to serving educators, parents, students, administrators, and policymakers —
Celebrating 25 Years

Dr. David Lohman, the Institute’s research director from 2006-2012, and Dr. Maureen Marron, associate research scientist from 2006-2013, established an international clearinghouse for research and policy on acceleration. The Institute pulls together and summarizes relevant research in ways useful to educators, policymakers, and other researchers at the local, state, national, and international level. And the Institute continues to study how different forms of academic acceleration affect students.

Among its offerings, all available at www.accelerationinstitute.org, are:

- Belin-Blank Solutions® for STEM Acceleration, a web-based tool for determining readiness for acceleration of students in those areas.
- Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy, which can assist school districts in developing a policy on acceleration of gifted students. The guidelines are available in English and Korean.
- The Iowa Acceleration Scale (3rd edition), an objective, decision-making guide to help a child’s parents and teachers determine if a student would benefit from grade skipping.

“Today, as a result of globalization, the world is much more interconnected than it has ever been before. It is quite a different world than your parents or grandparents grew up in. It’s a very competitive world today, but I feel so proud to be among those of you who are going to keep the U.S. in a competitive environment.”

– GREGS THOMPULOS, chairman and CEO of Stanley Consultants Inc. of Muscatine, Iowa, member of the Belin-Blank Advisory Board

in short, anyone interested in learning how academic acceleration meets the needs of high-ability students.

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“I think students always have a right to ask themselves, ‘Is it really worth it for me to work hard? Is it really worth it for me to do my best?’

The short answer is, ‘Yes.’ The long answer is, ‘Yes.’ The answer is always going to be ‘Yes, to use your talents, to work hard with what you have.’”

– Dr. NICHOLAS COLANGELO, Founder & Director Emeritus of the Belin-Blank Center
Knowledge is important because it leads to wisdom; wisdom is important because it leads to deed. One of the great differences between the United States and virtually every other country in the world is that we have so many people involved in volunteering their time in support of all kinds of charitable endeavors, ranging from education and the arts, to medicine and science; it’s the combination of the volunteerism, and the public and private support, that makes this the great nation that it is.”

David Belin

7. Expanding & Globalizing
What started as a small movement to help the state of Iowa has grown into an international organization, with many countries turning to the Belin-Blank Center to help them learn how to best identify and teach gifted students.
A good idea knows no boundaries, and the world has found its way to the Belin-Blank Center, forging partnerships to identify talented and gifted students and their teachers in around forty-five countries.

Belin-Blank professionals also journey to international conferences, sharing research, and serving as consultants in other countries determined to pursue educating their brightest students. Here’s an overview of some of the international projects pursued by the Belin-Blank Center:

AUSTRALIA — Beginning in 1995, the center helped The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) in Sydney, Australia, develop a system for identifying academically talented children in Australia. In cooperation with GERRIC, Drs. Colangelo and Assouline have routinely conducted workshops and presentations for Australian educators. Dr. Miraca U.M. Gross, director of GERRIC, from the University of New South Wales, co-authored with Colangelo and Assouline the seminal *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America’s Brightest Students* and *spearheaded development of the gifted center in Sydney. “The Belin-Blank Center is truly one of the world leaders in the field of gifted education. We are proud to be associated with them as academic partners,” Gross says.

ISRAEL — In the late 1990s, the Belin-Blank Center began partnering with the Israel Arts and Science Academy, a residential high school in Jerusalem, that offers extracurricular mathematics and science enrichment for high-ability, middle-school students. The partnership has seen a number of visits back and forth between Belin-Blank and Israeli educators. The partnership culminated with Drs. Assouline and Colangelo giving keynote presentations at a prestigious international conference in Jerusalem. As part of the Israel Excellence program, U.S. and Israeli educators took turns writing math and science riddles for students in the United States and Israel.

SOUTH KOREA — Science, math, and technology teachers from South Korea have attended professional development programs at the Belin-Blank Center. With the help of translators, experts in the field of gifted education lead sessions on concepts of giftedness and on creating lessons for gifted students. The visiting teachers also intern with master teachers and observe gifted programs in area schools. “My country gave me a chance to see the world and
“The Belin-Blank Center has made a great contribution to the gifted world. It continues to do quality research and offers many valuable services to gifted individuals locally and globally.”

– Dr. WU-TIEN WU, Emeritus Professor of National Taiwan Normal University, and former President of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children, Taipei, Taiwan
“The vision of the Belin-Blank Center has led to a worldwide awareness of the unique needs of gifted students and promoted excellence in education in general.”

— HEZKI ARIELI,
Former Director General, The Society for Excellence through Education, Jerusalem, Israel
What Belin-Blank Means to Me

How did you get involved with the Belin-Blank Center?

“I was a member of the inaugural class of NAASE (National Academy for the Arts, Sciences, and Engineering), I was 17 when I entered the program and left high school for the University. The Belin-Blank staff was great; even as the program was in its infancy, it felt like we were all doing something brand new. Nick Colangelo and Susan Assouline were always incredibly supportive, as was Jan Warren and Michelle Muratori (a former graduate assistant).”

Lee has fond memories of her time with Belin-Blank and made several lifelong friends. In fact, a friend she made at Belin-Blank, Pam Anderson, was the maid of honor at her wedding.

Can you talk about the good and the bad side of being talented and gifted?

“I have been aware of my classification as gifted/talented for almost as far back as I can remember. I reveled in it, sometimes too much.”

Lee admits that it’s not always easy for gifted and talented kids to fit in. They want to be proud of their accomplishments, but they don’t want to make their classmates feel uncomfortable.

“It was a tremendous boon, being able to handle accelerated coursework and having the opportunity to accelerate and not be limited by age. I was able to leave high school early, graduate college by the age of 19, and enter medical school by the age of 20 because of it. These days I work with tons of amazingly talented people at one of the top medical schools in the country.”

From my perspective, the Belin-Blank Center meets the highest standards of quality and richness in both research and education.”

– Dr. FRANZ MÖNKS, Former President, European Council for High Ability (ECHA) Center for the Study of Giftedness, Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands
8. Creating & Inventing

Not all learning comes from the pages of a book. Creativity, artistry and self-expression are equally important.

“Teaching happens throughout your life. And what is wonderful is when one can be open enough to teaching to continue that process of interchange throughout one’s life.”

ANTONIO DAMASIO, PH.D., M.D.
Professor of Neuroscience at The University of Southern California, former Professor of Neurology at The University of Iowa
Often, kids learn the most about themselves, and the world, when allowed to create and invent.

Invent Iowa is one of the state’s oldest STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) outreach programs, with regional competitions for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The winners advance to the state “invention convention” held alternately at The University of Iowa and The Iowa State University Colleges of Engineering. Winners receive a $500 scholarship to either university.

Approximately one-half million Iowa students have participated since the program began in 1987; Invent Iowa has been a part of the Belin-Blank Center since the center’s inception.

Over the years, young inventors have indeed invented a better, more humane, mouse trap, in addition to developing myriad other inventions, from motorized skateboards to mitten driers, not to mention diagnostics and therapeutics for macular degeneration-related disorders and genetic markers for improved meat characteristics in animals.

In the process, the students practice creative thinking, problem-solving, and research skills. They also practice writing and public speaking when they present their inventions.

All four of Michael and Sharon Schrunk’s children participated in the early years of Belin-Blank’s Invent Iowa competition. “Our kids are 24 to 27 now,” says Sharon Schrunk, of Spirit Lake, Iowa, noting that the program helped each of her children express their own unique creativity. “It’s an awesome program, a creative outlet for creative kids,” she says.

She fondly recalls her oldest, Nicholas, coming home from school, excitedly waving the Invent Iowa registration papers over his head. When he was in first grade, Nicholas invented a motorized guinea pig walker; today, he’s a producer/director for Red Bull Moving Images in Santa Monica, California. When Gineal Schrunk, now 24, was in fourth grade, she invented a Portable Pitching Pal. Today, she’s finishing her teaching degree. Twins Erin and Caedryn, both 26, also participated in Invent Iowa. Present day, Erin is graduating from The University of Iowa’s Carver College of Medicine, and Caedryn works in marketing and creative for Nike. “Invent Iowa was the highlight of their elementary years,” says Sharon Schrunk.
Developing talent in the arts

What about the student who has mastered piano or cello or dance or who shows promise as a writer, a painter or composer?

Enter Mary Bucksbaum Scanlan of Woody Creek, Colorado, whose total gifts of more than $1.5 million created programs and scholarships to encourage and nurture young artists and writers.

Dr. Nicholas Colangelo says, “These gifts take the Belin-Blank Center not only in new directions, but to a new level of outreach. It provides the center with the resources to make the arts a focus of our future.”

Trained as a photographer, Scanlan, a member of the Belin-Blank Center Advisory Board, sees the arts as an integral part of every person’s education. “In more and more art programs are cut from school budgets, I felt compelled to make a contribution to the Belin-Blank Center so that programs could be developed for children with ability and interest in the arts,” she says.

The Mary Bucksbaum Scanlan Arts Program annually honors an arts teacher and provides about twenty-five scholarships to artistically gifted and talented students to attend the center’s on-campus summer programs.

Some 275 students in grades four to eleven have attended summer visual arts programs since 2007. Two of those attending the National Scholars Institute for visual arts in the summer of 2012 were Cayli Graham of Ogden, Iowa, and Thad Stalmack II of Ann Arbor, Michigan.

“Coming from a small town, I have never gotten to know people who share my art interest,” Cayli says, adding she “absolutely loved” the Institute experience. “I was inspired by all of the wonderful people there who shared my passion for art. We worked throughout our stay and visited a museum, gallery, and toured parts of the campus at The University of Iowa. I made great friends.”

The instructor who coached us really broadened my creative thoughts and taught me techniques that I wouldn’t have thought of otherwise. I took home two finished paintings, a load of creative ideas, and a big smile on my face.”

Thad, too, cites the friendships he made and

“It’s not enough to be smart. A true scholar is perpetually curious, seeking avenues to use his or her talents to make the world a better place.”

– DR. SANDRA BOWMAN DAMICO,
Former Dean of the College of Education, The University of Iowa
“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever does.”

– MARGARET MEAD

“spending time with a bunch of people, outside my comfort zone, who shared a love of art like I do.”

Both say the experience affirmed their goal of pursuing art as a college major.

“The camp gave me a boost of confidence in my abilities and dreams for the future,” Cayli says. “It was a very nice way to shake some of the fears about college that most have at my age and also reassure myself that my major suits me.”

“I couldn’t have asked for a better experience,” Thad adds. “I found that’s what the arts program is all about, says Dr. Clar Baldus, the Center’s Administrator for the Arts.

“Talent development of young artists and creative writers is central to the Belin-Blank Center’s mission,” she says. “The center encourages and celebrates artistic creativity through programming, advocacy, and environment. The creative process provides a path not only to make art, but to achieve success in every field of endeavor.”

The Bucksbaum Scanlan endowment also helps support the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards program, which receives thousands of entries each year from students in grades seven through twelve. The Belin-Blank Center serves as a regional center for the competition.

Another happy, fun competition, Dr. Baldus says, is Vision of Inventiveness, which began in 2001. It invites students to visualize and draw a creative solution to an open-ended problem — say, a drought or a flood; what to do with old CDs; or ways to peel fruit.

That program, an offshoot of Invent Iowa, is supported in part by the McKee Voorhees & Sears law firm in Des Moines.
What Belin-Blank Means to Me

How did your kids get involved with Belin-Blank programs?

Sarvjeev Sidhu, an executive with AEGON in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is a member of the Belin-Blank Center Advisory Board. Perhaps more importantly, he and his wife, Homa, have children in Belin-Blank programs.

“Children with highly gifted, talented academic abilities often struggle in a school environment,” Sidhu says. Their second child, Shairaz, felt unchallenged and lacked motivation in the structured environment of a public elementary school. “It was clear that Shairaz was showing lack of interest in schoolwork, and we felt a need for a more stimulating environment. The Belin-Blank Center’s CHESS (Challenges for Elementary School Students) and WINGS (Weekend Institute for Gifted Students) programs gave Shairaz an opportunity to explore subjects of interest, while matched with other gifted and talented students. This was the beginning of our family’s association with the Belin-Blank Center.”

The staff at the Belin-Blank Center would help Shairaz in the grade acceleration process. He would take advantage of intellectually challenging programs in science, mathematics, research, and arts. He is now studying biomedical engineering at The University of Rochester.

The Sidhus’ oldest child, Shabana, was fascinated with scientific research and was accepted into the Belin-Blank Center’s National Academy of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering and early admission to The University of Iowa after her junior year in high school. Shabana is now a college junior with interests in genetics and biotechnology, and a career in medicine.

How has the center helped you as a parent?

“It is important for parents to take the initiative to inspire and motivate their children. But the Belin-Blank Center has provided our family a helping hand in figuring out the opportunities available to gifted and talented children. This effort has come together under the leadership of Nick Colangelo, Susan Assouline, and the staff at the Belin-Blank Center.

“This institution is not only about creating the environment for our children, but to also help them dream the impossible, a truly transformative experience for the gifted and talented.”

— Dr. RANDI LEVITZ, Belin-Blank Advisory Board

“Parents and teachers have a job: to help students interpret what they’re learning, to cheer them on from the sidelines, and to clear obstacles from their path so they can move forward ever faster.”

— Dr. RANDI LEVITZ, Belin-Blank Advisory Board
The expanding and life-changing work of the Belin-Blank Center has been enhanced by the selfless gifts of a number of benefactors.

“...what great people with great vision.”

DOUGLAS TRUE, Senior Vice President for Finance and Operations at The University of Iowa
In her letter, Levitz wrote, "The program helped foster my love of science, kept me engaged over the summer, and gave me a taste of ‘college life’ in the dorms that was so exciting at the time. I also formed several lifelong friendships. … I am thrilled to be able to donate even a small amount toward helping other kids have the same sort of experience."

The gift touched Dr. Assouline.

"I don't know that I would have thought to do that at such a young age," she says.

Gifts — small, large, and some beyond generous — have supported the Belin-Blank Center, and the students, teachers, and researchers it serves, since the center’s founding. Myron and Jacqueline N. Blank laid the foundation for the center and enabled its growth with gifts of $12 million. The Belin and Wallace families and their foundations have donated more than $2 million each. Mary Bucksbaum Scanlan has given more than $1.5 million for the arts program.

In total, more than $25 million has come to the center in private gifts and grants. Federal and state grants — representing taxpayer support of the center’s ideas and goals — have provided another $15.7 million.

Donors, large and small, "are tremendously caring and visionary people who want to make a difference in the lives of students and teachers," says Dr. Nicholas Colangelo, who was the center’s director for twenty-five years. "Thanks to these gifts, we can continue programs and learning for a long, long time. Without them, we couldn’t."

The first donation Dr. Susan Assouline received after becoming director of the Belin-Blank Center in December 2012 was from a former Blank Summer Institute student, Alyssa Levitz, 24, now a young working professional, who lives in Seattle and works for Microsoft. The Belin-Blank Center takes great pride in working to make sure that their programs are available to all students, regardless of a family’s finances. "Economics shouldn’t hold you back," says Founder and Director Emeritus Dr. Nicholas Colangelo. "We give a tremendous amount of financial aid." In addition, the center works to help students and their families learn more about how to access resources that can help them afford.
“From its infancy twenty-five years ago, the team at Belin-Blank has grown to national and international prominence helping kids, teachers, and parents maximize their gifts to this and future generations.”

- ANN HOFFMAN, Facilitator and Research Associate for the Center for Research on Learning at The University of Kansas; member of the Belin-Blank Advisory Board


Not pictured: Kate Degner, Megan Foley Nicpon, and Zach Suason.
The University of Iowa College of Education's Belin-Blank Center and The University of Iowa Foundation gratefully recognize the generosity of the following individuals and organizations who have made gifts and pledges of $1,000 or more through April 15, 2013, to the Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development.

“...that chosen program through extraordinarily generous support.”

– DARRELL WYRICK, President Emeritus, UI Foundation

Contributors of $5,000,000 and Above
Myron N. and Jacqueline N. Blank

Contributors of $3,000,000 through $4,999,999
BP Foundation, Inc.
Jack Hart Cooke Foundation
Richard L. Ferguson
Roper Kids Foundation

Contributors of $1,000,000 through $4,999,999
Aviva Charitable Foundation
Wallace Research Foundation

Contributors of $500,000 through $999,999
BP Foundation, Inc.
Blank Perry, and Jeffrey R. Perry
Beverly Blank Perry Foundation, Beverly

Contributors of $250,000 through $499,999
Mark C. and Cheryl A. Falb
Mark McCormick P.C.
Belin McCormick P.C.
Gregory W. and Suze Glazer Burt

Contributors of $50,000 through $249,999
Continued
How did you get involved with the Belin-Blank Center?

“When I was in high school, participating in the University’s Secondary Student Training Program launched my research career. It was a life-changing experience. I lived on The University of Iowa campus for eight weeks in the summers of 1981, 1982, and 1983 and conducted research under the guidance of a faculty mentor.”

Would you recommend it to others?

“All three of my siblings went through the program, too, and this past summer (2012), my son Alessandro was there to study the effects of caffeine on fruit flies. I just love the SSTP program and can’t wait till my other sons are old enough to participate!”
“Right here in Iowa, in the heart of our country, the Belin-Blank Center is an international jewel for gifted education.”

**Tom Vilsack**, Former Governor of Iowa, Secretary of U.S. Department of Agriculture
McCormick was a justice on the Iowa Supreme Court when Belin persuaded him to join the firm, now known as Belin McCormick, in 1986. David and Connie Belin, he says, were very interested in education. “Partly because they had children who were gifted, they were sensitive to the fact the school system lacked programs tailored to the needs and abilities of children at that end of the ability spectrum,” he says.

When David Belin died in 1999, Dr. Nicholas Colangelo contacted Belin’s law firm to see if another member of the firm would be interested in serving on the National Advisory Board. McCormick’s daughter, Kate, had been one of the gifted students recognized in the 1998 Belin-Blank Recognition Ceremony. This led to his introduction to the center, and as “a way to honor David’s memory,” McCormick volunteered.

“David and I had talked on numerous occasions about the status of gifted education because we each had children who had been involved in those programs in our local school district and had a shared interest in the goals of the center,” he says.
“It took us ten years to become an overnight success.”

– Dr. NICHOLAS COLANGELO, Founder & Director Emeritus of the Belin-Blank Center

Dr. Colangelo, he says, “was able to assemble a wonderful group of individuals to serve on the initial board. “I learned a good deal more about the center and was fortunate to see the fruition of Nick’s goal to have a building constructed that would be dedicated to the center.” McCormick adds, “He and Susan (Assouline) are wonderful people, and the center and its programs owe their success in substantial part to their dedication to its programs.”

The National Advisory Board first met on July 23, 1999, at The University of Iowa. McCormick agreed to chair the board. Honorary co-chairs were Myron and Jacqueline N. Bank.

The Belin’s son, Tom Belin of Santa Monica, California, a professor of bio-statistics at The University of California-Los Angeles, also was an initial board member and now chairs the Advisory Board.

The board, which meets annually, was created to provide advice and consultation on policy, programming, and fundraising for the center.

“The board has provided important leadership for the Belin-Blank Center as well as for the education for gifted students,” Dr. Colangelo says. “I would add my deep appreciation for the dedication of the board members, which is demonstrated by their timely advice and recommendations, often reflecting business and organizational acumen that helps us in our mission,” says Dr. Susan Assouline. “The board members inspires others with their generosity and certainty inspire the staff to strive to provide programming that is at a level of expertise that matches the board members’ generosity.”

Belin-Blank Center Advisory Board

Founders:
DANIEL BELIN*, West Des Moines, Iowa
CONRY BELIN*, West Des Moines, Iowa
MYRON BLANK*, Des Moines, Iowa
JACQUELINE N. BLANK*, Des Moines, Iowa
Of the original members, six continue to serve on the board in 2012-13: Tom Belin, Joanna Brown, Ann Hoffman, James Hoffman, Jeffrey Perry, and Sulis Radia

The current members of the National Advisory Board are:
TOM BELIN, chairman, San Diego, California
GEORGE BAKER, Snohomish Village, Colorado
BARBARA ROSS BELIN, New York, New York
JOAN BORIN, West Des Moines, Iowa
JOY CORNING, Des Moines, Iowa

SWATI DAVEKAR, Martin, Iowa
BOB DAVISON, Aviche Village, Nevada
JAN DAVISON, Aviche Village, Nevada
NANCY EVANS, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
DOUG FERGUSON, Iowa City, Iowa
ANN HOFMANN, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
JIM HOFMANN, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
ROBERT LEVITE, Iowa City, Iowa

JEREMY PERRY, Scarsdale, New York
CHUCK PETERS, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
SANG RIN, Des Moines, Iowa
MARY BUCKSAUL SCALIAN, Woody Creek, Colorado
THEODORE (BOB) SCARBOROUGH, Chicago, Illinois
SARVJEET SEHOL, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
GREG THOMPKIN, Muncie, Indiana
PAUL THOMPSON, Denver, Colorado
GREGORY WALKER, Chicago, Illinois
JON WHITEMORE, Iowa City, Iowa

DARRELL WYRICK, Iowa City, Iowa

Ex-Officio Members:
SUSAN ASSOULINE, Iowa City, Iowa
P. BARRY BUTLER, Iowa City, Iowa
NICHOLAS COLANGELO, Iowa City, Iowa
UNIETTE MARSHALL, Iowa City, Iowa
SALLY MASON, Iowa City, Iowa

TOM ROSELIN, Iowa City, Iowa

ART EPIAS, Iowa City, Iowa

Emeritus Members:
MARY JANE ASHER, Chicago, Illinois
ROBERT ASHER, Chicago, Illinois
ROGER BRICKER, Des Moines, Iowa
ROBERT BURRETT, Des Moines, Iowa
MARY SUE COLEMAN, Ann Arbor, Michigan
SANDY FERIN, Washington, North Carolina
GARY FETTHE, Iowa City, Iowa
MICHAEL GARTNER, Des Moines, Iowa
TREVINO POTTSFALL, Ithaca, New York

JERRY HARRIS, Dallas, Texas
MICHAEL HOLLAN, Storrs, Connecticut
JEANNE LEVIT, Des Moines, Iowa
MAI M. MCCORMICK, Des Moines, Iowa
MICHAEL NEST, Iowa City, Iowa
JOHN R. ROGERS II, Iowa City, Iowa
DAVID SHORTON, Ithaca, New York
CARMEN SODA*, Ankeny, Iowa
TED WHEAT*, Des Moines, Iowa
JOCELYN WALLACE*, Poughkeepsie, New York

ART WITTMER, West Des Moines, Iowa
CAROL WITTMER, West Des Moines, Iowa
ANN (*), Iowa City, Iowa

Honorary:
H. B. WALLACE *

* In memoriam.
“The center has earned an international reputation for success while helping thousands of gifted and talented students work toward realizing their potential.”

– Dr. P. BARRY BUTLER,
Executive Vice President and Provost, The University of Iowa
25 YEARS OF INSPIRING EXCELLENCE

A look at Belin-Blank through the years

1978-1987
The establishment of the Belin-Blank Center.

1988
Iowa State Board of Regents establishes Connie Belin National Center for Gifted Education, with Dr. Nicholas Colangelo as director.

1989
Invent Iowa. The annual competition grows to include tens of thousands of students.

1990
First Leadership Institute for talented and gifted educators in Iowa. Family counseling program initiated.

1991
First biennial National Wallace Research Symposium on Talent Development.

1992
First Talent Search is conducted, now known as Belin-Blank Exceptional Student Talent Search (BESTS). First National Scholars Academy.

1993
First Junior Scholars Academy. First Summer Institute for Creative Engineering and Inventiveness.

1994
First class of National Academy of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering (NAAS) students gain early-entrance to University of Iowa. First Talent Search for gifted students from inner-city Elementary School Students.

1995
Belin-Blank Center approved as site for State of Iowa’s Talented and Gifted Endowment. First Summer Institute for Creative Engineering and Inventiveness.

1996

1997

1998
First class of National Academy of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering (NAAS) students gain early-entrance to University of Iowa. First Junior Scholars Academy. First National Scholars Academy First Recognition Ceremony.

1999
First Wallace Policy and Leadership Conference. Iowa’s Acceleration Scale and Manual published by Dr. Susan Assouline, Dr. Nicholas Colangelo, et al. Dr. Laurie Croft becomes the Administrator for Professional Development.

2000
Blanks endow 120 student scholarships for the Blank Summer Institute. First Wallace Policy and Leadership Conference.

2001
Blanks give $5 million toward Blank Honors Center. Wallingford technological institute. Scottsbluff Regional Partnerships Institute.

2002
First class of National Academy of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering (NAAS) students gain early-entrance to University of Iowa. First Talent Search for gifted students from inner-city Elementary School Students.

2003

2004
First Talent Search for gifted students from inner-city Elementary School Students.

2005
Belin-Blank Teacher Fellowship Program providing professional development.

2006
First classroom of National Academy of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering (NAAS) students gain early-entrance to University of Iowa. First Talent Search for gifted students from inner-city Elementary School Students.

2007
Belin-Blank Summer Institute.

2008
Blank give $1 million for support of center’s technology programming. First Summer Institute for the Arts and Sciences.

2009
Blanks endow 120 student scholarships for the Blank Summer Institute. First Talent Search for gifted students from inner-city Elementary School Students.

2010
First class of National Academy of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering (NAAS) students gain early-entrance to University of Iowa. First Talent Search for gifted students from inner-city Elementary School Students.

2011
First Talent Search for gifted students from inner-city Elementary School Students.

First Summer Institute for Creative Engineering and Inventiveness.

American Regions Mathematics League (ARML) competition first hosted by Belin-Blank Center. Belin-Blank Center approved as site for State of Iowa’s Talented and Gifted Endowment. Honors Opportunity Program developed for undergraduates in the UI teacher education program. Dr. Susan Assouline appointed associate director of center.


First Talent Search is conducted, now known as Belin-Blank Exceptional Student Talent Search (BESTS). First National Scholars Academy.


Brian Douglas becomes the Administrator for Technology and Finances.

Jan Warren becomes the Administrator for Student Programs.

Jefrey Fisher becomes the Administrator for Conferences and Events (1999-2012).

Blank give $1 million for center development and publicity.

Wallace family endows Wallace Policy & Leadership Initiative.

First Environmental Health Sciences Institute.

Blank give $1 million for support of center’s technology programming.

International partnerships established with Australia and Canada. Chile is added in 2000, and Israel in 2002.

Blanks give $1 million for support of center’s technology programming.

First Summer Institute for Creative Engineering and Inventiveness.

First Summer Institute for Creative Engineering and Inventiveness.
Belin-Blank Center celebrates 20th anniversary. Pameka Bullock (Belin-Blank Center secretary from 1987-2010) appointed Administrative Specialist.

2009

Belin-Blank Center celebrates 20th anniversary. Dr. David Lohman appointed Research Director of the Templeton International Fellowship Program. Dr. Susan Assouline named director of Belin-Blank Center in December, following retirement of Dr. Nicholas Colangelo, who is appointed interim director of the UI College of Education.

2010

Belin-Blank Center celebrates 20th anniversary. Pameka Bullock (Belin-Blank Center secretary from 1987-2010) appointed Administrative Specialist. The John Templeton Foundation awards $450,000 to expand the Templeton International Fellowship Program. IDEAL Solutions® for Acceleration is developed. Center unveils National Institute for Twice-Exceptional Education and Social Media and Technology.

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The students featured on the front cover are the children of several Belin-Blank Center staff members: (left to right) Maya Warren (daughter of Jan Warren); Aiden Seifert (son of Melissa Keeling); and Makensie Hansen-Rich (daughter of Rachelle Blackwell)

With heartfelt thanks to the entire Belin-Blank Center staff for their help in bringing this book to life. It is their continuing dedication that has helped the Belin-Blank Center reach this significant milestone.