2016 MIT Spark Parents’ Program

While your kids enjoy Spark, join us in the Student Center (W20) for a selection of talks and sample classes. You’ll also find tea, coffee and a space to work, relax, or chat with other parents. All parents' program events will be held on the third floor of the student center.

Please note that parents’ program presenters are speaking as individuals, and not on behalf of MIT ESP. Thus, MIT ESP as an organization does not necessarily endorse the views our speakers contribute through their talks. Thank you for your understanding.

Saturday

All Social-Emotional, All day
Melissa Bilash
10:00-11:00

We talk about how gifted students need “all gifted, all day,” that they’re not just gifted a few hours a week during gifted seminars or challenge classes. But in addition to making sure their academic experiences are in line with their ability, how can educators and parents make sure that their social-emotional needs are addressed all day? We will discuss practical ways educators and parents can seek to integrate social-emotional supports throughout their school day.

In addition to working as an educational advocate for over a decade, Melissa Bilash is founder of the Grayson School for gifted learners in PA. She is co-author of a chapter of NAGC’s recently published state policy guide to gifted education and has advocated for gifted learners on both local and national levels.

Sample Spark Class: Hacking Flavor
Abby Noyce
11:00-12:00

Why do some things taste good and some things taste bad? Why are all the delicious things "bad for you"? How does your brain know what food tastes like? Why are some people picky about tastes, and some people aren't? Can you change the way your taste buds work? In this class, we'll learn about how the sense of taste works, from your tongue and nose to your brain.

Abby Noyce is a cognitive neuroscientist who researches attention and working memory at Boston University. She's been teaching for ESP since 2004, and enjoys geeking out about brains, perception, knitting, food, and unusual educational trajectories.
Sample Spark Class: Science Fiction vs. Fantasy
Josh Shaine
1:00-2:00
Where are the borders between Science Fiction and Fantasy? Is there such a thing as Science Fantasy? What works dwell on the border between them? Bring your ideas and recommendations! We'll see if we can come to any conclusions.

Josh Shaine is a teacher/researcher of Gifted Ed & Underachievement, as well as a former High School Studies Program director. He has been affiliated with the Educational Studies Program for more than 30 years. He also coordinates a series of conferences on nurturance of highly and profoundly gifted children called Beyond IQ (www.giftedconferenceplanners.org). You can email him at <josh@giftedconferenceplanners.org>.

The Dos and Don’ts With Your K-12 Child
Ahaan Rungta
2:00-3:00
Many parents do some detrimental things to their kids at the very intricate level when their kids are young. I will talk about things I have found from experience do not work and things which you might find ridiculous but should try instead. Motivate your child using some intuitive reasoning techniques.

Ahaan is a freshman at MIT hoping to double-major in mathematics and computer science. He’s an ordinary person with ordinary interests. In his free time at MIT, he enjoys being an officer for ESP and staff member for the Harvard-MIT Mathematics Tournament. He also likes starting up his own contests and such, so feel free to talk to him about random things he comes up with.

Understanding the Internet
Miriam Gershenson
3:00-4:00
How does information from websites find its way to you? I'll go over some of the technologies that make the internet possible.

Miriam Gershenson is a recent MIT computer science alum, now working as a software engineer. In her spare time, she sings, bakes, and helps keep ESP's website running.

Sunday

Seven Common Flawed Assumptions About College Admissions
Amy Estersohn
9:00-11:00
Lots of families worry about getting their children into college. This session won't necessarily relieve families of *all* their worries, but this session can give you seven things that families should worry less
about, ranging from scholarship availability to SAT and ACT exams. This session is mostly a lecture with limited opportunity for Q+A if time permits.

Amy Estersohn used to work in college admissions for an institution that admits less than 10% of students who apply. She traded weekends of reading college essays and teacher recommendations for weekends of grading student papers as an English teacher in suburban New York.

Building Lifelong Readers: Reading Habits and Book Recommendations for Every Young Teen  
Amy Estersohn  
12:00-1:00

In this session we’ll talk about ways to establish and build a lifelong love of reading in young teens. I will present a list of recommended books for a variety of readers as well as demonstrate useful resources for finding books.

Amy Estersohn knows a lot about college admissions .... and books for young teens. As an avid teen lit reader and as the proprietor of a classroom library with over 400 titles, she listens to teen readers talk about reading every day (minus weekends.) Please tell her about good fiction for adult readers.

Gerrymandering: Theory and Practice  
Ben Kraft  
1:00-2:00

Gerrymandering: America's favorite political power play since 1812. We'll learn how and why parties draw congressional districts with nicknames like "The Pinwheel of Death", "The Mistake by the Lake", and "The 8 Mile Mess", and why it's hard to outlaw such madness. Then you'll get to try your hand at gerrymandering, to see if you can do better than last fall's Splash students at getting more seats for your party.

WARNING: This will be a participatory class! If you want to check your email (and I totally understand if you do), this is not the class for you.

Ben studied math with a side of physics, computer science, and Splash at MIT and is now a software engineer at Khan Academy. When he's not busy learning, teaching, or writing education-related software, he enjoys hiking, folding origami, and making smoothies.

Sample Spark Class: How Big is Infinity?  
Rikhav Shah  
2:00-3:00

Are there more even numbers or odd numbers? More irrational numbers or rational numbers? Come learn what 'infinity' means and how not all infinities are created equally.

Rikhav is a freshman and math major. He enjoys teaching anything math related and is happy to satisfy any mathematical curiosities you have!