

GIFTED KIDS' PARENTS SWAP NOTES

It's not rocket science to these pupils

By JOHN A. GAVIN
Staff Writer

— ALLENDALE

During a special enrichment class on rocketry Saturday, Steven Sheriff was surprised when he felt a tile used to insulate the space shuttle.

The spacecraft uses light, foam-like tile in its capsule, and Steven said he thought the shuttle would have been protected by a heavier material because of the rocket's heat and high rate of speed.

Not bad reasoning, especially for a 7-year-old.

Steven is a gifted child — smart, perceptive, eager to learn, and years ahead of children his age.

On Saturday, Steven and about 50 children like himself attended special workshops while about 150 parents assembled in a special conference at the

Brookside School in Allendale to discuss topics related to gifted children.

The conference was sponsored by the Gifted Child Society Inc. of Glen Rock to discuss situations and problems that arise in households with gifted children.

"Our goal is to provide enrichment for gifted parents, help parents with special challenges they may have, and make educators aware of the special needs of gifted children," said Gina Ginsberg Riggs, executive director of the society.

By definition, a child is considered gifted if he or she meets several criteria, including scores on intelligence tests and achievement tests, teacher nominations, and parent information, Riggs said.

Most gifted children also have a large vocabulary for their age,

complex thinking skills, exceptional memory, a rich imagination, and early reading and writing skills.

But with those skills can come complications.

Several of Saturday's workshops were designed to help frustrated parents whose gifted children may underachieve or appear bored.

Caroline Cohen, a professor from the University of Hartford, told parents that because children learn easily and rapidly, they often may have too much time and not know how to manage it.

Cohen also said gifted children often purposely underachieve to keep pressure off themselves.

In fact, F. Richard Olenchak, a psychologist and professor from the University of Alabama, gave parents a startling comparison between studies conducted of

gifted children and those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

One study revealed that gifted children can display poor attention spans, show a lack of interest when tasks appear irrelevant, and show intensity leading to struggles with authority, just like children with the attention disorder.

With minimal options in schools, some parents have turned to private schools and home schooling.

Diana Sheriff of Oak Ridge in Morris County teaches Steven, who has the IQ of an 11th-grader, at home.

"What could they possibly teach him in public schools?" Sheriff asked. "He started writing notes to me when he was 2½ years old. He's already dissecting worms. He has a love of geometry."



MEL EVANS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Space historian Joe Lennox, who lives in River Edge, answering question about the Mercury 7 capsule for gifted child Brett Rosenberg, 8.