

TIPS AT A GLANCE FOR NEW PARENT GROUPS

ORGANIZATIONAL TIPS

- Start small, think big. Set realistic goals and prioritize activities.
- Look for holes, weaknesses, or inconsistencies in services and curricula—a great way to focus your group's activities.
- Help dispel the myths about gifted learners.
- Include parents of able learners who may not have been identified as gifted; they are looking for high-end curriculum and enrichment activities for their children.
- Invite teachers or teacher representatives to join the group.
- Learn as much as you can about the nature and needs of gifted students and what the research says about them.
- Divide tasks into smaller, manageable parts so no one is carrying too big of a load.
- Send your newsletter to school board members, legislators, media, and other influential people.
- Develop and distribute a brochure about your organization; place at preschools, psychologists' offices, children's museums, libraries, public and private school events, chess competitions, and other places gifted parents might congregate.
- Make meetings meaningful—not personal storytelling time.
- Keep bylaws simple and flexible.
- Celebrate successes!

IMPLEMENTATION TIPS

- Determine your non-negotiables for educational programming in the district and choose your battles carefully. Stay polite and persistent, but understand that compromise sometimes is the only way forward.
- Remember that gifted students have varying abilities and needs; what is right for your child may not be in the best interest of another student.
- Consider asking the superintendent to form a task force with parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders.
- Learn consensus building.
- Piggyback speakers and programs with chambers of commerce, school systems, and state gifted organizations.
- Learn your district and school's chain of command.
- Learn to practice "quiet lobbying." Much is decided outside of formal meetings, and a lot of positive change can be created over a few cups of coffee.
- Know the school district calendar and process for decision making (e.g., budget hearings, public hearings on program changes).
- Serve on relevant school district committees.
- Only have the president or designee speak publicly on behalf of the group.
- Seek common ground with those who appear opposed to gifted education services.
- Be sensitive to the pressures school district personnel are dealing with; gifted education is only one piece of the educational pie.
- Remember that schools and school districts are unique—find your niche!



How to Start a PARENT SUPPORT GROUP



National Association for Gifted Children

1331 H Street, NW, Suite 1001
Washington, DC 20005

Telephone: (202) 785-4268
Fax: (202) 785-4248
www.nagc.org

Adapted from National Association for Gifted Children. (2011).
Starting and sustaining a parent group to support gifted children.
Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.



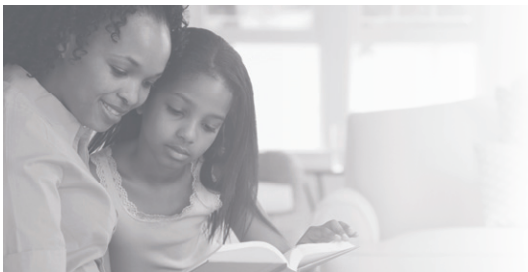
PARENTING A GIFTED CHILD

can sometimes be a lonely journey. That's why it's important to reach out to others who have experienced, or are facing, similar situations. In addition to support, parent groups provide parents and caregivers information, tools, and tips for navigating the world of giftedness and help them become proactive advocates and a positive influence in their child's life.

CLARIFY YOUR PURPOSE

Parent groups vary across the country, partly because each state operates its educational system and budget process differently. Although one group can serve multiple functions, the main reason for your group will help determine how it can best be organized. Parent groups commonly address the following needs:

- **Celebrating giftedness.** Parents and those involved with the day-to-day support of gifted children can discuss the wonders and pleasures from listening, talking, and dealing with extraordinary children.
- **Teaching parents, educators, and the public about giftedness.** Parent group meetings outline how best to support gifted children, not only for the children's sake, but for the greater good of the world.
- **Providing social and cultural interaction.** Family Fun Nights, cultural outings, athletic games, and other social events help attach members emotionally to each other.
- **Developing effective advocates.** As a support group grows in membership and/or state influence, parent group members can become local, state, and national advocates for the rights and needs of gifted youth in our society.



REVIEW YOUR OBJECTIVES

Joining with others who share your enthusiasm for gifted education can be exciting; however, don't let that tempt you to take on too many things at once. At the outset, ask these important questions:

- What is the primary purpose of your group?
- Who are you trying to reach?
- How will you find members?
- How will you work with other organizations (schools, groups, etc.)?
- Where will you meet?

Start small. Find one, two, or a handful of individuals who share your vision. Set up clear expectations and common goals to ensure success of the group.

ESTABLISH THE STRUCTURE

Your new group can be as formal or informal as your members desire. However, choose the organizational structure most comfortable to you and your members, and hold yourselves accountable to stay within the framework. At minimum, the group should set goals, assign responsibilities, and craft a to-do list or more formal work plan.

Informal. Most local groups are formed to address a short-term need or because a small group of like-minded families shares a common interest. Many informal groups support enrichment activities, create fact sheets and brochures about giftedness, raise funds for classroom and teacher scholarships, run online discussion boards, and have an officer/committee structure.

Formal. Often more formal models (e.g., a legally recognized 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization) can boost credibility with certain officials and the media. Formal organizations must have bylaws and articles of incorporation that establish an overarching purpose and leadership framework. Each state has regulations as to how groups incorporate; the NAGC website has more information about lobbying restrictions.

ORGANIZE FOR ACTION

There are many ways to communicate with members and to hold meetings. What is right for your group depends on many variables, including the geographic location of your members, time constraints, and your group's purpose. Meetings can be conducted in person, online, or a hybrid of the two.

As you plan your meetings, consider topics of interest to your members. Experienced parent group leaders have found it helpful to create a meeting committee of two to four members who can scout out possibilities and suggest a list of topics for the year ahead. Consider how different topics can be approached in a variety of formats: debates, panels, conversations, expert presenters, discussions of readings, webinars, and field trips.

KEEP THE SCHOOL INFORMED

Finding the right balance of involvement at a school can be a delicate issue because teachers can easily misinterpret the "one-two" forceful combination of strong interest and solid information coming from parents. Aim to establish a team approach with your school or district. It helps if the group is organized and functioning before reacting to any school problems, such as a proposed cut in programming. Keep to a prepared program or agenda, no matter how simple.

For best results, parent groups need to encourage positive attitudes and discourage adversarial interactions. The most successful groups recognize what school districts are facing today, and work in cooperation with their school and/or district.

TRANSFORM SUPPORT TO ADVOCACY

Advocacy from the perspective of a parent group simply means speaking or writing (or creating a website, video, or social media page) to promote improved education for gifted and talented students at the local, state, or national levels. While the concept of advocacy is simple, being an effective advocate is not. NAGC has articles and resources available to help parent groups craft appropriate messages, communicate effectively, build bridges to administrators, and network appropriately when they are ready to extend their reach.

