

Advocating for Gifted Services

Parents and caregivers are a gifted child's best advocates, especially when schools lack appropriate identification policies, adequate services, and resources.

School districts don't always provide effective or appropriate gifted services. As a parent, you may feel frustrated by the district's failure to meet your child's needs, and fear backlash if you confront your child's teacher or the school administration. It's important to remember that the majority of school personnel are eager to support the learning needs of all children. They may just not be aware of the educational requirements for children with exceptional abilities.

To better advocate for your gifted child, familiarize yourself with state regulations and policies, district and school educational policies and practices, and common terms in gifted education. It is also essential that parents fully understand which services are required by the state and find out the options that might already be available for gifted children in the district.

HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD

Before embarking on your advocacy journey, first join your state or local gifted association. They can provide valuable information and support. Next, find out your district's specific chain of command. Then, follow the steps to effective educational advocacy below:

1. Speak with your child's teacher.

Helping your child's teacher understand the gifted child's specific educational needs is key to ensuring your child succeeds in the classroom. Be sure to have a specific message to share.

2. Request a meeting with a school administrator.

If you are unable to reach a workable solution with your child's teacher, request a meeting with the next person in the chain of command. Send a brief email or call the administrative office to set up a meeting with the gifted coordinator, vice principal, or principal. Remember to keep communication friendly and non-confrontational.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

» Parents of gifted children may face the challenging task of advocating for gifted programs in the school district.

» Always follow the chain of command in a school or district.

» Parents may have to advocate each year with each new teacher unless they work for systemic school or districtwide change.

» Although school boards and administrators intend to meet each child's learning needs, they may not be aware of the unique characteristics or learning requirements of gifted children.

» Parents who show persistence, a willingness to collaborate, and an understanding of local and state politics have the most success.

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HOW TO ADVOCATE (continued)

3. Do your research before the meeting.

Familiarize yourself with common myths regarding gifted learners. Your school may mistakenly believe that gifted children do not need additional support. Learn about different forms of acceleration, such as grade skipping, grouping, pull-out programs, and curriculum compacting. Gather together your child's current grades, advanced assessment test scores, and examples of activities and projects at home. Come prepared with articles and data that demonstrate the impact of gifted programs on a child's social, emotional, and academic progress.

4. Focus on your child's needs, not the school district's failings.

Keep the tone positive. Have a specific goal in mind, but stay open minded to different approaches. Studies show that the most successful advocates for change in gifted programming are persistent, knowledgeable about best practices in gifted education, understand the local and state political process, and are willing to collaborate rather than be adversarial. Ideally, you will leave the meeting with a written plan specifying a timeline and the people responsible, making sure everyone understand their roles.

5. If faced with a resistant administration, escalate.

What if your school administrators are unwilling to collaborate with you? You will need to go higher up the chain of command and speak with district administrators, the superintendent, and, perhaps, the Board of Education.

Rely on the strength of numbers. Your local or state gifted association may be able to assist. Reach out to other parents of gifted children who may have similar concerns and start a letter writing and/or phone campaign. Build a coalition of influential community members, and contact local, state, and national organizations for support and resources. Offer to do a presentation to the board on the needs of gifted learners. Additionally, consider writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or contacting a television station—all school board members pay attention to the issues important to their constituents.



FOR MORE INFO

Go to www.nagc.org and search using these key words:

Advocacy toolkit
Effective advocacy
Gifted by state
Standards
Starting a parent group
State and federal advocacy

Gilman, B. J. (2008). *Academic advocacy for gifted children: A parent's complete guide*. Tucson, AZ: Great Potential Press.

Robinson, A., & Moon, S. (2003). A national study of local and state advocacy in gifted education. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 47(1), 8–25.

Rogers, K. B. (2002). *Re-forming gifted education: How parents and teachers can match the program to the child*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.



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