

Hope for the Future: Understanding and Meeting the Needs of Gifted Learners



Presentation by
Tracy Weinberg, Associate Director
Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented
1524 South IH 35, Suite 205
Austin, TX 78704
512-499-8248 x205
tweinberg@txgifted.org
www.txgifted.org





TAGT MISSION: The Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented connects and empowers educators and parents to meet the unique needs of gifted and talented individuals through awareness, advocacy, and action.

Increase Awareness

- Tempo Quarterly Journal
- Pulse Monthly e-Newsletter
- Timely updates and calls to action on legislative efforts via e-notifications

Take Action

- Discounts at Professional Development and Leadership Conferences for Professional/Advocate members
- Eligibility to sponsor students for TAGT scholarships

Support Advocacy

- Strength in numbers! Your membership helps TAGT advocacy efforts in the Texas Legislature and the State Board of Education
- For Professional members, involvement in any two divisions: Leadership, Research, Dual-Language Multicultural and/or Parent Division. Parent members may join one division.

TAGT SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS

The Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented celebrates gifted and talented students, teachers, and parents with scholarships and recognition. TAGT has awarded nearly \$1,000,000 in scholarships to over 3,000 people since 1982. TAGT is offering these scholarships and awards in 2012:

- **Summer Scholarships** (up to \$400)
 - For Identified gifted students, grades K-12, to attend academic or artistic programs
 - Top-scoring elementary applicant is named the Carole Vermillion Scholar and receives \$500
 - Top-scoring secondary applicant is named the Ann Shaw Scholar and receives \$500
- **Adelle McClendon Young Leaders Scholarship** (\$2,500)
 - For graduating high-school senior towards college tuition
 - Applicants must have demonstrated outstanding leadership
- **Laura Allard Future Vision Scholarship** (\$2,500)
 - For graduating high-school senior towards college tuition
 - Applicants must have outstanding academic achievement, possess a strong sense of purpose, have clearly defined goals, and a long-term plan for achieving these goals
- **TAGT/Summer Math Institute at the University of North Texas**
 - For rising 7-11th grade students with advanced skills in mathematics
 - This is a full scholarship to attend the three-week Summer Math Institute at the University of North Texas, sponsored by the Texas Academy of Mathematics and Science (TAMS).
- **TAGT Parent, Teacher, Advocate, and Rising Star Awards**
 - Five regional winners named in all categories
 - All regional winners are entered into TAGT State Award competition
 - TAGT State Award winners receive additional prizes/awards

For more information, visit www.txgifted.org

WHAT IS GIFTEDNESS?

Texas Definition of a Gifted and Talented Student

"Gifted and talented student" means a child or youth who performs at or shows the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment and who:

- (1) exhibits high performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic area;
- (2) possesses an unusual capacity for leadership; or
- (3) excels in a specific academic field.

Some Informal Indicators of Possible Giftedness

- Walks and talks at an early age
- Has a large and advanced vocabulary
- Learns rapidly and easily
- Reads at an early age
- Demonstrates a great appetite for books and reading
- Entertains self for large blocks of time
- Has a long attention span
- Readily retains a large amount of information
- Consistently organizes, sorts, classifies and groups things, and names them
- Has a heightened curiosity (asks 'why' often)
- Fantasizes often
- Is self-motivated, self-sufficient, and independent
- Shows sensitivity to other people's feelings and empathy in response to their troubles
- Demonstrates leadership abilities
- Exhibits perfectionism
- Likes to discuss abstract concepts (such as love, justice, etc.)
- Has a high energy, needing less sleep than age-mates
- Learns new material rapidly
- Loves puzzles, mazes, building blocks, and toys that challenge
- Has an advanced sense of humor
- Prefers the company of older children or adults
- Is highly creative, imaginative
- Is a keen observer
- Expresses unusual sensitivity to what they see, hear, touch, smell or feel
- Is widely informed, especially in areas of personal interest
- Expresses concern for the world's problems

Characteristics of Gifted Students

Gifted/talented individuals frequently possess one or more of the following characteristics:

1. Verbal Proficiency
 - Large vocabulary
 - Facility of expression
 - Breadth of information
2. Power of Abstraction
 - Interest in inductive learning and problem solving
 - High level of conceptualization
 - Pleasure in intellectual activity
3. Intellectual Curiosity
 - Interest in a wide range of things
 - Willingness for complexity
 - Persistent pursuit of goals
4. Retentiveness/Power of Concentration
 - Intense attention
 - Retains and uses information
 - Long attention span
5. Independence/Goal Directed
 - Self-initiated student
 - Pursues individual interests
 - Seeks direction
6. Power of Critical Thinking
 - Self-criticism
 - Skepticism
 - Adept in analyzing strengths and weaknesses
7. Sensitivity/Intuitiveness
 - High level of awareness
 - Keenly observant
 - Emotional depth
8. Potential for Creativity
 - Inventiveness
 - Liking for new ways of doing things
 - Interest in brainstorming, freewheeling
9. Versatility/Virtuosity
 - Diversity of interests and abilities
 - Many hobbies
 - Proficiency in art forms such as music and drawing

From *Raising Champions: A Parent's Guide for Nurturing Their Gifted Children*, by Dr. Michael Saylor

Distributed courtesy of the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented, www.txgifted.org

Needs of Academically Gifted, Creative, and Talented Individuals

Although differences may occur within groups of individuals, there is a common, underlying need for a strong, supportive person in the formative years in order that outstanding gifts and talents be developed to their full potential.

Needs of Academically Gifted Individuals

- Varied outlets for intellectual curiosity
- Opportunity to work with challenging situations and people
- Expectations appropriate to ability
- Opportunities to make wide application of knowledge
- To study, discuss, and develop ideas within a responsive environment
- To be valued as a unique individual, not stereotyped as “gifted” only
- Training in constructive, responsible leadership
- Thorough training in all facets of thinking
- Assistance with reasonable, high standards of performance
- Emotional support and peer acceptance
- Help in dealing with frustration and inactivity

Needs of Creative Individuals

- Opportunity to respond constructively to new situations
- Freedom to question and examine the unusual, unknown, and puzzling
- Opportunity to meet challenge and attempt difficult tasks
- Preference for complexity
- Willingness to take risks
- To submerge oneself completely in a task
- To be honest and search for truth
- Urge to be different, unique, individual

Needs of Talented Individuals

- Access to models in the area of talent
- Development of skills to a high level
- Feedback on success
- Specific help in overcoming obstacles
- Opportunity to progress at one’s own rate
- Systematic teaching of techniques for changing oneself
- Someone to study performance carefully and critique thoroughly
- Assistance in setting a reasonable, high standard of achievement
- Assistance with knowledge of how to tolerate frustration

Written by Thelma Epley

The Demands of Giftedness

Premises:

1. *High level intelligence makes certain demands upon the gifted child.*
 2. *Behavior of gifted children results from these demands.*
 3. *There are curriculum implications inherent in these demands.*
-

1. To crave for knowledge – to satisfy the need to feel progress in what he is learning.
2. To feel the need to focus on or devour a subject.
3. To make observations; to see relationships.
4. To place high standards on himself.
5. To be creative or inventive; to seek an unusual or unique approach to an assignment.
6. To question generalizations.
7. To be serious-minded; to be intolerant (usually) of foolishness or silliness.
8. To concentrate – to become totally absorbed in a task – to have a longer attention span.
9. To explore wide interests at a maturity beyond his chronological age.
10. To be sensitive to honor and truth.
11. To express ideas and reactions. (Sometimes seen as argumentative)
12. To resist routine, drill; to require unique ways of pursuing drill.
13. To work alone.
14. To be intolerant of stupidity.
15. To seek order, structure, and consistency.
16. To do critical, evaluative thinking. (May lead to critical attitude toward self and others)
17. To be rarely satisfied with the simple and obvious.
18. To be impatient with a sloppy or disorganized thinking.
19. To have his intelligence responded to.
20. To seek out his mental peers.
21. To be friendly and outgoing.
22. To use his power of abstraction; to see and point out cause-and-effect relationships.
23. To have time for thinking – solitude.
24. To pursue a learning pace of his own. (May be fast or slow)
25. To be outstanding in several areas but average in some.

Developed by Jeanne Delp, Consultant for Gifted, Garden Grove, California

Overexcitabilities

Based on the work of K. Dabrowski, M. Piechowski, and S. Lind

Characteristics

Psychomotor

- rapid speech
- movement
- little sleep
- impulsivity

Sensual

- 5 senses
- clothing
- foods
- able to discriminate at high level

Intellectual

- why? why? why?
- fairness
- world/adult issues
- drive to know

Imaginational

- vivid dreams
- mix truth & fiction
- escape to imaginary world

Emotional

- seems to overreact
- empathic
- strong attachments
- physical symptoms

Strategies

Psychomotor

- plan for movement
- teach replacement movements
- be careful of ADHD

Sensual

- plan environment
- understand the "pickiness"
- teach stress management

Intellectual

- teach research skills
- question journal
- act on moral concerns
- teach to reign in criticism

Imaginational

- respect their imagination
- mental stop sign
- use it

Emotional

- accept ALL feelings
- teach to anticipate
- respect attachments
- journal
- feeling vocabulary

Raising Your Spirited Child

The work on temperamental research has been expanded by Stanley Turecki, M.D. in *The Difficult Child* and Mary Sheedy Kurcinka in *Raising Your Spirited Child*. Statistically, 10-15% of all children have enough of these traits to be challenging. The key to the spirited child is understanding why he is doing what he is doing. They have what Kurcinka calls “spill-over tantrums,” swamped by their emotions, pushed beyond their temperamental ability to cope. Parents of spirited kids learn what triggers these meltdowns and try to stop them before they start by learning to read cues and feed them or enforce a rest time before they reach the critical point.

Using Kurcinka's terms, the nine traits are:

1. **Intensity** -- people often remark how “alert” an intense baby is or how much “personality” she has. Average kids will giggle at something funny; intense children burst into peals of laughter. When they are happy, they are always smiling, laughing; when sad or upset, they are desolate, inconsolable. Intense children are very easily overstimulated and lose their impulse control.
2. **Persistence** -- spirited kids have it; they will stick to something for a long time. But they also have the negative kind, stubbornness. They “lock in” to ideas and have trouble unlocking. They can never take “no” for an answer; they'll ask for the same thing 20 times in a row if allowed.
3. **Sensitivity** -- low sensory threshold for noise, lights, emotions, temperatures, tastes, smells, clothing. Spirited kids are physically sensitive to environmental factors. Lights can't be too bright, noises too loud, clothing too tight or scratchy.
4. **Perceptiveness** -- perceptive kids notice everything around them. The smallest detail seldom escapes them. However, these details provide distractions which make completing other tasks difficult. Perceptive kids are often accused of not listening, when in reality, their attention is simply focused elsewhere.
5. **Adaptability** -- to transitions, surprises, changes in schedule or routine. This is the trait that causes a child to melt down when a sandwich is cut into rectangles when she was expecting triangles. She's not being picky or demanding, she just doesn't adjust to changes or surprises.
6. **Regularity** -- spirited kids often have irregular body rhythms. Parents are told that they will learn to distinguish between our baby's various cries. But for parents of spirited kids, this is not always the case, since the child's eating, sleeping and elimination patterns are not regular.
7. **Energy** -- activity level. Most (but not all) spirited kids have limitless energy. From morning until night they are moving. My daughter tap danced all through my pregnancy. When I had an ultrasound at 17 weeks the technician said, “I'm having trouble getting a good picture because the fetus keeps moving too much.” Nothing has changed since then!
8. **First Reaction** -- to new people, places or experiences. Take a spirited kid into a new situation and they will turn shy and clingy. They need a few minutes to warm up. Ask a spirited kid a “yes/no” question and the first answer will most certainly be a resounding “no!” These kids will [eventually] try something new -- we just have to wait until they're ready.
9. **Mood** -- some spirited kids have sunny personalities, others tend to be serious, analytical and cranky. They are not trying to be difficult, this is their disposition, linked to brain patterns. These kids tend to see what's wrong with things instead of what's right. There are no management techniques for moody kids; parents learn to cope by realizing that their kids can't help how they view the world.

Adapted from <http://parenting/ivillage.com>: “*Raising Your Spirited Child*” by Deborah Shafritz

Possible Problems That May Be Associated with Characteristic Strengths of Gifted Children

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Possible Problems</u>
1. Acquires/retains information quickly	1. Impatient with others; dislikes routine
2. Inquisitive; searches for significance	2. Asks embarrassing questions
3. Intrinsic motivation	3. Strong willed; resists direction
4. Enjoys problem solving; able to use abstract reasoning	4. Resists routine practice; questions procedures
5. Enjoys cause-effect relations	5. Dislikes unclear; illogical areas (such as traditions or feelings)
6. Emphasizes truth, equity, and fair play	6. Worries about humanitarian concerns
7. Seek to organize things and people	7. Constructs complicated rules; often seen as bossy
8. Large vocabulary; advanced, broad information	8. May use words to manipulate; bored with school and age-peers
9. High expectations of self and others	9. Intolerant, perfectionist; may become depressed
10. Creative/inventive; likes new ways to do things	10. May be seen as disruptive and out of step
11. Intense concentration; long attention span; persistence in areas of interest	11. Neglects duties/people during periods of focus; seen as stubborn
12. Sensitivity, empathy, desire to be accepted	12. Sensitivity to criticism or peer rejection
13. High energy, alertness, eagerness	13. Frustration with inactivity, may be seen as hyperactive
14. Independent; prefers working solo; self-reliant	14. May reject parent or peer input; nonconformity
15. Diverse interests and abilities; versatility	15. May appear disorganized or scattered; frustrated over lack of time
16. Strong sense of humor	16. Peers may misunderstand humor; may become "class clown" for attention

Myths about Gifted Students

Myth #1: They are aloof, proud of their own abilities, and care little for others.

Reality: Just like their non-gifted peers, some gifted children display these characteristics and some do not. This myth generally springs from the fear of the idea that if gifted children learned together, they would develop an attitude of elitism, superiority or condescension.

Myth #2: They are good at everything and should be reminded of that when they fail to perform at high levels.

Reality: Gifted students vary in their abilities to perform just like any other group of students.

Myth #3: They do not need special programs as they will be able to perform at high levels regardless.

Reality: Gifted learners must be given stimulating educational experiences appropriate to their level of ability if they are to realize their potential”

Myth #4: They have even profiles in respect to intellectual ability, academic aptitude, and social emotional development.

Reality: Gifted students develop at different rates from their non-gifted peers and at different rates in developmental areas.

Myth #5: They benefit from being the second teacher in the room, tutoring others in greater need than themselves.

Myth #6: They work well in randomly assigned groups to ensure that the work gets done correctly.

Reality: Gifted students benefit from working with others of their ability level.

Myth #7: They all enjoy independent work and are motivated to complete projects.

Reality: Just like their non-gifted peers, gifted students are not always motivated or enjoy doing independent work.

Myth #8: They all have pushy parents who expect the school to do more than is possible or reasonable for their children.

Reality: The “pushy-ness” of parents is often a result of continued stress and struggle with minimal success with schools.

Myth #9: They are good students, rarely causing behavioral problems of any kind in class.

Reality: Gifted students, like all students, are diverse in their behaviors and attitudes.

Myth #10: They are rarely at risk for educational achievement or attainment beyond high school.

Reality: Gifted students are at risk for educational achievement beyond high school if their intellectual and affective needs are not met and/or if their community, home or school environments are not supportive.

Tips for Parenting the Gifted Child

Author: Edward Amend, PhD

On parenting a special needs child:

- First, remember that a special needs child, of whatever variety, takes more time. One problem for parents of gifted children, which is different from parents of other types of special needs children, is that other parents do not understand that a gifted child is a special needs child. Their needs arise from strengths, making them less visible than the needs of other special needs children.
- Parents need to take time and take care of themselves. Cultivate adult relationships and get AWAY to gain both perspective and peace of mind for a while. Make some "special time" for yourself or for you and your significant other.

On parent-child relationships:

- Each parent should spend time with each kid (one-on-one) to foster those relationships—"special time" as described in *Guiding the Gifted Child*. There is no substitute for this undivided attention, even for brief periods of time.
- Develop a healthy relationship based upon respect and trust to help guide you in determining when to "push" your child and when to support or nurture her. Balance between pushing the necessities of work in school and fostering the interests he shows.
- Value the child for who she is—encourage and support her. Find outlets to let her "show off." Children's theater, music lessons and recitals, chess tournaments, anywhere! Perhaps it is simply a family talent show—the venue is less important than the outlet.

On peers:

- Remember that peers may always be difficult for gifted kids of any level, primarily because of their "different-ness" and asynchrony. They may just not fit well with age peers.
- Help your child choose peers carefully and work to foster relationships with gifted age peers when you can find them.
- Use technology to help kids stay better connected, and don't forget that your child may have different peers for different activities.

On siblings:

- To improve sibling relationships, foster cooperation on tasks of mutual benefit (either naturally-occurring or set-ups) and help each see how achieving or behaving affects other sibling(s) and the family in positive ways.

On Discipline:

- One of the biggest problems parents of gifted kids face is their own impatience—just as our kids can be impatient, so can we as we want things to change NOW. Seek progress, not perfection, and keep trying a strategy (preferably one both parents can agree upon and implement consistently) for 4-6 weeks before reconsidering.
- Try to find positive ways to reinforce appropriate behavior. Too many parents jump right to “What can I do to him when” he doesn’t do something, before looking at how to improve what he does do.
- Watch how you phrase your statements. Using questions like “Will you make you bed?” could be literally interpreted and answered, “No, thank you.” If there isn’t a choice, make sure you don’t give one accidentally by phrasing your command as a question.
- Set as few limits as possible, enforce the set limits, and develop relationships with your child. Be consistent and follow through. Respectful communication and logical or natural consequences often help, while negative behavior, sarcastic comments and harsh punishments don’t.

On homework motivation:

- Work with schools to make homework both relevant and appropriate. Meaningless repetition of material already mastered helps no one.
- Try to develop good work habits early and build on those—early on, don’t worry as much about the grades as long as the child is learning and developing good work habits.
- Be sure to reinforce effort, not only outcome.
- Use a mix of advance (also called anticipatory) praise, unexpected reinforcement, set consequences, and natural consequences to motivate.

Gina Ginsberg Riggs: “It’s OK” Lists

For Parents and Home:

It’s OK to say you have a gifted child. It is not what you say but how you say it.

It’s OK for your child to know that he or she is gifted. Examine your own attitude that caused your doubt about this.

It’s OK if your child is smarter than you. You are still older, wiser and more experienced.

It’s OK to trust your own guts when neighbors, grandparents and well-meaning friends seem to know everything about gifted children – except how to live with them.

It’s OK for your child to have older friends. Intellectual peers do not count birthdays.

It’s OK if you cannot answer all your child’s questions. You are a loving parent and not a walking encyclopedia.

It’s OK if you have to live with dinosaurs. They usually do not stay longer than two years.

It’s OK to turn your laundry room into a rocket assembly plant. Thomas Edison had a laboratory too.

It’s OK to have snakes for pets if the terrarium is escape-proof.

It’s OK for your child to be less neat than you. Most people are.

It’s OK for your gifted child to have a very idealistic sense of right and wrong. That is the stuff the future is made of, we hope.

It’s OK for your gifted child to fail once in a while. How else can your children learn what their strengths and weaknesses are?

It’s OK for your child to live in a dinosaur’s prehistoric world, behave like a computer, discover an imaginary galaxy or invent a new alphabet. It is called learning by doing.

For Schools and Advocacy:

It’s OK to fight for your gifted child’s right to learn all he or she is able to learn. Remember that a well-informed discussion will get better results than an angry attack.

It’s OK to be dissatisfied with your child’s education if your efforts to improve it are constructive.

It’s OK to use your newspaper, the U.S. mail, the telephone, your local bulletin board and all the organizations to which you belong to identify other parents of gifted children to form a support or advocacy group.

It’s OK to check for quality before supporting any program, legislation or teacher labeled “gifted.”

It’s OK for gifted students to be gifted in one thing and not in others.

It’s OK for a gifted child not to get all A’s. Nobody is perfect, thank goodness.

It’s OK for gifted students to daydream or “waste” time sometimes. How do you know what they are thinking about?

It’s OK for your gifted child to have to adapt to the “wrong teacher” this year because we live in a less than perfect world. Learning how to cope in it is an important skill too.

It’s OK to march to a different drummer as so many gifted children do. Think of the wondrous journeys of those who followed a different tune.

Authored by Gina Ginsberg Riggs, Executive Director, Gifted Child Society, Inc.

Advocating for Appropriate Education for Your Child

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition, defines *advocacy* as "the act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, an idea, or a policy; active support."

As parents, the cause that moves us to action is our children. We all want happy, successful children and we know that their education is essential to their success. Yet finding and maintaining a high quality, cost effective education for gifted children is not an easy task. Unfortunately, we cannot just pack their lunches, kiss their cheeks, and wave good-bye, confident their school days will be filled with opportunities for them to stretch to their potentials.

Gifted children are often a challenge to schools. We understand—they are a challenge to us. But we also understand that if we offer gifted children the opportunity to stretch to their limits, our whole society benefits. What must we do as parents to advocate for appropriate education? And how do we do it successfully?

Societal expectations exist in all aspects of life. There may be written rules of behavior and an established, protocol for many situations. But there are also unwritten rules of behavior and the degree to which we recognize and follow these rules determines the success we achieve in our quests. Here are some suggestions for successful advocacy for your gifted child.

Learn the Status Quo

One of the most important tools for successful advocacy is becoming familiar with your child's school setting and the people in charge. Learn how your school and the school district are organized.

Begin by making an effort to meet the teachers, counselors, librarians, nurse, secretaries, and principals at your child's school. If your child is beginning a new school, make an appointment to tour the school with your child before opening day. If your child is attending the same school as the previous year, schedule a visit in August or September during the day while your child is in class. Call several days before you plan to visit and leave a message for the teacher that you would like to visit the classroom and ask if she has particular times she would prefer you to visit. This is to your benefit, in that you will gain the most from a visit if you are able to observe the teacher and students interacting. You do not want to go to all the effort of a visit to only sit through a test or art time. Teachers also appreciate this advance call so they do not wonder if something is wrong.

yourself to new staff members and reintroduce yourself to those who have returned. The school staff members meet hundreds of parents—they may not remember you the second or even the third time you meet. Observe the atmosphere of the school, personalities of the staff, the interaction of the students and staff.

Once in your child's class, sit in the back and observe the class setting, atmosphere, and how your child responds and interacts with his teacher and peers. If your child is in elementary school, have lunch with him in the school cafeteria. This will help you meet other children in his lunch group and observe the personalities surrounding your child.

These suggestions will help you come to understand your child's school, but to get an overall feeling of where the educational focus is in your district, you should attend a school board meeting. Observe how the meeting is run and how concerns are handled. Watch which speakers addressing the board are more effective and why.

After the meeting introduce yourself to the administrators and school board trustees. Walk up, extend your hand, and say with a smile, "Hello! I'm ____." Reintroduce yourself each time you meet again until you are sure the person knows your name. When you talk with someone you want him or her to be at ease so they absorb what you say. If they are searching their memory for your name, you will not have their undivided attention.

Establish Yourself as an Ally to Education

Actively support appropriate education for all children through your words and deeds. Quality education depends on a partnership of students, schools, parents, and the community. Parents who project a positive image, who respect the efforts of all those involved in education, and who work with the schools for the benefit of all children, are the parents who win the respect and the ear of the key decision makers. Parents who show up just to complain then disappear into the horizon again win few allies to their cause.

Many parents, primarily due to time constraints, are consumed with the needs of their own children. To advocate for gifted children, parents need to take the time and exert the effort to show other parents that what benefits gifted children can benefit theirs also. For instance, a school filled with National Merit Scholars enhances the reputation of the school and all who graduate from that school.

One way to demonstrate your support for your child's school is to read the mission statement for your school

and embrace it. Then, when talking with other adults about school - or school administrators - you can refer to the mission statement.

Respect the traditions at your school. These can enrich the educational experience. Wild hair day, a pep rally, an egg-rolling contest, and a Christmas tree in the classroom all offer opportunities to broaden the horizons of students.

Another way to demonstrate your support for the school and to win allies in the building is to volunteer in some capacity at school that will help many children. For instance, before any new book can be shelved in the school library it must be read by an adult. You could read some of the new arrivals on a regular basis for the librarian. If you read them to your children at home, you could spend time with your own children while helping the school. Or you could bake the cookies and serve refreshments for the class that has no room mother. Or you could make presentations on career day, organize the science fair, or judge a speech and debate tournament.

There are myriad ways of volunteering and there should be no excuses. Everyone is busy. This is an investment in your child's education and future. Find something that you want to do, like to do, and do well. Volunteer in this capacity year after year so you become an integral part of the system. Then stay involved through your child's entire school experience, not just in elementary school.

Know What Should Be Happening

An educated and informed parent makes a better advocate for her children. Familiarize yourself with what is supposed to be happening in the classroom, in the school, and in the district. Read the handbooks, newsletters, and information sent home by the school and district. Know the state laws on gifted education. Read the research on gifted and other educational issues of interest to you. Ask questions and learn the meanings of the terms used in "educationese."

Read books about gifted children so you understand who these children are, how they learn, what they need, and why. If you know the facts about gifted children and the policies and programs that help them, you can argue these issues with other parents and educators who are not as well versed and therefore do not understand the need.

Another way to stay informed yourself about gifted education is Texas State Plan for the Education for Gifted/Talented Students from the Texas Education Agency at www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=6420. Gifted education has been mandated in Texas since the 1990-91 school year. The wording of the law is changed periodically and it is important to stay abreast of the changes in state legislation.

State law emphasizes parental rights and responsibilities, as stipulated in Chapter 26; you can access this document from the TEA website.

Still another way to become educated is to attend meetings of your local parent support group for gifted, attend local presentations by speakers on the gifted, or attend sessions at the TAGT annual state conference. If your school district does not have a district-wide parent advocacy group for gifted education, form one yourself. Do not leave it for someone else to do. A large group of parents with a common goal for many children has a larger impact than one or two parents pleading for their own children. A district-wide gifted support group also provides an opportunity for parents to network with other parents and for gifted students to meet gifted students from other schools.

Give Credit for Jobs Well Done

One of the best ways to establish yourself as an ally is to recognize and acknowledge the effort of your school's faculty and staff. It's important to realize there are obstacles hindering the educational process at any school, but with encouragement and support, problems can be solved. Take the time to say or write something positive to teachers, principals, administrators, and staff when they do something exceptionally well. Usually it is problems and objections that are voiced. Make an effort to commend jobs well done. Two lines and two minutes can make a teacher's day, renew her energy, and shore her efforts. At the end of the year write a letter to each of the good teachers your child had that year, thanking them for their teaching skills and their contribution to your child's education and our world's future. Send a courtesy copy to the principal. When the time comes for you to express a concern or voice an objection, your negative stand will carry more weight because you have been actively positive in the past.

Choose Your Battles

Accept that not everything can be perfect for everyone at all times. Explain to your children that life offers challenges and opportunities under many guises. Teach your children ways to overcome obstacles to their education and/or happiness. The ability to "turn lemons into lemonade" is a valuable asset through out life. Model this behavior in your life, maintaining a positive, can-do attitude.

Recognize issues that should be addressed by the school and act in a timely manner. If you wait weeks or months before acting, the options for change are reduced. Contact the appropriate person when you have a concern. It does no good to call another parent to complain. That parent does not have the power to make the change. Instead, prepare your case and present it to the person with authority to make a change.

Prepare Your Case

Once you have identified the problem that you would like your school to address, take the time to investigate the situation and research the facts. Universalize the problem. Relate it to the mission and goals of the school and community. Determine how it affects all the students and the community. Extrapolate consequences. Strive for a reasonable and rational case. Emotion tends to detract from your credibility and professionalism.

Write a synopsis of your case in order to organize your thoughts. State the problem as you interpret it, present the evidence of the problem, and then list alternatives that might alleviate the problem.

View the problem from the perspective of the student, the teacher, the principal, and the administrator. Determine student benefits, school benefits, economic benefits, and community benefits that would be a result of your proposal. Consider any problems that might occur with your proposal and options. Organize your thoughts and notes into an outline of what you want to discuss with the person with authority to make the decision. Compose your initial presentation so that you can succinctly state what you have to say in approximately one to three minutes. Always use "we", not "I" and "you". And remember to compose yourself before you punch in that phone number. Never call when you are angry or very emotional.

Present Your Case

For a classroom problem, contact the teacher first. For a school problem, speak with the principal. Follow the established chain of command in your district. Traditionally the chain of command is: teacher > principal > instructional specialist > superintendent > board of trustees. If you are unsure of the protocol in your district, ask a secretary in the principal's office. Allow the person most directly involved the opportunity to hear your concern first.

Call for an appointment first but be prepared in case the person is able to speak with you at that time. Leave a message with your name, your child's name, your telephone number at work and at home, and the reason for requesting a return call or appointment: "I would like to speak with Ms. Jones concerning the English group project assigned to her sixth period class last Monday." By leaving relevant information, the teacher can be prepared with any materials in hand when she returns your call. This will save you both time. Allow 24 hours for your call to be returned, then call again. If your call is not returned after three tries, move up the chain of command.

Greet the person warmly. Your tone of voice can set the tone of the entire conversation and the consequent actions and reactions. Thank the person for returning

your call or meeting with you. Then come immediately to the point. State your facts calmly and in order. Ask your questions or make your request. Then listen without interruption. Take notes on the response. Briefly repeat back your interpretation of what was said; if you need clarification of a point, this is the time to ask. If it is necessary for you to respond with an answer, agree on a time when you will communicate again.

Build bridges; do not burn them. No two people have the exact same beliefs on all issues. Through the years, you will be aligned with some people today on one cause and other people in the future. Remain focused on your goal. Do not sidetrack onto a laundry list of complaints. Supply data to support your position and back it up with personal stories. Include yourself in the suggested win-win solutions.

If you are happy with the result of the meeting, say so and say thank you. However, if you are not happy, take your case to the next higher level on the chain of command and then the next. Do not skip a level unless you make an attempt to reach the person at that level and they are unavailable for an unworkable length of time. Keep trying and don't be discouraged. Consider compromises.

Through this entire process, you are teaching your children. First and foremost, you are demonstrating in actions that you love them and consider their education a priority. Second, you are modeling some of the most important lessons in life: Every human counts so respect others as well as yourself; problem solving involves creativity, logic, protocol, challenge, time, and commitment; think before you respond; take control of any situation as it occurs in your life; act, don't react; be positive and persistent and fight for what you believe in.

Remember that advocating for appropriate education for your child is a continuous process. Your positive, persistent involvement will foster your child's success in school and in life.

Texas Association for the Gifted & Talented

Contact TAGT when you need information or assistance on gifted issues.

TAGT
1524 South IH 35, #205
Austin, TX 78704
(512) 499-8248
www.txgifted.org

Colleen Elam, the author of this article, is a past president of the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented (TAGT) and a past TAGT Parent of the Year.

This article has been updated and edited by TAGT staff since its original publication in TAGT's Tempo Magazine.

A Checklist When Advocating with Public Policy Makers

ALWAYS: **prepare** yourself for an appointment; be clear and specific about the purpose of your meeting, introduce yourself and/or your group, and leave materials relevant to the issue.

be **punctual**, and be willing to wait for a person who runs behind schedule.

keep letters and visits **short** and **to the point**.

be **accurate** and authentic with supporting facts - **document resources**.

be **pleasant** and **polite**.

be **aware** that **issues have two sides**—yours and that of the opposition. Be the first to acknowledge an opposing viewpoint.

support officials with **positive visibility** on behalf of the special needs of gifted children.

ask for a response to **keep communication going**.

follow-up with a thank-you note, phone call, e-mail, an appointment, a letter, vote, etc.

DO NOT: **be disappointed** if you don't accomplish your purpose on the first visit; change is a slow process and involves a relationship built over time.

make your issue complicated. This person likely must deal with several important matters simultaneously and will be more attentive if you keep your points short and simple.

ever be **belligerent** or **threatening**. Consider opposing viewpoints, even if you do not share them. Conflict closes communication.

be late for an appointment. Lack of respect for other people's time is rude.

forget other staff members in your thank-you cards. Staff members often know as much or more about an issue than a legislator or administrator AND can get to him/her easier and more often than you can.

quit! Persistence and perseverance eventually pay off.

Adapted from an article by Gina Ginsberg Riggs, copyright 1984.

Establishing Parent Advocacy Groups for the Gifted

The Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented (TAGT) has provided support to educators and parents to meet the unique needs of gifted and talented students since 1978. TAGT has been a leader in advocating for laws and rules that ensure these students' needs are met.

Under Texas Education Code (state law) §29.122, "...each school district shall adopt a process for identifying and serving gifted and talented students in the district and shall establish a program for those students in each grade level..."

The Texas Administrative Code (state rule) 19 TAC §89.3 states "School districts shall provide an array of learning opportunities for gifted/talented students in kindergarten through grade twelve and shall inform parents of the opportunities."

The Texas State Board of Education has adopted the following as its goal for services for gifted learners: "Students who participate in services designed for gifted students will demonstrate skills in self-directed learning, thinking, research, and communication as evidenced by the development of innovative products and performances that reflect individuality and creativity and are advanced in relation to students of similar age, experience, or environment. High school graduates who have participated in services for gifted students will have produced products and performances of professional quality as part of their program services."

These are examples of a state law, a state rule, and a state goal that the State of Texas recognizes gifted students must have for their specific needs to be met. However, one of the most important tasks that the parent of a gifted child undertakes is to be that child's educational advocate. Why is it critical for parents to serve as education advocates? Because despite the lofty goals stated above, there is no accountability for gifted education written into law. Therefore, the quality of services for gifted students will vary greatly from school district to school district, from school to school within a school district, and even from grade to grade within a given school.

While many districts have quality programs in place that meet the needs of the gifted; many others do not have such programs. Advocacy is a significant factor that impacts the quality of a school district's program for the gifted. The most effective advocacy comes from inside the district and from the outside community. These advocates can maintain the necessary vigilance that ensures gifted programs remain a priority.

When there is no advocate within the school system, the role of the parent advocate becomes even more valuable. A group of advocates can increase the likelihood of having an impact—there is potential strength in numbers. But it is important to establish a positive working relationship with the school district. Good advocacy is most effective when the advocates has done their homework, and know how and when to approach school leaders in a positive and professional manner.

Websites and Books of Interest about Gifted Education

Compiled by the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented, www.txgifted.org

General Information about Giftedness

Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented (TAGT)
www.txgifted.org

National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)
www.nagc.org

Texas Education Agency: Gifted/Talented Education
www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=6420

A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's
Brightest Students
www.nationdeceived.org

Center for Gifted Education/College of William & Mary
<http://cfge.wm.edu>

Davidson Institute for Talent Development
www.ditd.org

Duke University Talent Identification Program
www.dukegiftedletter.com

Gifted Development Center
www.gifteddevelopment.com

Hoagies' Gifted Education Page
www.hoagiesgifted.org

Kid Source
www.kidsource.com/kidsource/pages/ed.gifted.html

Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG)
www.sengifted.org

The Association for the Gifted
www.cectag.org

The National Research Center on the Gifted and
Talented
www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt.html

University of North Texas Gifted Education
www.coe.unt.edu/gifted

Teaching and Learning Resources

Bright Ideas/A.W. Peller & Associates
www.brightideascatalog.com

Engine-Uity, Ltd.
www.engine-uity.com

Free Spirit Publishing
www.freespirit.com

Great Potential Press
www.giftedbooks.com

J Taylor Education
www.jtayloreducation.com

Prufrock Press
www.prufrock.com

Pieces of Learning
www.piecesoflearning.com

Professional Associates Publishing
www.kingore.com

Pieces of Learning
www.piecesoflearning.com

Renzulli Learning
www.renzullilearning.com

Royal Fireworks Press
www.rfwp.com

Texas Performance Standards Project
www.texaspsp.org

Dual Exceptionalities and Special Needs

Brainworks
www.brainworks.info

2e Twice Exceptional Newsletter
www.2enewsletter.com

Uniquely Gifted
www.uniquelygifted.org

Books for Parents of Gifted Children

TAGT Legacy Book Award Winners: Parents

2011 Winner

Parenting Gifted Children: The Authoritative Guide
Edited by Jennifer Jolly, Donald Treffinger, Tracy Inman, and
Joan Franklin Smutny, Prufrock Press

2010 Winner

Take Control of Asperger's Syndrome
Janet Price and Jennifer Engel Fisher, Prufrock Press

2009 Winner

Raising a Gifted Child: A Parenting Success Handbook
Carol Fertig, Prufrock Press

2008 Winner

*High IQ Kids: Collected Insights, Information, and Personal
Stories from the Experts*
Kiesa Kay, Deborah Robson, and Judy Fort Brenneman, Free
Spirit Publishing

2007 Winner

*Parenting Gifted Kids: Tips for Raising Happy and Successful
Children*
James Delisle, Prufrock Press

2006 Winner

Losing Our Minds: Gifted Children Left Behind
Deborah Ruf, Great Potential Press

2005 Co-Winners

Genius Denied
Jan Davidson and Bob Davidson, Simon & Schuster

Grandparents' Guide to Gifted Education
James Webb, Janet Gore, and Frances Karnes, Great
Potential Press

2004 Winner

*Empowering Gifted Minds: Educational Advocacy That
Works*
Barbara Jackson Gilman, Great Potential Press

Also Recommended

A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children
James Webb, Janet Gore, Edward Amend, and Arlene
DeVries, Great Potential Press

Raising Your Spirited Child
Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, Harper Perennial

*Being Smart about Gifted Education: A Guidebook for
Educators and Parents*
Dona Mathews & Joanne Foster, Great Potential Press

Books for Educators of Gifted Children

TAGT Legacy Book Award Winners: Educators

2011 Winner

*Making All Kids Smarter: Strategies That Help All Students
Reach Their Highest Potential*
John DeLandsheer, Corwin Press

2010 Winner

The New RTI: Response to Intelligence
Penny Choice and Sally Walker, Pieces of Learning

2009 Winner

*Strategies for Differentiating Instruction: Best Practices for
the Classroom (2nd ed.)*
Julia L. Roberts and Tracy Inman, Prufrock Press

2008 Winner

A Love for Learning: Motivation and the Gifted Child
Carol Strip Whitney with Gretchen Hirsch,
Great Potential Press

2007 Winner

Intelligent Life in the Classroom: Smart Kids & Their Teachers
Karen Isaacson & Tamara Fisher, Great Potential Press

2006 Co-Winners

Educating Gifted Students in Middle School
Susan Rakow, Prufrock Press

Designing Services and Programs for High-Ability Learners
Jeanne Purcell and Rebecca Eckert, Corwin Press

2005 Winner

Differentiation: Simplified, Realistic, and Effective
Bertie Kingore, Professional Associates Publishing

2004 Winner

The Survival Guide for Teachers of Gifted Kids
Jim Delisle and Barbara Lewis, Free Spirit Publishing

Also Recommended

The Survival Guide for Parents of Gifted Kids
Sally Yahnke Walker, Free Spirit Publishing

The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide, A Teen Handbook
Judy Galbraith and Jim Delisle, Free Spirit Publishing

The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide, Ages 10 and Under
Judy Galbraith, Free Spirit Publishing