

Parent Advocacy and Involvement

Parent Part E of the
Competencies
Collaboration

SEVA Council of Gifted Administrators

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Gifted Education Advisory Committees

What is the advisory committee?

- This committee is composed of parents, school personnel, and other community members who are appointed by the school board
- The purpose of the committee is to:
 - Review annually the local plan for the education of gifted students and to determine the extent to which the plan for the previous year was implemented, and
 - To provide to the school board and superintendent the findings and recommendations of the annual program effectiveness

Gifted Education Advisory Committees

What is the advisory committee (continued)?

- Meetings of the advisory committee are open to the public. Meeting dates and times are posted on the gifted web site. Minutes from the meetings are also posted.
- Anyone who would like to serve on this committee is invited to fill out a nomination form, and will be put on the mailing list for meeting notices. Nomination forms are available on the website and from the gifted office.
- Parents and other interested folks are welcome to attend these meetings to have a voice in gifted education.

Gifted Education Advisory Committees

An effective Gifted Education Advisory Committee:

- Positively represents the community it serves
- Collaborates with school division staff and the community
- Focuses attention on gifted education issues, not individual concerns or complaints
- Utilizes new information, current research and best practices in gifted education for its program effectiveness review

Virginia Department of Education, Office of Mathematics and Governor's Schools,
(2012), *Roles and Responsibilities of Local Gifted Education Advisory Committees*

Effective Advocacy for Gifted Education

Advocacy means supporting a cause and influencing decision-makers. Parents and teachers can be effective advocates in many ways:

- Attend the school division's Gifted Education Advisory Committee meetings
- Read the school division's Local Plan for Gifted Education so that you are familiar with how your division interprets the regulations
- Join organizations such as the Virginia Association for the Gifted (vagifted.org) or the National Association for Gifted Children (nagc.org). These organizations provide information, sponsor conferences and workshops, and sponsor scholarships and awards for gifted students.
- Reflect on current issues in gifted education by subscribing to journals such as *Parenting for High Potential* or *Teaching for High Potential*

Effective Advocacy for Gifted Education

More strategies for advocacy:

- Attend school board meetings to see how budget money is spent on gifted education
- Attend public budget hearings (for the school board as well as the city council) to support funding for gifted education; writing letters during budget cycles to the city council can also be helpful
- Follow legislation that impacts gifted education, and contact your state representatives to express your support
- Speak at your local school board regarding gifted services, especially when gifted instruction has had a significant impact on your student

Effective Parent Advocacy for Gifted Education

Parents can also be advocates for their students through effective parent-teacher conferences:

- Ask your child if there is anything that he or she would like you to discuss with the teacher
- Work as a team to establish goals and expectations
- Instead of “My child is bored” try “Let’s figure this out together”
- Be specific about “My child is not being challenged” – what suggestions do you have?
- Take notes about what has been discussed
- Follow up with a note or email expressing appreciation, and summarizing details

Effective Advocacy in the Classroom

Questions for the parent to ask the teacher:

- What are some of your academic goals for my child this year?
- How are gifted students grouped in your classroom?
- How do you accommodate differences in learning? (In what ways are you differentiating instruction to meet each child's specific needs and learning pace?)
- How does my child respond to critical and creative thinking or problem solving opportunities?
- What kinds of information do you use to evaluate each child's academic progress?
- What is an appropriate level of parent involvement and support for homework?
- How can I help?

Effective Advocacy in the Classroom

Questions for the teacher to ask the parent:

- What are some of your academic goals for your child this year?
- What are your child's favorite interests or activities? What kinds of books does he/she like to read?
- What life-long goals or career possibilities has your child discussed with you?
- What do you see as your child's greatest strengths? Greatest challenges?
- How can I help?

Effective Advocacy Through Conferences

Hints for successful collaborative conferences about gifted students:

- Be calm, tactful, diplomatic, and positive.
- Work as a team to establish goals and expectations.
- Prepare samples of student work to share, especially work that shows creativity or advanced levels of thinking and reasoning.
- Be prepared to explain how you have differentiated or modified assignments to meet the needs of the student.
- Take notes about what has been discussed.
- Follow up with a note or email summarizing or confirming details of your discussion and plan.

Effective Advocacy Through Conferences

Traps to avoid in collaborative conferences for gifted students:

- Avoid comparing one student with another student.
- Avoid comparing gifted siblings.
- Avoid unrealistic expectations. Not all gifted students get straight As, behave perfectly, or are gifted in everything.
- Avoid generalizations. (Gifted students should be able to...)
- Teachers should avoid making judgments. (Your child is too far ahead; your child should be in this program...) It is each teacher's responsibility to meet the academic needs of his or her students.
- Parents should avoid making judgments. Listen carefully to what the teacher is saying, and try to work out a feasible solution to the problem.

How Can Parents Help?

- Parents can help support their gifted child by:
 - Encouraging your child to play an active, meaningful role in family decisions
 - Encouraging integrative thinking by drawing relationships among ideas and events
 - Discussing possible consequences of actions, both personal and social, building upon daily experiences and contemporary events
 - Encouraging imagination – engage in storytelling and creative expression in the arts, for example
 - Helping your child develop resiliency in coping with disappointments

How Can Parents Help?

Parents can help their gifted children by: (continued)

- Supporting a child's or adolescent's calculated risk-taking and non-dangerous experimentation, even when the possibilities of success are slim
- Guiding your child in learning how to socially and emotionally cope with failure, AND with success
- Providing opportunities to experience a variety of books, games, puzzles, activities, and publications that foster critical and creative thinking
- Introducing them to situations that expand their horizons and help build an appreciation for diversity and an understanding of cross-cultural perspectives

How Can Parents Help?

Parents need to be as informed as possible:

- Read the documents and materials available on the HCS gifted website
- Read books and articles about gifted education (Prufrock Press has wonderful books for parents of gifted students)
- Check out the information available on websites such as Hoagies or Seng (see links on last page of this presentation)
- Participate in best practice workshops or seminars
- Make time to ask your gifted child about his or her needs, issues, and concerns
- Call the gifted director at 727-2160 if you have questions about anything related to gifted education

How Can Parents Help?

Parents need to be as informed as possible (continued):

- Establish a collaborative relationship and partnership with teachers and school administrators about educating highly advanced learners
- Understand policies and procedural guidelines that exist regarding accelerative options for your child
- Seek other parents of children with advanced capabilities and share ideas and concerns
- Explore activities and experiences outside of the school, within your local communities and state

Hillmann, Paula J. Ph.D., (2012) *How to Support Your Gifted Child's Education*, "www.parentinvolvementmatters.org/articles/giftedness.html"

How Can Parents Be Involved?

There are many ways that parents can be involved with gifted education. Some ideas include:

- Attend Local Advisory Committee meetings
- Attend workshops or seminars about gifted education
- Volunteer as a coach for Odyssey of the Mind or other after school clubs or activities
- Participate in IB parent activities and community service projects
- Serve as mentor for middle, high school, or Governor's School students interested in your field
- Volunteer to assist with publishing the gifted education newsletter or brochures
- Join the PTA

More Ways Parents Can Be Involved

- Work with the gifted resource teachers to provide assistance for special projects
- Work with your child's regular classroom teacher to provide assistance for special projects or small group work
- Work with the director to locate grant funding for special projects
- Provide your time and expertise for Career Day or College Day events
- Join the Virginia Association for the Gifted to support gifted education in Virginia
- Give recognition to outstanding teachers by nominating them for awards
- Share your expertise by serving as a speaker or presenter at a class or workshop

Still More Ways Parents Can Be Involved

- Donate class sets of novels or science materials for special projects (ask the teachers what they might need)
- Speak at school board meetings to support funding for gifted education
- Volunteer as a tutor to provide extra enrichment in mathematics or history
- Donate materials to the Excel Art program (ask the teacher first!)
- Work on the outdoor environmental classroom at Spratley
- Assist with logistics at Science Fairs, exhibitions, or other activities
- Offer to translate documents and information into other languages for other parents
- Be creative and let us know how else you might be able to help!

Organizations and Resources that Support Gifted Parents

- <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/parents.htm>
- www.nagc.org
- www.vagifted.org
- www.seng.org
- www.vdoe.gov