



Advocating for Our Children

Areas of expertise, levels of experience

The *Gifted Children's Association of British Columbia* has put together this newsletter to aid parents of gifted children in their attempts at advocacy. We hope this information will help parents support themselves and their children in their quest for appropriate programming.

British Columbia has some excellent guides to advocating for students in public schools. This newsletter is not intended to replace guides such as *Speaking up* produced by the BCCPAC (see references). This newsletter is designed to help parents of gifted children

deal with the advocacy issues which relate to gifted children in all systems.



The process of advocacy may encompass *more* for our gifted children. Single classrooms, schools or age based programs may not be the appropriate site for their abilities or development and this newsletter aims to help parents understand how to effectively examine the alternatives for their children in an appropriate manner. One very important step in

this process is to determine where the expertise and experience concerning your child's needs can be found. Use the checklist enclosed in the centre of this newsletter to begin to develop a plan to advocate for your child's individual needs. Combine with other parents with similar needs when you can, to develop a unified approach to your system.

Advocacy for a gifted child may be a long process. Current levels of awareness concerning gifted children may be low or non-existent. Don't give up! The process you model may help your child learn to stand up for themselves.

Where to start

Advocating means pleading for, not arguing for, not playing the system for gain. In order to successfully *advocate* you must have clearly defined goals and a plan of action. Often parents of gifted children forget they may be gifted individuals themselves with skills which may overwhelm or threaten the individuals whose support they are trying to gain for change. Before you or your child go to bat for change, make a plan.

What are you trying to change? Why? Is there a *win/win* way to suggest this change. (Mom, if I finish my math early can I clean my room with my extra homework time, then use my free time to play computers?)

What type of change are you after? Moderate adjustments? Major adjustments? System wide?

What is your time line? Fast before your child burns out? Three years in order to get to a particular program? One

month before the school budget is set, or the summer program filled?

What organisation, information and individuals do you need to present your point?

Will the change itself take time, personnel or funds which will impact the timeline?

Always start with a photo of your child to put the entire process in context and remind everyone who the focus should be on.

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Special points of interest:

- ☉ Finding support
- ☉ Steps to advocacy
- ☉ Create a support form for your child
- ☉ Resources

Advocate one who pleads in support of another. In the case of a gifted child, parents are most likely to do the pleading for children in the early years, with the goal of encouraging children to take more responsibility for self advocacy in later years.

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Support

In searching for ways to support your child ask the following questions, then try to make contacts with the appropriate people.

- ◆ Which groups or individuals know the most about your child and his or her needs?
- ◆ Who understands your child emotionally?
- ◆ What are the possible consequences of leaving your child in the current situation?
- ◆ Who can help you determine what options are available or have been used in your system in the past?
- ◆ Who can explain system alternatives to you?
- ◆ Where can your child find what they need?
- ◆ What are the entry or membership requirements for the group, agency or institution you feel can support your child?
- ◆ What agencies or individuals can write supportive letters about your child's passions, interests, skills? (can help them make the entry requirements)
- ◆ What requirements does your child need to fulfil in order to move on to study their passion?
- ◆ What major issues must you address or educate people about in order to achieve support for your child?
- ◆ Who has information about programs or adjustments similar to the ones you seek for your child?
- ◆ In the case of major adjustments (cluster classes, magnet schools etc.) what system wide costs and or efficiencies might be generated? Can you rally other individuals who will support the same changes you hope for?
- ◆ If the current system is not adjustable, what are your options?



Steps

Negotiating the system is often difficult for gifted individuals as they see many different routes to their goal and tend to want to take the most direct. Most systems however have levels, and rules about approaching those levels. If the levels are not approached in the correct manner and order, it often impacts on the overall result. Think of it as a queue and jump it at your peril! Be clear and non threatening. Issues around giftedness

are not well understood and you may have to do a lot of background work to help people understand why there is a problem.

- Always start with the lowest level you or your child function with (e.g classroom teacher, group leader)
- Present your well researched case fairly and clearly, avoid emotion. Have a written summary of your points available to hand to all participants. Keep notes. Present positive, easily instituted ways of adjusting the situation.
- If the case isn't resolved at the first level, take it to the next stage in your particular system. Make sure you have written summaries and take notes of the response you obtain.
- Use the notes from your previous levels to prepare for the higher levels, don't just keep restating the problem you began with. If you find successive levels less well informed, send the individuals involved some background information before your scheduled meeting.

Resources



Getting Change in the System Monique Prevost Lloyd, Oregon TAG Association (reprinted in *Beginning the Odyssey*, GCABC handouts in each chapter) <http://www.teleport.com/~rkaltwas/tag/articles/change.html>

Ten Tips for Parents of Students Monique Prevost Lloyd, Oregon TAG Association (reprinted in *Beginning the Odyssey*, GCABC handouts in each chapter) <http://www.teleport.com/~rkaltwas/tag/articles/10tips.html>

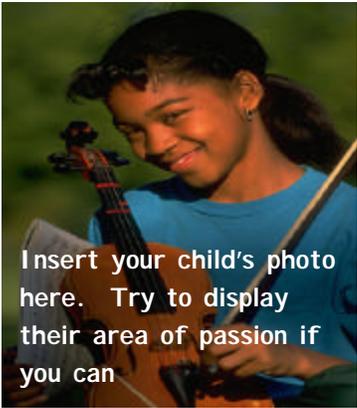
What Works examples from TAG of situations successfully resolved by parents <http://www.teleport.com/~rkaltwas/articles/works.html>

What Educators should know about ,,, a series of pamphlets available from the AEGTCCBC, the BC Teachers Professional Association for Gifted. Downloadable from the web at <http://www.bctf.bc.ca/PSAs/AEGTCCBC/index.html>

Special Education Services a Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines B.C. Ministry of Education available in every school in B.C. On the web at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/> Also check the course outlines and grade expectations at the main B.C. ed site.

Advocacy a webpage operated by the American Tourettes syndrome association <http://www.tourettesyndrome.na/advocacy.htm>

Child's Name _____



Strengths

- ★
- ★
- ★

List one or two strengths the system recognizes as well as the area where you intend to advocate for change

Areas of passion

- ★
- ★
- ★

Gifted Children may not display their passions to the general public. Use this area to help explain the passions that motivate your child.

Extra curricular interests and activities

- ★
- ★
- ★

Examples here can demonstrate skill sets and acceptance levels not known or seen in the system in which you are advocating. Children who are seen as solid mature leaders in an interest based peer group may only show up as *different* or *immature* in a system they have given up on. Use examples that demonstrate skills not seen in the system you are advocating in, to support your child's desire to move into a community with similar interests.

Future Goals

- ★
- ★
- ★

Give examples which explain how the changes you are advocating for fit in with your child's future goals. A future goal of early college entrance underlies why increasing the breadth of material may not be as useful as acceleration for a particular child. A goal of a career in music may support participation in an advanced group.

Areas where support sought List specific areas you hope can be adjusted for your child and check off how that can best be managed (pace, scope or complexity adjustments)

	Pace	Scope	Complexity

Child's preferred means of support

Use this area to identify how your child would like the system to adapt to their needs. (Video versus written report, opportunities to work ahead of group, opportunities to select areas to work when regular work is finished, opportunities for coaching, exposure to more critical performance, contact with professional working community)

Web pages: ideas to help you prepare the case for your child may be found here

- Gifted Children's Association of B.C.** Information on the B.C. organization <http://www.gcabc.ca>
- Gifted Canada**, Canadian information and resources for gifted <http://www3.telus.net/giftedcanada>
- Educators of the Gifted and Talented Children of B.C.** <http://www.bctf.bc.ca/PSAs/AEGTCCBC/index.html>
- Hoagies gifted page**, major source of info on all aspects of gifted children <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org>
- Eric clearing house on Disabilities and Gifted Education** run by the Council for Exceptional Children <http://www.cec.sped.org/ericcec.htm>
- Gifted Development Center** <http://www.gifteddevelopment.com>



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A registered non profit organization
dedicated to increasing awareness and
understanding of what it means to be
gifted.



These pages were
compiled by Lesley
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the GCABC© 2000



Join the GCABC to help support Gifted
Children. Annual memberships are
available for \$35 , Most local
members groups have regular monthly
meetings and members have library
privileges and reduced rates at
conferences.

Local contacts

GCA members meet together throughout the province at
informal meetings open to any member of the GCABC, re-
gardless of their home location. Contacts for groups
with **regular meetings** are in **bold**

Armstrong	Sari Cox	250-294-3395			
Cariboo-Chilcotin	Ken Soneff	250-398-7599			
Central Okanagan	David Taylor	250-860-3020	Powell River-Texada	Larry Dawe	604-486-7440
Central Van. Island	Lianne Raynor	250-758-8735	Richmond	Tony Lukashuk	604-271-0907
Coquitlam	Sheila Armstrong	604-939-4820	Shuswap	Karen Bissenden	250-833-4886
Delta	Karen Gillespie	604-940-0791	South Island	Lesley Ansell-Shepherd	250-598-1670
Langley	Jean Lau	604-857-0810	Surrey-White Rock	JoAnne Wardle	604-951-9570
			Vancouver	Marta McIntosh	604-736-2705
North Shore	Alistair Kent	604-925-6687	Vernon	Noelle Typusiak	250-545-0825



References: *Speaking up* A parent guide to advocating for students in public schools BCCPAC, phone (604) 687-4433 web
site <http://www.bccpac.bc.ca> each school PAC or DPAC has a copy.