

Advocating for Your Child in School

1. Educate Yourself

- Learn everything you can about giftedness! Read extensively and understand current research. Attend conferences, classes and meetings. You need data and facts to replace emotion.
- Familiarize yourself with the federal/state regulations and what is being done elsewhere.
- Familiarize yourself with your school and district's policy and programs, the key decision-makers and their educational points of view. (Learn the Rules of the Game)
- Connect -- online or in person -- with other parents of gifted kids. Advocacy can be lonely. Build a support system for you and your child. Get involved at school as a volunteer.
- Learn from the special education community. Gifted students are also a "special population"--but one without the legal protections afforded special ed.

2. Plan

- Detailed and organized objective information is essential for effective advocacy efforts on behalf of your child.
- What are you most concerned about right now in regards to your child's education? In the next two years? What are the essential components necessary for your child's educational plan? How will you measure progress?
- Understand testing and assessments performed on your child.
- Draft a tentative educational plan that addresses your concerns and your goals for your child. Share this with school personnel and invite their input. Include everyone who will take part in implementing plans within the classroom.
- Be sure to consider friendship and social areas as well as academics (social-emotional needs).

3. Compromise

- Make suggestions but be open to other ideas. Have a first, second and a third option ready! Listen!
- Approach the school respectfully and allow an open flow of information. Seek collaboration. Be honest about your child's strengths and weaknesses.
- Prepare to deal with problems early. The school year goes by very quickly. By the time a decision is made to address a situation, the school year may be half over. Don't allow undue delay.
- Advocate for the child, not the educational option. Remember that one size does not fit all!
- Recognize that everyone brings a degree of expertise to the table. Know how to win and lose gracefully. Maintain good relations – you will be at this school/district for MANY years!

4. Communicate

- Write that letter. Many schools allow and even encourage parents to write a letter about their child at the end of the school year to assist in placement for the coming school year. Take this as an opportunity to reflect on and share what has and has not worked for your child. If appropriate, share your letter or a portfolio with your child's teacher(s) (create a powerful personal story).
- *Document, document, document.* Keep records of all your interactions with school personnel. Make requests in writing. If needed, request to see your child's educational file.
- Keep examples of your child's work. Keep a list of books your child is reading. A great way to do this is with www.GoodReads.com. Document other areas as well to show your child's progress or lack of progress.
- Take notes at meetings and record discussions, decisions, action items and topics for continued discussion. Email a summary to the involved parties after the meeting to create a paper trail.
- Send thank you notes after meetings. Be generous with your thanks and praise.

Resources

General Advocacy

- The Davidson Institute for Talent Development. [Advocating for Exceptionally Gifted Young People](http://print.ditd.org/young_scholars/Guidebooks/Davidson_Guidebook_Advocating.pdf). http://print.ditd.org/young_scholars/Guidebooks/Davidson_Guidebook_Advocating.pdf
- Wrightslaw. Advocacy Tips. <http://www.wrightslaw.com/advocacy.htm>
- National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). Advocacy Toolkit. <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=36>
- Texas Association for the Gifted & Talented (TAGT). "15 DOs and DON'Ts of Advocacy." <http://txgifted.org/15-dos-and-donts-advocacy/>
- Elam, Colleen. "Advocating for Appropriate Education for Your Child," <http://txgifted.org/wp-content/uploads/files2/pdf/Advocating%20for%20Appropriate%20Education%20for%20Your%20Child.pdf>

Parent Education

- Texas Association for the Gifted & Talented (TAGT). "Suggested Reading for Parents." <http://txgifted.org/suggested-reading-parents/>
- Reis, Sally M. "Research That Supports the Need for and Benefits of Gifted Education." http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Information_and_Resources/Research%20Support%20for%20OGT.pdf

Testing and Assessments

- The Wright's Law website offers many resources. An excellent article to start with: [Tests and Measurements for the Parent, Teacher, Advocate & Attorney](http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/tests_measurements.html). http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/tests_measurements.html

Regulations and Rights

- The Texas Education Code on Gifted Education: <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.29.htm#29.121> and <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.42.htm#42.156>
- Texas Education Agency. "Gifted & Talented Education – FAQs." <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=6263>
- The [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>
 1. Parents or eligible students have the right to inspect and review the student's education records maintained by the school.
 2. Parents or eligible students have the right to request that a school correct records which they believe to be inaccurate or misleading. If the school decides not to amend the record, the parent or eligible student then has the right to a formal hearing. After the hearing, if the school still decides not to amend the record, the parent or eligible student has the right to place a statement with the record setting forth his or her view about the contested information.
 3. "I believe that FERPA ensures me that I can view this document" is a good phrase to have at the ready.