

Parent Advocacy Suggestions

An outline from *Empowering Gifted Minds: Educational Advocacy That Works*, by Barbara Jackson Gilman

“When a gifted child faces an unacceptable classroom situation, parents need to act to solve the problem... Parents should trust themselves to assess the level of need, but always know that the cumulative effect of a child not having his or her needs met over a long period of time is negative. There is no benefit to teaching a child to graciously accept being held back.”

For starters:

- Understand giftedness and the options available to your child. Become an “expert” on your child’s specific needs.
- Decide who first/most needs to hear your requests or questions:
 - Classroom teacher?
 - School’s gifted specialist?
 - School’s principal?
 - School’s counselor or psychologist?
 - District’s GT coordinator?
 - District’s Learning Services Director?
 - School Board?—policies or regulations that hinder or support the request?
 - State Legislature? Laws that hinder or support the request?
 - Representatives in U.S. Congress?
- It might be beneficial to become a member of SAAC, DAC, GTAC, or NoCo Gifted Community group to provide a voice for the gifted, to understand the bigger picture, and to connect with other parents and educators.
- It might be beneficial to be a volunteer in your child’s classroom, in the gifted program, or in district-level gifted administration or activities.
- Become a due-paying member of the Colorado Association for Gifted and Talented (CAGT).

Specific suggestions for school-level advocacy:

1. Demonstrate a documented need.
 - a. If the child is already identified, provide reasons for the accommodations being sought.
 - b. If the child is not already identified, have your child tested (in district/out of district).
 - c. Avoid defense mechanisms through documentation—see the last paragraph on page 242.
2. Follow the Chain of Command—begin with the people closest to the child
 - a. Conference with the teacher—classroom teachers may not have had sufficient opportunities for training in gifted children.
 - i. Keep the meeting as “upbeat, honest, respectful of the teacher, and oriented to finding ‘joint’ solutions as possible.”
 - ii. See yourself as a partner in the problem/solution.

- iii. Look at test scores and anecdotal data of things your child has achieved at home or in other settings.
 - iv. Bring an expert: a former teacher who is supportive of gifted education, the school's gifted specialist, a district employee, a psychologist, etc.—anyone who can serve as a professional liaison so you don't feel like "just a parent."
 - v. Create an ALP or modify the existing ALP, as needed, to address the specific concerns (this is required annually for all identified children).
 - b. Meet with the principal—if a teacher refuses to differentiate or if a teacher is not following through on agreed upon modifications, take this next step. Principals, too, vary in their support of gifted education and in their training on the needs of the gifted.
 - i. Work toward compromise, or
 - ii. Work toward alternative placement (another teacher, another setting, etc.)
 - c. Meet with the school/district counselor, psychologist, or GT specialist
 - d. Involve district personnel—again, it is helpful if you approach them with a problem-solving hat on and in a positive way. In addition, the authors point out: "District involvement is not likely to be swift and decisive." The district
 - i. Can suggest school choices
 - ii. Knows which principals support gifted children, have backgrounds in gifted education, are more flexible, will accommodate parents.
 - iii. Can share special program options at various schools
3. *Choose a school/program for your child:* "It is often difficult to modify poor school situations, but we can take a proactive approach to the education of the gifted... Across the country, there is a movement within public school districts to offer schools choice... it is generally easier to find a more appropriate teacher or school for a child than to effect substantial change in the child's current inadequate program." Note: the deadline for selecting a school of choice outside your neighborhood school is January or February (depending on elementary or secondary) of the school year previous to your child's requested enrollment.
- a. Meet with the school personnel and learn more about it.
 - b. Interview the principal on his/her knowledge of giftedness, appreciation of learning differences, willingness to suggest teachers and appropriate options, and flexibility. How is the school day set up? Can students take a class at a different grade level in order to accelerate? What options are there in advanced or accelerated classes? What personnel is available to support gifted kids? What extra-curricular/enrichment programs are typically offered? Can you and your child visit and observe before making a decision?