

Take Five! Advocating for Gifted Programs in Local Schools

Over the past few years, NAGC has received numerous calls and queries about how to respond to gifted programming cutbacks and eliminations. In every case, the need for fiscal conservatism is real - but so are the pressing academic and social-emotional needs of gifted students.

The question is how can you avert just such a crisis in your own school or community? Whether you are working with a group or acting on your own, the most important piece of advice we can offer is: don't wait for an emergency to begin building support for gifted programs and services. There is truth to the old adage that chance favors the prepared. So, start building support today with the following five suggestions:

1. Examine your program

In order to build support to retain (or develop) a program for gifted learners, it is important that you are aware of what the state and district currently offers for gifted students and how learners access these programs and services. You should know this information well enough that you can give details to those who may ask for them. Once that information is in hand, it will be possible to focus on the benefits to students and to develop strategies that ensure school leaders understand the value of gifted programming in your community. Your first stop should be to familiarize yourself with the *NAGC Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Program Standards*. The standards map out what the leading experts in the field view as exemplary practices as well as the bare essentials that are needed in a school to meet the needs of gifted students. This is a nationally recognized and accepted document similar to the content standards adopted by other content-based educational organizations (e.g., **NCTM**, **NCTE**, **NCSS**). Once you have a sense of what an "ideal" gifted program looks like, you can then begin to examine and evaluate your own program. Make a list of all of the areas in which your current program is a "shining star." Then tackle the more difficult task of specifically describing the areas in which your program has fallen short of the standards. This list and your newfound understanding of the recommended best practices for providing programs and services for gifted students will give you a starting point in thinking and talking about your gifted program with others

- ***NAGC pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Program Standards***
- From the Bookstore: *Aiming for Excellence: Gifted Program Standards*

2. Establish a rationale

Bear in mind as you speak with administrators and community members, your goal is to educate others about why gifted learners really do need something different educationally. It is imperative that you make your rationale for supporting programs and services as clear and informative as possible while also keeping the needs of gifted children front and center. Therefore, your resource collection for developing a rationale should be twofold: you will need resources about policies and practices (i.e., state and

local mandates, district policies and practices, and definitions concerning gifted education, national reports recommending best practices), and you will need resources about the needs of gifted students (including local demographics). Once others have an understanding that gifted students need something different, then you can demonstrate how specific programs for which you are advocating relate back to the standards and policies AND meet the unique needs of gifted students in your school and community.

<i>Policies & Practices</i>	<i>Needs of Gifted Students</i>
State of the Nation (pdf)	Why We Need Gifted and Talented Education
NAGC Position Statements	What is Gifted
Glossary of Terms	Common Myths about Gifted Children and their Education
Acceleration Guidelines	

3. Brush up on your communication skills

There are many different groups of people in your school and community that would be willing to lend support for high-ability students, but they need to understand the issue. Remember your job is to get the message out. For more information and helpful suggestions:

- Read the ERIC Digest, "*Public Relations: A Necessary Tool for Advocacy*"
- Visit our *Communication Tools* page
- Read "*Communicating Effectively with Your Child's School*" in preparation for meetings with teachers and administrators
- Read *Conversation Starters for Talking about Talent Development* to get you thinking about how to raise awareness of gifted kids in everyday casual settings.

4. Build a bridge for administrators

School administrators are deeply concerned about ensuring educational excellence for all of their students; however, many are unaware of the unique needs of advanced learners. As you plan your campaign for increased awareness and understanding with this key group of decision makers, recognize that at every level their entire day is packed with a wide range of educational and managerial crises. Therefore, your plan must be both artful and efficient. Consider sharing a brief article like "Nine Truths About Working with Gifted Students" from the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) that describes the value of gifted education as well as how to make it work administratively or invite superintendent to attend a culminating event with your students and their families. You might also offer to brief school administrators at the beginning of the year about the local population of high-potential learners including an

upbeat, yet honest, overview of the current state of gifted programming in your district. Look at the Resources for Administrators pages to see what materials NAGC has to offer principals, superintendents, and other administrators.

- *Nine Truths About Working with Gifted Students,*” National Association of Elementary School Principals
- *Ten Things All Administrators Should Know About Gifted Children* by Joyce VanTassel-Baska
- *Resources for Administrators*

5. Network, Network, Network

Once you have a rationale and a message in place, you need to make sure that gifted education stays in the limelight. The best way to do this is to celebrate your successes (and conversely, share the challenges) with other people who care about gifted learners and the future of gifted education. There are many positive, active ways to meet like-minded individuals and begin an open dialogue in your community. You can:

- become an active participant in local school groups like the PTO or booster club,
- offer to provide a speaker for local service organizations (e.g., Lions Club, Chamber of Commerce, etc.) about your gifted program and its ties to the community,
- volunteer to serve on school committees involved with strategic planning, accountability, or program evaluation and planning,
- form your own local support organization,
- get to know the education reporters for your local media outlets and develop your Letters to the Editor writing skills (see *Working with the Media*), or
- join a gifted organization (like NAGC) that advocates for a challenging and appropriate education for gifted learners or start a gifted organization in your town or state.

Do you have an idea you want to share about advocating for gifted students or gifted programs?

Contact us at **nagc@nagc.org** and write the words "website idea" in the subject line.

For more information about advocating for gifted education at the federal and state level, visit those pages in *NAGC's Advocacy Toolkit*.