

Starting

&

Sustaining

a Parent Group TO
SUPPORT GIFTED
CHILDREN

National Association for Gifted Children



Starting & Sustaining a Parent Group TO SUPPORT GIFTED CHILDREN

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STARTING AND SUSTAINING A PARENT GROUP TO SUPPORT GIFTED CHILDREN

Acknowledgments	5
Introduction	6
	Parents as the Power Source: An Introduction Nancy Green
Section 1	8
	Why Start a Parent Group? Christy D. McGee and Pauline Bowie
Section 2	11
	Getting Organized: Options and Opportunities for Your Parent Group Diana Reeves and Robin Schader
Section 3	20
	Building Support for Gifted Children and Your Local Parent Group Diana Reeves and Stephanie K. Ferguson
Section 4	26
	Turning Support Into Advocacy Diana Reeves
Section 5	30
	Next Steps: Starting the Journey Kristin Clarke
Appendix A	32
	Tips at a Glance for New Parent Groups
Appendix B	35
	Building an Accepting Culture: Ground Rules for Parent Groups Kristin Clarke
Appendix C	36
	Resources: What's Available for Parent Groups Tracy Ford Inman and Jennifer L. Jolly
About the Contributors	42

Acknowledgments



This eBook came about at the suggestion of Joel McIntosh at Prufrock Press, who made the connection that quality gifted education exists in places where there are strong parent groups. Always about meeting needs through publications, he asked if the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) could help create the content for a guide to help parents develop effective and sustainable parent groups. The leaders of the NAGC Parent Advisory Committee and the Parent and Community Network jumped at the opportunity because they know about the successes that occur when parents come together to advocate with schools, districts, and governments.

The advice and examples included in this eBook come directly from the experiences of parents of gifted children who have learned, firsthand, how to work with and encourage others to speak out in support of the learning needs of gifted students.

NAGC is indebted to Diana Reeves and Stephanie K. Ferguson, co-chairs of the Parent Advisory Committee; Pauline Bowie and Christy D. McGee, current and incoming chair of the Parent and Community Network; as well as Tracy Ford Inman, Jennifer L. Jolly, Robin Schader, and Terry Wilson, all active contributors to NAGC's *Parenting for High Potential* magazine and other parent resources, who contributed their time and expertise to this project.

Thank you to all who spoke to NAGC about your experiences with parent groups and to those who are out there working week in and week out so that gifted children learn something new every day. ■



Parents as THE Power Source: An Introduction

**Nancy Green, Executive Director,
National Association for Gifted Children**

Early on the morning of my very first day as executive director of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), I was in the shower when the phone rang. It was a call from a member—a parent from Missouri who was about to make a case to the school board asking them to retain her child’s gifted program. My sister, an educator and parent who happens to live in

Missouri, had offered to put her in touch with me by providing my home phone. The first thing I noticed was her tone—a sense of panic and urgency. She was on the front lines of the advocacy effort on behalf of her child and others, but clearly all alone. Did NAGC have any information that could help her? Sample letters? Policy information? Did we know of anyone else in her school district or in the region who could offer some guidance? Dripping wet, I assured her that NAGC could help.





You have stories, too. We know because every day NAGC staff members take your calls, hearing firsthand from parents—the amazement at what their bright children are doing, the frustration at the “nonsensical” barriers often put in their way, and the desire to do something to help them.

NAGC has a unique national vantage point, one grounded by the insights and anecdotes shared by the incredible network of gifted education leaders, educators, and, yes, parents like you. From this bird’s-eye view, we hear from advocates in states that have successful policies and programs supporting gifted learners, as well as from folks in states where the landscape is more barren, patchy, or shamefully still nonexistent in terms of services and programming for the gifted.

But one common thread has emerged: When parent groups are involved in advocacy and support for their gifted children, change happens—maybe not all at once, maybe not as comprehensively as we might like in this tough economic climate—but parents make a difference.

With that backdrop comes the reason for the creation of this important guide to *Starting and Sustaining a Parent Group to Support Gifted Children*. Over the years, our members have shared bits and pieces of what parent groups can do, how they are organized, and how they can be successfully sustained. For the first time, with the support of Joel McIntosh and Prufrock Press and a wide network of parents, we have brought together all of the ideas, resources, and stories in one place. This practical resource is designed to meet you where you are, and to reassure you that getting started does not have to be intimidating or overwhelming.

Many groups begin and grow out of a need to share information to support their gifted children. Other

groups come out of the gate with a stronger advocacy purpose, organizing only after programs and services are threatened. That’s why this guide provides valuable content relevant at any crossroads—for the savvy advocate as well as the first-time organizer.

We begin each section with a story or observation from parents who have lived these situations. Then we move into the how-to, including set-up ideas, potential pitfalls, and quick tips from experienced parent group leaders of all backgrounds. Finally, we offer loads of additional resources and checklists in Appendix A (Tips at a Glance for New Parent Groups), Appendix B (Building an Accepting Culture: Ground Rules for Parent Groups), and Appendix C (Resources: What’s Available for Parent Groups), including many from NAGC.

Diana Reeves, a longtime parent group member and advocate who has contributed her wisdom to this guide, made a telling remark during conversations about how to engage more parents in grassroots organizing: “The one saving grace that I know to be true in all of these years is that the voice of parents is the only voice that will be listened to consistently. Educators often cannot advocate because of job limitations, but legislators really will listen to parents.” We at NAGC know she is absolutely right: Individually we struggle to be heard, but collectively we cannot be ignored.

The case for parent groups couldn’t be stronger—or more urgent. Your child changes every day. Clearing the road to accommodate his or her rapid development and building a supportive environment will ensure that your child—every gifted child—is able to learn something new every day. ■

Section 1

WHY Start a Parent Group?

Christy D. McGee and Pauline Bowie

The kindergartner assumed she was in trouble because she had to go to the principal's office. The student said she had asked to read a book to the class, like others in her class had done. The little girl insisted she could read a book from the bookshelf, which she read flawlessly. When she finished, the teacher took her hand, telling her they needed to go see the principal. The girl read for the principal and then the counselor, but no one smiled when she was finished.

The child arrived home from school anxious and upset, and told her mother about the experience. Her mother then called the principal to relate the tale. The principal laughed, saying that she and the counselor were just amazed that a kindergartner could read so well. This certainly wasn't the first time her daughter's precocious abilities had stunned those around her, but the mother wished she could share what happened with someone. She was frustrated even further by the fact that the teacher and principal realized her daughter needed additional support for her gifts, yet didn't recommend anything different.

You likely empathize with the family in this vignette because it reflects typical experiences faced by parents like us, parents of gifted children. Also typical is the question that arises early in our child's life, when we realize that she learns at a rapid pace; reads, walks, or talks significantly earlier than other children; shows advanced abilities in the arts; or reasons at levels well beyond her physical age. You ask yourself, "Is this typical behavior?" Soon, our observation of other children and our inevitable research on child development reveals that such intellectual, artistic, or reasoning behavior definitely is not typical. Our child is gifted.

Now comes the avalanche of other questions: What do we do to support our child and his gift? How will this change our lives? What do we do next? Where can we go for help? "Help," unfortunately, may not be found in the usual places such as with friends, family, or work colleagues. Indeed, most parents of gifted children quickly learn that talking about these accomplishments with other parents whose children are developing at a typical rate is not helpful and might be perceived as arrogance or bragging. So, where else might we turn?

"Because of the myths that prevail about gifted learners, adults without any personal experience may find it difficult to show any empathy in regard to the struggles and challenges that we as parents of gifted children go through," explains Keri Guilbault, of the



Florida Association for the Gifted (FLAG). “Just as our gifted children sometimes feel the need to ‘dumb down’ or hide their giftedness to fit in, we as parents of gifted children also find ourselves at times playing down our children’s strengths or gifts.”

Pediatricians are often among the first people we call, because they can discuss unusually advanced child development objectively. However, these professionals typically don’t have specific knowledge or training about gifted children. And although school officials also should be and often are vital allies, most parents still want advice and guidance directly from their peers—other parents who love and have high hopes (and fears) about their gifted children.

Sadly, though, we often feel isolated, because we don’t know how to connect with these peers. Our frustrations and challenges grow, whether with a school principal who refuses to allow our child to skip a grade, or with the lack of funding available for gifted services. Fortunately, a straightforward solution exists: join or form a group for parents of gifted children.

“Much of what I learned about the educational and parenting needs of gifted children came from my involvement with the local and statewide gifted support and advocacy organizations,” says Terry Wilson of Lakeland, FL, who joined a newly forming parent group for gifted children in the 1990s when her son was in kindergarten. “My life has been significantly enriched by my involvement in these groups, and I know I was a better parent and advocate for my children while they were in school due to what I learned as a participant.”

She points to her tenure on a committee to address underachieving gifted students, where she learned how to help her son avoid shutting down and underachieving. “I also learned from parents of students older than him about specific courses he needed to take and the pitfalls of middle school for gifted students,” Wilson adds. “I learned about appropriate afterschool programs and about the hoops my son needed to jump

through in order to get into an Ivy League or top-tier college. And I learned to measure success for my child as more than achievement on school tests and report cards.”

Parent groups vary across the country, in part because each state operates its educational system and budget process differently. And although the issues parents of gifted children face will vary, there are several needs that parent groups commonly address:

- *Parent groups can celebrate giftedness.* A parent group meeting is a place where you and others involved with the day-to-day support of gifted children can discuss the wonders and pleasures that come from listening, talking, and dealing with extraordinary children. The bonding of parents who can share positive stories about their children is powerful, and camaraderie was often the biggest draw to members who were asked what they like most about their parent group.
- *Parent groups can teach parents, educators, and the public about what giftedness means and how it is best served.* Parent group meetings outline how best to support gifted children from early childhood through high school, not only for the children’s sake, but also for the greater good of the world in which they will grow and become productive, creative contributors.
- *Parent groups can provide social and cultural interaction.* Family Fun Nights, cultural outings, athletic games, and other social events all provide participants with entertaining and educational events. Support groups cannot be 100% about business; they also must provide activities that help attach members emotionally to one another.
- *Parent groups develop effective advocates.* As a support group grows in membership and/or influence, its members can become local, state,



and national advocates for the rights and needs of gifted youth in our society. Frankly, advocacy in all of its forms—from writing a letter to a principal about an issue, to testifying before the local school board or a state legislative committee—is a primary area of activism for most parent support groups. Members can become familiar with state laws that provide for the education of gifted children and lobby to ensure that these laws are followed. As countless success stories have proven, parent support groups are powerful change agents for gifted children and their families.

A number of communities already have parent groups, especially in areas with gifted programs in place. Others do not, so you may need to start one. Don't let that put you off! Establishing such a group may seem a bit daunting at first, but this guide and dozens of other resources developed by experienced parents, administrators, teachers, NAGC, and other

leaders will help you build a parent group that can accomplish almost any goal while also celebrating and supporting your own gifted child.

“You don't need more than 10 parents to create change in a district,” according to Todd McIntyre, a 6-year member of a parent group for gifted children in Audubon, PA. “It takes fewer people than most people think to start having an impact. What you need, though, is for people to keep showing up and to embrace new parents. . . . As far as what I've seen groups do, I've seen districts change their screening criteria for identifying gifted children because of a group of 8–10 parents, not 100 parents assailing the district. These parents are just making good points: ‘Hey, there's a need, and here's how we can address it.’”

“Parents of gifted children often wonder if they're the only one in the district with concerns,” McIntyre continues. “They're relieved to find other parents aren't satisfied either, which reassures them that they're not ‘crazy’; they just didn't know about the others.” ■



Todd McIntyre worries in particular about parents of gifted teenagers who may not understand the profound difference a parent's involvement in such a group can have on his or her high schoolers. “Parents of high school kids already are looking at colleges,” McIntyre says. “They don't think they can do anything at this point. But one of the major misconceptions is that there isn't much you can do if the kid is a teenager. The biggest challenge is making

parents aware that there's still time to do advocacy work and help a gifted kid learn how to study and develop the skills he is going to need as he goes on to be a lifelong learner. I say to parents, ‘Would you rather have him or her learn how to study as a sophomore in high school or in college?’”

Section 2

Getting Organized: Options and Opportunities for Your Parent Group

We started out with a bang with a small group of highly committed people. We shared a focus and a goal—to get a program for gifted children into our schools. We were led by a dynamo of a president who had vision and leadership capability. We worked diligently with community members and school representatives. One of the school committee members had a gifted child. We eventually were able to get what we wanted. We were so immersed in our mission that we failed to notice that the same people were doing all of the work. We were reluctant to lose our best people, so the same people stayed on the board for years. But to tell you the truth, there are only a few of us left. My kids are grown now, and we don't have any new volunteers. We lost our school liaison. We've made some mistakes. The funding for the gifted program is in danger and there just doesn't seem to be anyone left to join the effort to save it.

Diana Reeves and Robin Schader

You've gathered a group of like-minded people, come together and exchanged contact information, and even held a few meetings. Have you seen a core of particularly interested people emerge? These folks are great candidates for a volunteer steering committee. This body (often it ranges from 5–10 people, but it may be smaller) should begin making decisions about your group's composition, direction, and operating guidelines, which then should be submitted to the general membership for approval. These decisions should be based on consensus by the group whenever possible, so the general membership is not surprised by the proposals.

Getting organized means choosing a structure (e.g., elected officers or informal volunteers, casual community group, or tax-exempt organization), writing a short mission statement, setting goals, forming committees, assigning re-



sponsibilities, choosing meeting topics, and crafting either a to-do list or formal work plan. All of these actions are taken to ensure transparency and consistency. Also critical are conversations and decisions about the breadth of the organization's focus and how the organization will work with outside officials. Successful, long-lasting parent groups share a variety of organizational components, although not necessarily all of them.

Your new group can be as formal or as informal as your members desire, although you will find that more formal models (say, as a legally recognized 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization) can boost your credibility with certain officials and the media.

Still, start with the basics and understand that building a parent group for your children is a journey, one that can evolve into different levels of organizational complexity when it comes to the nitty-gritty of achieving the work plan that your group has crafted. "Work to get a list of parent names and e-mail addresses from those you know and by asking teachers to send a message home with your contact informa-

tion," advises Terry Wilson, a longtime Florida parent group leader. "If you are only able to get those and form an online e-mail discussion group or a social media group, that is a tremendous start!"

Experienced group leaders contributed to the following list of success factors. Remember, though, these groups have worked hard and come a long way from the starting point you are at today. Certainly, success wasn't immediate. Successful parent groups:

- elect officers, including a president, vice president (president-elect), secretary, treasurer, and clerk;
- have a role for past presidents;
- have a board of directors;
- assign member representatives to the local school district;
- have term limits for officers and committee chairs;
- commit to a written statement of the mission, goals, and bylaws;
- adhere to parliamentary procedure during board meetings;
- have board meetings with both consent and action agendas;
- include standing and ad hoc committees and committee chairs;
- have written descriptions of officer, director, and committee chair duties;
- support a leadership development committee (to continuously seek new volunteers for officer and committee chair responsibilities);
- make a special effort to help new members feel welcome;
- formally recognize member contributions;
- keep a broad focus as opposed to being a single-purpose organization;
- solicit input from members on a regular basis to be sure that the group's activities reflect the members' priorities;

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- provide direct services to members, as well as the wider community;
- have an advocacy and/or legislative focus to keep abreast of local, state, and federal legislation and inform members accordingly;
- support a member communication network and/or organizational website;
- require dues;
- continually update “how-to” data banks specifying how various programs (e.g., annual meetings, conferences, kids’ days) are run to enable someone new to the group to step into a leadership role and have a guidebook to follow;
- commit to work with, rather than against, the officials in decision-making positions;
- have a designated spokesperson for the organization (usually the president or group founder);
- share annual reports with the membership;
- focus on high-quality education for all children, not just gifted youth;
- keep careful records of members’ expertise, interests, activities, and the ages and school placement of their children for future projects and to solicit for specific volunteer and advocacy activities; and
- use meetings as educational opportunities for members and those who might join.



With guidance and determination, your parent group will mature (sometimes faster than you anticipate!) into an entity that can create positive change for your gifted child and his or her same-ability peers.

Beware THE PITFALLS

Group management can be fairly simple or, depending on the personalities involved and the issues

at stake, quite challenging. It’s easy to identify the likely pitfalls facing an organization of passionate parents who adore their gifted children and will fight for the best for them. Yes, things can heat up. “One thing parent groups have to be careful of is not becoming an angry mob,” cautions Brooke Burling of the Connecticut Association for the Gifted (CAG). “The situation becomes too adversarial otherwise. While parents do have to be insistent that their kids’ needs be met, there must be recognition of what school districts are facing today. They have so many constraints with the No Child Left Behind law, overburdened teachers, and eroding political and public support.”





Diana Reeves, a parent group member from Massachusetts, notes, “The whole issue of leadership development is something many group founders don’t think about when creating a group, but it’s something you must acknowledge from the get-go. . . . Other parents will consider the group ‘elitist’ unless its members consciously reach out to families and groups in different neighborhoods.”

Here are a few other mistakes frequently made by even the best leaders:

- *A program or organization that is built around one person.* Should that person depart, no one is left to lead the group.
 - *No leadership development program in general.* A few well-trained leaders with gifted children at various ages help divide and pace the workload while providing the group with different areas of expertise and a leadership pipeline.
 - *Inadequate use of volunteers.* Share the work so your group will grow, even when it can seem like more of a hassle than a help.
 - *An overambitious agenda and timeline.* Trying to do too much too soon is frustrating and exhausting for everyone. Plan your growth in steps.
 - *Failure to keep the general membership informed of group actions and board decisions.* No one likes to feel marginalized.
 - *Failure to realize that advocacy must continue even after goals have been achieved.* This has proven an ongoing challenge even for the longest lived parent group.
- *Sloppy or sporadic recording of group actions, both internal and external.* Committee actions need to be shared, as do notes from meetings with legislators and community members. A paper trail for any and all expenditures is vital as well.
 - *Disorganization.* Allowing meetings to be disorganized (e.g., starting late, lacking an agenda) or to be dominated by a single voice is unacceptable.
 - *Failure to comply with state and federal record-keeping requirements.* Tax-exempt organizations must ensure that they follow all requirements.
 - *Paralysis.* Groups can become paralyzed due to the tug of war between immediate action and distant goals.



You could set up a website to serve as an information clearinghouse and to announce events and news . . .

Structure to Fit the Group

The threat of the above-mentioned pitfalls can be diminished dramatically by jointly choosing the organizational structure most comfortable to you and your new group members, and holding yourselves accountable by staying within the framework. Of course, member time constraints, geography, the purpose of your parent group, and other factors may require a modification somewhere along the way.

Generally, local parent groups are organized either informally or formally. Each is discussed below.

Informal Organizations

Many local parent groups are originally organized to address a short-term need or because a small group of like-minded families shares a common interest. Although they're interested in supporting their children and other families, they don't have long-range plans for the group and are satisfied to have it be an all-volunteer, loosely knit organization.

The informal structure does not prevent parent groups from actively supporting enrichment activities, educating parents and school leaders about the educational needs and characteristics of gifted students, or developing brochures, fact sheets, and newsletters to promote gifted education and the benefits of joining the group. Many informal parent groups also raise

funds for classroom and teacher scholarships, run on-line discussion boards, have a structure for officers and committees, and conduct annual elections.

Informal organizations can be launched quickly, can be flexible about leadership, and can evolve over time to a more formal structure, especially as the range of activities becomes more complex.

Formal Organizations

In some cases, parent groups start out only after becoming an official nonprofit organization because they are launched to affiliate with another organization, such as a state gifted education association, or to become a chapter or local affiliate of a national organization such as the PTA/PTO. There are costs associated with incorporation, and it involves both state and federal processes to be recognized as a nonprofit organization. However, being an official nonprofit organization doesn't mean that the group must have employees, office space, or equipment or property in its name at the time of start-up, although there are reporting requirements and restrictions on how nonprofits may spend their funds. Conversely, it can be easier to handle finances and to create a permanent address and identity for your group if it is an official organization. Additionally, receiving tax-exempt status (501(c)(3)) from the IRS means that donations to your group are tax-deductible to donors, which can aid in fundraising efforts.



Formal organizations, by their very nature, must have bylaws and articles of incorporation that establish an overarching purpose and leadership framework, but they can be flexible about how and where they conduct their meetings, whether those meetings are in person, online, or a combination of the two. When establishing a formal organization, the following should be kept in mind:

- Each state regulates how groups incorporate and details the recordkeeping requirements.
- There may be a state association for nonprofit organizations in your state. A quick check of its website could be very helpful in wading through your state's laws and regulations and may offer seminars and other resources for new association leaders.
- The IRS has numerous web pages and publications for nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations. To start, check out the Life Cycle of an Exempt Organization web page (<http://www.irs.gov/charities/article/0,,id=169727,00.html>) for more information.
- NAGC offers some basic information about lobbying restrictions by 501(c)(3) organizations (<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=378>).
- Hurwit & Associates is a law firm dedicated to nonprofits and philanthropy. The resource library on its website houses information such as Starting Up: Nonprofit & Foundation Basics (http://www.hurwitassociates.com/l_start_forming.php).

Organizing For Action

There are many ways to communicate with members and hold meetings. What is right for your group will depend on many variables, including the location

of your members and what you want to accomplish. Below are three possible models.

MODEL 1: In-Person Meetings

Before the rise of more recent technological advances, all groups met face-to-face to conduct business, share ideas, organize activities, and raise issues of concern. Telephone trees were used to reach members between meetings or to alert members to time-sensitive issues such as impending votes in the state legislature.

Today, many groups continue to hold regular, in-person meetings for business, elections, discussion, and sharing. For many volunteers, the camaraderie developed by seeing and supporting each other at regular

THE HYBRID MODEL IS OFTEN A GOOD MIDDLE GROUND TO TEST THE COMFORT LEVELS AND DYNAMICS OF THE GROUP . . .

intervals reinforces a commitment to the group's goals and individual responsibility to follow through on volunteer activities.

In-person meetings require someone to organize the logistics, which can be complex if the meetings move around geographically, can be costly over time,



and include commuting time for members. Conversely, holding open, in-person meetings can allow for drop-in attendees who could be potential members, and can easily accommodate speakers, activities, and other learning opportunities to benefit the group. Often the strongest commitments to action are those made face-to-face.

MODEL 2: Online Meetings

Some parent groups exist only in cyberspace. You could set up a website to serve as an information clearinghouse and to announce events and news, establish a profile and offer frequent updates on one or more social media platforms such as Facebook, start an electronic mailing list for discussion threads, create a Yahoo group, download Skype software and use a webcam to stream yourself talking live over the Internet to another recipient, or simply use e-mail and discussion boards to communicate.

Online groups can keep their set-up costs low; much online communication is free, such as establishing a social media site. Selecting an online-only meeting and communications strategy means that fewer people are needed to coordinate and oversee the organization. Of course, that can be a negative as well, should those persons leave the group. Decisions can be made and input gathered quickly. This model may be especially satisfying to time-pressed young parents who are comfortable with social media and mobile communications, although keep in mind that not all members may have a high comfort level with technology.

MODEL 3: Hybrid Meetings

Your group can conduct most of its business over the Internet through e-mail, conference calls, Skype, or

the like but then gather periodically for special events such as a webinar viewing party, a special speaker presentation, or a back-to-school evening for parents of gifted children. In-person meetings are not held regularly, but might be needed to coordinate projects that the group undertakes or to conduct elections. The hybrid model is often a good middle ground to test the comfort levels and dynamics of the group in terms of technological savviness, online culture-building, and general communication skills. The group would need to balance in-person contact with online connections and monitor whether the group is weaker or stronger as a result of this mixed approach.

Getting organized can seem frustrating when the group really wants to begin accomplishing its goals. But members of longtime parent support groups confirm the importance of these initial organizational decisions. Care and consideration given at the outset in terms of how a group will function can help minimize misunderstanding, confusion, and member burn-out. When group members can see that decisions are made inclusively with all stakeholders and that policies remain consistently and fairly applied, they become more willing to contribute and to work toward group improvement and longevity.

Sustaining Interest Through Meeting Topics

Once your parent group is established, it's time to bring people together around opportunities to learn as well as to share expertise. Most groups use their meetings—whether online or in person—to explore these



In 1989, the director of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music Preparatory Division, which serves gifted musicians ages 4 to 18, finally entertained the idea of an organized parent group. In explaining her previous years of reluctance, she talked about her fears of parents talking together and made some basic conditions abundantly clear to the two founding mothers: The newly formed Prep Parent Council must never be used as a forum to discuss or compare specific teachers or students, competition results should not be touted, and each meeting must be based on a topic that was agreed upon at least 4 weeks in advance.

In retrospect, her rules provided some important boundaries for the group. The parents wrote a simple statement about the council's purpose and guidelines that were acknowledged at the beginning of each gathering (because new parents often attended), and they carefully searched for intriguing topics, presenters, readings, and discussion opportunities. At different meetings, for example, a panel of performers, teachers, and students talked about problems, concerns, and frustrations that impede effective practicing; a noted orthopedist presented information about repetitive stress injuries in musicians; two teachers debated the pros and cons of "Conservatory or College?" after high school; a visiting violinist talked about balancing sports, academics, and music; and vocalist/conductor Bobby McFerrin gave a seminar on creativity.



topics of interest. There are many ways to collect potential topics. As you build a list, consider the different parents who will attend. It's difficult to find subjects appropriate for all, yet it is often possible to incorporate ideas that will offer new information for everyone (e.g., those with very young children, parents new to gifted education, children with specific abilities or challenges, working with the classroom teacher). Experienced parent group leaders have found it helpful to create a meeting committee of two to four members who can scout the possibilities and present a list of suggested topics for the year ahead. This list should circulate among members for comments and prioritization. Here are some ideas to get started on compiling a topic list:

- *Discover what other parents of the gifted have already asked.* You can find that by looking up the ABCs of Gifted in the Parent section of NAGC's website (<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=956>). The headings on that page represent the categorization of more than 4,000 e-mail questions received by NAGC.
- *Track down what's available locally.* In some cases, local experts have made presentations at recent gifted education conferences. Perhaps a presenter from your area would be willing to share his or her presentation with your group. There are likely other local resources for your group, such as testing and assessment experts or school district leaders who can discuss the status of gifted education or the district's plan for supporting advanced students.
- *Watch webinars and then open the meeting for discussion.* Check out NAGC's Webinars on

Wednesday (WOW) archives and calendar (<http://www.nagc.org/WOW.aspx>), as well as the offerings on NAGC's Live Learning Center (<http://www.softconference.com/nagc/default.asp>), which can be an excellent meeting opener.

- *Ask a national expert to speak to the group.* NAGC offers an Expert Speakers Program (<http://www.nagc.org/esp.aspx>) that, for a fee, can bring national experts to a local parent group. Announcing the appearance of a national speaker might be the time for the group to conduct a major membership campaign.

As you plan your meetings, consider how different topics can be approached in a variety of formats: debates, panels, conversations, expert presenters, discussions of readings, webinars, and field trips, among others. A broad topic may be presented, followed by small discussion groups with a narrower emphasis. For example, if the topic is homework, your parent group may want to explore the challenges of perfectionism, stress management, organizational skills, motivation, discipline, or even talking to a teacher about expectations.

There are many options for how you can structure your group to suit your members and circumstances, as well as your goals. It is not necessary to have every detail worked out in the beginning. Creating a parent group is an evolutionary process, which will be successful with strong interest and sustained commitment. ■

Creating a Parent Group is an evolutionary process, which will be successful with strong interest and sustained commitment.

Section 3

BUILDING SUPPORT FOR GIFTED CHILDREN AND Your Local Parent Group

Diana Reeves and Stephanie K. Ferguson



My local parent discussion group, hosted by our state affiliate, has given me a lens through which I can understand my son's behavior. I don't always use that lens, but, when I am looking for something to make sense out of all I see, especially when things are wrong or challenging, more often than not it is the tools and behaviors suggested during those guided discussions that make the most sense.

At first, the idea of a parent discussion group for

just the parents of the gifted students seemed like it might be a bad idea to school administration. But we have come to realize is that it is one of the best things that could have been offered to the school. Participating parents are learning many helpful strategies, as are the teachers. No one in the school is an expert on educating the gifted, and we have found these meetings very valuable. I hope to promote participation throughout the district.



Encouraging key decision makers to buy into the goals of your parent group and needs of your child and other gifted students requires awareness, knowledge, funding, strength in numbers, and creative, unified strategies. You and your group need to cultivate relationships with those who may be influential (and who share common views), as well as engage those who may be uninformed, so that you build a wide, diverse base of support. Note that support can come in many forms: publicity, funding, membership growth, in-kind donations, votes, sponsorships, and volunteer hours, to name a few.

Parent group members must understand both the potential pitfalls and the process of advocating for gifted education. Failing to focus efforts on building continual support can mean issues for what appears to be even the most successful of new parent groups.

Networking With Individuals and Like-Minded Organizations

Membership growth and friendly relationships with influential and supportive individuals and like-minded organizations are vital to attaining your group's goals. All too often, after groups initially form, efforts to organize and plan force membership campaigns to a back-

MEMBERSHIP GROWTH AND FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIPS WITH INFLUENTIAL AND SUPPORTIVE INDIVIDUALS AND LIKE- MINDED ORGANIZATIONS ARE VITAL

burner. This is a mistake. Decision makers are influenced by numbers—the bigger the group, the more seriously the message will be received (although, as mentioned before, even small numbers can bring about change). This makes networking a top priority for any parent group.

There are many ways to meet other interested parents. Begin by talking to the school's gifted education teacher or school counselor. Keep in mind that some school personnel might feel threatened by the thought of parents getting together. Take the time to explain that the group is about connecting families who have gifted children.

In most states, schools cannot give out contact information or even tell you who the gifted students are. However, your child probably knows the other gifted children. These children are often drawn to each other because of their similar abilities, or they may be grouped together for gifted services. Posting a note in the community paper and school newsletter or hanging a flyer at the school inviting interested parents to a meeting can generate interest within a wider circle of parents.

Here are some other ways to locate families who may be interested in joining or supporting your parent group:

- Consider sponsoring meet-ups like those organized by the Oregon Association for Talented and Gifted (<http://oatag.schoolfusion.us/modules/cms/pages.phtml?pageid=139283&sessionid=c9a29d0d63a320d6a5da8915d3006fe1>)



&sessionid=c9a29d0d63a320d6a5da8915d3006fe1).

- Other local organizations may be a source of support; state gifted education associations sponsor outreach opportunities and visit towns and cities throughout their states to link people and share information. Visit the listing of state associations that are affiliated with NAGC (<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=609&gbs>).
- There may already be clubs in your school district that tend to attract gifted students. Get to know the parents of the participating students.

Organize, Launch, Ask, Sponsor, Start YOUR GROUP

- Organize a Toy and Game Festival to which families with gifted children are invited to bring their favorite toys and games. Some parent groups hold Super Saturday events for families, spring symposiums for adults, or events geared for children. The Connecticut Association for the Gifted sponsors popular regional Minds in Motion events on some Saturdays (<http://ctgifted.org/events.htm>).
- Launch an “Each One Reach One” recruitment campaign. With proper permission, the parent group can provide its members with the names and addresses of other parents interested in gifted issues. Parents of newly identified gifted students can be referred to those who have older children and those who have had more experience. As a reward, some parent groups extend existing memberships for recruiting members.
- Ask a parent group member to volunteer on a School Improvement Committee, thereby bringing an advocate for the gifted to the table and inviting interested committee members to attend one of the group’s meetings.
- Sponsor a general meeting with an informational focus. Parents and/or educators who initially gather to learn about a topic of interest will often realize the benefits of working together to influence policy around that topic and join the existing group. When a live presentation is not feasible, groups should consider purchasing a site license and sharing an NAGC webinar (<http://www.nagc.org/wow.aspx>) or other online learning program as the focus for a meeting.
- Start a study group. Members could use articles included in the NAGC *Mile Marker* CD-ROM (<http://www.nagc.org/NAGCMileMarker.aspx>) as fodder for discussion, focusing parents and educators on shared concerns as a way to accelerate understanding and identify possible goals.
- Sponsor “Guided Discussion” groups such as the SENG Model (<http://www.sengifted.org>) for parent groups as a way to create parent-oriented partnerships between group leaders and local school guidance personnel. The result could be improved awareness and enhanced collaboration for both groups.



- Consider starting a professional development program geared toward teachers, parents, and administrators that requires attendees to register in teams consisting of at least one parent, teacher, administrator, and local lawmaker.
- Recruit members to enhance positive perceptions of the group by volunteering to work in school programs that benefit all students, not just those who are gifted.
- Sponsor a program or conference (combining regionally with other parent groups, if feasible) and build the expense of a one-year group membership into the cost of attendance. All attendees then receive a “free” introductory year in which to participate in the work and benefits of the parent group.
- Launch a social media page. This is especially effective for recruiting and serving younger parents, although plenty of parents use this platform regularly.

BUILDING Awareness THROUGH Community Outreach

People who share concerns are often easily converted into advocates. Influencing the general public to support the needs of gifted students requires a somewhat different approach. Parent group members should examine the other groups to which they already belong. They can then help spread the word about the social, emotional, and academic needs of gifted children, as well as solicit new members at school, com-

munity and business meetings, religious congregation gatherings, university classes, and other meetings.

The intent of this type of networking is to foster community recognition of and support for your group’s mission. Reaching out to the broader community not only opens the way for others to advocate for gifted and talented programs, but also may create unexpected and vital educational opportunities for students and community members. Additionally, students who can become constructively and actively involved in the community are their own best advocates.

According to several parent group leaders, the key to successful outreach and, thus, membership growth and public support, is to make sure that people are personally approached to become involved. People don’t want to be a member of a group they just send money to, so face-to-face contact is important. And to have that kind of contact, you need to sometimes reach out to people to invite them to do tasks that you might do more expeditiously yourself. Unless you engage them, they don’t get a taste of what the battle is about or learn how to be leader.

Parent groups around the country have shared the following successful outreach strategies:

- Corporations or community service organizations (e.g., Rotary and Lions clubs, Association of American University Women, League of Women Voters, chambers of commerce) are great places to request sponsorships of student involvement in an activity, either via volunteer hours or financial contributions. Many national enrichment programs geared toward students (e.g., Future Problem Solving Program) offer opportunities for corporate employees to be trained as coaches and judges. This type of partnership is a win-win situation and often results in positive publicity, as well as educational opportunities for both parties.



Susan Dulong Langley, chairperson of the Massachusetts Association for Gifted Education (MAGE), shares her story of outreach: “As the chairperson of an affiliate in a state without mandates to identify or meet the needs of the gifted, I have had to think outside of the box in building community support and developing future leaders. In doing so, I have earned a reputation that might at first seem unfortunate: Newcomers are warned about the ‘dangers’ of sitting next to me at any meeting. Although this may sound negative, it is in fact one compliment I enjoy receiving.

“Why? A significant portion of our leadership at any given time is composed of people who become directly involved after sitting next to me at an event. Results don’t lie. Personally asking for help has proven to be a successful way to thoughtfully and warmly engage newcomers in becoming empowered leaders—to the benefit of not just the organization, but to their own benefit as well. The following should be kept in mind:

- Diversity of talent strengthens the organization. Although you should include professionals from within the field of gifted and talented, also seek those with expertise outside of the field. Their perspectives can be valuable.*
- Leadership should provide the opportunity not only for service to the organization, but also for individual growth of the volunteer.*
- Potential leaders need and deserve support. What might seem like a readily apparent task may be unfamiliar to even the most accomplished professional who is new to the group. It is imperative to not only clearly define expectations, but also to provide direction and support.*
- Camaraderie counts for a lot. Maintaining a thriving organization requires ongoing work and attention to detail, which can become overwhelming in its scope. It is important to make time to get to know each other and socialize beyond the drudgery. The resulting friendships are a special benefit to being a contributing member in advocacy and serve to strengthen the organization.”*

- Local businesses can be solicited to donate raffle or door prize items to be given away at conferences or programs sponsored by your parent group. They might even collaborate to provide scholarships for district teachers to attend gifted education professional development held outside of the district.
- Once you have a regular group of parents who meet or volunteer, educators, administrators, and local elected officials should be invited to participate in your group or in specific program activities.
- Your group should also strive to have representatives on already-existing school councils and committees. It is imperative that you diffuse all “us versus them” mindsets. All stakeholders involved in implementing any potential gifted education program or policy should have a voice in its creation.
- Parents and educators working together can develop community mentorship programs. These opportunities pair students with experts who can help them learn more about topics of interest. The mentors learn more about gifted behaviors, and the students develop not only knowledge of their topics, but also appreciation for how a community works together to provide for its citizens.
- Parent groups in many states honor teachers, community members, parents, media, and students with awards that recognize achievement, support, and advocacy. Contact information about your parent group can be shared when awards are given.
- Many parent groups support and promote the national Nicholas Green Distinguished Student Awards scholar recognition program sponsored by NAGC. Participation is open to all students in grades 3–6 and nomination involves parent





and school collaboration. This national program sheds a positive light on gifted students and has generated supportive local publicity (<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=558>).

- Many advocacy groups have a standing Leadership Development Committee whose task is to actively, and on an ongoing basis, seek new candidates to run for group officers and committee chairs. It is very important to dispel any perception that the group is open only to a select few.

From these suggestions, you can take away that building support and outreach is critical to the ongoing health and vitality of your parent group. From this solid footing, your group is ready for even more influential steps. ■

Parents and educators
working together can
develop community
mentorship programs.

Regarding meetings, some people believe that holding meetings at individual homes can be perceived as elitist or exclusive instead of warm and welcoming. Choose times carefully, too, so that the most people can attend. Many parent groups rotate meeting locations and times to foster maximum attendance. Many businesses, community groups, parks and recreation buildings, or libraries can be asked to provide low-cost or free space for parent meetings. These corporate and community sponsorships can often enhance group credibility. You do, after all, need to be mindful of how other people may perceive your meeting location, so strive to choose a spot that allows maximum inclusion.

SECTION 4



Turning Support Into Advocacy

Diana Reeves

Having raised two gifted children and been an active advocate within our state, I know that time is a commodity in short supply, whether you are a parent or an educator. But immediate action by members is often necessary to create change.

I send out an online newsletter to get the latest gifted information to members, including advocacy efforts at the state and federal levels, the latest articles and research on gifted education, and local resources and events of interest to members of the gifted community. Originally I thought it would be a biweekly or monthly mailing, but it soon became obvious that that would not always be enough.

In the last several years, I have sent out an average of 50 “call-to-action” e-mails annually. When advocacy is needed, I request that our readers send letters, contact representatives, or otherwise make their voices heard. In response to a message I sent alerting our membership to a recent newspaper article perpetuating myths about gifted education in our largest metropolitan newspaper, five letters to the editor from our group were selected to be printed.

Now that you have found others who share your concerns, it is time to advocate for change. Advocacy from the perspective of a parent group simply means speaking or writing (or creating a website, video, or social media page) to promote improved educational opportunities for gifted and talented students at the local, state, or national levels.

Although the concept of advocacy is simple, being an effective advocate is not. Kathy Jones, past president of the Kansas Association for the Gifted, Talented, and Creative, suggests that effective advocates have well-honed traits that allow them to accomplish their goals. They are PRACTICAL: Persistent, Resourceful, Articulate, Creative, Tactful, Informed, Courageous, Aware, and Leaders. An advocacy group should be working toward enabling all members to develop these qualities. When members feel equipped, they will be empowered.



“The biggest hurdle we had was teaching parents how to talk to teachers, the principal, and administrators,” says Pauline Bowie, who founded a parent group for gifted children in Scottsdale, AZ, and now serves on the board of Northwest Gifted Child Association. “They often weren’t very polite. I think a lot of it was because they were frustrated. They felt they weren’t being heard. So we had to do a lot of work to help them to communicate with teachers to get across what their child needs in the classroom without offending or putting the teacher in the position where she feels she has to defend what she’s been doing. The more we can do to help out parent-teacher communication and help parents look at the situation from the teacher’s perspective, the better.” NAGC has a helpful article that looks at ways for parents and teachers to work together to help a gifted student (<http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/CHP/CHP%20-%20fall%2005.pdf>). Other important topics are addressed in *Connecting for High Potential* (<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=944>), which looks at classroom issues from both the parent’s and teacher’s perspective.

Five Steps to Framing an Effective Advocacy Plan

The following are five steps to help your parent group develop an effective advocacy plan:

- *Examine the gifted programs at your district, county, state, or school.* Contrast what you have with current national gifted programming standards and any state or local standards or requirements. (See NAGC’s Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards at <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=546>.) Document both strengths and weaknesses.
- *Establish a rationale.* Connect the local needs of gifted students to policies and best practices. The goal is to communicate to school and elected officials how the program for which you are advocating relates to standards and policies while meeting the unique needs of gifted students in your community.
- *Communicate clearly.* To be successful advocates, a group must have a clear message that is focused on the audience in a position to make the desired change. Crafting and communicating your advocacy message takes patience, skill, and consensus. A parent group should speak with one voice and repeat the message many times. A positive, easily remembered message wrapped around a belief already shared by the target audience is likely to be seen as a solution rather than a problem.
- *Build bridges to administrators.* Realize that school administrators are largely uninformed rather than hostile to the unique needs of advanced learners. Provide articles and other materials (e.g., <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=2423>) geared to them as a means of initiating

ALTHOUGH THE CONCEPT OF ADVOCACY IS SIMPLE,
BEING AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCATE
IS NOT.



ing the conversation. Consider hosting a panel of superintendents who have made gifted education a part of their district offerings at one of your group's meetings. Develop an outreach plan just for these targeted individuals.

- *Network, network, network.* Cultivate friendly relationships with education reporters, home-school groups, families in private and parochial schools, teachers, administrators, and legislative aides. Create a legislative action network with member e-mails so that information and action can be quickly delivered.

Below is additional advice from experienced parent groups regarding the advocacy process:

- Learn about and be able to communicate information about law, policies, best practices, and gifted students that are relevant to your advocacy efforts. Explaining how your state or town compares to others is important. A state gifted education organization can help, as can a visit to the NAGC advocacy website to check out the *State of the States* report and individual state statistics and policies on the state interactive map (<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=37>).
- Strengthen your communications skills. Learn how to conduct a public relations campaign. One great tool is the online NAGC Advocacy Toolkit (<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=36>), which describes how to communicate with reporters, legislators, editors, educators, and people in everyday settings.
- Be able to answer the question, “What does the research say about that (e.g., whatever key issue prompted the advocacy effort)?” Emphasize that Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards already exist; schools and districts do not need to reinvent the wheel!

- Be aware of legislative timetables and calendars, especially budget submission deadlines.
- Understand and respect the chain of command in your child's school and in the district.
- Create a slogan such as, “Every child deserves to learn something new each day,” that allows your members to capture your advocacy goal in a short statement.
- Conduct advocacy training with your parent group members to clarify the primary message, share strategies, and role-play how to communicate that message as briefly as possible to elected officials (sometimes referred to as the “elevator speech”).
- Understand that all advocacy is local—that elected officials want to hear from constituents only.
- Help members understand that change can be slow. Combating member frustration can mean defining success with incremental goals.
- Host “Meet the Candidate” coffees or forums and ask about gifted education policy considerations.
- Determine the target audiences for your messages, tailoring the focus to the audience.
- Get to know your advocacy targets before you make requests. Involve students in shadowing local legislators and presenting their experiences to school boards, PTAs, and other potential allies.
- Invite key decision makers to attend student product showcases, competitions, and award programs.
- Institute an “Adopt-a-Legislator” plan. Group members select one local, state, or national legislator and agree to communicate with that person at least three times a year, keeping him or her apprised of local news and developments related to gifted education concerns.





SUGGESTED Advocacy Resources

- Emphasize the importance of proactive advocacy strategies, even in a climate where gifted children receive services. The advocacy can help to head off future problems.
- Document all communication with school and elected officials. It is important to know who said what, when, and where for follow up as well as to bring new officials up to date on conversations with predecessors.
- Collect personal stories. Legislators, reporters, and administrators are often in need of a way to put proposed programs in a context relevant to the general population. Ask group members to share stories if you have a newsletter or electronic mailing list. Archive them online for easy access by the media.
- Match advocacy responsibilities to the talents, interests, and passions of your parent volunteers.
- Be sure to credit jobs well done. Thank people with whom you have had meetings; reward dedicated advocates with public recognition.

Building support takes clear goals and the ability to convince others to share them. A powerful and memorable message, careful planning, and in-person advocacy as well as general advocacy through the media will result in a growing realization of and support for providing appropriate educational options for gifted students. Our children will thank us. ■

- **Advocacy: Communicating Powerful and Timely Advocacy Messages**
BY JULIA L. ROBERTS and Tracy F. Inman
(http://www.nagc.org/PHP_June09Web/Advocacy.html)
- **EFFECTIVE ADVOCATES: Find “Kindred Spirits”**
BY JULIA L. ROBERTS and Tracy F. Inman
(<http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Advocacy/5.1%20PHP%20Effective%20Advocates%20-%20Find%20Kindred%20Spirits.pdf>)
- **Home and School Report: Be Practical: Effective Advocacy in Small-Town America**
BY KATHY JONES
(http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/PHP/PHP_Article_Archive/2003/March/Be%20Practical%202003%20March.pdf)
- **MYTHS ABOUT GIFTED EDUCATION: DISPELLING MYTHS, Serving Students BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR GIFTED CHILDREN**
(<http://www.nagc.org/myths.aspx>)

Section 5

Next Steps: Starting the Journey

Kristin Clarke

As a first-time parent, I learned in my parent group how to navigate the school system, what I might expect from the developmental milestones of other highly to potentially gifted children, and opportunities such as scholarships, schools, and special-interest camps. My son gained social skills and friends, even soul mates, as well as challenges such as engineer days, Odyssey of the Mind, and contests. And he learned how to be a leader, how to use his gifts to help others.

Now it's your turn. You have the foundation and an array of success stories that show the incredible influence possible by as few as 8–10 passionate, organized parents in small communities and large states nationwide. You can indeed have a strong say in how your gifted child will and won't be challenged and prepared for lifelong learning and success.

You also have guidance from experienced parent group leaders that will let you take a breath and work past the “how-do-I-even-start?” nerves. It's true that founding a parent group takes work, but what is worth



more than your child's future? Plus, you are not alone—or you won't be once word spreads that a group for the gifted is forming.

And finally, you have plenty of how-to tips and from-the-trenches advice about how to sustain your parent group, so everyone's hard work doesn't die as soon as some of the children graduate high school. Don't forget to access the resources in Appendix C as well—you are not lacking for tools, templates, models, advice, and reasons to move forward!

So please get a pen or sit at your computer and start making your own list. Begin by asking yourself these questions, and soon you'll be celebrating the launch of your first parent group.

- Am I willing to try to unite a group of parents of gifted children for the benefit of my child and theirs?
- What do I personally hope to accomplish with a parent group? Is it likely that others will want to achieve the same?
- Am I ready to be a bridge builder—with my child's teacher, with other parents, with administrators, and beyond?
- Do I have all of the information I need to move forward? If not, have I turned to recognized sources for help?
- What barriers might be holding me back and how can I resolve them?
- Finally, am I ready to start alerting people about a newly forming parent group right now? When exactly will I create a flyer, place a small ad, or make some calls to potential members?

Congratulations! You are officially a founder, just as hundreds of other parents who love their gifted children and are committed to their futures have been. Use their wisdom and lessons, tap into the ever-expanding resources for parent groups, reach out to others for help, and keep reminding yourself that you are doing everything possible to ensure the long-term success of your son or daughter. ■

Got It Done: More Parent Group Success Stories

Here are some other examples of what parent groups have been able to accomplish:

- In Connecticut, a parent group was concerned that its school district historically did not have children in grades 6 and 7 progressing in math as fast as it thought they should, and no option existed for gifted youngsters to learn at their own pace. The group worked with the district to allow sixth graders who tested well to go straight into honors algebra (normally offered in eighth grade) in seventh grade.
- When Pauline Bowie started a small parent group for gifted children in Scottsdale, AZ, the 40,000-student district had no gifted education coordinator. She called the superintendent's office and scheduled a meeting to talk about gifted programs, requesting that all assistant supervisors be there. Amazingly, four of the five assistant superintendents showed up. With great diplomatic tact, the parent group representatives then conducted a meeting that resulted in a rich to-do list for everyone, who reported back monthly to the others. Eventually, those meetings and a public forum that attracted about 40 other parents led to the hiring of a coordinator.
- A parent group in Massachusetts succeeded in bringing the nationally recognized Future Problem Solving Program to the state. It also started the New England regional conference for gifted education that is now in its 16th year. The conference, which includes education sessions and speakers for parents, teachers, and others involved with the gifted, covers a wide range of issues, including advocacy.

APPENDIX A

TIPS at a Glance FOR New Parent Groups

As you develop your group and bolster your membership, keep the following tips in mind.

Organizational TIPS

- Start small and think big. Yes, much needs to be done, but this is your child you're focusing on, and a parent group is well worth the effort when you're trying to build the best future for your bright daughter or son. Setting realistic goals and prioritizing activities should keep the work manageable (and maybe even fun!).
- Look for the holes, weaknesses, or inconsistencies in services and curricula, and choose your group's activities accordingly.
- Understand that part of your job as a parent group is to dispel the many myths about gifted learners. "It's not a sympathetic issue," states Pennsylvania parent group leader Todd McIntyre. "When parents go to school boards, you have to understand that it's like advocating for the good-looking. There's a misconception that gifted kids will turn out fine. That's not necessarily the case, so the first issue is convincing them that there is a problem."
- Include parents of able learners who may not have been identified as gifted; they are also looking for high-end curriculum and enrichment activities for their children. Again, the number of people involved can make a huge difference in the speed with which an issue is addressed.
- Invite teachers or a teacher representative to join your group.
- Knowledge is power. Learn as much as you can about the nature and needs of gifted students and what the research says about them.
- Divide tasks into smaller elements so no one is carrying too big of a load. Consider having co-presidents and co-chairs. Look for people to serve off-board (e.g., retired teachers, art teachers, young moms) to help with the myriad details of various activities.
- Send your group's newsletter to school board members, legislators, media, and other influential people. Also send the newsletter to the president and/or newsletter editor for parent groups in other school districts and ask them to return the favor.
- Develop and distribute a brochure about your organization. Include brief information on the nature and needs of high-ability learners (e.g., book lists, myths about gifted kids). Place the brochures at preschools, private and school psychologists' offices, children's museums, libraries, public and private schools, chess competitions, and any place parents of the gifted might congregate.
- Make your meetings meaningful, and it's worth repeating a dozen times—do not let your meet-



ings become personal horror storytelling time. Nothing kills a group faster! Consider a more positive way to let parents share their frustrations with the school system. Move parents toward fact-finding and creative problem solving. (See *Building an Accepting Culture: Ground Rules for Parent Groups* in Appendix B for discussion about this important topic.)

- Keep any organizational bylaws very simple and flexible.
- Celebrate your successes!

IMPLEMENTATION TIPS

- Determine your nonnegotiables for educational programming in the district and choose your battles carefully. Stay polite and persistent. Understand that sometimes compromise really is the only way forward.
- Remember that gifted students have varying abilities, interests, and needs. What is right for your child may not be in the best interest of another student. (That's why school systems need to offer an array of services.)
- Consider asking the superintendent to form a Task Force for Gifted and High-Ability Learners with parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders. Working together, these groups can find creative solutions to educating our brightest students.
- Learn consensus building. It is a skill that must be mastered to ensure maximum positive

change. Don't just assume you can find middle ground without knowing how to listen well, ask probing questions that clarify core concerns and values, and offer creative ideas and options. Your library will have books that should help. If you are going to host a meeting on a particularly sensitive topic (e.g., testing, twice-exceptional students, culturally or linguistically diverse populations), use a good facilitator.

- Piggyback speakers and programs. Contact local chambers of commerce, school systems, state gifted organizations, and other organizations to see when they have a noteworthy, relevant speaker scheduled so that you can also invite the person to present to your group's members. Individual schools or classes may want to invite the speaker to work with their students, too. Local bookstores can be excellent resources for speakers as well, as many host visiting authors who are promoting their books.
- Review your district's and school's organizational charts and learn the chain of command. You will avoid wasting time talking to the wrong people.
- Learn to practice "quiet lobbying." Become acquainted with key administrators (e.g., curriculum supervisors, directors of finance, directors of professional development). Share your information, concerns, and ideas with them. Listen to their responses. Much is decided outside of school board meetings, and you can build strong relationships and create a lot of positive

You can BUILD STRONG relationships
and create a LOT OF POSITIVE CHANGE
over a FEW CUPS OF COFFEE . . .





change over a few cups of coffee and this type of nonconfrontational approach.

- Familiarize yourself and the group with the school district calendar and process for decision making (e.g., budget hearings, public hearings on program changes, committees that recommend curricular changes).
- Reiterate that only the president or designee speaks publicly for the organization.
- Serve on relevant school district committees.
- Avoid getting caught up in school district personnel conflict and inside political battles.
- Expand your advocacy efforts for reform initiatives that impact gifted students but may not be part of the gifted program: higher academic standards, the International Baccalaureate program, Advanced Placement classes, flexible pacing, and mentorship programs.

- Keep an eye out for early signs of change that might positively or negatively impact gifted students so your group can act proactively. It is easier to prevent than undo.
- Seek common ground with those who appear to oppose gifted education services.
- Avoid confrontation and try to be seen as reasonable negotiators. Ask questions and do not back yourself into a corner.
- Be sensitive to the pressures school district personnel are dealing with. Remember that gifted is just one piece of the educational pie, and the financial resources to build that pie are dwindling at the same time student diversity and needs are increasing.
- Especially important is to remember that schools and school districts are unique. Find your niche! ■

APPENDIX B



BUILDING an ACCEPTING CULTURE: GROUND RULES FOR PARENT GROUPS

Kristin Clarke

Groups are composed of people with different experiences, personalities, talents, biases, and opinions. Therefore, discussion can get animated, especially when conversation focuses on what is best for our children.

Groups of parents of the gifted often have the same challenges of building consensus, sharing constructive criticism, debating options, focusing passionate energy, and prioritizing actions that other gatherings do. That's OK! In fact, it would be worrisome if no one spoke up.

That said, though, no one likes to waste their time in meetings that get out of control, hurt people's feelings, or don't rein in rudeness and domineering behavior. Based on advice from experienced parent group leaders, below are some suggestions that may help your new parent group stay on task and build positive energy.

- *Establish a group culture.* Have a conversation about the kind of culture you want to establish within the group. Make this purposeful and commit to it.
- *Be sure to keep it positive.* Don't trash-talk individual teachers, fellow parents, school board members, and other potential partners. An "us versus them" culture within a parent group is negative, frustrating, and generally unsuccessful

in reaching its goals. Remember that learning and outreach are best accomplished with a calm, open mind.

- *Be constructive.* Disagreement is fine; disrespect is not. Keep meetings—both internal and external—cordial.
- *Skip the competition.* Everyone's child is unique. Thus, there is no need for any sharing or comparing of test scores, grades, or other quantifying rankings of your son or daughter.
- *Share your findings.* Many group members benefit when individuals share knowledge, ideas, or contacts that have been helpful in supporting their gifted children.
- *Have some fun.* Parent groups form because people love their children and want to do their best by them, so you already have a meaningful connection in the making. Allow time at group meetings for members to talk about the joys of parenting gifted and talented children, not just the battles. Celebrate your successes—as a group and as individual parents—and consider how you might inject some lighter moments into the meetings and establish a relaxing environment in which to converse. Always remember, it's about what's best for the kids. ■

APPENDIX C

Resources: What's Available for Parent Groups



Tracy Ford Inman and Jennifer L. Jolly

Parents who want to start and maintain effective parenting groups should be prepared with ideas and general knowledge about gifted children and gifted education, research-based information and strategies, and awareness of current trends.

Most parents are not gifted education experts (although you may feel that way after a few years of work within your district's education system!), and time is a precious commodity, so the choice of what publications and resources to read and trust can be difficult. This section offers a launch site.

Written by leading experts and respected professionals, these websites, publications, and blogs are filled with research and practical strategies for establishing and maintaining supportive advocacy groups for gifted children, as well as parenting these exceptional youngsters. Obviously, this list is not exhaustive, but it is a helpful place to begin and to which you can refer others. Consider using it to prompt discussion of other resources that parents in your new group have found interesting and important.

WEBSITES

National Association for Gifted Children

(<http://www.nagc.org>)

The National Association for Gifted Children is the leading voice for advocacy for gifted children in the United States. Because of its wide scope and long history within the field of serving gifted children, its ever-expanding site is filled with incredible information. A prime example is the Advocacy Toolkit with dozens of pages and links—all aimed at helping parents become effective advocates.

There are other websites to which you can go for specific information about different aspects of giftedness, gifted education strategies, forming parent groups, and advocating for your gifted child. NAGC has compiled a list of some of these websites to help you start your search (<http://www.nagc.org/index2.aspx?id=6754>).

State gifted education associations have websites with information that can often be very helpful to local parent groups: sample advocacy materials, links to resources, archived newsletters on a host of topics of concern to parents, and suggestions for starting and sustaining local groups. NAGC has several web pages devoted to state associations, including links to the state associations' websites (<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=609&gbs>).



Gifted Exchange

(<http://giftedexchange.blogspot.com>)

Written by Laura Vanderkam, coauthor of *Genius Denied: How to Stop Wasting Our Brightest Young Minds* (2004), this blog discusses gifted children, schooling, parenting, and changing American education for the better.

Ingeniousus

(<http://www.ingeniousus.net/blog>)

Deborah Mersino's blog is a powerful resource. She tackles issues head-on and offers a rich list of web resources. Whether she's discussing social networking or math challenges, her blog is informative, current, and relevant to the real world.

Prufrock Press

(<http://resources.prufrock.com/tabid/56/Default.aspx> and <http://resources.prufrock.com/tabid/57/Default.aspx>)

Prufrock Press manages two blogs from its website: the Gifted Education Blog by Joel McIntosh and the Gifted Child Info Blog by Carol Fertig. These blogs chronicle articles, book chapters, lists of upcoming gifted education events, links to other important gifted education websites, and ongoing discussions about gifted education and gifted children.

CD-ROM

Mile Marker Series, National Association for Gifted Children (<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=3546>)

An indispensable resource created by dedicated NAGC parent advocates, this CD-ROM series is for all parents of gifted children, regardless of where they are in their parenting journey. Designed to be web-interactive and 100% individualized, the series features a “driver” navigating the roads of his choice, discovering answers and gaining insights along the way. From Dis-

covering Differences (Mile Marker 1) to Making a Difference (Mile Marker 5), this experience encompasses parent-friendly advice, articles, and resources.

Clinkenbeard, P. R., Kolloff, P. B., & Lord, E. W. (2007). *A guide to state policies in gifted education* [CD-ROM]. Washington, DC: National Association for Gifted Children. (<https://www.nagc.org/nagc2/ngshopper/>)

Most opportunities for significant progress in gifted education come at the state level. NAGC's Task Force on State Policy created this guide to state policy language to assist advocates as they push to create state policies that support gifted education. This CD has live links to the actual state policy language.

Books and Print Resources

Baum, S. M., & Owen, S. V. (2004). *To be gifted and learning disabled: Strategies for helping bright students with learning and attention difficulties.* Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press.

Children who have multiple exceptionalities tend to struggle in school. Their giftedness allows them to create coping skills that can mask the learning difficulty. At the same time, the learning difficulty prohibits them from demonstrating their giftedness or even achieving basic skills. This book examines the paradox, looks at the theory and research behind it, and provides strategies to cope with it.

Castellano, J., & Frazier, A. D. (Eds.). (2010). *Special populations in gifted education: Understanding our most able students from diverse backgrounds.* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

This work, written by leading experts in their areas, devotes each of its 20 chapters to a particular aspect of special populations. For example, one chapter



When Parent Groups are Involved in Advocacy and Support for Their Gifted Children, Change Happens

explores early identification and development from infancy onward. Other chapters examine populations based on ethnicity. The plight of twice-exceptional children, including an entire chapter devoted to autism, is discussed as are the special challenges facing children who speak English as a second language. Designed for educators but applicable to parents, *Special Populations in Gifted Education* should help educators identify and serve these traditionally underrepresented populations—a win for everyone.

Cross, T. (2011). *On the social and emotional lives of gifted children (4th ed.)*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Compiled from columns Tracy Cross wrote for *Gifted Child Today*, this important read provides sensitive insight into the social and emotional lives of the gifted. Cross encourages support for these children and suggests ways to do that effectively. Although his ideas are based on research, he presents them in a nonthreatening, practical way.

Jolly, J. L., Treffinger, D. J., Inman, T. F., & Smutny, J. F. (Eds.). (2011). *Parenting gifted children: The authoritative guide from the National Association for Gifted Children*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

No home of gifted children should be without *Parenting Gifted Children*. Gleaned from the best articles

of *Parenting for High Potential*, this resource explores myriad topics from the social-emotional needs of the gifted to advocacy to creativity. With almost 600 pages of insightful information, no school should be without a copy either! For conscientious parents who need answers and advice, this book is a must-have.

Neihart, M., Reis, S. M., Robinson, N. M., & Moon, S. M. (Eds.). (2002). *The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know?* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

This comprehensive book shares expert opinions while examining the social and emotional needs of gifted children. Although research based, the 24-chapter book is readable and enjoyable, exploring such areas as perfectionism, underachievement, peer pressure, gender issues, and overexcitabilities. Another must for parents of extremely bright children.

Neu, T. N., & Weinfeld, R. (2007). *Helping boys succeed in school: A practical guide for parents and teachers*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Current research indicates that fewer boys are graduating from high school and going to college. Not only does this book explore possible reasons for this trend, but it also provides strategies and tips on ways to ensure that boys succeed in school. From bullying



to athletics, the authors examine misconceptions and truths about boys and their learning.

Purcell, J. H., & Eckert, R. D. (Eds.). (2005). *Designing services for high-ability learners: A guidebook for gifted education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Parents shouldn't let the fact that this book seems to be written for educators dissuade them from reading it. For parents to advocate effectively for their children, they must know what high-quality gifted education looks like. This book defines and delineates those characteristics, while providing step-by-step strategic planning ideas to help schools embrace those qualities. Research-driven, yet practical, this is a powerful resource.

Renzulli, J. S., & Reis, S. M. (2009). *Light up your child's mind: Finding a unique pathway to happiness and success*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.

This book encourages parents to find ways to capitalize on their child's strengths. The authors, both of whom are researchers and parents of gifted children, artfully address what education should look like for gifted children. Through practical tips and sensible perspectives, they encourage parents to advocate for their children. The book ends with dozens of pages of minds-on activities guaranteed to challenge any child.

Rimm, S. (2008). *Why bright kids get poor grades and what you can do about it* (3rd ed.). Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.

Founder of a respected clinic for underachievement and a former *Today Show* education consultant, Sylvia Rimm explores underachievement realistically and thoroughly. In addition to explaining the many categories of underachievement, she delves into the possible causes. Most important, however, is her examination of what can be done about it.

Walker, S. Y. (2002). *The survival guide for parents of gifted kids: How to understand, live with, and stick up for your gifted child*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

Written with warm humor, this book carries a title that says it all. Get out your highlighter because you'll be learning basic parenting survival skills, including the "not-so-pretty truth about gifted education," "early walkers, speedy talkers," and the ever-popular "intolerance and the too-smart mouth." In a light-hearted way, this guide helps you gain perspective as you gain knowledge.

Webb, J. T., Amend, E. R., Webb, N. E., Goerss, J., Beljan, P., & Olenchak, F. R. (2005). *Misdiagnosis and dual diagnoses of gifted children and adults: ADHD, bipolar, OCD, Asperger's, depression, and other disorders*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.

A should-be staple in your library, this book provides information on myriad topics: identification, twice-exceptionality, social norms, sibling rivalry, peer pressure, depression, discipline, and characteristics of the gifted. A book that is both practical and current.

BUILDING SUPPORT AND OUTREACH
IS CRITICAL TO THE ONGOING HEALTH
AND VITALITY OF YOUR PARENT GROUP.



START WITH THE BASICS AND UNDERSTAND THAT BUILDING A PARENT GROUP FOR YOUR CHILDREN IS A JOURNEY

Magazine

Parenting for High Potential (<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=1180>)

Published quarterly by NAGC, it is the leading magazine for parents with gifted children and an NAGC parent membership benefit.

Other Resources

Avacilla, L., Borish, E., Cooper, P., Hester, J., Milner, V., Myers, R., & Thomas, J. (2008). *Parent groups: Practical pathways for stability and growth*. Retrieved from http://www.txgifted.org/files/pdf/Parent_Groups_-_Practical_Pathways_for_Stability_and_Growth.pdf

This document records some of the problems and successes experienced by a new, but quickly growing parent group, Parents Advocating for Gifted Education, in Keller, TX.

Colangelo, N., Assouline, S. G., & Gross, M. U. M. (2004). *A nation deceived: How schools hold back America's brightest students* (Vol. 1). Iowa City: The University of Iowa, The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development. (http://www.acceleration-institute.org/Nation_Deceived)

This seminal study examines the research conducted on student acceleration in the past 50 years. Few educators support acceleration even though, according to *A Nation Deceived*, it is the most cost-efficient and easily implemented service for gifted children. This

powerful tool should be in the homes of all parents of gifted children—and placed in the hands of educators, administrators, and school board members as well.

Connecting for High Potential (<http://www.nagc.org/CHP.aspx>)

Parents and teachers are working with the same child, but often see problems and opportunities differently. *Connecting for High Potential* appears quarterly in *Compass Points*, NAGC's member e-newsletter, and looks at an educational or behavioral situation from both the parent and teacher perspectives and suggests ways for the two to work together.

Kentucky Association for Gifted Education. (2006). *Chapter development handbook*. Bowling Green, KY: Author. (<http://www.wku.edu/kage/chapters.html/chapterhandbook.pdf>)

This handbook helps parents start and promote local chapters of the Kentucky Association for Gifted Education. There is helpful information here for parents starting parent groups around the country, as well as suggestions for meeting topics and family events.

Loveless, T., Farkas, S., & Duffett, A. (2008). *High-achieving students in the era of NCLB*. Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute. (http://www.edexcellence.net/detail/news.cfm?news_id=732&id=130)

This report argues that America is closing the achievement gap but not in the most effective way. Lower achieving students are moving up, while high-



achieving students remain essentially stagnant. Showing hard data, this resource speaks volumes to people interested in education.

Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented. (2008). *Handbook for starting a chapter.* Edina, MN: Author. (http://www.mcgt.net/Handbook-Starting_a_Chapter.pdf)

In addition to information on how to form a chapter, specifically of the Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented, this resource provides a start-up timeline as well as a sample invitation, press releases, and parent survey.

National Association for Gifted Children. (2010). *Pre-k–grade 12 gifted programming standards.* Washington, DC: Author. (<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=546>)

Advocates must know what high-quality gifted education looks like if they are to make positive changes in their schools, districts, and states. The NAGC Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards are designed for use by districts to develop quality services for gifted children. The standards should be a primary reference for school districts.

VanTassel-Baska, J., & Stambaugh, T. (Eds.). (2007). *Overlooked gems: A national perspective on low-income promising learners.* Washington, DC: National Association for Gifted Children. (<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=1719>)

This monograph, developed at a ground-breaking conference, distills decades of research on how to bring out the best in high-ability students from disadvantaged backgrounds and, with the input from conference attendees, maps out priorities for action. The con-

ference was cosponsored by NAGC and the Center for Gifted Education at The College of William and Mary, and was funded by the Jack Kent Cook foundation. Leading authorities from outside of the field brought a rich dimension to the conference.

Plucker, J. A., Burroughs, N., & Song, R. (2010). *Mind the (other) gap! The growing excellence gap in K–12 education.* Bloomington: Indiana University, Center for Evaluation and Education Policy. (<https://www.iub.edu/~ceep/Gap/excellence/ExcellenceGapBrief.pdf>)

This study examines National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data and argues that excellence gaps—the “differences between subgroups of students performing at the highest levels of achievement” (p. 1)—are growing. Ending with a list of recommendations, *Mind the (Other) Gap!* should be shared with all decision makers.

Wyner, J. S., Bridgeland, J. M., & DiIulio, J. J. (2010). *Achievement trap: How America is failing millions of high-achieving students from lower-income families.* Lansdowne, VA: Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. ([http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Advocacy_and_Legislation/Equity_and_Excellence/Achievement_Trap%20\(JKC\).pdf](http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Advocacy_and_Legislation/Equity_and_Excellence/Achievement_Trap%20(JKC).pdf))

This ground-breaking study argues that lower income students score lower and lose more educational ground than their wealthier classmates. Only 28% of students in the top quartile of first grade are lower income, and just 56% of them will remain high achievers by fifth grade. They virtually disappear in high school. This report examines the causes and harm of losing this valuable population. It can be a powerful tool for you and your parent group. ■

WITH GUIDANCE AND DETERMINATION, YOUR PARENT GROUP WILL MATURE INTO AN ENTITY THAT CAN CREATE POSITIVE CHANGE FOR YOUR GIFTED CHILD AND HIS OR HER SAME-ABILITY PEERS.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Kristin Clarke, the mother of a gifted high school student, is a business journalist and editor for the American Society of Association Executives. She formerly wrote a column in *Parenting for High Potential* and takes on occasional freelance projects.

Katie Augustyn served as president of the Connecticut Association for the Gifted (CAG) from 2004–2010 and is co-chair of the 2010 New England Conference on Gifted/Talented Education. Katie currently serves as treasurer of the NAGC board, and was the parent representative on the board from 2008–2010. As with many parents, Katie's interest in gifted education began when her son, who is now a sophomore at Union College, started school. She has taken graduate courses in gifted education and attended numerous conferences and workshops on the topic. Katie is passionate about advocating for gifted and talented children and helping their families and schools meet students' educational and social and emotional needs.

Pauline Bowie served on the board of the Arizona Association for Gifted and Talented, founded the largest parent support group in Arizona, and was a member of the NAGC Parent Task Force. She is currently the chair of NAGC Parent and Community Network, board member of the Northwest Gifted Child Association, and a consultant to parent groups. She speaks at state and national gifted conferences and school board and parent group meetings. Pauline's interest in gifted children began when her son, a college graduate, was

identified as gifted in the fourth grade. Her passion is to assist parents of gifted children to organize and advocate for their children.

Stephanie K. Ferguson (formerly Nugent) is Executive Director of Early College and Director of the Program for the Exceptionally Gifted (PEG) at Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, VA. Stephanie has 10 years of middle and secondary teaching experience in general and gifted education as well as academic counseling; education faculty positions at various universities and colleges; and numerous presentations and publications at the state, regional, national, and international levels. Her research interests include single-gender educational settings, advocacy for the gifted, moral development, integrating the affective domain in curricula, radical acceleration/early entrance, and developing teacher leaders. She is the proud stepparent of a gifted son.

Tracy Ford Inman is associate director of the Center for Gifted Studies at Western Kentucky University and current chair of the *Parenting for High Potential (PHP)* Editorial Advisory Board. She has taught at the high school and collegiate levels, as well as in summer programs for gifted and talented youth. In addition to writing and co-writing several articles, Tracy has co-authored two books with Julia Link Roberts and co-edited a book compilation of the best of *PHP*.

Jennifer L. Jolly is an assistant professor in elementary and gifted education at Louisiana State University.



Jennifer's research interests include the history of gifted education and parents of gifted children. She serves as editor-in-chief of NAGC's *Parenting for High Potential*. Before becoming a professor at LSU, Jennifer taught in both gifted and regular education classrooms as a public school teacher in Texas.

Christy D. McGee is an associate professor of education at Bellarmine University. She is an active member of NAGC, having served as chair of the Curriculum Studies Network and a member of the Parent Advisory Committee; she is currently chair-elect of the Parent and Community Network. Christy is a part of the team that developed NAGC's *Mile Marker Series* for parent and teachers of the gifted. She has written and presented in the areas of gifted education and teacher education reform.

Diana Reeves is a parent; teacher of third grade at the Gordon School in East Providence, RI; university instructor; education consultant; and advocate for gifted children. She has served as president and chairperson of the Massachusetts Association for Gifted Education and is now the co-chair of its legislative action committee. She served as a parent member on the NAGC board, and is currently the co-chair of the NAGC Parent Advisory Committee. Diana helped to develop NAGC's *Mile Marker Series* for parents and teachers, and recently received the NAGC Community Service Award. Her long-term involvement with gifted

children and their families confirms her belief that parent power is a potent, largely untapped, renewable energy source fueling educational change.

Robin Schader volunteers as the Parent Resource Specialist for NAGC and is a regular contributor to *Parenting for High Potential*. As an assistant professor at the University of Connecticut, her research and teaching focused on parental influence in talent development. Robin continues to write and speak about ways parents and teachers can work together in recognizing and supporting high-ability children.

Terry Stetson Wilson lives in central Florida, where her involvement with gifted advocacy began when her son was identified for the gifted program in kindergarten. Terry has served as the president of her countywide gifted support group and chair of the school district's gifted advisory group. She has served on numerous Florida Department of Education gifted eligibility rule revision committees and the statewide gifted advisory group. She was the director of Parents for Able Learner Students, now called the Florida Gifted Network (FGN), a statewide organization focusing efforts on providing resource information for parents and advocacy for gifted programs. Terry was the recipient of the 1995 NAGC Parent of the Year award and the 1998 NAGC Community Service Award. Terry is currently president of FGN and a board member of the Coalition for the Education of Exceptional Students. ■

