

GATE
DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Inform - Educate - Engage



**Speaking Up For Your Gifted Child:
Strategies and Tips for Parent-Teacher Conferences**

By Mary Ann Hawke Ph.D.

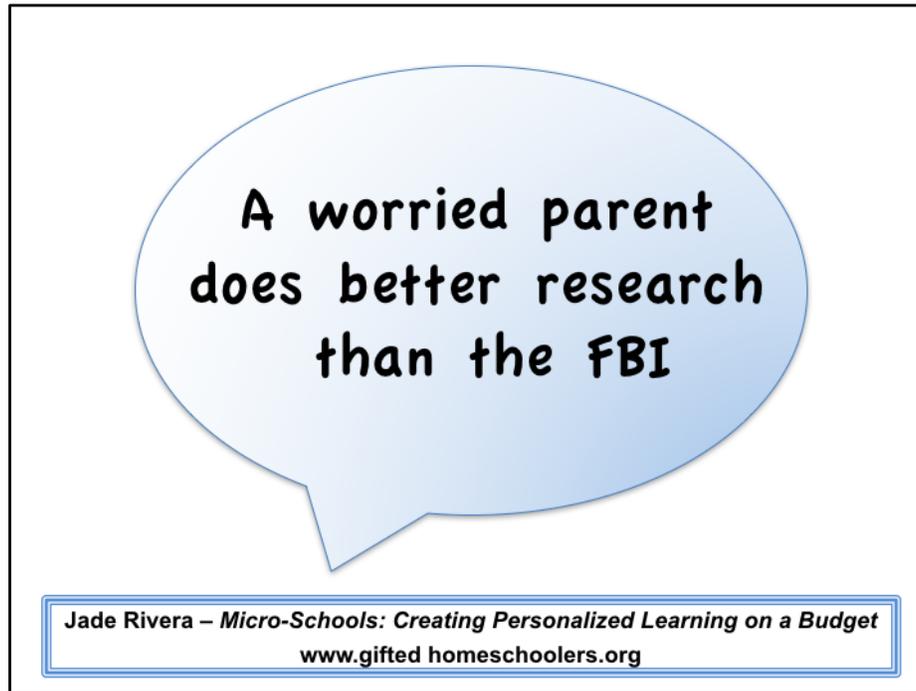
October 2019

It's October and that means it's time for Parent-Teacher Conferences!

To prepare you, I've pulled together valuable information about what to know, what to look for, and what to ask.

I'm also providing some ideas for how to get involved in advocating, not just for your own child but for GATE in general.

That's because your child's GATE experience is embedded in the larger context of gifted education at both the district and state level.



More than ever, parents need to be informed about what is going on in schools. Education in California is undergoing a massive reform, and it has direct impacts on your child. Parent engagement is built into this new system, so parents cannot complain if they don't bother to get informed, and get involved!

Since the laws changed in California beginning in 2013-14, **"All GATE is Local"** and parents need to be able to advocate for their own child and other GATE students in the District, especially those under-represented in gifted programs, who may not have the ability to self-advocate.

With the LCFF legislation, California moved away from a highly centralized funding scheme, based mostly on categorical funding (i.e., where pots of money were earmarked for specific purposes) to a new participatory framework whereby school districts are expected - and supported - **to engage in consultation with their local communities**, unions and staff to determine their core priorities in relation to ten priorities and fund accordingly.

Parents have a strong voice, and if they don't use it, they will lose it!

The State of GATE in California

Does the state:

- Mandate identification for gifted & talented education? **No**
- Mandate services for gifted & talented education? **No**
- Provide guidance for identifying gifted & talented students? **Yes**
- Have a policy requiring districts to recognize gifted eligibilities from other districts in the same state? **No state policy, up to LEA (District) to determine**
- Have a policy permitting early entrance to kindergarten? **State policy leaves LEA to determine**
- Have an acceleration policy? **State policy leaves LEA to determine**
- Require general education teachers to receive training on gifted students after initial teacher certification is attained? **No**
- Require professionals working in specialized gifted ed programs to have a gifted ed endorsement or certification? **No Information Provided**
- Monitor/audit LEA programs for gifted & talented students? **No**
- Report on the achievement or learning growth of gifted students? **No**

Source: NAGC <https://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/gifted-state/california>

Key message: there are currently no state laws that support GATE and now it is all controlled locally - **so the school district has all the POWER**. LEA = Local Education Agency i.e., a school district.

The Guidance is still available online, so districts can still use it, but nothing in it is mandatory or required. See <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/gt/lw/index.asp>

The new process requires each district to develop a **Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)** in consultation with parents, the community, staff and other key stakeholders, and to submit it annually to their local county office for approval. See Fullan's *Golden Opportunity Report* (2017) at <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3988292-LCFF-Fullan-Report090417.html> for an explanation of these changes and the expected impacts.

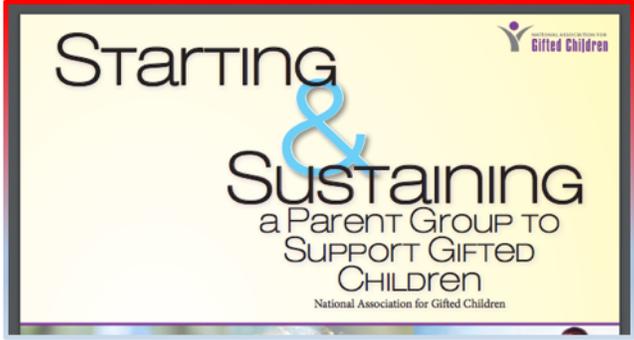
Every parent should be familiar with the LCAP and what is in it because it tells you what the District's priorities are and how they are budgeting for those (or not). A short user-friendly version is available online at <https://www.sandiegounified.org/what-lcap>. During the 2019-20 school year, work will begin on the next 3-year plan, so GDAC and GATE parents have an important role to play in making sure that GATE is included in the new plan.



With LCFF (Local Control) parent's voices are more powerful than ever! Our District makes its own decisions about priorities and funding and they are required to get community input on those decisions, so **speak up and make your voice heard!**

Here are some ideas for ways to become engaged at your school:

- Who sits on your school site governance team (aka the **SSC – School Site Council**)? Forge ties with the **PTA**. Both groups help determine school priorities and how the money is spent. GATE really needs to have a voice on the SSC.
- Who from your school attends your **Cluster meetings**? Is GATE being represented? Find out when your Cluster meets at <https://www.sandiegounified.org/clusters>
- Get to know your **Board of Education** trustee – they are elected officials and often attend Cluster meetings. If they are not doing their job then vote them out. Challenge their views on GATE. There are efforts to set term limits for Board trustees, and change the way they are elected - see the San Diego Grand Jury report at <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/grandjury/reports/2016-2017/SchoolBoardElectionsReport.pdf>
- Start a "**GATE Matters**" **postcard campaign** with GATE families at your school. GDAC has hundreds of printed postcards to provide for this effort. Or write letters to your Board trustee or Cindy Marten.
- Attend Board meetings with a friend, and use the **public testimony** feature to get 2-3 mins each to speak directly to the Board about supporting GATE.



The image shows the cover of an e-book titled "Starting & Sustaining a Parent Group to Support Gifted Children" published by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). The cover features a yellow background with a red border. The title is written in a mix of black and blue fonts. A small logo for "Gifted Children" is in the top right corner. Below the title, it says "National Association for Gifted Children".

“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.”

<https://www.nagc.org/get-involved/advocate-high-ability-learners/advocate-your-child>

From the NAGC e-book on creating a parent group found at <http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Parent%20CK/Starting%20and%20Sustaining%20a%20Parent%20Group.pdf>

This document is a great toolkit for how to develop strong advocacy in schools.

- Encourage other GATE parents to get involved, by attending the GATE DAC meetings or doing some of the other advocacy actions provided in this presentation.
- Or start a GATE book club or study group (or informal meet-up group) at your school and meet with other GATE parents to discuss the challenges and joys of parenting and schooling gifted children! GDAC can provide suggestions for readings that will spark conversation.
- Join advocacy organizations like the **California Association for the Gifted** (cagifted.org) or the **National Assoc. for Gifted Children** (NAGC at nagc.org) and **Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted** (SENG). There is strength in numbers and these groups need the support.



Source: NAGC <https://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/nagc-publications/connecting-high-potential/connecting-high-potential-issu-21>
This link points to a great 3-pg handout on Parent-Teacher Conferences, from the perspective of both parents and teachers.

Too often, high achieving students seem to be “doing fine” and don’t raise any issues for the teacher so some teachers don’t bother to have conferences with parents of the top students, and that is wrong. You don’t know if your kiddo is engaged, bored, or just coasting, or if they are actually being challenged to stretch a little and reach a bit beyond their comfort zone, which is where deep learning occurs. Ask questions and don’t fall for the “no news must be good news” thinking.

Be sure to go into a parent-teacher conference with a printed list of questions to ask and make notes on what is said (and keep those in your records). We’ve provided you with a printed sheet to take in with you for this purpose. Also be sure to set some “action items” that need to be followed up on later, and remember to follow through and revisit those to see that they’ve been addressed.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

- Prepare ahead!
- Print out your school's **GATE Program Summary** – are they doing what they promise to do?
- Review the differences between the general education and GATE classrooms.
- Use our handout to guide the conversation and document by writing down notes.
- Follow up later to be sure action items are completed.

Be sure you are familiar with your school's **GATE Program Summary** – available online here: <https://www.sandiegounified.org/school-site-cluster-andor-seminar-program-information> Is it up to date? Is the school actually implementing the GATE Best Practices they've checked the box for?

Familiarize yourself with GATE educational strategies so you know the jargon - see the glossary at <http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/glossary-terms>

Understand what a gifted classroom looks like, and how it differs from a general education classroom.

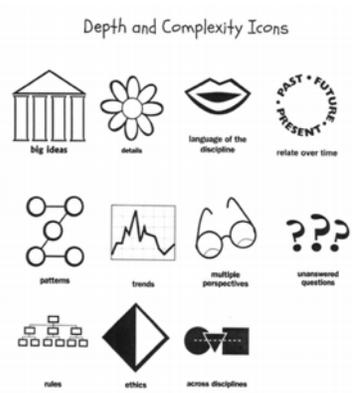
Take our handout with you to the conference and use it to make notes. Note the specific questions about growth, assessment, strengths and weaknesses. No matter where your child's starting point is (even if it is already quite advanced) you should see improvement and growth from there. Every child deserves a year's worth of growth!

Remember to ask about social-emotional as well as academic growth. Ask how you can partner with the teacher to help your child, or volunteer to help in the classroom.

A high quality gifted class will noticeably **“differentiate”** (change, enhance) activities to match the characteristics, preferences and passions of gifted students.

Teachers can differentiate through **Content, Process, Product, or Learning Environment**

Taking into account a student’s **Readiness, Interests, and Learning Style.**



The image displays a grid of 12 icons titled "Depth and Complexity Icons". The icons are arranged in three rows and four columns. The first row includes: a classical building labeled "big ideas", a flower labeled "details", a mouth labeled "language of the discipline", and a circular arrow labeled "past • future • present" with "relate over time" below it. The second row includes: a network of nodes labeled "patterns", a line graph labeled "trends", a pair of glasses labeled "multiple perspectives", and three question marks labeled "unanswered questions". The third row includes: a hierarchical tree labeled "rules", a diamond shape labeled "ethics", and a globe labeled "across disciplines".

Developed by Sandra Kaplan at USC

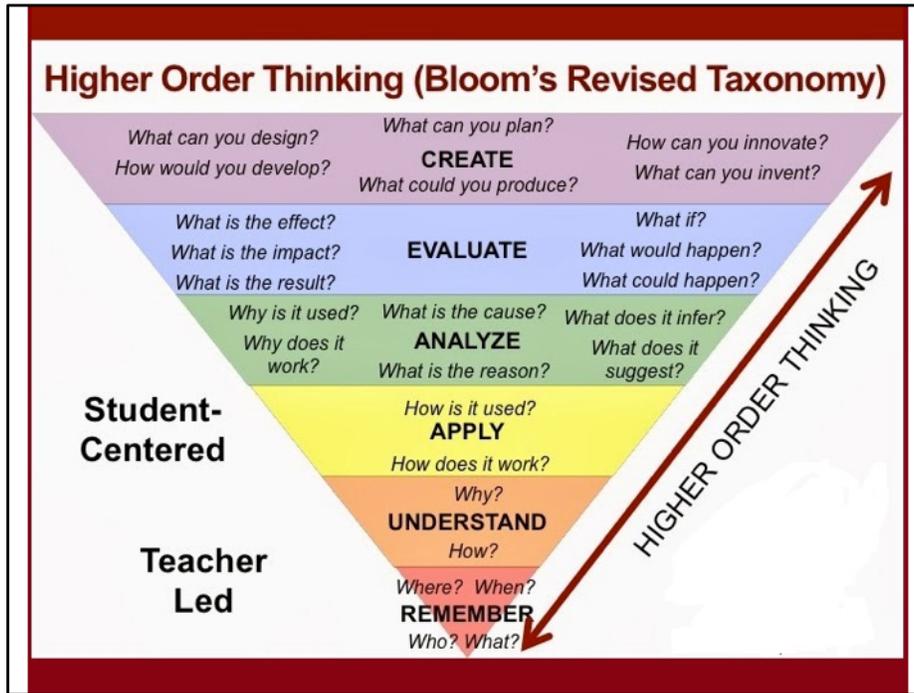
Sources include: <http://possibilitiesforlearning.com/>

What should a gifted classroom look like? How should it differ from a general education classroom? GATE certified teachers have been trained in both GATE instructional methods and in the characteristics of gifted students. The following are just some of the teaching techniques listed as possibilities in the District’s **GATE Program Summary**, so you can look up your school’s summary to determine whether these are going on in your child’s classroom.

You may see the **“Depth & Complexity Icons”** (developed at USC by researcher Sandra Kaplan) being used in your child’s class. They are visual cues that students can use to help them remember how to dive deeper into content.

You may see **flexible group work** going on, and you may see the **Socratic seminar** being used (it is a formal discussion, based on a text, in which the leader asks open-ended questions and students listen, think critically, and respond to the thoughts of others). **Project-based learning** (PBL) may be used.

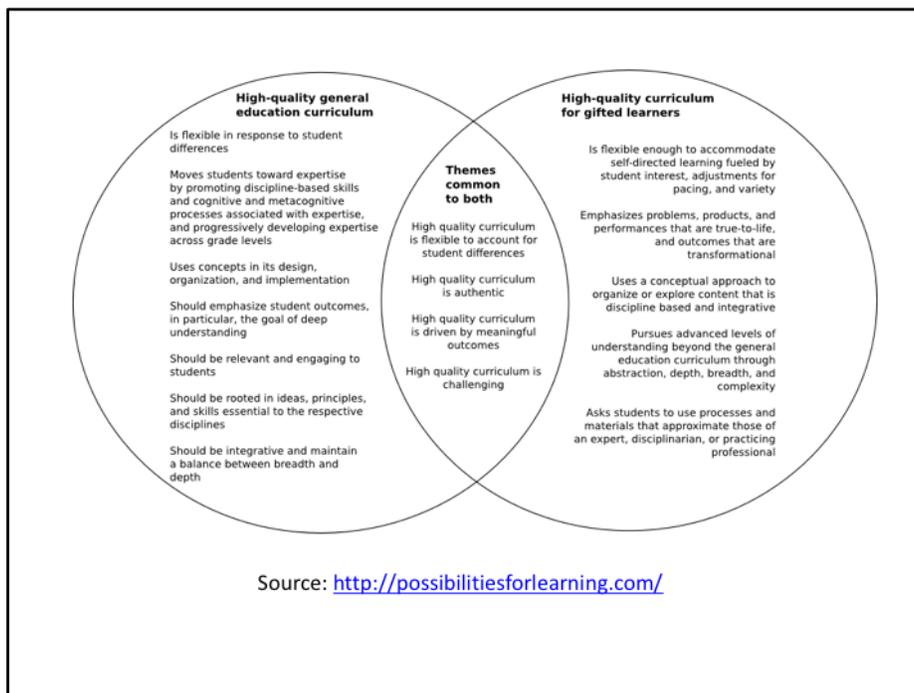
You should see **Bloom’s Taxonomy** being used regularly to encourage higher-order thinking (see next slide).



Bloom's Taxonomy is a framework teachers use to focus on higher-order thinking. By providing a hierarchy of 6 different levels, it can assist teachers in designing performance tasks, crafting questions for conferring with students, and providing feedback on student work.

It can help teachers promote more complex thinking (instead of simply remembering facts) which is especially appropriate for gifted students. The CA Association for the Gifted (CAG) supports the use of Bloom's Taxonomy as a tool to provide more effective and appropriate curricular planning for gifted students.

Source: <http://www.edutopians.com/2019/06/28/everything-teachers-need-to-know-about-blooms-taxonomy/>



In the ways and to the extent students are similar, their curriculum should be similar. In the ways and to the extent that they are different, their curriculum should be different. Although the notion of differentiation has appeared in the education literature since the 1950s, it has gained greater significance and attention as the diversity of students in today's classrooms has increased.

Tomlinson defined curriculum differentiation for all students as "ensuring that what a student learns, how he/she learns, and how the student demonstrates what he/she has learned is a match for that student's readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning." This implies a commitment to accommodating individual learner characteristics.

Flexibility "to account for student differences," a theme common to high quality curriculum in both general and gifted education, is operationalized in practice as curriculum differentiation.

Source: visit this link for more information about differentiation
<http://possibilitiesforlearning.com/curriculum-differentiation/>

The Autonomous Learner Model (ALM)

by George Betts of NAGC

What are 6 essential qualities can gifted educators instill in students to focus on the “whole child”?

- 1) Unconditional Positive Regard
- 2) Development of Self
- 3) Emotional, Social, Cognitive and Physical Development
- 4) Passion Learning
- 5) Working Together
- 6) Seek to Better the World



From NAGC and Fordham blog article in The High Flyer by Dr. George Betts

Title: **The Autonomous Learner Model: The Whole Gifted Child.** See

<http://www.nagc.org/blog/whole-gifted-child>

These 6 essential qualities are things you can be aware of. Are these important to you? Are they occurring at your school? If not, why not?

If the ALM aligns with your thinking, let your teachers know during the parent-teacher conference that these are things that you value and wish to see happening in your child's classroom.

C.A.L.M. D.O.W.N. Approach

- C** – Craft your desired outcome
- A** – Assemble your evidence
- L** – Learn your rights; consider options
- M** – Meet with your teacher first

- D** – Don't get confrontational
- O** – Offer help
- W** – Write things down
- N** – Next steps

Edited from a post written by Natalie, mom and blogger at [Afterschool for Smarty Pants](http://afterschoolforsmartypants.com) as seen on Imagination Soup (<http://imagination soup.net/2014/01/29/read-this-if-your-child-is-unhappy-at-school/>)

Be sure to provide feedback to the school and let the teachers know what you value about the availability of gifted classes at your school. Tell them what the impact is on your kiddo and your family. Explain how GATE is making a difference for your child.

Also tell them if you don't see the difference between the GATE class and a general education class. Often schools say that all their teachers are GATE certified and therefore all students are receiving GATE classes, but that cannot possibly be true. GATE classes should be obviously different and have more depth, complexity, and rigor than a regular class.

Don't accept the argument that the new Common Core curriculum is an acceptable replacement for GATE – it is designed to support grade level standards and make those more consistent between states and districts. It is definitely not designed to meet the needs of advanced learners who may meet or exceed the grade level standards before the school year is even over.

GATE in Middle & High School

New issues to confront:

- Multiple teachers instead of one home room
- New school, new friends, new responsibilities
- Big expectations
- Now a *Small Fish* in a **Big Pond**
- Adolescence
- Asynchronous development

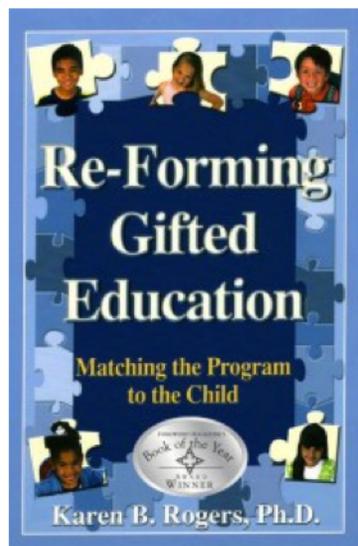


Making the switch from elementary school to middle (or high) school comes with a lot of changes!

In particular, students are going to spend much more time in the general education classroom, so they have to begin to learn how to self-advocate to ensure that they are getting what they need in order to thrive. They may "hit a wall" when there is more work, and higher expectations - or when they realize they can no longer coast along easily with little effort.

Their teachers may no longer be GATE certified, and may not understand common gifted issues like **over-excitabilities** or **asynchronous development** that can be bewildering to those not "in the know". So you may need to do some additional work to explain these issues to their teachers.

Remember to check in with both the student and the teacher(s) about how your child is doing in the social-emotional (as well as the academic) realm. Are they getting enough sleep? Are they eating healthy food? Getting enough exercise? Not stressing over relationships or peer pressure? Not experiencing bullying or feelings of isolation? Have they learned tools for self-regulation and self-advocacy?



2002 Book by Karen B. Rogers

Parents often need to **negotiate** for an education plan that works for their gifted child.

Explains educational options and their benefits for different types of children to match the right program to your child.

One size does NOT fit all!

This excellent book provides lots of information about school GATE programs and teaching methods (such as acceleration and grouping). It is aimed at helping parents figure out what services are usually available, and determine which are appropriate for your child.

It also explains the pros and cons of various educational approaches so that you understand the jargon and have heard all the arguments explained in advance. This will prepare you to speak clearly and assertively to teachers and Principals.

