

## ADVOCACY AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL, CONT.

### Some ideas for Regional Advocacy:

- Attend regional OAGC meetings for orientation to OAGC programs and activities and to network with gifted educators.
- Visit the OAGC website to find nearby parent groups.
- Attend meetings of other parent groups.
- Join the OHIOGIFT and Parent Division list serves, where you can ask questions of other parents and teachers.
- Develop business partnerships to benefit your district and region.
- Build relationships between coordinators and parents by connecting to the coordinator groups.

### Maximize regional resources to build capacity for parent groups:

- Connect with other parent groups.
- Coordinate to bring in a speaker, have larger functions.
- Share strategies.
- Form multi-district groups to grow or strengthen smaller groups.
- Join with PTA's for meetings and to bring in speakers.
- Network with Non-public schools - parochial, charter, independent, home school networks.
- Communicate among parents, coordinator and teacher groups to share information.

## ADVOCACY - STATE LEVEL

As you become more aware of issues at the regional level, you realize that the big picture solutions come at the state level. OAGC is involved in educating legislators, sharing information and resources with the Ohio Department of Education and sponsoring annual conferences where vendors, presenters and gifted educators of all sorts, including parents, can learn and grow.

The first, most important step to becoming aware of state issues is to join OAGC. If you join the Parent Division as well, you will be included on the Parent listserve. You can also join two other list serves: Ohiogift, or the GTAdvocate loop, as found on the Advocacy page of [www.oagc.com](http://www.oagc.com). OAGC is a statewide organization. Encourage your group to affiliate with OAGC, as there is strength in numbers.

OHIO ASSOCIATION for GIFTED CHILDREN

## ADVOCACY - A VOICE FOR YOUR CHILD

When faced with the need to speak on behalf of their gifted students, most parents quickly find that what is happening with their child is inextricably linked to the larger context of education – what is happening in the classroom, the school, the district, etc. When your child needs challenge, help or support at school, the kind of response you will get is affected as much by the quality of leadership as by the quality of teaching and parent support, not to mention available resources. Most parents of gifted students eventually discover their own child is only one of many who need help.

**An educated and informed parent makes a better advocate for his or her children.** One of the most important tools for successful advocacy is becoming familiar with your child's school setting and the people in charge. Learn how your school and the school district are organized. Familiarize yourself with what is supposed to be happening in the classroom, in the school and in the district.

**Establish yourself as an ally to education, through your words and deeds.** You can begin by making an effort to meet the teachers, counselors, librarians, nurses, secretaries, custodians and principals at your child's school. Another way to demonstrate your support for the school and to win allies in the building is to volunteer in some capacity that will help many children. Parents who project a positive image and who respect the efforts of all those involved in education win more allies than those who show up just to complain.

There are many online resources for how to help your child at school. The article "Advocating for Appropriate Education for your Child," by Colleen Elam of the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented covers the following:

- Learn the Status Quo
- Establish Yourself as an Ally to Education
- Know What Should be Happening
- Give Credit for Jobs Well Done
- Choose your Battles
- Prepare your Case and Present your Case

Many districts may have gifted specialists that work directly with teachers: meeting jointly with the gifted specialist and the classroom teacher can be a good way to start. Developing a friendly relationship with the school secretary is always a good idea. The following excerpt from "Present your Case" suggests meeting strategies. (Continued)

From "Present Your Case":  
*For a classroom problem, contact the teacher first. For a school problem, speak with the principal. Follow the established chain of command in your district. Traditionally it is: teacher > principal > instructional specialist or gifted coordinator > superintendent > School Board. If you are unsure of the protocol in your district ask a secretary in the principal's office.*

## A Voice For Your Child: Present Your Case, Cont.

*Call for an appointment first, but be prepared in case the person is able to speak with you at that time. Leave a message with your name, your child's name, your telephone number at work and home (or cell phone) and the reason for requesting a return call or appointment. .... Allow 24 hours for your call to be returned, then call again. If your call is not returned after three tries, move up the chain of command.*

*Greet the person warmly. Your tone of voice can set the tone of the entire conversation and the consequent actions and reactions. Thank the person for returning your call or meeting with you. Then come immediately to the point. State your facts calmly and in order. Ask your questions or make your request. Then listen without interruption. Take notes on the response. Briefly repeat back your interpretation of what was said; if you need clarification of a point, this is the time to ask. If it is necessary for you to respond with an answer, agree on a time when you will communicate again.*

***Build bridges; do not burn them.*** *No two people have the exact same beliefs on all issues. Supply data to support your position and back it up with personal stories. Include yourself in the suggested win-win solution.*

*If you are happy with the result of the meeting, say so and say thank you. However, if you are not happy, take your case to the next higher level on the chain of command and then the next. Keep trying and don't be discouraged. Consider compromises.*

*Through this entire process you are teaching your children. First and foremost, you are demonstrating in actions that you love them and consider their education a priority. Second, you are modeling some of the most important lessons in life:*

- *Every human counts, so respect others as well as yourself*
- *Problem-solving involves creativity, logic, protocol, challenge, time, and commitment*
- *Think before you respond*
- *Take control of any situation as it occurs in your life*
- *Act, don't react*
- *Be positive and persistent and fight for what you believe in.*

*Advocating for appropriate education for your child is a continuous process. Your positive, persistent, involvement will foster your child's success in school and life.*

(Excerpted from "Advocating for Appropriate Education for your Child," by Colleen Elam of the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented.) [http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content\\_storage\\_01/0000000b/80/25/28/1f.pdf](http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/25/28/1f.pdf). It takes about 15 minutes to download.

## ADVOCACY - LOCAL LEVEL

As stated above, advocacy for your own child often leads you to consider what is needed in your district. If you have the time and commitment, join your local parent group, PTA or other group that can foster change. Attend School Board meetings and become knowledgeable about such things as the district Acceleration Policy. Check for district websites about gifted and talented services. Meet your Gifted Coordinator and find out what he or she needs to improve services to gifted students.

Get to know the decision-makers on a personal basis and communicate with them frequently. This will allow you to build a relationship of trust and make you the "go to" person on a particular issue. It also allows you to get a feel for the person and the district's hot-button issues.

Get to know your local School Board. They need to know your group exists and that you are current on your information.

If your district has a policy committee, a task force on something, a forum or any other policy-making body, make sure someone represents the gifted view. Decisions are often made only from the perspective of the people sitting at the table. So make sure you get a seat at the table! Never let a slur to your issue go unanswered.

Parent groups can be very effective, even in small numbers. By developing a reputation for a reasoned approach as well as a fierce commitment to appropriate education for gifted children, many gifted parent groups have facilitated change in district and regional policy.

***A tremendous satisfaction comes from knowing you have made a difference in the lives of many children.***

## ADVOCACY - REGIONAL LEVEL

As you become more knowledgeable about district services, you realize that they are affected by regional issues, especially in rural areas. Training for teachers goes on at Regional Service Centers. Gifted Coordinators have regional meetings. Identification in the visual and performing arts is often done at a regional level. Special Education advocates, who struggle with many of the same issues are organized at a regional level. The Ohio Association for Gifted Children (OAGC) holds regional events where you can meet other parents with the same concerns and share solutions with them. By becoming involved at the regional level you can share the knowledge you have gained and learn from others' experiences.