

Alabama  
Gifted Education Advocacy Handbook  
January, 2014



*"If our children do not get the opportunity to learn all they are able to learn, it is because not enough people insist on appropriate education for them."* Gina Ginsberg Riggs  
"A Call for Parent Advocacy"

Alabama gifted children  
need **YOU** as their advocates in order to reach their  
full potential.

Join other advocates across the state as we strive to collaborate with State Legislators and Administrators about the value of gifted education for both our students and our state.

## SPONSORS

Alabama Association for Gifted Children

**AAGC**

[www.alabamagifted.org](http://www.alabamagifted.org)

Helping parents, students, and teachers since 1994

President: Amy Waine

[bamswaine@aol.com](mailto:bamswaine@aol.com)

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National Association for Gifted Children

**NAGC**

[www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

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# What is a Gifted Child Worth?

Alabama **NEEDS** to invest in our gifted and talented youth, not only because they too deserve “a free and appropriate education,” but also because the state **NEEDS** their gifts and talents recognized in order to remain competitive and prosperous.

- **The primary value of a gifted student is his/her brain power and creativity.** These are commodities we cannot manufacture. Investing in the education our most promising young people has a societal return on our investment.  
According to The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), \$1 invested in a college graduate in 1985 would yield an unadjusted \$15.06 in 2011 while \$1 invested in the S&P 500 in 1985 would only yield an unadjusted \$7.00. Education is the best investment! (OECD, 2011)
- **Higher levels of educational attainment lead to higher levels of income.** Gifted and high ability learners who complete college and post baccalaureate education have the capacity to earn significantly more than those with high school diplomas or less. This translates into more money funneled into the state and local economies.
- **Highly educated individuals are arrested less, are healthier, live in better equipped homes and provide better support for the education of their children.** (US Census Bureau, 2011 Annual Social and Economic Supplement)

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# Benefits of Gifted Education

Advocates for Gifted Children recognizes the need for educational excellence. We believe that every gifted child has the right to learn something new every day. When we address the emotional and social needs of gifted learners we increase the likelihood that they will be productive citizens and reach their maximum potential. Thus, supporting gifted children we increase the likelihood that Alabama will move to higher levels of productivity and economic growth.

## **Benefits to students who participate in gifted programs:**

- enhanced leadership opportunities
- development of informed opinions
- exposure to various perspectives and points of view
- establishment of goals leading to career options
- exploration of post-secondary education opportunities
- demonstration of 21st Century Skills: creativity, imagination, collaboration, cooperation, service to others, and problem-solving strategies
- participation in field experiences and service learning
- growth in social-emotional domains
- development of autonomous lifelong learners and responsible citizenship

## **Benefits of gifted education to the State of Alabama:**

- advancements in new technologies
- leadership in business, community, schools, and state leadership
- attraction of businesses that require innovative individuals
- increased pool of inventors and entrepreneurs
- productive citizens who will contribute to the state's economy and a global society

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## Advocacy for Gifted Education

**What works well with one Legislator or Administrator might not work at all with another. Much depends on the nature of your relationship with the individual and with the depth of their knowledge about gifted children.**

Effective advocacy requires individuals to be knowledgeable, organized, have defined goals and objectives, be committed, and be persistent. Advocacy efforts to heighten awareness and support for gifted programs, funding, and support groups through:

- Annual “Gifted Education Month” to highlight gifted learners and program services in Alabama (January)
- AAGC Advocacy Group Database
- AAGC Parent Advocacy Group Information Packet
- AAGC Parent Brochure
- AAGC Annual Conference
- Email contacts
- Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, and AAGC website
- Newsletters
- Phone blitz
- Letter writing campaigns to stakeholders, community leaders, state legislators
- Information presented at school faculty meetings
- Network with stakeholders, businesses, and community leaders
- Professional development training for educators
- Meetings with school officials and administrators
- Parent meetings
- Informational flyers to parents
- Meetings with state representatives and senators
- Meetings with university instructors

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## Menu of Suggested Activities for Gifted Education Month for Gifted Specialists

Teachers should select activities or programs that exhibit gifted characteristics and conceptual framework. The following are suggested activities. There are a myriad of activities and options that can be effective advocacy tools.

1. Brown bag lunch with local eminent (gifted) person/speaker, or a college student, or a recent graduate who was in gifted to discuss how it made a difference in their life.

2. Have your students make a video, or a play, or a podcast, or publish a book on the topic of:

- What a gifted kid worth?

What happens if gifted education isn't funded (like the nightmare in A Christmas Carol)

- What if there were no gifted people?
- What does it mean to be gifted?

This list is not limited to the above ideas. Use your imagination and creativity to extend this list.

3. Gift them with AAGC logo items: cups, stickers, bags, pens OR student made products.

4. Invite them to special events, such as Lego competition, chess tournament, club meetings, parent meetings, service learning functions, local field trips, robotic competitions...**the list is unlimited.**

5. **Show them something unexpected**....

- Team challenges,
- Public speeches,
- Debates, mock trial
- Programming Scratch or Alice

Music, graphic design, art works, how-to seminars, literary circles, Socratic circles...**the list is unlimited.**

6. When Legislators and visitors are in your room, make sure *essential understandings* and *planning / brainstorming lists* are posted on walls...

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**FOR A SAMPLE PARENT & STUDENT LETTER** – visit [www.alabamagifted.org](http://www.alabamagifted.org)

## **Tips for Meetings with Legislators**

**Start early** to make arrangements. Phone well ahead for an appointment. A month's lead time is not too much!

**Prepare for the meeting** by deciding (1) what information and messages you want to convey, and (2) what you want the legislator to do.

**Be on time.**

**Introduce yourself** by name and affiliation. State that you are a constituent from their district.

**Be sure your message is short and concise.** Most meetings with legislators are brief. Avoid too many details about your issues. An anecdote is good, but a life story is too long. If emailing, keep your letter about one issue. Express your position in one paragraph.

**State your reason for being there:** the importance of appropriate educational opportunities for gifted students, the successes and achievements of these students, and the overall impact on both the district and the community. Pause to allow the Legislator to respond; listen to them to determine where they stand on the issue.

**Be ready to answer questions.** It is OK if you don't know the answers. If this is the case, just tell Legislators that you don't know the answer, but that you will get back to them — if you say this, you must follow through. We will be happy to help you get the answer.

**Leave some information** (on AAGC website); be sure that it has your contact information including your email address on it or contact information of others the Legislator can contact.

**Ask for a response by email.**

**Keep in touch** with your Legislator. You want to build an ongoing relationship.

**It's OK if you meet with the legislative assistant.** They are usually friendly and will convey your message to the Legislator. The staff in a Legislator's office can be powerful: they frequently control

the Legislator's schedule, the information s/he receives, and may influence the Legislator's decisions.

**When phoning your Legislator's office to express an opinion**, either write out your message or jot down your points before calling to make sure you get your entire point across quickly.

### **Some strategies great advocates use are:**

✓ Advocates build and maintain trusted relationships with policy makers in order to set the stage for future successes. They nurture relationships that foster credibility and that lead to action on their proposals. They maintain strong relationships with legislators' staff and work constantly to identify potential leaders. It is especially important to maintain strong relationships at the local level.

✓ Stick to clear messages and achievable goals with widespread support.

✓ Great advocates don't just highlight problems; they propose concrete policy solutions.

Advocates protect against simple solutions and silver bullets, and they continue to look for ways of keeping policy makers engaged and committed to their key education priorities.

### **How do advocates build and maintain respect of leading policy makers?**

✓ Great advocates maintain fidelity to values based in student achievement, staying above the fray when fights become more about political ideology than what is best for kids. Sometimes policymakers do care more about partisanship than issues, and advocates need to stay above that fray.

These two pages are adapted from *Seizing the Opportunity: How Education Advocacy Groups and State Policy Makers Work Together to Advance Reform*. Policy Innovators in Education Network, January 2012, with some additions of our own. More information at <http://www.pie-network.org/>

## Using Social Media to Advocate For the Gifted

July 20, 2012 by Karla Archer, Irondale, Alabama

Many politicians and policy makers are accessible via various social networks, such as [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#), and most are well monitored by the politician him/herself, and/or a staff person.

Social media is a fantastic advocacy tool. But there are certain things to keep in mind, when taking this advocacy route.

Keep in mind:

1) **Be respectful.** Despite what internet trolls would have you believe, the internet does not give you carte blanche to be rude and disrespectful. Be firm. Write well. Don't be ugly. You will engage them better that way. No one wants to feel attacked, whether face-to-face, or online. Just because you can say it, doesn't mean you should.

2) **Don't let it become emotionally charged.** This goes along with 'be respectful', but I can't stress enough, how important it is to keep your cool. When it goes to that level, you will often lose your credibility.

3) **Write out your thoughts beforehand.** The internet allows us to correspond and do things at a much quicker pace, but don't just get on your computer, type out your complaint or request and hit 'enter'. Once it's out there, it's out there. Gather your thoughts, think on it for a bit and revisit your ideas. Edit as needed. Read it again. Edit again. Rinse and repeat.

4) **You only have 140 characters on Twitter.** Make them count. Sometimes, it is best to break your thoughts into several separate tweets, rather than risk losing the message in a bunch of shorthand. (Writing on your school board's Facebook wall or your state Senator's LinkedIn page? Have at it – there are no word/character limits.)

5) **Don't use social media as a bullying tool.** I've been turned off by some efforts for some great causes, simply because what they were doing seemed more in the realm of bullying. We don't tolerate it in schools. We shouldn't tolerate it online. (see #1 and #2)

6) **Understand that it is difficult to measure its effectiveness.** Unlike seeing someone face-to-face and getting a handshake, you will not know for certain whether the policy maker you are trying to engage has read or seen what you write. In social media, sometimes the power comes from getting the word out to others, and combining your voices, rather than your individual update or tweet.

7) **Be sure to thank them for their work, time and effort.** Don't just bombard with stats and requests. Thank them for the job they are doing, thank them when they do listen, or they ask questions. Even the worst policy maker does something right, once in awhile, right? Dig deep, and compliment him on the lovely tie he had on at the last board meeting.

Taken from the *Living the Life Fantastic* web site on August 23, 2012  
<http://www.livingthelifefantastic.com/2012/07/using-social-media-to-advocate-for-the-gifted/>

For more information about Legislation and Advocation activity, refer to: [www.alabamagifted.org](http://www.alabamagifted.org)

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## **In Closing:**

### **Arching Argument**

Evidence suggests that our gifted students rarely get the opportunity to reach their full potential. Gifted students sit idle in classrooms, sometimes invisible, stagnating because educational opportunities for them are either mediocre, or does not exist. School systems want every student to meet proficiency or meet annual yearly progress. With all sincerity, what is adequate for most is inadequate for some. Gifted students have higher expectation than proficiency and adequacy.

Policy, funding, and best practice should support high achievement, excellence and acceleration. A gifted child can enter an elementary classroom at age five and intellectually be in fifth grade. Gifted children have asynchronous development. If we want our children to excel and strive for excellence, then our schools should not focus on only what is adequate. Are our students college and career ready with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills?

**WHAT IS YOUR PLAN FOR GIFTED  
ADVOCACY IN ALABAMA-  
Because GIFTED MATTERS!.**