The Positive Power of Effective Advocacy

Over the years and throughout Australia positive advocacy by various interest groups have had a significant effect. Parents and educators with an interest in gifted education should be encouraged to speak out on its behalf - for instance promoting and explaining the needs of gifted children in positive and user-friendly terms.

However, it's not always easy to advocate on behalf of gifted children, particularly in Australia. The 1998 report of the Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children findings includes:

1.6 There is a generally held view that there exists an Australian ethos, which is said to discourage individual excellence. Witnesses asserted that Australians would not support special educational provisions for gifted children because they are seen as being privileged already.

In the foreword of the 2001 Senate Report 'Education of Gifted Children' Senator Jacinta Collins states 'there has been little progress in provision for gifted children since 1988'.

Positive advocacy will make a difference! Advocacy will not work every time and it will not necessarily be immediate, so the other essentials are patience and the steady accumulation of factual evidence combined with regular targeted lobbying.

ADVOCACY – SOME IDEAS FOR PARENTS

- Become known to the teacher in positive ways before a problem arises, eg as a parent, help in some way, so the teacher knows you as a sensible person and is more likely to listen to you when you present with an issue;
- If possible, be involved in school committees that benefit everyone. You will meet a variety of people, and have opportunities to remind educators that all children, including gifted and talented, need to work at their individual levels of challenge.
- Expect to find an ally at the school, this may be the librarian, a previous teacher or even the school Principal;
- Try to find other parents with similar issues – eg, organising an activity likely to attract more able children and advertising it through the school newsletter. Talking to the parents of children to participate. Working together is often more effective than working alone, and such a group can have quite an impact on school management;
- A parent group might suggest options such as funding some professional development for teachers in the school;
- Try to understand the situation from the teacher's perspective. Be aware that teachers may lack training and resources;
- Be aware of how your child may appear in the classroom especially if not displaying gifted behaviours or is seriously frustrated;
- Consider accessing support groups, eg. gifted and talented associations, supportive friends and carers;
- Remember that there is a time and a place for advocacy. We do not need our children growing up with an over-developed sense of entitlement!

GENERAL ADVOCACY TIPS

Some other useful suggestions for advocates of gifted education, including parents, are:

- Read and research, do your homework on the issues;
- Find and use support groups;
- Be prepared to share information with others, using practical examples;
- Consider using information from tests/assessments as supporting data;
- Ask questions, and give defensible answers;
- Advocate positively, look for events and opportunities to congratulate and reinforce;
- Keep your message simple and straightforward;
- Giving practical examples and explanations;

http://www.aaeqt.net.au/advocacy.htm
• Don’t mistake ignorance for malice;
• Respect time limitations, be prepared at every meeting. Make it easy for people to help you;
• Consider advice and offer appropriate follow up;
• Give positive feedback and record relevant information;
• Be a leader. One of the greatest challenges is to help a group of advocates work together collaboratively, cooperatively, and productively;
• Remember that in standing up for gifted children we must not appear to neglect the others.

The benefits of linking with others include:

• Sharing advice, information and experiences;
• Involvement with meetings and activities – this can assist access to current information and research;
• Connecting with others who understand, gaining a sense of belonging.

USEFUL ADVOCACY ARTICLES

Asimov’s Law and Advocacy Toni Goodman: http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/asimovs_law.htm

Assertiveness and Effective Parent Advocacy Marie Sherrett: http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/advocacy.html

How parents can support gifted children Linda Kreger Silverman: http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPages/02515546.html


Ten Tips for Parents of Students Monique Prevost Lloyd: http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/tips.htm