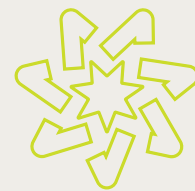




Davidson InstituteTM
Nurturing Intellect. Unlocking Potential.

A Parent's Guide to Advocating at School





The Myth of the Gifted Child

Gifted students are often portrayed and thought of as the children that glide easily into schools, are enthusiastic about all things academic, and that are beloved by their teachers for being so easy to work with or as a little assistant.

But the lived experience of school for most gifted children isn't picture perfect.

The Real Challenge

In the current education system of the United States, typical schools are not designed for neurodivergent, including profoundly gifted (PG) and twice-exceptional (2e), students. This doesn't mean that gifted kids can't or don't find success in schools. They do. However, that often means that families are frequently communicating, advocating, and working closely with their student's educational team.

Messages That Silence Parents

Parents receive lots of messages over time that may lead them to downplay their role in their student's educational team. Teachers are stretched thin; don't bother them! School budgets are tight; there's no room to do anything different! If your child receives something different, that's not fair to the others; don't you want all children to receive a good education?! Don't rock the boat; do you really want to be that parent in the community?!?

The Truth About Change

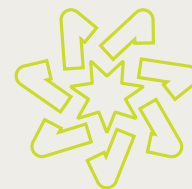
We're not saying that teachers aren't managing Herculean workloads, that schools aren't under-resourced, or that all children shouldn't receive education that meets their needs. We know that's true. At the same time, we know that change only can happen when the boat gets rocked a little (or a lot!).

You're Already on the Right Path

Advocacy is often a long, slow, and hard process, but its rewards can be far-reaching. We're here to help.

If you're reading this, you've already taken the first courageous step. Perhaps you've sensed that something—whether it be the level and pace of their school's curriculum, a facet of their learning environment, or something else—isn't quite hitting the right notes for your child, or maybe you're standing at the crossroads of tough educational decisions. Whatever brings you here, know this: You're not alone, and, more importantly, you hold more power than you might realize.

Your voice matters. Your concerns are valid. And, your instincts about your child's needs deserve to be heard. The educational landscape can often feel like an intricate maze of bureaucratic corridors, but you need not ask permission to start advocating for your child's needs. You are their first and most powerful advocate, equipped with both the authority and insight to reach out, question, challenge, and explore every available avenue for their growth. Though there are no guaranteed outcomes, every step you take in advocacy—whether grand or subtle—shapes the foundation of your child's educational journey.



We've briefly touched on this, but let's start by exploring some myths about gifted students that can be used to discourage parents from advocating for their students.

Common Gifted Myth	Often Lived Experiences
If a child is really gifted, then everything comes to them easily, and they won't need any help.	Gifted children have an asynchronous profile, which means they may be far ahead of their peers in some areas, but they may be at grade-level (or even a little behind) in other areas. This can create a disconnect, where their intellectual strengths mask the fact that they still require support in other areas. It's also important to remember that gifted children are children who haven't lived on the earth that long yet; they need guidance as they navigate through the world.
Teachers are experts in all types of learning profiles, and schools know how to differentiate for different learners.	There is a significant gap in the understanding of giftedness in many schools. Gifted education is not part of the core curriculum in most teacher preparation programs, meaning many teachers may not be equipped to support gifted students effectively. Even within the professional community of gifted education, there hasn't been universal agreement on definitions and best practices. Thus, even within gifted schools and programs, there can be a lot of variability in service to gifted students.
Parents of gifted students are pushy, entitled, and overestimate their student's abilities.	You do know your child best, and we know that you're often just desperately trying to keep up with your child. As one Young Scholar parent said, "I don't push my kid; my kid pushes me! I feel like I drag behind sometimes." It's not entitled to ask for what your child needs to grow into a healthy adult.

You're Not Alone—And Help Is Here

Parenting a profoundly gifted or twice-exceptional child can feel isolating. The free [Young Scholars program](#) connects families like yours with professionals, resources, and a community that *gets it*. From school advocacy to emotional support, we're here to help you thrive.

Where should I start? Should I approach a specific teacher or go straight to administration?

With most concerns, you'd start with your student's classroom teacher.

Classroom teachers typically see your child every day, have developed an individual relationship with your child, and know the most about their day-to-day activities. Just because you begin here, doesn't mean that the classroom teacher is the end of the conversation. In many school systems, there is a chain of command or hierarchy for



addressing concerns. After starting with the classroom teacher, if you feel that your concerns need further attention or if you are looking for specific accommodations, your next step may be to reach out to the school's administration. This could involve meeting with the school counselor, gifted coordinator, assistant principal, or even the principal, depending on the nature of the issue.

Of course, the chain of command can vary depending on the issue at hand. For example, if your concern is related to health or medication, you might want to start with the school nurse, who is the most knowledgeable about medical needs and medication protocols. If your child has dietary needs or allergies, reaching out to the head of the cafeteria or the school nutrition director may be the right place to start. Each area of concern often has a designated person who can assist you and knowing who to go to can save time and energy.

Ultimately, the approach depends on the specific nature of the issue, but starting with the classroom teacher is often a good first step. From there, you can assess whether to move up to administration or reach out to other school staff members to address particular needs.

Try this: [Use the Advocacy Glossary of People](#) to help identify key contacts and roles in your advocacy efforts.

You Don't Have to Wait for a Problem

You don't necessarily want to wait until there is a problem to reach out to your child's school. Establishing a rapport and a collaborative relationship early can make it much easier to navigate issues if they arise later. The goal of your first conversations is simple: set a positive, open tone so everyone feels like they're on the same team.

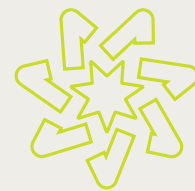
These connections can start small—an email, a quick chat in the pick-up line, or a brief phone call. Thoughtful, proactive contact helps teachers see you as a partner who's interested in supporting both your child and the classroom as a whole.

What Does Initial Communication with a School Look Like?

When you're starting a relationship with your child's teacher, it can be helpful to think in terms of four moves: introduce, frame, affirm, and invite.

- **Introduce yourself and your family briefly.** Let the teacher know who you are, and give them the opportunity to reciprocate by asking about themselves.
- **Give them a lens for understanding your child.** Explain your child's characteristics in the way you hope they are viewed. For example, you might describe your child as curious and enthusiastic about learning rather than saying that they ask 1,000 questions per hour.
- **Acknowledge the work the teacher is doing,** while also giving them a window into how you are already supporting your student at home. For instance: "From the back-to-school night, it sounds like you're going to be working hard with the class on improving writing this year. I really appreciate that. Over the summer, I gave my child silly prompts to respond to each day to encourage a habit of journaling. I know this isn't the formal instruction you'll provide, but I hope this has kept their writing abilities sharp."
- **Open the door for further communication,** while offering to support their work in whatever way is realistic for you. This may be volunteering in the classroom or on field trips, purchasing supplies, or contributing a unique skill you have.

Starting with appreciation and shared goals doesn't mean you ignore problems. It simply lays a foundation of respect that makes it easier to talk honestly when concerns come up.



Try This: Use an Email Template to Break the Ice

If “cold-emailing” a teacher feels intimidating, you don’t have to start from a blank page. To begin conversations with your child’s teacher, explore and utilize these [basic email templates](#). You can personalize them with details about your child, their interests, and any questions or concerns you’re already noticing.

What Information Should I Provide to Help the School Understand My Student’s Unique Needs and Profile?

When communicating with schools about your child, think beyond test scores and grades. Numbers can be useful, but they rarely capture the full picture of a profoundly gifted or twice-exceptional learner.

One powerful way to communicate your student’s unique needs, wants, and goals is by curating a portfolio.

A portfolio allows you to highlight your child’s strengths, talents, and achievements in a way that demonstrates who they are as a profoundly gifted individual. While schools often say they are interested in potential, they more often respond to demonstrated achievement. In addition to any private testing reports or assessments, consider including:

- Work samples from previous grades or schools
- Products from enrichment programs or extracurricular activities
- Projects from summer programs or camps
- Independent projects your child has pursued on their own

Accompany each piece with a short summary explaining why it’s relevant and how it reflects your child’s abilities or needs. For instance, sharing a project that shows deep intellectual curiosity or advanced reasoning can offer a glimpse into their potential beyond what might be visible in day-to-day classwork.

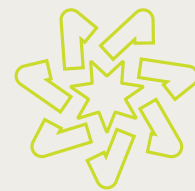
This portfolio isn’t just about impressing the school—it’s a tool to anchor conversations in concrete examples. It makes it easier to talk about appropriate challenge, pacing, and placement because everyone can see what your child is already doing.

Dig Deeper: Self-Advocacy

While self-advocacy is often associated with older students, such as those in middle and high school, advocating for oneself is a skill that can be developed at any time in an educational journey. Younger children in elementary school can also have strong opinions about their education and what might help them learn best.

One tool that can be used to foster self-advocacy skills is writing a letter. Crafting a letter allows students to practice communicating their thoughts and needs in a structured, low-stress environment. They can draft and revise as many times as needed before sharing with their teacher.

To gain a clearer understanding of how to best communicate your child’s unique needs, you can review our [Self-Advocacy template](#) to support your child in beginning to speak up for themselves at school when appropriate.



Putting It Together: A First Conversation Blueprint

By the time you've:

- Reached out early with a brief, positive introduction
- Shared a strengths-based snapshot of your child
- Collected concrete examples of their work in a simple portfolio
- Used a letter or template to frame their needs clearly

...you've set the stage for more productive, less adversarial conversations down the line. You're signaling: I'm here to partner, and I'm also paying close attention to my child's needs.

Relationships Are the Foundation of Good Advocacy

How do I build a collaborative relationship with the school?

The first step to building collaborative relationships is coming into every conversation with shared goals and generous assumptions.

You and your child's teachers want the same thing: for your child to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. When you start from that common ground, even difficult conversations become more productive.

Three Keys to Lasting Rapport

To build genuine connection with school staff, get to know them as people, not just professionals. Try these practical steps:

- **Ask about their world.** What's their favorite part of teaching this year? What's their coffee order? These small personal details create bridges of mutual respect.
- **Acknowledge shared pressures.** Show up with a coffee or small gesture that says, "I know we're both juggling a lot." It doesn't excuse anyone from doing their job—it just sets a tone of teamwork.
- **Lead with clarity and kindness.** Clear communication is kind communication. Don't assume teachers know what your child experiences at home or what specific needs aren't being met at school.

Start with Shared Goals

Frame every conversation around what you both want for your child. Whether you're asking for accommodations, discussing pacing, or just checking in, shared clarity prevents misunderstandings and keeps everyone focused.

Try This: Simple Gestures That Build Goodwill

Learn more about your child's teacher with small, thoughtful actions:

- Bring in classroom supplies they might need (markers, notebooks, tissues).
- Pick up a \$5 coffee shop gift card with a note: "I'm not sure what you prefer, but I thought I'd share this small treat. My go-to is a latte—what's yours?"
- Mention something specific and positive about how they've helped your child.



These gestures don't "buy" accommodations—they signal you're a partner, not an adversary, which makes tough conversations easier later.

How do I move from one good relationship to building a sustainable support network?

Your Child Needs More Than One Champion

Building a support network for your profoundly gifted child is strategic, multi-layered work that takes time and intentionality. It's not just about finding "helpers"—it's about cultivating relationships that grow with your child through multiple years and transitions.

Every family's network looks different. For some, it's classroom teachers, counselors, and specialists. For others, it's online communities and parent groups. The key is recognizing this as a continuous journey, not a one-time task.

Where Do You Find People Who Understand?

1. Start where you are: Davidson Institute resources

You're already in the right place. The free Young Scholars program connects families like yours with professionals, resources, and a community that gets it. From school advocacy to emotional support, we're here to help your family thrive.

2. Look local

- Search for parent groups in your area
- Connect with your state's gifted association
- Find district-level gifted coordinators or advocates

3. Build online

- Join gifted parenting forums and Facebook groups
- Participate in national gifted organizations like NAGC
- Explore platforms where 2e and PG families share strategies

Facing the "Label" Challenge

One common obstacle is hesitation about the "gifted label." It carries baggage—not yours, but society's. Yet there are [good reasons to wear that label proudly](#).

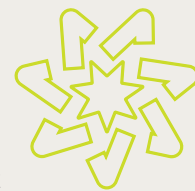
Many parents struggle with [how to talk about giftedness](#) with teachers, family, and even their own child. If you've been burned before, we get it. But these connections are worth trying again.

The Support Network Flywheel

Here's what happens when you invest in relationships at every level:

- **One teacher** becomes your first ally
- **That ally** connects you to counselors, coordinators, or administrators
- **Those professionals** help identify additional specialists or programs
- **Parent connections** share what's worked in your specific district
- **Online communities** offer perspective when local options fall short





Each relationship compounds. What starts as coffee with a teacher becomes a web of support that serves your child for years.

Pro Tip: Document Everything

Keep a running list of who you've met, what roles they have, and key takeaways from conversations. This “relationship map” helps you know exactly who to call when new needs arise.

Is it normal for my child to tell me they are bored at school?

Yes. Boredom is a common experience for profoundly gifted children. It's rooted in how their unique brains process information, but that doesn't mean it's something to dismiss or ignore.

The gifted brain craves [complexity, depth, and novelty](#). When a learning environment fails to provide intellectual stimulation, gifted students naturally disengage. This might look like:

- Daydreaming, chatting with peers, or other “off-task” behaviors
- Asking “why?” behind every concept
- Frustration with slow pacing or repetitive work
- Intellectual restlessness when material feels too easy

The Boredom Trap

Teachers might not recognize boredom for what it is. They may see it as a behavior issue, lack of motivation, or even a sign your child doesn't understand the material. Even when they do recognize it, many default to “more of the same” work or ask gifted students to help struggling peers instead of providing appropriately challenging material.

Long-term Risks

Chronic boredom isn't just uncomfortable—it's dangerous. It can lead to disengagement, underachievement, and a dimming of that intellectual spark both in and outside the classroom.

Try This: Use the tools from our article “[Paving the Path to Meaningful Engagement for High-Potential Children](#)” to help you and your child identify specific triggers and patterns.

What are my student's rights, in terms of their giftedness, within the education system?

The honest answer is sobering: in the United States, legal protections for gifted education are **limited**.

- No federal mandate requires schools to provide gifted services
- Students with disabilities have IDEA protections; gifted students do not
- Fewer than 10 states mandate gifted programs
- Support varies widely by district, creating a patchwork of opportunity

What This Means in Practice

Most gifted services depend on individual school districts. Some offer differentiation, acceleration, or pull-out programs. Many don't. This leaves parents as the primary advocates



for appropriate challenge.

Start Here:

- [NAGC State Directory](#) – Find your state gifted association
- [NAGC State-of-the-States Report](#) – Most-recent status of gifted education nationwide

Does the school know which accommodations my child needs? If not, how do I know what to ask for?

Short answer: Not likely.

Many schools lack gifted education expertise or best practices. Gifted students—especially profoundly gifted (PG) and twice-exceptional (2e)—are incredibly diverse. There’s no universal “gifted accommodations” list.

Your Action Plan:

- **Gather observations** from you, your child, teachers, and other professionals
- **Look for patterns** – boredom, frustration, disengagement, need for depth
- **Translate needs into requests** – more time for deep dives, faster pacing, etc.

Acceleration: The Research-Backed Solution

The [Acceleration Institute](#) calls acceleration “the most effective academic intervention for gifted children.” [NAGC agrees](#).

It’s not just grade-skipping – there are [20+ acceleration strategies](#), from curriculum compacting to early entrance to subject acceleration.

Can my 2e child receive special education services AND gifted services?

Yes – federal law requires schools to address both, though many aren’t fully aware of these protections.

The “They’re Fine” Trap

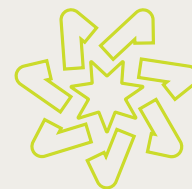
Administrators often argue that good grades = no needs. This completely misses twice-exceptional reality. A child might earn solid grades but take 4x longer on homework due to processing challenges. “Fine” grades don’t equal appropriate challenge or emotional well-being.

Real 2e Example

Consider a child with a processing disorder who finishes homework but needs 4–5 hours for what peers complete in 1. Their grades look “acceptable,” but the effort crushes their spirit and leaves no time for their true strengths.

Your Rights

- Read: “[Clarification of Federal Law as It Applies to Twice-exceptional Students](#)”
- Deep dive: [Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy](#)



What if I do all this work, spend all this time, and it doesn't work?

Like a lighthouse keeper tending their beacon through storms and calm alike, your dedication creates ripples far beyond any single outcome.

The Long View

Every conversation, email, and meeting plants seeds. Some bloom immediately. Others take time. Your persistence:

- **Transforms your child** – they see they're worth fighting for
- **Educates the system** – one conversation at a time
- **Builds your wisdom** – for future challenges
- **Connects you to others** – parents, advocates, professionals

Even if accommodations don't change tomorrow, you've shown your child: *your needs matter. Someone's in your corner. You can advocate for yourself.* That message sustains them through every future challenge.

Your Next Steps – Resources That Actually Help

- Read [Genius Denied: How to Stop Wasting Our Brightest Young Minds](#) by Jan Davidson, Bob Davidson, and Laura Vanderkam. This book is far more than just a collection of ideas; it is a reflection of over 20 years of deep dedication to understanding and meeting the unique needs of the gifted population. As we continue to grow, this book serves as a bridge — linking the experiences and wisdom of the thousands of current families with the invaluable contributions of alumni who have walked this path before.
- **Learn more about your state's and district's policies.** One part of the advocacy puzzle is understanding the policies and frameworks that shape your state's and district's educational system. Knowing the ins and outs of these policies allows you to navigate the system effectively, ensuring that you can advocate for your child in a way that aligns with existing frameworks and supports their unique needs.
- [Apply for the Young Scholars program.](#) Young Scholars families access individualized Family Services guidance for complex advocacy situations – from 2e rights to acceleration planning to district negotiations. Our community shares what actually worked in hundreds of districts nationwide.

Further Reading:

[How to Talk to the School About a Gifted/ Twice-Exceptional Child](#) – Understanding how to accommodate gifted students with learning differences starts with knowing what to ask for and how to ask for it. This article will walk you through the preparation, communication strategies, and specific accommodations that can help you advocate effectively for your child.

[How to Communicate Effectively with Your Gifted Child's Public School](#) – This article provides parents of gifted students with a wealth of advice on communicating with their gifted students' public school teachers, as well as additional information and resources on how to locate gifted programs both in and outside of the public education system.