

How to Advocate for Your Gifted Child

Under Colorado Law's "The Exceptional Child's Act", (The "Act") children identified with cognitive Gifts that fit within the outlined parameters within the Act are to be provided an Advance Learning Plan (an "ALP"). The ALP is a legal document and it is used to guide, nourish, and grow a child's cognitive (and other talents) strength area(s). As parents we trust that the ALP will be honored, but we must also verify, each year, with teachers and/or counselors. This can be a daunting task, and so often we feel we are on the path by ourselves. But we are not. Over the past number of years JAGC has worked with administration, staff and various school boards to draw greater focus on outcomes for our GT students. At the end of the 2015 fiscal year, the Board unanimously agreed to provide additional GT funding of \$850,000 to provide additional Resource Teachers and services for our GT students, which is in line with the Act and recent legislation that provides funding for screening all kids. (Do we need additional funding to meet the Act's guidelines for meeting children's ALPs? Absolutely, but that's for another article.) The state and district's funding has certainly helped, but Resource Teachers continue to be stretched thin (each resource teacher is responsible for 700-800 GT students), so we as parents must work with the GT department and our child's teachers to ensure our children's academic, as well as their social emotional needs are addressed and met. So how can we as parents be partners with our teachers and our schools? By understanding the steps to take and the resources that are available to all of us. So here we go....

- Your first collaborator is your child's teacher. Remember they have anywhere from 24 children (elementary school ideal level) to 150 students, middle school and high school. They are swamped and a bit overwhelmed at the beginning of the year. So, it doesn't hurt to send an email to highlight your child's ALP, ask how you can work with them to honor the ALP. The ALP is a living document, so take an active interest in the goals that are established and how they will be monitored through the school year. You know your child best, be the advocate they deserve. Just as you would advocate tirelessly for medical care for them, so too must you advocate that they get what they need to grow their brain!
- But what if my teacher is too busy? What if they don't believe in "gifted kids"? Remember, the ALP is a legal document. It is to be honored, so the next step would be to reach out to your Resource Teacher.
- What's a Resource Teacher? Glad you asked. This group of individuals work tirelessly for your child. You can find your Resource Teacher [online](#).
- Ok, that's great, but is there a community within my school that I can look to or join to have a cup of coffee to talk with about the journey I'm walking with my child and the school? Ideally, we would have a [GT Ambassador](#) at each school, someone who links to JAGC, but not all schools have a parent in that role, so perhaps you might consider being that parent. Someone who can be a sounding board or can be a resource for others. You could also ask your principal to offer to have a coffee one morning for parents whose children have an ALP. They have the list and JAGC has the data with the percentage of ALPs per school, so all you have to do is ask us!

- You can also get involved by joining your school's Accountability Committee and engaging with your community about how all kids are growing in your school. ALL kids deserve to grow each and every year. As a Resource Teacher once told me, " All kids should learn something new each day....even those advanced learners." The District has an addendum to its Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) that provides goals for children with ALPs, does your school's UIP align with, at a minimum, those goals? If you don't engage, who will? Find the district's (the gifted addendum is the last few pages) and your school's UIP [here](#).

- Those are great points for me to go through, but my child is still struggling or I don't know where to go next, my child is maxing out on their math or they are just plain bored with the books they are reading or not reading as the case may be. My child is disengaged, or they are twice exceptional (gifted with a disability) and I'm just not finding the help I need....Contact [JAGC](#) we are just on the other side of email. All of JAGC's board members are walking along with you on the journey. We have all struggled with finding the help we need for our children be they in center, neighborhood, charter, homeschooled or private schools. The depth and breadth is available once you press send. So please reach out, we are here for you and your child(ren).

Wishing you the very best for you and your child this school year. JAGC is with you.

Susan Miller, President, JAGC
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