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COMMUNICATING WITH SCHOOLS

GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION

Communicating effectively with schools about meeting the specific learning needs of gifted and talented children, intellectual and social and emotional, is of critical importance. Parents of gifted and talented students are important advocates for their children; therefore establishing a working partnership with your child's school is paramount.

There are ways that parents can prepare for discussions with teachers and schools to assist in achieving positive educational results that are in the best interest of their children's academic and emotional wellbeing. Promoting a collaborative approach to gifted and talented education ensures better outcomes for gifted and talented students.

Under the guidelines of the ACT Education and Training Directorate's (the Directorate) Gifted and Talented Students Policy, school principals are required to nominate a first point of contact for all enquiries about the school's approach to, and advice on, meeting the needs of gifted and talented students. The front office staff will be able to tell you who this is for your child's school. Parents may also need to meet with their child's teacher, the school counsellor, principal or other executive and teaching staff from time to time.

Preparing for the Meeting

- Objectively discuss with your child what is happening at school, what they see and feel. Explore the good things that are happening. Ask questions such as, what would make school more interesting? If they could change anything at school what would it be? What is something at school that excites them? When do they tune out? Write down any concerns that are raised during the discussions.
- Write down thoughts and questions about your child's education as well as your attitudes, values and perceptions. This will help clarify your position before you attend the meeting.
- Make an appointment. This will ensure that you have everyone's complete attention. Send a note prior to the meeting outlining what you would like to discuss. The school then has time to investigate your concerns so that your needs will be thoroughly addressed and any responses will be thoughtful and relevant. Make sure the right people attend the meeting - take an advocate with you if necessary.
- List tangible goals. What would you like to see achieved?
- Bring along any subjective (anecdotal evidence) or objective (psychological tests) evidence you have obtained about your child that will help demonstrate their abilities and potential. Step two of the Directorate's Gifted and Talented Students Policy Flowchart has some specific examples of things that can be gathered to help create a comprehensive picture of a student's abilities. Having this evidence can avoid the meeting turning into a debate on a student's giftedness or non-giftedness.
- Read your school's documentation on identifying and meeting the needs of gifted and talented students and highlight items relevant to your child.
- If possible research current educational theories on gifted and talented education. Start with Gagne's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT). This is the model used as a rationale for the Directorate's Gifted and Talented Students Policy. The Directorate's Parent Fact Sheets on Gifted and Talented Education also provide useful information including an overview of Gagné's DMGT and will give you access to common terminology.

During the Meeting

- Approach the meeting with a positive mindset expecting cooperation and positive outcomes.
- Be future focused rather than dwelling on things that have happened in the past. Your objective is to get the best possible outcomes for your gifted and talented child from now on.
- Try to understand a range of views, attitudes and knowledge about gifted and talented education that are likely to be discussed during the meeting. Participate constructively in the meeting and stay focused on the needs of your child.
- Give a detailed picture of your child. Share information about your child's outside interests.
- Work on solutions. The end result should be better educational outcomes and improved well being for your child if you are working on solutions. Make some suggestions for alternative programs that the teacher or school may not have thought of. The Directorate's Differentiation Parent Fact Sheet provides some useful information on how the curriculum can be adjusted to better suit the learning, physical and emotional needs of gifted and talented students.

Modifications to curriculum might include:

- A community or older student mentor
 - Cluster groups of like-minded students
 - Individual projects
 - Subject or grade acceleration.
- Offer to help with any processes.
 - Take notes and look for consensus in understanding of the issues discussed.
 - Clarify anything you don't understand.
 - Try to have all questions answered or at least a plan of action for follow up.
 - Develop a list of tasks.
 - Have a timeline for the completion of each task.
 - Get the phone number or email and suitable contact times of any school staff, including the school's Gifted and Talented Liaison Officer, for any follow up that may be required.
 - As a group, develop an agreed plan for supporting your child. This may be a PLP, if appropriate.

After the Meeting

Continue to offer your support and collaboration by:

- Regularly following up on any agreed course of action
- Reflect on the meeting. Was there anything that you were unsure of? Were your objectives for the meeting met?
- Regularly ensure that you have copies of any plans created at the meeting
- Check in with your child and the teacher to confirm that your child's needs are being met
- Ensure sufficient information is available to assess your child's progress
- Seek advice and support from outside agencies that specialise in Gifted and Talented Education such as the Gifted Education Research Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) located at the University of New South Wales.