

# Tips For Meeting With Teachers and Administrators

A positive working relationship is important, and change is most likely to occur when the advocate approaches his/her task with these things in mind: Use good sense, good humor and good manners.

## For Meetings

- ~ Be professional in your approach and respectful of others' points of view; be articulate and tactful.
- ~ Be aware of the decision-making process and chain of command in the organization, and act accordingly. Approaching your child's teacher first is probably the best idea, but check to see if your school sets up any type of Team Meetings that would include the principal, high ability coordinator, and/or other teachers your child has.
- ~ Prepare well for your meetings; be well-organized and accurate in your reporting. Do not exaggerate and do not be emotional, but provide specific examples to illustrate your points.
- ~ Be calmly persistent and do not be afraid to ask questions.
- ~ Be prepared with practical suggestions and reasonable goals for progress. Most teachers and administrators will welcome input from parents which saves them both time and energy. Implementing the ideas may not always happen easily but you will at least have set some common goals.
- ~ Ask that student growth be measured. Having goals and suggestions in place is wonderful, and seeing these come to fruition is even better. However, make sure that you and the school are gauging your child's progress. The overall goal is for your child to be learning new things every day!

## Working With Your Child's Teacher

Teachers today have one of the most difficult jobs when it comes to educating children. Most are expected to teach a classroom full of students with a vast range

of needs and abilities. Anything you can do to aid your child's teacher in planning and providing for your own child's academic experience will make his or her job easier. As you spend time educating yourself about the world of high ability education be on the lookout for ideas that you can pass along to the teachers. A few examples might include:

- ~ Provide a different spelling list with more challenging words.
- ~ Extend his or her science and social studies lessons by suggesting a project or report, and sending in library books based on the topics being studied.
- ~ If there is a computer in the room, provide websites (researched by you) that relate to topics being studied in class.
- ~ Provide ideas for open-ended projects that could include all students.
- ~ Help plan inexpensive field trips or arrange for guest speakers.

## Key Steps In Identifying

What should you look for to know if your child's school is appropriately identifying high ability students?

~ Does the district have an Identification Plan in place? Check the school's website or ask the principal or high ability coordinator.

~ Do identification and programming begin early? (Ideally, these should be in place for Kindergarteners.)

~ Do they use multi-faceted assessment? In other words, does the school rely on several sources of testing data when considering students? Are these assessments based on both ability and achievement as well as performance and/or behavior?

~ Is there a committee (rather than an individual) in place for the identification process?

~ Does the district allow nominations to the high ability program from a variety of sources? (e.g. parents, teachers, school personnel other than the child's teacher, etc.)

~ Are teachers and parents informed as to the characteristics of being high ability?

~ Does the district continue identifying students throughout the school career?

~ Does the district allow for further testing for those who request it or for students who are considered “borderline” in terms of meeting the requirements for high ability programming?

## Evaluating a High Ability Program

If your school district has a high ability program in place this is obviously a significant step towards meeting your child’s academic needs. However, you may want to consider some of the following questions which can help you evaluate the program and know if it’s in line with best practices in high ability education.

- ◆ Once students are identified, how are they served?
- ◆ Are services provided only in core content areas or other areas as well?
- ◆ How often are services offered? (Once a week; once a day; all day?)
- ◆ Are there self-contained classrooms/honors sections for high ability students or are they pulled out?
- ◆ Are the teachers who work with high ability students specifically trained to work with this population? (Do they have licensure in high ability education or at least some separate training?)
- ◆ What type of curriculum is being used with high ability students? Are they expected to “go deeper” and use more critical thinking, or just do more work?
- ◆ Is pre-assessment a common tool used to determine needs and readiness?
- ◆ Are open-ended, student-directed activities a common part of the learning process?
- ◆ How is the high ability program evaluated within the school system?