



Every Voice Counts

Dr. Del Siegle, NAGC President

One year ago, I shared the arrival of my infant daughter in this column. Although my wife and I both hold advanced degrees in gifted education, we were nervous about being parents, so we began busily educating ourselves in our quest to be good parents. Like most parents, we continue to be amazed as our young charge matures and develops. We proudly observed her progress from crawling to walking, and we are now marveling as she begins to break the language code and communicate with us.

In previous columns, I have expressed my hope for our daughter's happiness and her continued curiosity. As this curiosity develops, I hope that there will be supports in place to help her grow. As an educator, and now as a parent, I know how important it is for parents to advocate for their own children, as well as for gifted children throughout the nation. If you are not already a member of NAGC's Legislative Action Network, I hope you will take a minute and join (<http://www.nagc.org/forms.aspx?ekfrm=3718>). Joining in this advocacy effort may be the single most important act you can perform in advancing educational opportunities for your gifted child and gifted children everywhere.

Why Is Your Participation So Important Right Now?

Over the past year, NAGC has developed an advocacy agenda aimed at increasing local, state, and national awareness of the educational needs of gifted children. We also have been able to build strategic alliances with members of Congress and with other professional organizations. This effort is resulting in current and potential legislative action that will increase teacher awareness of the needs of gifted children, make schools and states accountable for yearly academic growth for gifted children, and provide services for at-risk gifted students. These advocacy efforts will ensure that every gifted child has an opportunity to learn something new at school every day. This dream can become a reality only if we demonstrate to our educational and legislative leaders that gifted education is important and supported. Your participation in the NAGC Legislative Action Network is an essential element at this time of demonstrating widespread support for gifted students.

The essential education services that special education students now enjoy would not exist if parents around the nation had not bonded together and lobbied for special education support. As advocates for gifted students, we must now do the same. To quote President Obama, "Now is our time." NAGC, in collaboration with other national organizations, has laid the groundwork for legislation supporting the needs of gifted children. Just as my daughter unsteadily ventured

forward step-by-step, she realized that she could accomplish much more by walking than crawling. We, too, must step out of our comfort zone and learn to stand tall and walk for gifted education.

Parents are a vital component of the NAGC organization, and they play an essential role in this movement. Over the past year, NAGC has expanded its outreach to parents. We have created special parent membership fees through a joint state/national membership category. We recently released the *Mile Marker Series* that guides parents through every step of their journey in supporting their gifted children successfully. This interactive CD was developed by experts in the field and parents who have traveled the parenting route. It includes useful, up-to-date, practical information, and guidance for nurturing gifted children.

NAGC also has formed a taskforce to address some of the confusion surrounding gifted terminology. Over the next 9 months, this group will be reviewing and clarifying terms in the field and possibly proposing new terminology that more clearly and positively reflects the nature and needs of gifted children. This group's efforts will enable us to communicate more effectively with educational and legislative leaders as we strive to increase educational services for gifted students.

Active involvement by all of us is essential if we are to reach our mission of having giftedness and high potential in youth recognized, universally valued, actively supported, and developed. We can do better than restricting the highest levels of achievement in our schools to mediocrity. Many gifted elementary school students already know between 40% and 50% of the material covered in their current grade prior to the start of school. We can do better than ignoring almost half of our nation's talent. Forty-four percent of low-income students who are classified as high achieving when they enter first grade can no longer be classified as such by the time they reach fifth grade.

As an organization, and as individuals, we need to grow and develop new skills as we strive to improve educational opportunities for gifted children. Although parents often serve as important role models for their children, our children also can serve as role models for us as we advance toward obtaining appropriate educational opportunities for them. We must retain their childlike wonder and appreciation for the world around them as we learn to explore options that surround us. When we falter during our advocacy journey and lose our balance, we must jump back on our feet and continue to move forward just as we did when we learned to walk. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said that, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." Break your silence and sign up for the NAGC Legislative Action Network today. Join the chorus of voices for gifted education.