

Effective Advocates

by Dr. Julia Link Roberts and Tracy Ford Inman



Find “Kindred Spirits”

Make the year 2006 a year for advocacy! In each edition of Parenting for High Potential, a new column, “Effective Advocates,” will focus on a specific advocacy issue: Find Kindred Spirits, Craft Messages, Communicate Effectively, and Be Involved for the Long Run. We thank Dr. Julia Link Roberts Chair of the NAGC legislative committee and Tracy Ford Inman, both of Western Kentucky University, for preparing this series.

As parents, you may often feel alone in your thinking. Maybe you see your child bringing home all A's or 100's, but you never see any studying going on or real effort being put into it. You might even question if this is a concern (It is!) or if anyone else feels the same. Maybe your child complains of boredom in school or of covering the same material as last year. Perhaps he's reading *Harry Potter* at home but only allowed to read *Harry the Horrible* in school. You may be confused and rightly concerned. Is your child getting what he needs in school? Is it just your child experiencing this? Is there anything you can do about this?

It's time to speak out. In order to speak out, to advocate for your child, you must discover others who feel the way you do. Step one in advocacy is to find “kindred spirits.” Who else questions easy grades? Who else is interested in advanced math for children who already have mastered the grade-level concepts? Who else in your child's school supports children reading materials that are beyond grade level? Who else shares your concerns or interests? Other parents will undoubtedly share your concerns, but what about educators? Administrators? They, too, may be kindred spirits. They, too, need to find others who share similar beliefs and concerns. Together you are likely to be more effective than you can be alone. Your voice will be much stronger – and better heard.

What happens, though, when the answers to all those questions aren't obvious? What if it's not clear who shares your interests in speaking out to encourage more challenge for children at your child's school or even in the school district? You may discover a fellow advocate at your very own dinner table: your child. Listen when he talks about other children who are reading chapter books when most other children are not ready for reading at that level.

Listen when your daughter describes another child who is very capable in math and enjoys challenging problems. Their parents are possible fellow advocates, kindred spirits. They may indeed be interested in advocating for challenge. Search for others, too. Attend school council meetings and parent-teacher meetings; listen for conversations that indicate an interest in issues related to challenging children to work hard on reading, math, or any other subject to ensure that each is making continuous progress. Consider activities where like-minded people gather: academic team, Future Problem Solving, FIRST LEGO® League, Science Olympiad, Math Counts, Destination ImagiNation®, Odyssey of the Mind – the list depends greatly on your own child's interests. You will find others who think as you do.

Numbers matter when it comes to advocacy. It may be easy to ignore one parent, but a dozen parents get more done. Double that number and the chances of getting your message across also doubles. That is why it is so important to find “kindred spirits.”

Here's how schools might look at the number of people raising questions, as described by Parent Leadership Associates/KSA Communications (the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence is a statewide education advocacy organization):

- 1 Advocate = A Fruit Cake
- 2 Advocates = Fruit Cake and Friend
- 3 Advocates = Troublemakers
- 5 Advocates = Let's Have a Meeting
- 10 Advocates = We'd Better Listen
- 25 Advocates = Our Dear Friends
- 50 Advocates = A Powerful Organization

Once you've located the kindred spirits in your area, you're ready to craft a message. Stay tuned for the next column!

Recommended Resources

www.nagc.org. See the Advocacy Toolkit, in the Information and Resources section.

Purcell, J. H. & Eckert, R. D. (Eds.). (2006). *Designing Services and Programs for High-ability Learners: A Guidebook for Gifted Education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. See the chapter, (Planning for Advocacy).