

THE MINNESOTA COUNCIL FOR THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

Mission Statement: "The Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented (MCGT) is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting better understanding of, and educational services for, gifted and talented children and their families." Its membership is comprised primarily of parents, educators and other professionals.

MCGT works to:

- educate parents and the community about the characteristics, problems and special needs of gifted children;
- create and maintain channels of communication between parents, educators and other interested persons concerning information on development of high potential;
- develop state-wide workshops and seminars for parents, educators and the general public concerning high potential students; and
- promote advocacy and legislation that will expand educational provisions for high potential students.

Members receive information about MCGT activities and a variety of topics about gifted and talented children through Outlook newsletters (published 5 times a year), a website, special meetings and seminars, chapter meetings, and an annual conference with a special children's program. The current issue of Outlook includes updated lists of the MCGT Board of Directors and chapters (both recognized and developing). The MCGT office also has a Resource Center with materials on a wide variety of topics which may be borrowed: books, magazines/journals, articles, videotapes, cassettes. Because benefits increase greatly when an active local chapter exists in the area of a member's residence, MCGT provides assistance in the organization of local chapters throughout the state.

The members of MCGT are also encouraged to become involved in the state organization through board membership or work on various committees including legislation, public relations, annual conference, fund-raising, chapter development and others.

MCGT is affiliated and/or collaborates with the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), the Council for Exceptional Children - Talented and Gifted Division (CEC-TAG), The Association for Gifted, and the Minnesota Educators of the Gifted and Talented (MEGT), as well as with organizations concerned with gifted children in other states.

WHY ORGANIZE A LOCAL CHAPTER FOR THE GIFTED AND TALENTED?

A parent support group is a unified effort to meet the needs of parents and their gifted and talented children. The most significant people who touch the lives of gifted and talented children are their parents. It is these special adults more than anyone else who have the opportunity and responsibility to guide and support these children into realizing and continually stretching to reach their full potential.

Gifted and talented children have special needs. They require unique guidance, emotional support, and educational opportunities. Gifted and talented children need to be understood by their peers and adults. When these needs are fulfilled, they are able to rise to their greatest capabilities.

Not only do the children have special needs, but so do their parents. In *Teaching Young Gifted Children in the Regular Classroom: Identifying, Nurturing and Challenging Ages 4-9* (1997), Joan Smutny and her co-authors wrote: "Parents of gifted children need support from other parents and from educators and other professionals who understand the challenges of living with highly able and creative children. They need to know that they are not alone and that there are people who are willing to help them." Fears of rejection, scorn, envy, and loneliness can be eased when parents meet other parents to talk and share concerns and plans for these children. Sally Yahnke Walker said (in *How to Understand, Live With and Stick Up for Your Gifted Child*, 1991): "You'll get a lot out of joining a parent support group. Such groups offer moral support, companionship, the chance to exchange ideas and increase your knowledge, and contacts with other adults who may join with you in advocating for your kids."

A safe and responsive environment can provide the necessary emotional support parents are seeking. A parent support group can do not only this, but can also open communication channels between the schools and community to enhance appropriate educational opportunities for gifted and talented children. When these lines are open and parents, teachers and community forces are sharing and planning together, many of the problems and concerns of gifted and talented children and their parents can be resolved. When the home, school and community work together, the child's special needs may be addressed more quickly and conscientiously.

MCGT provides these services and information to its chapters:

- Rebates of a portion of the MCGT membership paid by its chapter's members.

- Chapter contact meetings (at least once a year) for chapter presidents and other interested individuals to exchange concerns and information.
- A list of speakers that may be contacted for chapter meetings.
- A list of other chapter contacts.
- The Chapter Development Handbook of organizational information and procedures.
- Membership application forms.
- Information from the MCGT office on requested special topics.

GETTING A LOCAL CHAPTER STARTED

GOAL 1:

Develop a list of educators (superintendent, principals, counselors, teachers, school board members, gifted/talented coordinator), parents and community members who would be receptive to the formation of a local chapter.

Suggestions to accomplish it:

1. Call MCGT to request a Chapter Development Handbook.
2. Contact teachers and administrators for names of potentially interested parents. If these names cannot be released, ask if the educators would be willing to distribute information to those parents.
3. Send a flyer home with parents (sample in appendix).
4. Print notices in the school district newsletter and/or community flyer.
5. Make announcements at school functions (carnivals, concerts, parent/teacher organization meetings, parent/teacher conferences).
6. Put up posters in schools, libraries, local shopping centers, stores.
7. Submit a news release to the local paper (sample in appendix).
8. Arrange for announcements on a local radio station (sample in appendix).
9. Publish your intentions in the MCGT state newsletter as a developing chapter.
10. Always include a phone number and/or email address so parents can contact someone for more information.

GOAL 2:

Hold an organizational and motivational meeting.

Suggestions to accomplish it:

1. Plan a fairly short program, possibly with a speaker, aimed to generate enthusiasm for a chapter.
2. Set a date that allows ample time for publicity (see goal 1).
3. Hold the meeting in an easily accessible location.
4. Extend personal invitations to educators.
5. Set up a concise meeting agenda (see example following goal 5).
6. Have MCGT membership forms available. (Make copies for the chapter to keep, then send original forms and checks made out to MCGT by each member to the MCGT Membership Chair, 5701 Normandale Rd., Suite 315, Edina, MN 55424.)
7. Have each person complete an informational survey (sample in Appendix D in this handbook). Ask them to fill in their professions and hobbies

so that when something needs to be done in an area of their expertise, they can be contacted.

8. Establish a core of individuals to assess needs and to organize the next meeting.
9. Plan to set up a chapter bank account to use when the chapter is accepted by the MCGT board and the chapter receives rebates for its members. Take care when choosing a bank. Some do not cater to non-profit organizations and impose service charges for deposits and checks written. Use the MCGT letter establishing non-profit 501(c)(3) status. This letter (Appendix I in this handbook) contains the necessary federal tax identification number.

GOAL 3:

Hold a second meeting.

Suggestions to accomplish it:

1. Publicize the meeting (as you should do for every meeting. See goal 1).
2. Put together a meeting agenda (as you should do for every meeting).
3. Have MCGT membership forms available.
4. Have informational surveys available for newcomers to complete.
5. Set up committees that have been deemed necessary, including one to draft local chapter by-laws (sample in this handbook).

GOAL 4:

Hold a third meeting.

Suggestions to accomplish it:

1. Business part of meeting:
 - Present the slate of officers and vote.
 - Continue to develop the chapter by-laws, if not completed. Vote on the by-laws if they are completed.
 - Review the summary of the informational surveys.
 - Announce plans for future meetings.
2. Meeting options this time might include a speaker, small group discussions or interaction with someone from your local school district administration.

GOAL 5:

Send necessary information to the MCGT Board of Directors to become an official chapter. (Until now, the group has been designated a developing chapter.)

Suggestions to accomplish this:

Be sure to include:

1. Local chapter by-laws
2. Chapter membership list, including information gathered from MCGT membership forms.
3. A letter requesting affiliation as a chapter with MCGT. (At least seven paid members are required. Some people may have paid directly to MCGT; call the office to find out.)
4. Names, addresses, e-mail, and positions of local officers.
5. Information about chapter bank account.