

## What's Going On!?! Info-Gathering at School

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This section has a lot of overlap with the previous section. You are still approaching your advocacy with curiosity and gathering information about what's going on and what your child is experiencing, feeling, and grappling with. This time the focus is on what's going on outside your home—specifically, what's going on at school. If your child homeschools, don't worry, you can certainly adapt this section to any type of educational programs your child may be engaging with as a homeschooler.

### Who to Trust: Child vs. Teacher—Why Not Both?

Chances are that you aren't with your child every minute of their school day. Even if they attend online school from your kitchen table or homeschool, there are bound to be part of their school day and experience that you do not witness firsthand.

Further, your child's experience of a situation probably differs from yours, at least slightly, simply because you are each individual humans who experience the world in unique and personal ways.

All of this means that as you embark upon your school-related info-gathering, you will likely have to reconcile different perspectives, agendas, and goals.

What your child experiences and wants from school likely differs in some ways from what you want from your child's school, and all of this likely differs in some ways from the goals, policies, and agendas laid out by your child's teacher(s), which may also differ from school administration or the district.

There are a lot of players when it comes to your child's school experience. Sometimes, this makes it hard to know which voice to listen to.

In the last section, we talked about how to info-gather with your child and to understand their perspective. You can continue to use those tools and strategies to understand what they like and don't like about school. By continuing to have ongoing conversations with your child, you can learn what they're experiencing, what they're struggling with, and what their preferences are. All that information is useful when making advocacy decisions.

In this section, we've included tools to help you start gathering information about what's happening at school—including what's working and what's not:

- [Who's Who Contact Sheet](#): Start with the basics by filling out this contact sheet, which will help you keep track of the contact information of the professionals on your child's educational team.
- [Start-Stop-Continue Activity](#): This activity is something both you and your child can fill out. This is a fairly quick, to-the-point gut check that can help you and your child determine what things about your current environments, routines, and rhythms you'd like to start, stop, and continue. This activity can help you and your child more clearly understand what parts of school or daily life are working well and where there is room for change.
- [Parent Goal Worksheet](#): This worksheet will help you to understand what your goals are

for your child—including the goals you may have for their educational or school experiences.

- [Student Goal Worksheet](#): This worksheet will help you to understand what your child's goals are for themselves—including goals they may have for their educational or school experiences.

These tools are meant to help you identify the key players in your child's school experience and to define the goals you and your child have for their education. Clarifying who you are working with (contact list) and what you're working toward (your and your child's goals) will help you to focus your advocacy efforts more effectively.

## Tool: Who's Who Contact Sheet

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Sometimes, it can be difficult to remember the details of the people you are working with in your advocacy efforts. It can be helpful to record some basic notes about those you are working with. This can also come in handy if another parent or team member needs to communicate with someone you normally communicate with. These notes can help to make communication a bit more seamless.

**Tip:** Unsure what to include in the notes section? Consider what personal details you know about this person. If you ran into them at the grocery store, what kind of small talk would you make with them? Do they have children you might ask about? Do they like the same TV show or team as you do? These might be good details to chat about at the start of a meeting. Opening and breaking the ice like this can help to make stressful meetings more grounded and personal. If you don't feel comfortable with this level of personal conversation, you can use this note section to record actions this person took in a meeting or classroom that resonated with you or your student—something you appreciated or worked well. Being able to refer back to things you appreciate about a person can have a similarly positive, grounding effect in a meeting.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

Role: \_\_\_\_\_

Supportive of Young Scholar: Yes / No / It's Complicated

Responsive to Parent Communication: Yes / No / Sometimes

Preferred Method of Communication: Email / Phone / Video Call / In-Person Meeting

Contact Info: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Tool: Start-Stop-Continue Activity

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Discussions about how to adjust or maintain a family's dynamic and routines can be challenging. Often, families fall into a routine where only the parents are involved in making decisions and rules. Though the entire family is expected to live with these decisions and rules, there is not necessarily a lot of conversation about how and why decisions and rules have been made. This dynamic can often be challenging for PG and 2e children because they have distinct world views and are often heavily invested in their understandings of justice and fairness. As a result, they often have strong ideas and want to be part of conversations, especially when that conversation will impact their lives.

This is not to say everyone in your household should have the same decision-making power. For reasons of safety and wellness, that is not always possible. However, there are often still ways to make decision making within a family more collaborative.

One collaborative tool is this Start-Stop-Continue activity. This activity can be scaled up or down in complexity to fit the needs and asynchronies of all family members, meaning even the youngest Young Scholars or siblings can contribute to the Start-Stop-Continue conversation.

### How to get started: Hear everyone's voice.

Family routines and rhythms—including what's happening at school or work—can be difficult to revise because they impact so many parts of our lives. As such, discussing family changes in broad terms can seem overwhelming. To begin, everyone should fill out the Start-Stop-Continue Chart below.

This framework helps to create a more constructive structure for conversation around family routines because it is asking simple questions that everyone in the family can weigh in on. The chart has three sections:

- **Start.** This is an opportunity for each family member to share what they think will help to improve your family's routines and dynamic. Keep in mind, everyone may have a different idea of what should "start." Take time to discuss everyone's ideas. *Even if there is no clear consensus, are there any emerging themes? If there are, that might help you to clarify the needs of your family.*
- **Stop.** This is an opportunity for each family member to share what is not working for them about your family's current routines and dynamic. Again, everyone might have a different perspective here. Take time to discuss everyone's ideas. *Even if there is no clear consensus or some things can't be completely stopped (example: certain chores or logistical necessities), are there any emerging themes? If there are, that might help you to clarify the needs of your family.*
- **Continue.** Often, we assume things are working in a family unless we hear otherwise. This is part of the reason that people can be reluctant to share what isn't working for them. They may be hesitant to speak up. Taking time to let everyone share what they think is working is a really important activity. It helps to reinforce the positive rhythms and routines of your family. It provides a setting for each family to better understand the needs and priorities of everyone else.

Start	Stop	Continue
<i>Example: rotating chores - I hate always having to take out the trash. It would be nice to have a break.</i>	<i>Example: The "tech only in shared spaces" rule. I like doing homework in my room because it is less distracting there. So sometimes having tech in our bedrooms should be ok.</i>	<i>Example: movie nights</i>

Once everyone has had time to fill out the Start-Stop-Continue Chart, you can have a discussion to better understand each family member’s perspective.

Once everyone has shared their thoughts on the family’s rhythms and routines, what’s next?

**Make a plan.**

It is important to be clear about what will happen next. Sharing a want for change without any discussion about how that change may be enacted can be frustrating or unfulfilling.

## Tool: Parent Goal Worksheet

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Setting and accomplishing goals often has less to do with the specific goal and more with the systems or habits you use as you work toward your goal.

This worksheet is designed to help you name your goal and its component parts, as well as the systems you'll need in place to accomplish your goal. Articulating the process required to achieve your goal can help you to better understand your goal. It can also help you to put in place more effective practices to help you accomplish this goal.

Set aside about 30 minutes to think through and articulate what you'd like to accomplish. Start with one goal. Repeat as needed.

What follows is an example of how a Young Scholar parent may fill out the goal worksheet, followed by a blank copy for you to complete.

As you complete this Parent Goal Worksheet, your child can complete the [Student Goal Worksheet](#). When you are each done, you can discuss the worksheets together and make plans together.

### Section 1: Define your goal.

First, break down the specific components and expectations of the goal.

**Example:** Cheryl wants her son to be happy. Her son is 10 years old and profoundly gifted. He may also be on the autism spectrum, but she isn't sure since the PG and autism profiles overlap in so many ways. For now, she is holding off on more testing and just wants to do everything she can to make sure her son is a happy kid. She dedicates all her time to this goal. However, this leaves her feeling overwhelmed and as if she is never doing enough. It makes her son feel as if he is always being assessed but that he is never quite reaching his mother's expectations.

After a conversation with other parents and realizing how stressed her and her child are, Cheryl comes to the conclusion she must be more specific with her goals. She starts by thinking through what her son "being happy" really means for her.

#### **What's your goal?**

*For my son to be happy.*

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#### **What does accomplishing your goal look like? What needs to happen for you to consider the goal complete? Be specific.**

*He needs to have friends, be able to learn at his own pace, and balance screen time with other activities.*

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#### **Why is this your goal? What does accomplishing this goal mean for you?**

*I worry he doesn't have enough time to be a kid. I just want him to be happy and normal.*

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#### **Who will need to be involved to accomplish the goal?**

*Kids who are like my son.*

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**When does this goal need to be accomplished? Are there mini-deadlines along the way?**

*I don't know.*

**Where is this taking place?**

*Anywhere—just as long as he finds a kid like him to connect with.*

**How will this goal be accomplished? What are the top 5 actions that need to take place to accomplish this goal?**

1. *Find a kid just like my son.*
2. *Sign him up for normal kid stuff.*
3. *Limit his screen time.*
4. *Join a parent group to try and make connections.*
5. *Put a virtual event on the calendar.*

## Section 2: Define your systems.

After breaking down the goals in Section 1, reflect on the Section 1 answers. What practices are currently in place to accomplish this goal? What can be put in place to help accomplish this goal?

**Example:** Since no two profoundly gifted students are exactly the same, Cheryl feels overwhelmed by her “find a kid just like my son” action item. This seems like a daunting task, but after talking over her goals, she realizes that her son is happy when he is watching *Nova*, playing Minecraft, and coding with his friends. While she was originally worried about screen time, Cheryl is starting to realize that her son is making meaningful peer connections while online.

Suddenly, Cheryl’s goal seems a bit more achievable. Cheryl will continue to look around the systems, routines, and rhythms she already has in place (or can put in place) to achieve her goal.

Next, Cheryl will list out the 5 actions she listed in the first half of the worksheet. Then, she’ll think through what practices will help her complete these actions. She will also consider the circumstances that will be most conducive to her accomplishing her goals. She knows that there are some activities and practices her son is flexible about and some he is adamantly against. This will help her consider what circumstances may be most successful for her son.

Goal	Under what circumstances has this been successfully achieved in the past?	What do these examples have in common?
<b>Goal 1:</b> <i>Find a kid like my son.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Minecraft.</i></li><li>• <i>That robotics class he took last year.</i></li><li>• <i>STEM book club at the local library (but that’s with older kids).</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Working independently in a group.</i></li><li>• <i>Interest-based.</i></li></ul>
<b>Goal 2:</b> <i>Sign him up for normal kid stuff.</i>	<i>Almost never. He always ends up watching videos on my phone or reading a book and ignoring the other kids.</i>	<i>He won’t participate when he isn’t interested.</i>

<b>Goal 3:</b> <i>Limit his screen time.</i>	<i>When he is transitioning to something else he really likes or when he negotiates his screen time With his dad (who is lets him have more time than I would). Usually, it is whining and sulking when I take his devices away.</i>	<i>Works well when he is engaged or participates in the limiting process.</i>
<b>Goal 4:</b> <i>Join a parent group to try to make connections.</i>	<i>Joined and participated regularly in a Facebook parent group. Participate in virtual events for parents. Talk with families I've connected with.</i>	<i>When I have the energy to participate, I can usually find someone to talk to and relate to. But sometimes I am just too tired. It is lonely. Constantly working to connect with strangers is too much work some days.</i>
<b>Goal 5:</b> <i>Put a parent virtual event on the calendar.</i>	<i>Registering for at least one event a month. This way, even when I feel like I'm in the weeds and overwhelmed, I've got time already scheduled to check-in and get help.</i>	<i>When I'm overwhelmed or in an advocacy crisis, I don't think to reach out for help. Emails pile up, and I miss events that could probably help my situation. If I already have an event like this on my calendar, I'm more likely to attend and ask for help.</i>

### Section 3: Make a plan.

This can seem like the most overwhelming step. However, you're more prepared for it than you might think. Take a look at your responses thus far. Consider what you've been doing and what resources or options are available to you. This will all help you to make a plan for moving forward on your goal.

**Example:** Reflecting on her response, Cheryl has started to identify some trends.

#### What efforts tend to work well?

Working independently in groups. Interest-based activities. Having him participate in making decisions. Reaching out to my PG-support community regularly.

#### What efforts are less successful?

Making all decisions on my own. Trying to handle everything on my own until things are overwhelming. Pushing age-based activities over interest-based activities.

Now that Cheryl has reflected on the trends or patterns she was noticing, she is better equipped to make a plan to help her son meet more like-minded peers and engage in less screen-based activities.

**Based on your goals and the trends you've identified, what are 3 things you can do within the next two weeks to work toward your goal?**

1. Reach out to PG-support network (Facebook groups, the Davidson Member Community,

Family Services virtual events, etc.) for peer connection and activity ideas.

2. Talk with my son and family about how to balance screen time.
3. Talk with my son about what activities he might want to try. Review ideas from PG-support network as well as his ideas.

The action items on Cheryl's list are still working toward making sure her son is happy. However, these are specific, manageable, and actionable items, which helps ease the pressure on both her and her son. In realizing she doesn't have to handle this all on her own, Cheryl can take a deep breath and find a little more space for herself as well.

### Now it is your turn...

Set aside 30 minutes to fill out the following worksheet with your own goals.

#### Section 1: Define your goal.

First, break down the specific components and expectations of your goal.

What's your goal?

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What does accomplishing your goal look like? What needs to happen for you to consider the goal complete? Be specific.

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Why is this your goal? What does accomplishing this goal mean for you?

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Who will need to be involved to accomplish the goal?

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When does this goal need to be accomplished? Are there mini-deadlines along the way?

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Where is this taking place?

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How will this goal be accomplished? What are the top 5 actions that need to take place to accomplish this goal?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

### Section 2: Define your systems.

Now that you have broken down your goal. Reflect on your answers. What practices do you have in place to accomplish this goal? What can you put in place to help you accomplish this goal? Take the actions from the first half of the works sheet. List them here. Articulate what practices can be put in place to complete these actions. Consider under what circumstances this goal is most likely to be accomplished

Goal	Under what circumstances has this been successfully achieved in the past?	What do these examples have in common?
Goal 1:		

<b>Goal 2:</b>		
<b>Goal 3:</b>		
<b>Goal 4:</b>		
<b>Goal 5:</b>		

**Section 3: Make a plan.**

Reflecting on your above response, consider the trends or commonalities you have noticed.

What efforts tend to work well?

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What efforts are less successful?

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Based on your goals and the trends you've identified, what are 3 things you can do within the next two weeks to work toward your goal?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

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Now that you have completed this worksheet, read it over and think about when and how you can share these goals with your advocacy team.

You can encourage your child to fill out the following [Student Goal Worksheet](#), and then, you can discuss and compare your separate lists.

If you are co-parenting with someone, you might consider asking them to fill out this worksheet, and then, you can discuss and compare your separate lists.

## Tool: Student Goal Worksheet

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Setting and accomplishing goals often has less to do with the specific goal and more with the habits you use as you work toward your goal.

This worksheet is designed to help you name your goal and the habits you'll need in place to accomplish your goal. Planning the steps required to achieve your goal can help you to better understand your goal. It can also help you to put in more effective habits in place to help you accomplish this goal.

Set aside about 20 minutes to think through and write about what you'd like to accomplish this school year. Start with one goal. Repeat as needed.

### Define Your Goal

What did you like best about school last year? Why?

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What did you like least about school last year? Why?

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What would have made last school year better?

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What is your biggest goal this year? Why?

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How will you know when you've achieved your goal?

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What steps will you need to take to achieve your goal?

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Who can help you achieve your goal?

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How can you ask these people for help?

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**Develop Your Action Plan**

Now that you have defined your goal, it's time to make a plan for achieving your goal. Review your answers above, and consider the following questions about the first step of achieving your goal. Repeat this step for each step of your goal.

What is the first step of achieving this goal?

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How will you know when you have completed Step 1?

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When do you want Step 1 to be completed?

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What materials do you need to complete Step 1?

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### Build Your Team

Now that you've named your goal and each of the steps that will help you achieve your goal, it is time to gather your team to help you make your dream a reality:

- Tell your parents about your plan. Ask for help, as needed.
- Can a teacher help with your plan? Ask!
- Can a coach, tutor, or club leader help with your plan? Ask!
- Can a friend help with your plan? Talk to your parents, and set up a time to work on this goal with your friend.

## Conclusion

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As we reach the end of this section, it's time for a quick gut check.

### **TL;DR: Green Flag; Red Flag**

After reading and working through this section, what are you feeling good, reassured, or energized by (green flags), and what are you feeling wary of, resistant to, or otherwise concerned about (red flags)?

#### **Green Flags**

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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Red Flags**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Consider revisiting these flags whenever you finish the next section. What has stayed the same? What are you maybe feeling differently about?

Gut feelings are often based on where we are at a particular point in time and can be impacted by a variety of things. Revisiting gut feelings and reactions over time can help to stay curious and open-minded as the situations around us evolve and change.