

This document is designed to give a set of guidelines for any member of a school trying to start a Gifted and Talented Student Board at their own school.

STUDENTS:

1.0 Student Support

1.1 Introduction

As a student interested in creating a student-led GT board, the first step is to recruit other students to aid in the process. The majority of schools hold a minimum interest requirement on interest in order to create a club or organization, and while a student-led GT board (henceforth referred to as a GT board) may not fall under traditional club standards, schools often enforce these policies regardless. We recommend groups of 3 or more students to begin these boards, as this shows teachers and administrators that there is enough student interest to upkeep the organization. Beginning a board is quite a lot of work, and having multiple people to help spread out the tasks will make this process much easier.

1.2 How to find like-minded students

Finding like-minded students in your school, whether large or small, can be a challenge due to the unique nature of a GT board. While on the search for members, it is important to take into consideration that some students may not be interested in a board or may oppose the idea entirely. This means that it is essential to focus on the students who are willing to engage with and interested in the topics. To create a board, it is vital for the first members to be passionate about the topic and willing to put work and effort into it.

Another important consideration in this matter is the importance and benefits to those who create the board. When talking to peers about creating a board, mention benefits, such as leadership and organizational experience. Encourage peers to think about the skills this board will help them gain, and the leadership they can showcase to future jobs and universities by helping with the startup.

1.3 Dialogue

The dialogue used to encourage students to join in the process of creating a board is important as it can influence the culture of the board, its structure, and its future. When talking about the prospect of starting a student-led GT board, it is important to use diction that properly conveys the purpose of the board.

Much of the proper diction as to how to speak about the board can be found on our website and resources page at NGTSAB.org, however we will give a high-level overview of it here.

A key part of a student-led GT board comes from the title, “student-led”. This is an important aspect to keep in mind when discussing the board, as the ultimate goal of GT boards is to encourage student advocacy in the gifted space. While discussing the board, it is also important to refrain from using language that isolates or discriminates against GT students, especially if your state does not contain procedures for identifying and supporting GT students. Verbiage is also important when it comes to how to refer to GT students, as in some states, the traditional way of referring to students as “GT” is no longer in effect, and they are referred to as “advanced” students or otherwise. Our general recommendation is to use the verbiage most commonly found in your state. We will refer to boards as “GT” throughout this document, but substitute in the vocabulary of choice when referring to your board.

The purpose of boards such as this is to give students a platform to advocate for what they need in educational policy school-wide, state-wide, and even nation-wide. By creating a group of students who are passionate about giving their peers a voice in their education, it allows for school to be more productive and beneficial. It can also bring attention to issues that students face such as declining mental health and lack of access to challenging material.

1.3.1 Close friends

A primary place to find like-minded students is within your own friend group. As a student, it is likely that you surround yourself with like-minded people, so consider those around you as your first options. Reach out to your friends first, and you may be surprised how many are willing, and wanting, to participate.

Close friends are often the easiest place to start when it comes to creating a board, as it does not take very many involved students to begin the snowball effect to create one. Talking to close friends can be as simple as mentioning the prospect of a GT board in a conversation, or presenting it to your friends during a class or a passing period. The method of presentation here is largely up to individual experience, so do what you believe is in your best judgement.

1.3.2 Other peers

If close friends don't work out, whether through disinterest or otherwise, looking to other peers is a difficult, but worthwhile endeavor. The first step in looking to other peers for support is finding those we would support the board. The first place to look is to others in the GT program at your school, such as through advisory groups or other organized events. If those events/programs do not exist at your school, looking for peers in your advanced classes is the next best step. Look for students who are involved in the school community already, as they are typically more willing to pursue advocacy and try to benefit the community.

It is often best to introduce the topic to other peers as a support system for advanced students, rather than a “gifted and talented board” especially if your school does not already have established support for gifted students. This rephrasing, while ultimately accomplishing the same thing, can help avoid the internal biases of those you are reaching out to in the creation of the board. Ultimately, the best way to represent the idea of a GT board to others is to frame it as another avenue of support for advanced students who often do not get the support they need. Or as a way to improve an educational system that might not be satisfactory?

1.4 How to organize

In the starting stages of a GT board, organizing the students can be difficult due to the lower numbers. Each board will be different based on student makeup, however there are some guiding principles to follow

We recommend avoiding traditional leadership structures like “president”, etc. We have found that a GT board thrives in less traditional leadership structures, such as being run by project leads or simply relying on more experienced members to provide guidance. While traditional leadership structures utilizing roles such as presidents or officers can be an easy way to structure a board, project leads or less rigid roles can also be effective depending on the number of members. By using a non-traditional leadership style, it allows each member of the board to speak up about what they believe the board should do, creating a more creative environment which supports advanced students better. A local-level GT board is a very personal endeavor, so allow those on it to be the people driving the direction of the board’s decisions and projects. Encourage younger students to lead projects rather than just being part of them. The younger students should be a large part of the board and the decision making, as they will eventually inherit the board after the older students graduate. A GT board has much freedom in what it does and where it lends its support, so allowing fresh voices to be a part of the conversation leads to bigger, better ideas.

2.0 Teacher Support

2.1 Introduction

The second phase of creating a student-led GT board is to gain the support of at least 1 teacher or counselor. This is mostly in part to follow typical administration rules of official clubs/activities needing a teacher “sponsor”, but is also intended to give the board access to more opportunities and resources by having a teacher supporting it. It is important to find a teacher who encourages the board being student-led, as a teacher who is against a student-led board is against the core tenants of the board.

2.2 How to find supportive teachers

Finding supportive teachers can be broken down into 2 main categories based on whether your school has or does not have pre-existing GT or advanced learner support. While the process is undoubtedly easier with pre-existing GT support, it is by no means impossible without it, and in fact can be much more valuable to the students the board supports if the board is the only GT support offered at the school.

2.2.1 With pre-existing GT support

With pre-existing support for advanced learners, such as a GT coordinator or other personnel, it is only logical to go to them first for support. When reaching out to a GT coordinator or other personnel, it is best to use language highlighting the student connection and benefit a GT board can have. GT coordinators are always looking for more ways to support GT students that are relatively low on time requirements and are low-cost/nearly free, so a student-led GT board is an enticing option for them. Propose the board as a source of connection between the coordinator and the GT student body, as it can help connect students, especially at the high school level, to the GT support system. We have found it is much easier to support GT students when the support is coming from peers rather than an authority figure, so ensure to highlight this when proposing a GT board to a GT coordinator.

2.2.2 Without pre-existing GT support

We understand that having pre-existing GT support is a rare unicorn in the world of education, thus this section discusses how to find supportive teachers without having official GT support.

The best place to look for GT-friendly teachers is within your own advanced classes, as those teachers are often the closest to you and peers who are a part of the advanced student community. To gather teacher support, use similar principles to gather peer support, such as calling it an “advanced student support program”. Many advanced teachers understand that advanced students require additional support, so introducing the topic to them in this way allows for better communication and promotion of the idea. Some teachers may be predisposed to biases and may believe that advanced students do not require more support since they already do “well enough”, so finding other teachers who are understanding of the cause would allow for more success. Additionally, it is beneficial to mention that the teacher role on a board such as this is low-commitment, which could sway some teachers who are on the fence.

It is also possible to look in your school’s counseling department for support, as there may be counselors who are friendly to the idea of supporting GT students. Use the same principles as recruiting teachers, plus advocate for how the board provides extra support for students who are not typically the focus of the counseling department. This act of “filling in the gaps” of the support system in a

school is incredibly beneficial for all parties involved, so mentioning this can help sway counselors, alongside the other principles already mentioned in this section.

2.3 The role of teachers

When incorporating teachers/counselors into the process of a student-led GT board, it is key to remember the “student-led” in the board. While teachers can have an active role in the decisions and actions of the board, at the end of the day the students should have the majority of voice in the decision making process. It should be the students, not the teachers, who are deciding where the effort of the board goes. There are some obvious exceptions, however, as oftentimes teachers know what is allowable or not for the board to pursue, and teachers should serve as advisors and guides for student advocacy.

Teachers should also be used as a place to garner resources, as they most often have enough connections to other teachers, administrators and district personnel and other opportunities that might not be known to the majority of students. Thus, working through teachers gives more room for the growth of the board. The utilization of teachers will vary drastically depending on individual schools, but we encourage you to utilize teachers and staff as much as you can within the boundaries of your situation.

3.0 Administrator Support

3.1 Introduction

After garnering student and teacher support, the next step is to get support, or at least acceptance, from the school and district administration. Being able to work with, or through, administrators is a crucial step in the creation of a GT board as the administrators serve as the final “checkpoint” in the tangible work, goals, and existence of the board. Administrators have the power to make or break a project or initiative, or the board itself, so maintaining good relationships is important. However, we will also cover what to do if they provide obstacles to the board’s initiatives.

3.2 Knowing your administration

Knowing the way your administration functions and who has the decision making power is the first step to working alongside them. The teacher/counselor sponsor discussed in earlier sections is usually a great place to start asking questions about who in administration is capable of making decisions pertaining to the official creation of your board. It is important to know who is making decisions regarding clubs, events, and initiatives at the administrative level as these are the people who will control the potential impact of your GT board. By knowing who these people are, and making a conscious effort to build good relationships with them, it becomes much easier to accomplish the goals your board sets forth.

3.3 Dialogue

When speaking to administrators, it is important to use dialogue that caters to their view of the school, which often does not include support for advanced learners. The

best way to introduce this topic to them is through the lens of student advocacy and voice. Administrators are often concerned with making the school appear better to gain more enrollment and thus funding, so speak on how a student-led GT board will help attract more students, especially advanced ones, to the school due to the opportunities it provides.

School administrators will also often question the validity of a student-led GT board, and whether it is a “real” club/organization. The best way to dispute this argument is to bring up the existence of the NGTSAB, alongside the fact that there are boards throughout the country following this same model under the NGTSAB. By mentioning the fact that the board is nationally recognized, you also provide more motivation to allow the board, as it is part of a national movement rather than solely being a local initiative.

3.3.1 Supportive Administration

When you encounter an administration that is supportive of your goals and ideas, there is not much more advice to be given than to just utilize them as much as possible. Meet with them often to discuss ideas and plans, use their vast knowledge of the school and district workings in order to further support for advanced students in all ways possible. Overall, just let the supportive administration support you, and repay them by supporting them back.

3.3.2 Unsupportive Administration

Unfortunately, a far more common situation is to have an unsupportive/indifferent administration. The main solution to this predicament is simply the rule “go higher”. If you encounter roadblocks at one level of administration that cannot be overcome, go to the next level up, to the next person in the administration food chain. The idea is simply to rinse and repeat this process until you find someone who is supportive, as then they will be able to relay support down the chain and into your own school. Finding a supportive person in an unsupportive administration can be hard, but it is far from impossible. The vast majority of administration personnel wants to make the school a better place, so by using the appeals discussed earlier in this section, someone, at some level of administration, will listen, and will be supportive of your efforts. If you have gone to the world's end to find a supportive person and still cannot find one, feel free to reach out to us at the NGTSAB with the email: connect@ngtsab.org and we would be happy to assist in any way possible.

3.4 The role of administration

Administration serves a role similar to that of teachers, if not slightly more detached. The idea behind working with administration is to pass that final layer of “checking off” your work and projects, as well as using them as a launchpad for larger ideas and events, though that will be discussed more in later sections. If your administration is especially supportive, you can also use them as a source of knowledge

and feedback, as most administrators are incredibly knowledgeable about the working of schools and districts, and may even have ideas for projects and initiatives that they believe could help support the advanced learners at your school. Ultimately, use administration as a resource as much as possible, though in many situations they may be a roadblock instead

3.5 Board/administration relations

The best advice we can give on sustaining good board administration relationships is to be conscious of how you appear to administrators. Your actions within the board will directly reflect upon your ability to have conducive and effective projects, so ensure that you are making a visible effort. The goal of sustaining relationships with administration is simply about showing them what they want to see. If your administration is concerned about student scores on standardized tests, show them how you support students and how that can correlate to higher test scores, etc. This principle will allow you to maintain good relationships with administration without excess administration involvement in the processes of the GT board.

4.0 Growth

4.1 Introduction

Now that you have assembled the basics of a GT board, from student to teacher to administrator support, it is time to grow the board. We have broken the growth of the board into two main growth phases, what we have called (very creatively) phase 1 and 2. Phase 1 growth is all about getting the board up to a size where small-scale school-level impact is possible, and how to create and work through the preliminary projects of the board. Phase 2 then discusses how to organize the board to increase impact on the school level so you can impact all GT students in your school, as well as how to grow impact beyond the walls of your school and into the surrounding community.

When you have reached this stage of the creation of a new board, we highly recommend officially registering your board under the National Gifted and Talented Student Advocacy board, as this will give you access to resources and advice from boards all across the country, and even opportunities to participate in national-level advocacy initiatives. The link to register is: <https://forms.gle/H4xmPfbqfd2XFZKK8>

4.2 Phase 1 growth

In Phase 1 growth, the goal is to grow the board to a size where running small projects over the course of a year is feasible. We believe a reasonable first goal for a board is ~10 members, as with 10 members a board is able to exert influence onto the school setting on a small-scale. At a board in Phase 1 growth, we encourage pursuing projects that are unique to your school environment as those projects are where you will have the greatest potential for impact. While we cannot give advice on every niche project, we can give some guidelines for how and why to pick projects, which we will discuss later in this section.

Additionally, don't be afraid of limiting factors during this phase. When in the process of growing a GT board, you will encounter many obstacles, whether from teachers, administration, or other students. Ultimately, while some obstacles may be impossible to overcome, the vast majority of obstacles are temporary, and should not be allowed to stop the achievement of goals. If an administrator says "no" to a certain idea, find a way to rephrase or redefine the idea that is allowable. Always try to problem-solve your way through challenges, as often if you do not, nobody will.

4.2.1 Recruiting new members

The first obstacle of a newly official board will be to recruit more members from the starting community. While the goal of earlier recruitment efforts was to find the most driven and passionate students, with some parts of the board already established you are able to broaden the search to students to those who may not have been immediately accepting of the idea of a GT board. There are many students who may be on the fence or unaware of the topic, fostering the opportunity for more members if they are informed.

The best way we have found to recruit members at this stage is to create an application process, as creating scarcity adds higher value to the membership on the board. By creating an application process, you both add value to the act of being on the board and give yourself a way to vet those who want to be on the board. For the application process, we recommend a simple google form with 2-3 questions for the interviewee (outside of the basic contact information and name questions). By having 2-3 questions, you both make the application process relatively straightforward and easy, while also adding weight to the application as it is more than just filling out name and contact information. This acts as a first layer of filtering as well, as only the students who, at minimum, somewhat care about GT advocacy, will fill out the application.

For questions, we recommend asking the following 2:

Why do you want to join the GT board?

What changes would you like to see in the GT system and how do you believe the GT board could help address them?

You may optionally add a third question more specifically catered to your school.

The second question additionally doubles as "research" into what issues at your school are important to other students, and can be used as a launchpad for the first projects the board pursues. By pursuing the projects proposed by new members of the board, you also will see more member engagement as they are working on projects that are personally important to them, leading to more and better quality work.

When finding new board members at this stage, it is more important to look for a person who has passion for the subject than someone who has previous

exceptional accomplishments. During Phase 1 growth of the GT board, projects take lots of student initiative and work to get moving and complete, therefore students who care about GT advocacy will most always be better choices than those who are talented yet lack passion and commitment.

4.2.2 Finding purpose for the board

Once you have built up the numbers of the board, the next step is to find purpose. As mentioned in the previous section, a good starting place is to look through the new member applications and find what areas of GT they believe need to be worked upon. Each school/district is different, and has different issues and levels of advocacy present, which means the process of finding purpose for your board will be unique to your board.

When in the process of finding a main purpose for your board, consider the GT resources already available to students in your area, and try to “fill in the gaps”. If your district has good support for class planning yet limited mental health support, plan events surrounding mental health. Find where the holes in support are, and do your best as a board to fill them through the projects you develop.

One place to start that is relatively consistent across most schools is to help students with their “passion projects”. Whether this be through skills workshops, an expo for them to showcase their projects to the community, or any other method of support, passion projects are universally undersupported in the GT educational space, and are a great place to start.

4.2.3 Early projects

As a general rule of thumb, it is better to start with small projects to build a rapport of small wins which helps build confidence and advocacy skills. You will also learn about the strengths and weaknesses of each member of your board during these smaller projects, which can help with task assignment on the larger projects later.

A good pace for early projects is to aim for 1-2 per semester, as this sets a difficult, yet very possible pace of completion. Early projects can also be a way to explore the purpose of the board and determine the plausibility of potential options, as your community may be more responsive to certain types of initiatives and projects than others.

Some examples of easy early projects include running AP study sessions, school tours and information sessions for incoming GT students, and creating a GT Q&A question board. These projects, while being relatively simple to complete, have tangible impact and put your board on the map for the school community.

4.3 Phase 2 Growth

Phase 2 growth is where the GT board truly begins to take shape. During Phase 2 growth, the board is able to expand to larger member sizes, likely around 15-20 members, with larger amounts of less experienced, younger members. This phase also includes the expansion of the board into larger scale, full-year projects, that may impact others not directly inside the school community. These projects act as exploratory projects for what may become consistent yearly initiatives or reference points with which to launch future projects from.

4.3.1 Board Structure

When structuring the board at this stage, true leadership positions are sometimes unnecessary as there will typically be a clear dynamic between the older, experienced students and those who are younger and new to the board. By allowing this dynamic to flow freely (within reason) rather than pushing for hard leadership, it encourages less experienced members to speak up and actively participate more. An increase in active participation at this stage is crucial as it is when the board is at its most flexible while still having a profound impact.

We also encourage running meetings at this phase as more casual conversations rather than as an official meeting setting. A more casual environment also encourages participation and free sharing of ideas. Ensure to keep on topic and be productive during this time, but try to guide conversations rather than control them.

During this time, you may also find that it is necessary to increase the frequency of meetings since larger projects will require more work from the board. This ties into task management, as it can be helpful to assign members of the board to different sub-topics within a task to allow for more efficient task completion.

4.3.2 Growing influence

During this phase of board growth, one key goal should be to grow the impact of the board past small-scale projects and into initiatives that benefit the entire school community. In order to create and sustain projects that make a larger impact, it is important to dream big. Think up projects that could potentially take a full year to complete, those which may seem impossible, and those which can create big waves in the GT community. Pursuing these projects is the best thing that you can do at this stage, as they are now within the realm of accomplishment and will have the most impact on the school. Even if these larger scale projects fail, the experience and lessons learned from attempting these projects will be incredibly valuable for future incentives.

Examples of larger projects include running an expo for GT students to showcase their passion projects, or creating mental health rooms for students within the school. The only limits imposed during this phase are those of your creativity.

Flexibility is an especially important skill during this time period, as it is important to be able to pivot plans when something inevitably changes.

Adaptability allows for better initiatives and projects, allowing your board to change projects if one does not receive the desired community response.

4.3.3 Growing beyond the school

Gaining recognition from district officials-and potentially state officials- is a big step for a local GT student board as it gives the board access to resources and opportunities far beyond just the walls of the school. Thus, gaining recognition is an important goal to factor into decision making during Phase 2 growth. Most of the growth beyond the school during this phase will come naturally rather than being an objective to be worked for since expanding project scopes will naturally attract more attention to the board. However, it is still important to know when and why to reach out to adults beyond your school.

The goal of reaching out to adults beyond your school, whether it be to the district or state level, is to gain more resources and opportunities for the board, as well as network for future endeavors and create more contacts for support. If your board is stagnating at a certain point of growth or stuck without a purpose and a lack of projects, reaching out to higher-level adults can help your board progress to the next level. Another case in which reaching out beyond the school could be useful is when advice and support is needed for a larger-scale project. These projects can be quite difficult, so having more adults who are capable of assisting and giving recommendations is incredibly helpful during this time period.

The best way to reach out to adults at district or state level is to ask the teachers and administrators at your school for advice on who to talk to, as they will know specific district/state personnel and will be able to recommend people. When reaching out, make sure you include all of the “selling points” of the board, and speak on how a GT board is a national level movement, as this will encourage district/state personnel to give more support and become more involved in helping your board.

5.0 Organizing for Sustainability

5.1 Introduction

The final part of creating a student-led GT board is to organize it to ensure longevity and sustainability. There would be little point to creating a board that dies out after the founders graduate, so this section will discuss how to prevent that and work to pass down the board from year to year.

The main way to create a lasting board is finding 2-3 younger students per year who are truly passionate about and committed to GT advocacy work. While many

members of the board are not required to be super passionate or committed, it is necessary to have 1-2 members who are willing to put in the work to maintain the board due to its student-led nature.

It is also crucial to have a consistent teacher sponsor/advisor of the board who is able to retain records of previous board actions and initiatives and push board progress forward when the previous students leave. Since the teacher sponsor/advisor is the only consistent factor in the board, it is important to utilize them as much as possible for the continuation of the board.

5.2 Creating a lasting cycle

When organizing the board for longevity, the best tool to use is repeated cycles and organized routines. These processes are easily put into writing, leading to a more complete and correct transfer from older students to young students. These records should include things such as application processes, previous communications with administrators and contacts, and details of repeating yearly events and initiatives.

5.2.1 Membership

Depending on school size, a board should have between 7-20 members in order to be sustainable while still having enough manpower to produce impactful projects. To create sustainable membership practices, create a consistent application process that is easy to replicate and will keep membership at the adequate levels required to successfully run a board. It is also important to continue to promote the GT board to the school, both through the projects and initiatives themselves as well as in dedicated promotional projects that boost application numbers. Join activities that other clubs are participating in, hold booths at school events, and you might gain more interest!

When selecting applicants for the board, we recommend keeping about equal numbers of members from each grade, as this creates a good balance between experienced, older members who can lead projects and younger members who are able to come up with new ideas and learn how to run the board.

It is also important to keep power dynamics of the board in mind, and to avoid accepting applicants who wish to have larger amounts of control over the board. The only way the board survives is to maintain the creative and free environment in which projects are created, and if a member attempts to build a hard power structure it can seriously damage the board's ability to positively impact the GT community.

5.2.1 Community involvement

In order to maintain good community involvement, keeping up relationships with administrators and district personnel is key. By being proactive in your relationships with these personnel, you increase the resources and opportunities available to your board and establish a good line of communication with those who can approve of your board's projects

You will also likely have at least 1 major recurring project each year, so it is important to begin to fine tune the project at this stage, and to document the process of organizing the project. This documentation is what will allow the project to recur year after year. When documenting the project, ensure to include as many details as possible, even seemingly trivial ones, as what may seem common knowledge to you may be unknown to the next members of the board.

At this stage you may also try to reach out to the GT community in your area at large, and projects such as volunteering at local elementary school GT programs or helping run GT events for a local middle school are incredibly beneficial community initiatives that will ensure the board never runs out of projects and that a positive buzz is created about your board

Involvement in the nationwide GT community is also much more possible at this point, as when you have reached this stage, you will be one of the more “senior” GT boards, and your advice and support would be invaluable to other boards across the country who are in earlier stages of the process. At this stage, we heavily recommend getting involved with the NGTSAB, sending liaisons to the public meetings, and overall engaging with the nationwide GT community as much as possible.

5.4 Adaptation

The final piece of advice we can give to you is to be able to adapt. Projects will fall through, members will change, unforeseen events *will* occur. You can never predict anything, so be flexible in any situation. Whatever the situation, keep in mind that your work is for the GT students at your school and in your community, and if you keep that principle close to heart while decision-making, you will do great things.

Feel free to reach out to us at the NGTSAB at any time for any questions you may have or any support you may need for your board. You can email us at:
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