



MCGT CHAPTERS AND PARENT GROUPS: HOW TO GET STARTED

What is MCGT?

The Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented (MCGT) is a support and advocacy organization for parents and educators of gifted children. MCGT publishes a bi-monthly newsletter, maintains an informative website, hosts a member-only email discussion list, sponsors an annual state conference with special children's programs, maintains a Resource Center on a wide variety of topics which may be borrowed including books, magazines/journals, articles, videotapes, and cassettes. MCGT conducts monthly CHAT Nights and occasional topical seminars, promotes advocacy at all levels for gifted and talented children, is active in public policy efforts on behalf of kids, and supports local MCGT Chapters and Parent Groups.

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 person 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 inform members about public policy issues that will expand educational provisions for high potential students.

Because benefits increase greatly when an active local MCGT Chapter or Parent Group exists in the area of a member's residence, MCGT provides assistance in the organization of local chapters and parent groups 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 public policy, public relations, annual conference, fund-raising, chapter and parent group development and others.

Why organize a local MCGT Chapter or Parent Group 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 Chapters and Parent Groups offer a safe and supportive environment for parents, educators, and professionals to share concerns, offer support, exchange ideas, build social connections, and work to improve the opportunities available to their children.

Getting Started

The following pages will explain MCGT Parent Groups and MCGT Chapters and highlight some of the differences between them. These pages will also outline the steps needed to form a new MCGT support group. A few things worth noting are:

1. When an MCGT support group is first formed it is designated as a Parent Group. While some Parent Groups will choose to formalize their support group as a chapter (thus meeting all the chapter requirements) it is perfectly acceptable to continue as a Parent Group indefinitely if that format meets the needs of those involved.
2. You may request the *MCGT Handbook for Starting a Chapter* and the *MCGT Chapter Essentials Handbook* whether you plan to become a chapter or stay a parent group. The information in the handbooks is invaluable and very detailed. It includes organizational information, samples of forms, meeting agendas, advertisement flyers, etc.
3. MCGT provides chapters rebates of a portion of the MCGT membership paid by its chapter members. Parent Groups do not receive rebates.
4. MCGT hosts a Chapter and Parent Group contacts meeting at least once a year for chapter and parent group leaders and other interested individuals to exchange information and discuss issues affecting chapters and parent groups.
5. MCGT can provide your group with a list of speakers that may be contacted for Chapter and Parent Group meetings.
6. As Chapters and Parent Groups grow we encourage them to consider forming **MCGT Regional Partnerships**. Regional partnerships allow chapters and parent groups to pool their resources to bring in speakers and provide opportunities for gifted children and families that one chapter or parent group might not be able to organize and/or fund alone. Partnerships can be temporary or long-term depending on the needs of those involved. Regional Partnerships do not need to be formalized with the MCGT board. Simply connect with other chapters and parent groups when the need or opportunity arises. MCGT will provide you with a list of other MCGT Chapter and Parent Group contacts for this purpose

We look forward to working with you as you work to build a circle of support for gifted families in your area and around Minnesota. We can achieve so much for our gifted children by working together in and around Minnesota.

Thank you,
The MCGT Board

MCGT Parent Groups

MCGT Parent Groups have two roles in the MCGT parent support structure. First, they serve as the starting point for new chapter development and, second, they allow families of gifted children to come together for support and sharing of information when a chapter is not a good fit. All MCGT support groups begin as Parent Groups.

MCGT Parent Groups may be more fluid and informal than chapters. They might be temporary to meet a specific short-term need, such as advocating for a change in school district policy, or long-term for ongoing support based on a school, geographic area, program, or gifted focus. Parent Groups are not subject to chapter requirements nor do they receive chapter rebates. While some Parent Groups will choose to formalize their support group as a chapter (thus meeting all the chapter requirements) it is perfectly acceptable to continue as a Parent Group indefinitely if that format meets the needs of those involved.

Basic guidelines for MCGT Parent Groups

- Parent Groups have a primary contact person but no leadership team is required. This primary contact person must be a current member of MCGT. The primary contact person serves as a liaison between the group and the MCGT State Board as well as the listed contact person for inquiring families.
- The state office will not track membership in a Parent Group like it does members in a chapter. Parent Groups may be more fluid and informal and do not require dues and will not receive chapter rebates. Participants in MCGT Parent Groups are not required to be MCGT members, though it is encouraged.
- The MCGT office will provide the primary contact with a list of current MCGT members in their area when requested. There is an expectation that this information will be kept private and be for MCGT Parent Group use only.
- The MCGT board will provide the Parent Group with a Parent Group email address (*<your area name>@mctg.net*) and this address will be added to the MCGT Parent Group Contacts email list in **Outlook** and on the MCGT website.
- The Parent Group will be responsible for setting up their own communication method within their group (e.g. email lists, egroups, etc.)
- All Parent Group activities are planned by the members of the group. Parent Group events may be advertised on the MCGT website using the calendar feature, listing the event in the **Outlook**, and by posting a notice of events on the *MCGTdotnet* email group.
- There may be limited grant funding for group needs based on the MCGT mission.
- The MCGT board will provide the Parent Group with:
 - ◇ Chapter development guidance, if desired.
 - ◇ Information on gifted issues (via email, phone, or face-to-face meetings)
 - ◇ Publicity of this group on the MCGT website, in **Outlook**, and on *MCGTdotnet*

Four Simple Steps for Starting an MCGT Parent Group

Step 1: *MCGT Handbook for Starting a Chapter*

If you don't already have one, contact MCGT and request a copy of the *MCGT Handbook for Starting a Chapter*. Whether you plan to become an MCGT Chapter or stay an MCGT Parent Group, the information in the handbook is invaluable and very detailed. It includes organizational information, samples of forms, meeting agendas, advertisement flyers, etc. You may also request a copy of the *MCGT Chapter Essentials Handbook*.

Step 2: The First Meeting

Pull together a list of interested parents, community members, and educators (superintendent, principals, counselors, teachers, school board members, gifted/talented coordinator) who would be receptive to the formation of an MCGT Parent Group. Hold an informal first meeting to share ideas and assess if an MCGT Parent Group is a good fit. A few things to consider:

- Are you forming to meet a short term need in your area?
- Will you have a specific focus (specific school, shared academic interests, social outlet, book discussion, etc)?
- Do you plan to grow into an MCGT Chapter?
- When should you have your second meeting?

Step 3: The Second Meeting

By the second meeting you should be ready to officially form your MCGT Parent Group. You will need to choose a primary contact for your Parent Group to be listed in the MCGT Chapter and Parent Group listings (*Outlook*, website, etc.). You will also want to determine how often you will meet and for what purpose? Choose a communication method and create a membership directory if desired.

Step 4: The Paperwork

Submit the attached *MCGT Chapter and MCGT Parent Group Form*. Once we receive this form we will create an email address and list your MCGT Parent Group in *Outlook*, on our website, and in other MCGT publications.

MCGT Parent Groups are encouraged to share information about their meetings and other activities to MCGT folks outside of their immediate chapter or parent group. You may post emails on our Yahoo! egroup (*MCGTdotnet*), share your event with other MCGT Chapters and Parent Groups, post information on the MCGT website www.mcgt.net (email info@mcgt.net for instructions), and announce your event in the *Outlook Coming Up* listing.

Starting an MCGT Chapter

Once you have an established MCGT Parent Group you may decide to transition your group into an MCGT Chapter. MCGT Chapters are often organized within a school district or region or are organized around a special interest. Chapters provide members ongoing opportunities for networking and sharing of information on various gifted and talented issues. Chapters may work with the schools, bring in speakers, and generate and promote enrichment activities for gifted children. Chapter membership usually includes parents, educators and professionals.

Membership in MCGT includes membership in one local chapter. Other chapters may be joined for an additional fee per year per chapter (see membership form for more information).

When should a Parent Group become a Chapter?

Not every Parent Group should or needs to become a Chapter. Here are some question to ask yourself as your group considers the options.

- Is our group growing at a rate that would benefit from the structure of a chapter?
- Are we planning activities and events that would require the use of chapter funds? (Chapters receive membership rebates from the state office of MCGT.)
- Are we able to meet the minimum expectations of chapters (a regular schedule of events, an established communication method for members, at least seven members and members willing to take on the necessary leadership roles of a chapter, etc)

Basic guidelines for MCGT Chapters

- MCGT Chapters have a leadership team including a primary contact and a treasurer. All chapter leaders must be members of MCGT. The primary contact person serves as a liaison between the chapter and the MCGT State Board as well as the listed contact person for inquiring families.
- Chapters have at least seven active members who are also members of MCGT. Occasionally exceptions will be made on the number of required members based on several factors including, but not limited to, rural locations, special interests, chapter activity and chapter history.
- MCGT Chapters will provide their membership with a regular schedule of activities. The number and scope of these activities is determined by each chapter but a minimum of three per year is expected. It is discouraging to new members of MCGT to join a local chapter and find the chapter does not offer the opportunity to connect with other parents on a regular schedule. Chapters who do not meet regularly may want to consider the MCGT Parent Group option. Chapter events may be advertised on the MCGT website using the calendar feature and by posting a notice of the event on the *MCGTdotnet* email group.
- MCGT Chapters will have established by-laws. Samples can be found in the *MCGT Handbook for Starting a Chapter* and the *MCGT Chapter Essentials Handbook*.
- New chapters must file a letter with the MCGT state organization requesting affiliation as an official MCGT chapter. This letter should include the names, addresses, e-mails, and positions of local officers and information about the chapter bank account. Once certain requirements have been met (e.g. leadership set, seven active members, etc.), MCGT will send the chapter membership rebates. Rebates will not be sent if a chapter does not comply with the established protocol laid out in the MCGT bylaws. Rebates are sent on a pre-set schedule as determined by the MCGT office.
- Chapters have certain financial and legal obligations which require annual financial reporting to MCGT and possible additional reporting if the chapter income goes above \$5000.00.
- The MCGT office will provide the primary contact with a list of current MCGT members in their area when requested. There is an expectation that this information will be kept private and be for MCGT Chapter use only.
- The MCGT board will provide the chapter with an MCGT Chapter email address (*<location>@mctg.net*) and this address will be added to the MCGT Chapter Contacts email list in *Outlook* and on the website's chapter contacts.

Five Simple Steps for Transitioning to an MCGT Chapter

Step 1: MCGT Handbook for Starting a Chapter

If you don't already have one, contact MCGT and request a copy of the *MCGT Handbook for Starting a Chapter* and the *MCGT Chapter Essentials Handbook*. The information in the handbook is invaluable and very detailed. It includes more specific information about starting a chapter, organizational information, and samples of forms, meeting agendas, advertisement flyers, etc.

Step 2: Announce Your Intentions

Moving from an MCGT Parent Group to an MCGT Chapter is big news. Let your membership and the community know your intentions. There is no set timetable for transitioning from a parent group to a chapter. For some the process will take months or years. Other groups will find they have an active and willing membership and the process will move more quickly.

- Develop a list of parents, community members, and educators (superintendent, principals, counselors, teachers, school board members, gifted/talented coordinator) who would be receptive to the formation of a local MCGT Chapter.
- Send out flyers to parents (*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.*), print notices in the school district newsletter and/or community flyer, make announcements at school functions, put up posters in schools, libraries, local shopping centers, stores, submit a news release to the local paper or arrange for announcements on a local radio station.
- Be sure to let MCGT know your intentions so the information can be published in the MCGT state newsletter (*info@mcgt.net*). Don't forget to send an announcement to the *MCGTdotnet* egroup.
- Always include a phone number and/or email address so parents can contact someone for more information.

Step 3: Chapter Organizational Meeting: Are we ready to be a chapter?

When you have enough interest and willing members schedule your first chapter meeting.

- Set a date that allows ample time for publicity and hold the meeting in an easily accessible location.
- Submit meeting information to MCGT at *info@mcgt.net* so it can be published in the MCGT state newsletter and post your own announcement on the *MCGTdotnet* egroup.
- Plan a fairly short program, possibly with a speaker, aimed to generate enthusiasm for a chapter.
- Have MCGT membership forms available. Chapters receive rebates from MCGT membership dues. These rebates allow your chapter to fund events and other activities so MCGT membership should be encouraged.
- Establish a core of individuals to assess needs, recruit a leadership team and set up committees that have been deemed necessary for your chapter goals, including one to draft local chapter by-laws.
- During this meeting set the date for the next meeting!

Step 4: The Official Transition

Once you have determined you are ready to become an official chapter you will need to complete the following tasks: Establish a chapter bank account, determine leadership (including a treasurer), write chapter bylaws, set up a chapter contacts list, etc. The details for these requirements are in the *MCGT Handbook for Starting a Chapter* and the *MCGT Chapter Essentials Handbook*.

Step 5: Plan Future Meetings and Events

Chapters are expected to offer at least three events per year and communicate regularly with their membership. MCGT Chapters are also encouraged to share information about their meetings and other activities to MCGT folks outside of their immediate chapter or parent group. You may post emails on our Yahoo! egroup (*MCGTdotnet*), share your event with other chapters and parent groups via *chapters@mcgt.net*, post information on the MCGT website *www.mcgt.net* (email *info@mcgt.net* for details on how to do this), and announce your event in the **Outlook Coming Up** listing.

MCGT Parent Group Form

Date: _____

All MCGT support groups begin as Parent Groups. You may stay a Parent Group or, if desired, you may choose to become an MCGT Chapter once the chapter requirements have been met.

Name of Primary Contact: _____

Parent Group Name/Location: _____
(ex. LCGT (Lakeville Chapter), Homeschoolers Chapter, Twice-Exceptional Parent Group, Bloomington Chapter, etc.)

Parent Group Mailing Address:

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Please provide us with a short description of your chapter/parent group for the listing on the MCGT website. Possible things to include are the chapter mission, activities, events, meeting location, etc.

Check all that apply.

- Please add my name to the Chapters/Parent Group communication email group (*chapters@mcgt.net*)
- I give MCGT permission to create an email for our Parent Group (*<your area name>@mcgt.net*) and to forward that email to my email address. Please list you email: _____ .
This allows you to maintain your privacy and not have your personal email published.
- I give MCGT permission to publish my phone number in the MCGT Chapter and Parent Group listing in **Outlook**. (Phone numbers will not be listed on the website.)
- Please list this group in the MCGT newsletter, **Outlook**, on the MCGT website, and other MCGT publications.

signature

Mail this completed form, to:

Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented
5701 Normandale Road, Suite 315
Edina, MN 55424

*Questions? Contact MCGT at info@mcgt.net.
Thank you!*