



# PHP'S PARENTING FORUM

PHP's Parenting Forum presents a new scenario in each issue—a brief description of a common challenge or concern that many parents of high-potential youngsters might encounter at one time or another during their child's school years. We provide

several brief responses from experts in the area of gifted and talented education and other related areas, or from parents who have dealt successfully with that challenge. At the end of each Forum, you'll find a new scenario to be addressed in a future issue of PHP.

## *The Current Scenario: Being Effective Advocates*

**M**y husband and I find ourselves on opposite sides of a critical issue, one that we probably created ourselves. It concerns our son and his performance at school. Over the years my husband has talked freely, with a sense of amusement and perhaps a bit of pride, that he was always able to breeze through accelerated programs at school with very little effort. On many occasions, my husband expressed his satisfaction with "getting by without having to work hard," and never feeling obligated to go beyond the mini-

mum that came so effortlessly. Unfortunately, our son Kyle (now a sixth grader) now acts as if he can do likewise. His teachers—and his grades—indicate otherwise. I would prefer to set up a consistent study routine at home to help him acquire the discipline he needs, and to encourage him to challenge himself to do his best. My husband has taken the approach, "leave the boy alone and he will work it for out himself." Please help us to find a constructive way to resolve this dilemma.

**Dr. Tracy L. Cross**  
*Ball State University*  
*Muncie, Indiana*



**I** recommend that you and your husband discuss what goals you have for your son. If you disagree or are unsure, encouraging your son to excel in school is a safe position to take. This will offer the greater number of options later in school and beyond. In your favor is the fact that many gifted students become increasingly interested in school as they move through the grades and the curriculum becomes more focused on academic disciplines. Another reason to encourage your son to do his best is to avoid a common developmental trap into which some gifted students fall: when things come easily to gifted students, they tend not to learn how to study. They also learn that being gifted means not having to work hard. Consequently, for these students, secondary school becomes a rude awakening. A strong academic high school can be an even greater setback. Such an experience often leads to self-doubt and underachievement. I suggest that you and your husband meet with your son's teacher to make sure that everyone is aware of your son's abilities and areas of need. Establish a plan that will help your son be well prepared for the future.

**Dr. Michael C. Pyryt**  
*University of Calgary*  
*Calgary, Alberta*



**T**he good news is that Kyle is only in sixth grade. As long as his achievement is sufficient to warrant promotion to the seventh grade, Kyle's lack of effort and achievement might not be the crisis it seems to be right now. I would encourage you to gather information about Kyle's intellectual ability and performance on standardized achievement measures. This would provide a baseline for monitoring Kyle's progress. I would focus my energy on preparing to make seventh grade a successful experience. I would try to have an agreement with Kyle that he should excel in at least one area and achieve an acceptable standard in the other areas. As long as Kyle is meeting agreed-upon goals, I would give him freedom. I would only intervene if he fails to meet those goals. At the school level, I would advocate for the regular use of pretests to determine each student's curricular needs. I would encourage Kyle to explore his "passion" area(s) in greater depth. When Kyle has projects due, I would encourage him to develop work plans to manage the various aspects of the project. I would also highlight how Kyle's heroes combined both ability and effort to succeed.

**Dr. Jane Piirto**  
*Ashland University*  
*Ashland, Ohio*



Getting by is often good enough for smart people, who often do not know how to study as well as C students do, and who thus often have low frustration ceilings, and easily quit when the going gets tough. This is a choice that a smart person can make. There are no real consequences, and it is truly unfair that someone can do well and get great grades and never delve into a subject with passion and depth. At our university we have had state-funded summer institutes for the past 13 years, and we offer in-depth courses from Ph.D. professors. Ninth and tenth graders attend such classes as “What is Truth?,” taught by a philosopher, or “The American Idea,” taught by a political scientist, or “Biomedical Gene Cloning,” taught by a medical researcher. Our professors become like rock stars to the students. The students’ lives are changed, for working hard and thinking hard, for anyone, produces its own reward—that jingling, tingling, head-burning feeling; those shooting stars of insight—that result when one is encountering the great thoughts and ideas of the great thinkers of the world, and finally, finally, beginning to do the hard work that understanding them entails.

**Dr. Jeanne Purcell**  
*Connecticut State Department*  
*of Education*  
*Hartford, Connecticut*



You have two issues. First, you have some critical indicators—grades and teacher reports—about your son’s lack of academic progress. It is in your son’s best interest, both long-term and short-term, to provide an intervention at home. Specifically, these interventions include, among other things: conversations about his lack of academic progress; conversations with specific classroom teachers to pinpoint exactly what he is missing in class; an analysis of your son’s study time at home to realign it with the work and effort that is required of him to be successful; and a monitoring protocol (e.g., a chart that he can use to record his grades) that will not only provide him with timely reports about his academic progress, but also place responsibility for academic success squarely with him.

Second, you need to deal with the difference between you and your husband regarding the handling of this issue. While you can have ongoing discussions in private about how to handle and monitor the situation, it is critical that you present a united front to your son. A united front sends an important message: the problem is real and important, and that you will work as a team to solve it.

### ***New Scenario: A Student's Concern***

I have been in my school’s gifted program since the third grade. Next year I will be going into eighth grade. I love the challenge of being in advanced classes and have lots of friends. We help each other, joke around, and work hard. However, there are times when I wonder if I am good enough to be in the gifted program. My mom has given up trying to convince me that I am wrong to think this way. She reads PHP and suggested that I write to you and explain my problem. I get down on myself when I look around and see that others’ work

is much better than mine in some areas. Science is my best subject, and I really love it and do well in it, but I still feel badly when it seems to me that my work in other areas doesn’t measure up to the quality of the work that others are doing. All it takes is one nasty comment from a classmate to make me upset about my ability and myself. I am not sure what to do. Should I stay with this program or not? My mom says that I’m being too hard on myself, and need an “attitude overhaul.” Please help!

#### ***Contribute a Scenario for a Future Issue...***

***We invite any PHP readers to submit their responses to this new scenario. If we select your response, you’ll become a guest panelist in the Forum that discusses the case. You must submit your response by email to Dr. Don Treffinger (cclofc@gte.net); type your response right in the body of your message. Each response is limited to 200 words. We reserve the right to edit any responses we decide to use. Responses must be original, and will become the property of NAGC. We cannot pay anyone for responses. Include in the email your name, address, and your occupation, in one or two sentences, as you would like a credit line to appear if we use your response.***