







The Twice-Exceptional Dilemma The Twice-Exceptional Dilemma The Twice-Exceptional Dilemma The Twice-Exceptional Dilemma

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National Education Association

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*...failure to help the gifted child reach his potential is a societal tragedy, the extent of which is difficult to measure but what is surely great. How can we measure the sonata unwritten, the curative drug undiscovered, the absence of political insight? They are the difference between what we are and what we could be as a society.*

*—James J. Gallagher*



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# The Twice-Exceptional Dilemma

*Rodney gets decent grades and achieves close to or at grade level on all of his district's assessments. When concerns about his reading achievement were raised and an evaluation conducted, it was found that his IQ is well above average, superior in some areas, but his reading decoding scores are below the average range for students his age. He has a combination of some gifted abilities and other areas that require intensive intervention. Rodney is twice-exceptional.*

## Introduction

America's public schools strive to educate all children in an inclusive environment. Consequently, children of varying skill levels all learn together in today's classrooms. While there are individual children with distinctive or exceptional learning needs in every classroom, some youngsters show a pattern of extreme strengths combined with areas of significant difficulty. Like Rodney described above, these youngsters are commonly referred to as twice-exceptional; students who have outstanding gifts or talents and are capable of high performance, but who also have a disability that affects some aspect of learning (Brody & Mills, 1997).

Certainly, any child with a disability can also have gifts and talents. For example, a student with mental retardation can be a gifted artist or athlete. These students' needs and gifts or talents present school staff and their families with distinct challenges in developing appropriate programming. However, the purpose of *The Twice-Exceptional Dilemma* is to address the specific challenges of the largest group of twice-exceptional children—those students who have a disability and are also academically gifted.

Students who are gifted and disabled are at risk for not achieving their potential because of the relationship that exists between their enhanced cognitive abilities and their disabilities. They are among the most frequently under-identified population in our schools. Twice-exceptional students present a unique identification and service delivery dilemma for educators. Often educators, parents, and students are asked to choose between services to address one exceptionality or the other, leaving twice-exceptional students both under-identified and underserved in our schools.

This guide will:

- Address identification considerations for students who are twice-exceptional
- Provide common characteristics of students who are both gifted and disabled
- Explain obstacles and learning difficulties faced by these students
- Identify the roles and responsibilities of school districts for ensuring appropriate programming for twice-exceptional students
- Identify the roles and responsibilities of teachers for addressing the needs of twice-exceptional students
- Suggest some adaptations, accommodations, and available resources.







## Why is it important?

*All of Denise's teachers described her as a very bright girl capable of meeting and succeeding the highest standard of work if she would only apply herself. When she was eventually evaluated for her inability to stay on-task and her frequent inability to complete her assignments, Denise was confirmed to have cognitive ability that was well above average and also to have attention deficit and hyperactive disorder (ADHD), which was making it difficult for her to sustain effort in a variety of situations and settings.*

### Why is it important for educators to know about twice-exceptional students?

Each of our students is a resource that should be developed to his or her highest potential, skill, and competence. As described above, Denise represents a common occurrence: her high intelligence allows her to compensate for her disability. As a result, she is able to maintain at or near grade-level performance and may not appear to qualify for special education services. Likewise, the disability may deflate both achievement and standardized test performance so that the student is not recognized as gifted or qualified for gifted programming (Baum, 1990). Many seemingly average students are in fact students whose gifts and disabilities mask one another. As they experience discrepancies between their strengths and weaknesses in school, they may become frustrated leading to social, emotional, and behavioral problems.

How many twice-exceptional students are there? No one really knows. Twice-exceptional individuals are found within every socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and ethnic population and are present in most school classrooms. Regrettably, no federal agency or organization collects these student statistics resulting in a lack of available empirical prevalence data.

Based upon some estimates, there are approximately 3 million academically gifted children in grades K-12 in the United States, comprising approximately 6 percent of the total school population.<sup>1</sup> In the 2000–2001 school year, there were nearly 6 million students aged 6–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). When these pieces of data are overlapped, it is reasonable to estimate that a comparable percentage (approximately 6 percent) of the students served by IDEA may also be academically gifted. It is also reasonable to assume that every school has twice-exceptional students whose unique learning needs must be met.

Beyond just the numbers, there are other reasons why educators need to know about twice-exceptional students. They represent a potential national resource whose future contributions to society are largely contingent upon offering them appropriate educational experiences. Without appropriate education and services, their discoveries, innovations, breakthroughs, leadership, and other gifts to American society go unrealized.

Although there is evidence that students can be both gifted and disabled simultaneously, limited awareness causes many school systems not to provide services to students who are twice-exceptional. This practice is in direct opposition to the demonstrated needs of students with dual exceptionalities. In particular, two significant obstacles negatively impact how schools service twice-exceptional students: 1) inadequate identification procedures, and 2) the lack of access to appropriate educational experiences.

Just as students with special education needs require services along a continuum, twice-exceptional students require a similar combination of gifted and special education. Rather than satisfaction with at or near grade-level performance, schools should provide special services, programs, and instruction to address both giftedness and disability, thereby teaching the whole child.

<sup>1</sup> This number is generated based on an estimate that dates back to the 1972 Marland Report to Congress, which estimated that 5–7 percent of school children are “capable of high performance: and in need of services or activities not normally provided by the school.”





*Angel has cerebral palsy. She utilizes a wheelchair and at times relies on a keyboard to express herself in words. She is also a gifted mathematician taking advanced courses three levels higher than her same-age classmates.*

## Identification—Who are these students?

**A**ngel may not come to mind as a ‘typical’ twice-exceptional student. Frankly, it is difficult to describe the ‘typical’ twice-exceptional student because of the variability demonstrated among them. The one common characteristic of this group, however, is that they simultaneously possess attributes of giftedness as well as learning, physical, social/emotional, or behavioral deficits.

Identification of twice-exceptional students is complicated. It requires both an awareness of the unique relationship between the two areas of exceptionality as well as the knowledge and capability to employ assessment and identification procedures that provide alternate vantage points for viewing both giftedness and disability. Sometimes the disability may be hidden (e.g., ADHD, learning disability, Asperger Syndrome), which complicates the assessment and identification process.

### Categories

Experts suggest that twice-exceptional students may be found in one of the following three categories (Baum, 1990):

- Formally identified as gifted but not having an identified disability—giftedness masks disability
- Formally identified as having a disability but not gifted—disability masks giftedness
- Not formally identified as gifted or disabled—components mask one another—giftedness and the disability not readily apparent.

Let’s look at these categories more closely.

#### **A student who is formally identified as gifted but not having an identified disability may:**

- Go unnoticed for possible special education evaluation.
- Be considered an underachiever, often attributed to perceived laziness, poor motivation, or a low self-concept.
- Maintain grade-level expectations until the difficulty level of the curriculum increases, often during middle and high school years.

#### **A student who is formally identified as having a disability but not as gifted may:**

- Be involved in programs, services, and instruction that are focused solely on remediation and/or compensation for the disability.
- Have significantly underestimated intellectual abilities due to an inadequate assessment that yielded depressed IQ scores.
- Become bored in special programs if the services do not match their required level of challenge.
- Be misdiagnosed as having an emotional disability.

**A student who is not identified disabled or gifted may:**

- Be achieving at grade level and assumed to have average ability.
- Show areas of difficulty as curriculum becomes more challenging.
- Be viewed as performing within expectations and, therefore, never referred for a special education evaluation.
- Have deflated achievement and standardized test scores due to the disability and may not qualify for gifted education services.

**Types of Twice-Exceptionality**

- **Gifted Students with Physical Disabilities**—In the majority of cases, physical disability and cognitive ability are unrelated. Students with even the most extreme of physical disability may be classified as gifted and in need of appropriate education services (Willard-Holt, 1994). Stephen Hawking, a Nobel prize-winning physicist who has ALS, is an example of a person with a physical disability who is also gifted.
- **Gifted Students with Sensory Disabilities**—Traditional education settings are increasingly becoming more inclusive resulting in the likelihood of gifted students with sensory disabilities (i.e., hearing impaired, blind) attending regular education schools and requiring provisions that accommodate both their giftedness and their disability. Helen Keller, who was deaf and blind, is an example of a person who had sensory disabilities and was gifted.
- **Gifted Students with Asperger Syndrome**—Asperger Syndrome is generally considered to be a disorder that falls along the autism spectrum and is characterized by language and social impairments (hence, often referred to as *high functioning autistics*). Aside from their deficits in social functioning, these students are marked by a greater passion for acquiring knowledge and advanced skills in a variety of areas. Dr. Temple Grandin, Assistant Professor of Animal Science at Colorado State University and accomplished author and designer of animal facilities, has written of her experiences as an individual with autism.
- **Gifted Students with Emotional and/or Behavioral Disorders**—Reviews of the literature on the social-emotional aspects of giftedness indicate that gifted students are no more or less likely than their non-identified peers to experience emotional or psychosocial difficulties (Fiedler, 1999; Neihart, 1998; Robinson, Reis, Neihart, & Moon, 2002). However, in many cases, their possible giftedness goes unrecognized as attention is focused only on their disruptive behaviors. Princeton University professor and Nobel prize-winning mathematician John Nash Jr., whose struggle with schizophrenia was the subject of the movie “A Beautiful Mind,” is an example of a gifted individual who has an emotional disorder.
- **Gifted Students with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**—Gifted students with ADHD have difficulty focusing their attention, completing their work, following directions, and organizing their school materials (Kaufmann, Kalbfleisch, & Castellanos, 2000; Moon, 2002). At the same time, they mirror their gifted peers by being advanced in ability and capable of high levels of performance, particularly when their interest is high and tasks are challenging. Nikola Tesla, a foremost inventor who helped usher in the age of electrical power in 1887 with his patent on alternating current motors, would also be characterized as having ADHD today.
- **Gifted Students with Learning Disabilities**—The largest subgroup of twice-exceptional students is those who are gifted and also have a specific learning disability. For these students, giftedness does not immunize them against disabilities that impact learning (such as dyslexia, receptive, and expressive language disorders). Many students with this type of profile are unidentified because their areas of strength and weakness move them toward average performance and they appear to be in need of neither gifted nor special education services. An example of an individual who was gifted and had a learning disability was Albert Einstein who gave the world the theory of relativity even though he struggled to learn how to read.

## Identification Considerations

Identification procedures for twice-exceptional students are complex and must consider assessment in both giftedness and disability. The following considerations for identifying twice-exceptionality in students have been suggested by specialists in the fields of gifted and special education (Brody & Mills, 1997; Johnson, Karnes, & Carr, 1997; McCoach, Kehle, Bray, & Siegle, 2004; Nielsen, 2002; Silverman, 1989):

- Use multiple data sources for gifted programming identification: intelligence and achievement tests, teacher reports, creativity tests, student interviews, self-referral, portfolio, and family or peer referral.
- Avoid combining multiple pieces of data into a single score; combining scores allows lower scores to depress the total score thereby disqualifying students with strengths from gifted programs.
- Reduce qualifying cutoff scores for gifted program to account for depression of scores due to the disability.
- Compare expected performance on statewide standardized testing as well as psycho-educational assessments with actual performance using the student's daily classroom achievement, as well as other authentic assessments.
- Use both formal (such as standardized tests) and informal (such as student class work) assessments.
- Conference with families about student performance outside of school.
- Be aware that identification is seldom pursued for students whose gifts and disabilities mask one another. As such, be hyper vigilant about looking for subtle indicators of exceptionality in students.
- Use culturally sensitive assessment processes to prevent language and cultural differences from creating bias in the identification process.

## Characteristics of Gifted Students with Disabilities

The following characteristics<sup>2</sup> may be among those observed in twice-exceptional students, particularly those with learning disabilities (Higgins, Baldwin & Pereles, 2000; Weinfeld, Barnes-Robinson, Jeweler, & Shevitz, 2006):

- Struggle with basic skills due to cognitive processing difficulties; need to learn compensatory strategies in order to master basic skills
- Show high verbal ability but extreme difficulty in written language area; may use language in inappropriate ways and at inappropriate times
- Experience reading problems due to cognitive processing deficits
- Demonstrate strong observation skills but have difficulty with memory skills
- Excel in solving "real-world" problems; have outstanding critical thinking and decision-making skills; often independently develop compensatory skills
- Show attention deficit problems but may concentrate for long periods in areas of interest
- Have strong questioning attitudes; may appear disrespectful when questioning information, facts, etc. presented by teacher
- Display unusual imagination; frequently generate original and at times rather "bizarre" ideas; extremely divergent in thought; may appear to daydream when generating ideas

<sup>2</sup> Please keep in mind that not all of these characteristics are seen in every twice-exceptional student. Also, specific characteristics may be stronger in some students than they are in others.

## The Twice-Exceptional Dilemma

- May be unwilling to take risks with regard to academics; take risks in non-school areas without consideration of consequences
- Can use humor to divert attention from school failure; may use humor to make fun of peers or to avoid trouble
- Appears immature since they may use anger, crying, withdrawal, etc. to express feelings and to deal with difficulties
- Require frequent teacher support and feedback in deficit areas; highly independent in other areas; can appear stubborn and inflexible
- Sensitive regarding disability area(s); highly critical of self and others including teachers; can express concern about the feeling of others even while engaging in antisocial behavior
- May not be accepted by other children and may feel isolated. May be perceived as loners since they do not fit typical model for either a gifted or a learning disabled student; sometimes have difficulty being accepted by peers due to poor social skills
- Exhibit leadership ability. Is often a leader among the more nontraditional students demonstrating strong “street-wise” behavior; or the disability may interfere with the student’s ability to exercise leadership skills
- Show a wide range of interests but may be thwarted in pursuing them due to processing or learning problems
- Very focused interests, for example, a passion about certain topics to the exclusion of others, often not related to school subjects.









*The rule to follow when teaching twice-exceptional students is simple. When teaching these students in their areas of strength, offer them the same compacting and differentiation opportunities available to other gifted students. When teaching in their areas of challenge, teach them directly whatever strategies they need to increase their learning success. Never take time away from their strength areas to create more time on their deficiencies (Winebrenner, 2003, p. 133).*

## Responsibilities of the Classroom Teacher

Uncovering student interests and recognizing learning differences is effective classroom practice for teaching all students. This is especially true when teaching students who are twice-exceptional. As Winebrenner (2003) offers in the above quote, teaching a twice-exceptional student can be simple if the classroom teacher is aware of and teaches to the student's strengths while providing direct instruction in the areas of need.

Here are some suggested effective practices:

- Gathering information to identify student needs and strengths. To fully understand student needs, it is important to use both formal and informal assessments and to gather or request information from families about the student's interests and performance outside of school.
- Developing and implementing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that include gifted and talented instruction. As appropriate for the individual student, an IEP can include provisions for advanced learner needs (such as enrichment) and/or additional professional development for the classroom teacher.
- Collaboration with other professionals in the district to better serve twice-exceptional students in the classroom. Having access to expert consultation is helpful support for educators and families. Experts could include individuals involved in gifted education, special education, and counseling/school psychology.
- Exploring avenues to meet individual student needs. Not all student needs are met in the general education classroom. Educators should consider referral for formal services, including special education and gifted and talented education programming, as well as access to other opportunities such as afterschool activities, clubs, independent study, and related arts programs.

### What Do I Do In My Classroom?

Appropriate educational services for students who are twice-exceptional require simultaneous provision of gifted instruction and the specialized instruction, adaptations, and accommodations needed by students with special needs (Nielsen, Higgins, & Hammond, 1995). The extent to which appropriate instructional practices are delivered can either eliminate or create obstacles for these students.

#### Key Issues

There are five key issues to consider for this special population of students:

- Accommodating Academic Strengths/Gifts
- Accommodating Academic Weaknesses/Disabilities
- Providing Direct Instruction to Support Classroom Success
- Addressing Social/Emotional Issues
- Addressing Behavioral Issues

### *Accommodating Academic Strengths/Gifts*

Successful educational experiences for twice-exceptional students should focus on developing personal strengths as well as higher order thinking and reasoning skills. Best practice in the classroom always uses students' strengths and skills to teach new concepts. Therefore teachers must use a variety of techniques to find each student's strongest learning style. The following are recommendations for accommodating the academic strengths of twice-exceptional students (Baum & Own, 2004; Brody & Mills, 1997; Nielson & Higgins, 2005; Olenchak & Reis, 2002; Weinfeld, Barnes-Robinson, Jewler & Shevitz, 2006):

- Use an interdisciplinary curriculum to allow the student to find connectedness between topics.
- Provide opportunities for student inquiry and questioning of content—allow students to challenge material.
- Address passion areas in student instruction.
- Rely on student strengths to hook student interest, learn in-depth about a topic, and demonstrate understanding of the concepts.
- Offer alternate ways to demonstrate understanding – this is crucial to this population.
- Where appropriate, provide the same gifted education services that would be afforded to other advanced learners (such as curriculum compacting, differentiation, acceleration).
- Explore multiple avenues to meet student needs (such as afterschool activities, clubs, related art programs, mentoring, online learning, interest-based independent studies).
- Avoid using gifted education services as an incentive for addressing problem behaviors or academic weakness.
- Allow students to participate in enrichment programs and experiences.

### *Accommodating for Academic Weaknesses/Disabilities*

Like other students with disabilities, twice-exceptional students need to learn how to accommodate and compensate for their areas of relative weakness. This may be done in a variety of ways (Baum & Own, 2004; Brody & Mills, 1997; Olenchak & Reis, 2002; Weinfeld, Barnes-Robinson):

- Supply opportunities for hands-on learning.
- Use graphic organizers to help these students see the big picture.
- Apply differentiated instruction (content, process, and product/assessment) techniques
- Provide direct instruction in skills that are affected by the disability (such as verbal and written expression, organization).
- Allow for the use of assistive technology where appropriate (such as text read by computer).
- Make modifications that allow for student success (such as keyboarding, spell check).
- Provide necessary accommodations (such as extended test/work time, working in a quiet or less distracting environment, use of assistive technology).
- Provide direct instruction in study skills and learning strategies.
- Promote student self-determination by working with students to develop knowledge, skills, and beliefs necessary for increasing self-understanding and autonomy (such as self-advocacy, goal setting).

### *Providing Direct Instruction to Support Classroom Success*

Twice-exceptional students have a need for direct instruction in the skills areas impacted by their disabilities. These improved skills allow students even greater success in the development of their gifts (Weinfeld, Barnes-Robinson, Jeweler, & Shevitz, 2002). Skills instruction can be accomplished through direct instruction and/or content instruction and may include one or more of the following areas:

- Writing
- Organization
- Reading
- Mathematical Calculations
- Test Taking Strategies

### *Addressing Social/Emotional Issues*

Twice-exceptional students can have social/emotional issues that interfere with their ability to make friends and sustain social relationships. Additionally, the social/emotional difficulties of twice-exceptional students are often linked with educational concerns (Reis & Colbert, 2004). Frequently, these social/emotional issues, such as feelings of failure, worthlessness, anger, depression, isolation/thoughts of suicide, mask their giftedness. Students need tools to overcome these issues and to see themselves as successful learners. It is important for twice-exceptional students to:

- Have an emotionally safe learning environment
- Have an opportunity to develop a healthy self-concept
- Recognize their emotional vulnerability
- Have occasions to interact with twice-exceptional peers
- Visualize a positive personal future.

### *Addressing Behavioral Issues*

Difficult behavior typically has two purposes: avoidance or attention-gaining. These behaviors are often viewed as aggressiveness, laziness, or manipulation. In order to address these issues, educators need to:

- Be attuned to the function or purpose of the behavior
- Provide a consistent environment with limits and expectations
- Teach self-regulation skills
- Teach appropriate behaviors to use in place of inappropriate behavior (such as raising a hand to get the teacher's attention rather than shouting out in class)
- Provide positive behavioral supports not focused on negative consequences.





*Because of his behavioral difficulties, James attends a special program within his school for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. His teachers have difficulty seeing him as “gifted” as he is often uncooperative and reluctant to perform academic tasks in class. However, indicators are there. He participates in a weekly community program with students who are not disabled to design a functioning robot and does so with a tremendous amount of ingenuity. He is also an avid reader outside of school and can offer a very keen oral analysis of the works he has read.*

## Community and Local Issues

James is fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in the robotics program at his school with students from the general education class. It gives him the chance to enhance his social skills and show his advanced cognitive capabilities. This is not possible for many twice-exceptional students because community programs of this kind don’t exist in their communities or are not readily available to students who are identified as disabled.

Educators, administrators, school board members, community decision-makers, and NEA local Association leaders all have a stake in whether students who are twice-exceptional are appropriately educated. Twice-exceptional students may go undiagnosed as either gifted, disabled, or both. Due to a lack of appropriate educational programming that addresses both components of giftedness and disability, these students may be underachieving and their underachievement can affect the school and community in significant ways. Here are some examples:

- Twice-exceptional students may underestimate their own capabilities and choose not to pursue a college or other postsecondary education.
- Without understanding their own strengths and weaknesses, they may not be attractive hires to business leaders who are looking for employees who can contribute to the company’s growth.
- Students who are not meeting their true academic potential and fail to meet proficient levels on the assessment and accountability measures of the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the so-called No Child Left Behind Act, can cause a school or district to be identified as ‘in need of improvement.’
- Community reputations are often built upon how effective the school district is in preparing children for college or other postsecondary success.
- Underachievers are more likely to drop out of school and add to the social program costs of the community (such as homelessness, low-income housing, criminal activity).

Looking at the “big picture,” twice-exceptional students are important to the future of our communities. Their unrealized potential can mean immeasurable societal costs: inspiring community leaders who are never elected, cures for diseases that are never discovered, revolutionary inventions that are never patented; thrilling novels that are never written; and ground-breaking theories that are never conceived.

## Roles/Responsibilities of School District

### *Specialized Services for Twice-Exceptional Students*

The most appropriate programming for twice-exceptional students consists of specialized programs and services that focus on providing for both areas of exceptionality. Best practices include special education programming and classroom accommodations that address both giftedness and disability. Unfortunately, there are only a few model programs of this type currently in existence in the country. One exemplary program is provided by the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland (see Montgomery Public Schools, 2003, in resources section for more information).

In school districts across the country there is a range of professionals who should be responsible for meeting the needs of twice-exceptional students, including special education teachers, related service providers, teachers of the gifted/talented, and mental health professionals. It is the responsibility of the district educational leaders to ensure that a variety of supports and services are available to meet the complex needs of twice-exceptional students and their teachers.

### *Professional Development*

School staff should participate in professional development to raise awareness of the characteristics of twice-exceptional learners, services available in the district, and identification procedures used to identify these students. Professional development activities might focus on definitions of the twice-exceptional population, identification, programming, and classroom practices. Training on learning strategies, accommodations, and communication would also be beneficial.

Additionally, there should be shared planning time to allow gifted/talented and special education personnel, content experts, and school-based mental health professionals to collaborate. General education teachers should have the opportunity for meaningful communication with colleagues regarding particular students.

### *IEP and Related Services*

No one individual in a school can be expected to have all the knowledge necessary to address the needs of the twice-exceptional student. The multidisciplinary nature of the IEP team is ideally suited for making decisions about and monitoring the comprehensive educational programs and services necessary for twice-exceptional students. Ideally, the IEP not only focuses on areas of weakness, but also on providing access to gifted and talented services. IEP goals may need to address specific advanced learner needs.

### *Talent Development Opportunities*

Although this guide is focused on the needs of those twice-exceptional students who are academically gifted and disabled, it is important to keep in mind that they may also have special talents. Twice-exceptional students must have the opportunity to develop and to excel in talent areas, such as arts, music, or dance. This could include mentorships, internships, independent study experience, nonacademic competition, community college programs, art and music programs, clubs (such as chess, language), and other enrichment activities.

### *Family Involvement*

Family involvement is critically important to student success. Schools should engage in meaningful, ongoing communication with families in order to gather information to assist in assessing and meeting individual student needs. Linking student work with personal passions can be accomplished by asking for samples of student work that might be done at home, hobbies in which the child is involved, and the clubs/organizations to which the child belongs.

### *Roles and Responsibilities of Related Services and Support Personnel*

Pupil support personnel, related service providers and school-based mental health professionals, such as counselors, psychologists and social workers, can serve important roles in ensuring that twice-exceptional students receive appropriate educational programming to meet their individual needs.

#### *School Counselors*

School counselors can provide a variety of direct (for example, person counseling) and indirect (for example, advocacy, working with parents) services to assist twice-exceptional students (McEachern & Bornot, 2001). Social and emotional difficulties are often present in the twice-exceptional population. Counselors may be helpful to these students by giving them the opportunity to address concerns related to self-concept, self-esteem, and other specific concerns (for example, depression) that occur as a result of the frustration and confusion of experiencing extremes of ability.

#### *School Psychologists*

Evaluations for disabilities must be conducted by trained professionals familiar with psychological and educational assessment. In most cases, the individual with this credential in a school will be the school psychologist. School psychologists should be trained in the nuances of twice-exceptional identification. They should have both the knowledge of various disabilities that impact student learning and psychosocial functioning as well as the knowledge of giftedness. School psychologists also provide counseling services in many schools and can assist twice-exceptional students address social and emotional difficulties. They often work with general education teachers in implementing appropriate classroom behavioral programs.

#### *Other Specialists and Services*

Just like other students with disabilities, twice-exceptional students may benefit from occupational therapy, speech and language support, and other related services. They may be in need of assistive technology or health care services from the school nurse. No child's IQ is too high to be considered eligible for special education and related services of this nature.







## Conclusion

**T**wice-exceptional students have a wide range of disabilities and demonstrable giftedness as they share characteristics of both areas of exceptionality. It is important for educators to recognize that extremes of ability can exist within any one student; students can have disabilities and still be considered gifted.

When a youngster identified as gifted is not performing up to expectations, we should first question whether the student should be evaluated for a possible disability. Immediate removal from the gifted program should not be considered until the possibility of twice-exceptionality is ruled out. Likewise, it is important to identify giftedness in students who have disabilities as they may also require services to develop their gifts and talents.

Lack of identification and appropriate services often contribute to a student's low academic self-efficacy and self-esteem. Students who understand their personal pattern of strengths and weaknesses are better equipped to actively participate in their learning. The ideal fit for a twice-exceptional student and his or her educational environment is one where both the student's giftedness and disability are evenly accounted for through appropriate education and services.

*The Twice-Exceptional Dilemma* is published by NEA, in partnership with the National Association for Gifted Children, as part of its initiative to close achievement gaps in this and other student populations. Twice-exceptional students who are gifted and disabled are under-identified in our schools. As a result, they do not receive the most appropriate services to meet their unique needs and are often underachievers in our classrooms. Along with all other children, they deserve a great public school that has the tools, resources and programs to meet their needs.

The suggestions and recommendations offered in this guide are intended to serve as catalysts to initiate dialogue and encourage systemic change in schools and districts. Through efforts to improve assessment and identification processes and instructional practices, in collaboration with families and community partners, we can move closer to eliminating the achievement gaps that persist in our schools today.





## Appendix

### Special Education

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines special education as “specially designed instruction.” First enacted in 1975 as the Education of Handicapped Children Act, the federal statute was last reauthorized in December 2004. The law requires states to provide appropriate special education and related services to students meeting eligibility criteria under 13 disability categories (i.e., Autism, Blind and Visually Impaired, Deaf and Hearing Impaired, Deaf-Blind, Emotionally Disturbed, Learning Disabled, Mentally Retarded, Orthopedically Impaired, Other Health Impaired, Speech and Language Impaired). Some states provide gifted and talented services through special education funding although it is not one of the categories listed in IDEA.

### Gifted and Talented

Federal law does not require that states and districts provide for the educational needs of gifted and talented learners. As a result, gifted programming decisions in the United States are made at the state and local levels. Although many states mandate that districts identify gifted students and provide services, few states specify the services, or the grade levels in which students must be served. In states without mandates, or in states that do not fund gifted services, it is up to local districts to determine whether to provide services and which talent areas will be served. In these cases, services are available only in well-funded districts.

### Javits Program

The Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act is the only federal program that specifically addresses the needs of gifted and talented children. The Act was passed in 1988 to support the development of talent in U.S. schools, but does not fund local gifted education programs. The purpose of the Act, which was reauthorized as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2001, is to orchestrate a coordinated program of scientifically based research, demonstration projects, innovative strategies, and similar activities that build and enhance the ability of elementary and secondary schools to meet the special educational needs of gifted and talented students.

The Javits program works through a national research center and demonstration and statewide grant projects. In fiscal year 2005 the Congress provided just over \$11 million for the Javits program. The program focuses resources on identifying and serving students who are traditionally underrepresented in gifted and talented programs, particularly economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, and disabled students, to help reduce gaps in achievement and to encourage equal educational opportunities for all U.S. students.

### Definition of Gifted and Talented

The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* provides the following definition of gifted and talented students:

*Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities (No Child Left Behind Act, P.L. 107-110 (Title IX, Part A, Definition 22) (2002)).*

Many states and districts have adopted the same or similar definitions for gifted and talented students, although identification procedures are not consistent and the instruments used vary widely.





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## RESOURCES

### Books

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## Professional Organizations

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)

1110 North Glebe Road, Suite 300

Arlington, VA 22201

[www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)

Publications: *Exceptional Children*; *Teaching Exceptional Children* (available online)

National Association of Gifted Children

1707 L Street NW, Suite 550

Washington, DC 20036

[www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

Publications: *Parenting for High Potential*; *Gifted Child Quarterly*

National Education Association

1201 16th Street, NW

Washington, DC 20036-3290

[www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)

Publications: *Meeting the Challenge: Special Education Tools that Work for All Kids*;  
*The Puzzle of Autism*; *The Twice-Exceptional Dilemma*

Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG)

P.O. Box 6074

Scottsdale, AZ 85261

[www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org)

## Internet Resources

2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter

<http://2enewsletter.com>

Awesome Library – Special Education

[www.awesomeibrary.org/library/special\\_education/gifted/Gifted.html](http://www.awesomeibrary.org/library/special_education/gifted/Gifted.html)

Davidson Institute's GT-CyberSource

[www.gt-cybersource.org/](http://www.gt-cybersource.org/)

ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education

<http://ericec.org/gifted/gt-menu.html>

GT World

[www.gtworld.org](http://www.gtworld.org)

Hoagies Gifted Education Page

[www.hoagiesgifted.org](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org)

Uniquely Gifted

[www.uniquelygifted.org](http://www.uniquelygifted.org)





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*This guide to working with twice-exceptional students represents an important collaborative breakthrough to acknowledge the needs of this special population and to provide ideas for practitioners at the classroom and school level to address them. Some of our most brilliant contributors to society may be found among this population, including Stephen Hawking, Einstein, and Edison. Providing support for individual differences in all classroom settings is a goal of our national organizations. I am most pleased to see this publication come to fruition and be put in the hands of classroom teachers who can make the critical difference in the lives of these students.*

*–Joyce VanTassel-Baska, NAGC President*

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