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Twice-Exceptional Students

What’s not often well-known or well-understood is that students who are gifted may also have a special need or disability— just as students with disabilities may also be gifted. The term “twice-exceptional,” also referred to as “2e,” is used to describe gifted children who, have the characteristics of gifted students with the potential for high achievement and give evidence of one or more disabilities as defined by federal or state eligibility criteria. These disabilities may include specific learning disabilities (SpLD), speech and language disorders, emotional/behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, autism spectrum, or other impairments such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Like other gifted learners, 2e students are highly knowledgeable and talented in at least one particular domain. However, their giftedness is often overshadowed by their disabilities, or these students may be able to mask or hide their learning deficits by using their talents to compensate. Sometimes a twice-exceptional child’s special education needs are overlooked until adolescence or later, or are never identified throughout his or her life.

Twice-exceptional children often find difficulty in the school environment, where organization, participation, and long-term planning play a role. They can be highly creative, verbal, imaginative, curious, with strong problem-solving ability, and a wide range of interests or a single, all-consuming expertise. However, at school, they may have difficulty keeping up with course rigor, volume, and demands--resulting in inconsistent academic performance, frustration, difficulties with written expression, and labels such as lazy, unmotivated, and underachiever. All this may hinder their excitement for school and be detrimental to their self-efficacy, self-confidence, and motivation.

How does twice-exceptionality look at school and at home?

What the Teacher Might See	What the Parent Might See
The start of the school year has already proved quite challenging. I have a new student that shows high interest and ability in math and science. Her level of understanding and problem-solving capabilities are off the charts. So, why the challenge? This student has extreme difficulty with any work that requires writing and reading. So much so that homework, note-taking, and assigned reading are very hard for her to	Each night, homework ends in frustration, tears, and meltdowns for my middle schooler. It takes her hours each night to complete her homework, when other classmates seem to complete assignments in a fraction of the time. She often seems disorganized or clueless about what needs to be done, and her backpack is a mess. She’s very creative and enjoys delving into deep, complex content-- but is having major difficulties when it comes to language arts and math.

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complete. Does she have a learning disability?

I wish there was an answer for what is going on with one of my students this year. “Jim” is a bright, highly motivated 10-year-old who enjoys the STEM problems we cover in class. He’s a walking encyclopedia on the planet Mars and recent missions; he’s even designed his own plans for a new Mars rover. Despite this, Jim is extremely quiet and withdrawn, does not seem to have any friends, and rarely looks me in the eye when I try to talk with him about Mars or other subjects.

I’ve been receiving complaints from the teacher about my son, who is concerned he is distracting and annoying his classmates. She described him as interruptive and rude, often not paying attention. He has a high IQ, but is viewed as a “behavior problem.” He has deep interests outside of school, and can engage for hours in topics he cares about. Normally outgoing with a great sense of humor, he is becoming withdrawn and hates school. I wish for more than negative phone calls and emails from the school.

What can parents do to help?

