

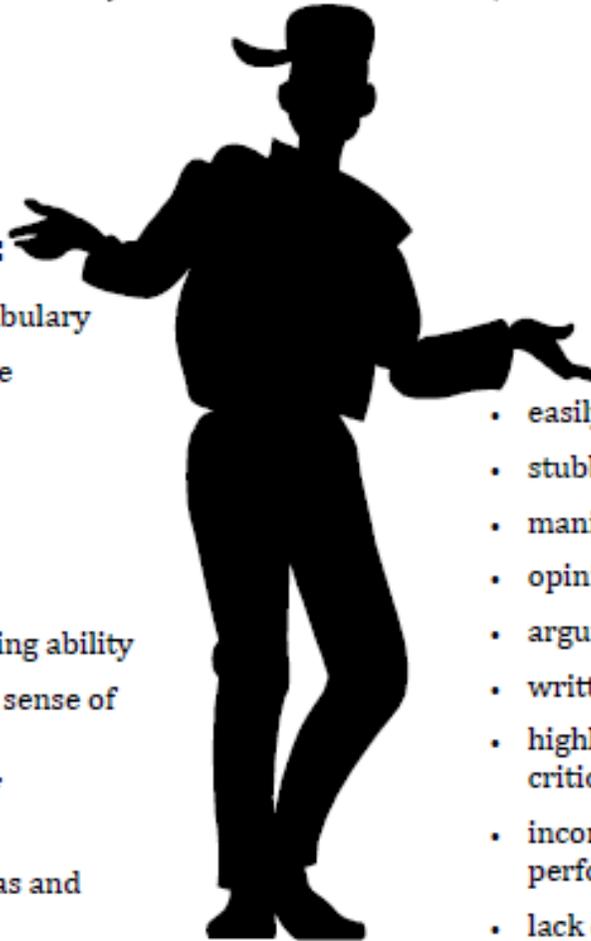
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# TWICE-EXCEPTIONAL STUDENTS



## Strengths:

- superior vocabulary
- highly creative
- resourceful
- curious
- imaginative
- questioning
- problem-solving ability
- sophisticated sense of humor
- wide range of interests
- advanced ideas and opinions
- special talent or consuming interest



## Challenges:

- easily frustrated
- stubborn
- manipulative
- opinionated
- argumentative
- written expression
- highly sensitive to criticism
- inconsistent academic performance
- lack of organization and study skills
- difficulty with social interactions



## Misunderstood Children

The combination of marked strengths and weaknesses found in 2e children can result in behavior and academic performance that puzzle parents, teachers, and even some medical and mental health professionals. Because their disabilities or deficits are often not apparent to those around them, twice-exceptional children may appear to be uninterested, lazy, distracted, or disruptive in class. They might present any of the three profiles identified by educator and researcher Susan Baum:

- Bright but not trying hard enough
- Learning disabled but with no exceptional abilities
- Average.

In each situation, the 2e student's strengths help to compensate for deficits; the deficits, on the other hand, make the child's strengths less apparent.<sup>[1]</sup> The interplay of exceptional strengths and weaknesses in a single individual results in inconsistency in performance. A 2e student's grades commonly alternate between high and low, sometimes within the same subject. The child might have advanced vocabulary and ideas but be unable to organize those ideas and express them on paper. He might be a skilled artist or builder but turn in assignments that are messy or illegible. She might complete assignments but lose them or forget to turn them in. To the parents and teachers observing this behavior, it may seem that the child just isn't trying. In fact, many 2e children work as hard if not harder than others, but with less to show for their efforts. This struggle to accomplish tasks that appear easy for other students can leave 2e children frustrated, anxious, and depressed. It can rob them of their enthusiasm and energy for school and damage their self-esteem.

## Identifying Twice Exceptionality

Children identified as twice exceptional can exhibit a wide range of traits, many of them typical of gifted children. Like those who are gifted, 2e children often show greater asynchrony than average children (that is, a larger gap between their [mental age](#) and physical age). They are often intense and highly sensitive to their emotional and physical environments. The following chart summarizes characteristics commonly seen in this population.

**Typical Characteristics of Twice-Exceptional Children**<sup>[2]</sup>

* Superior vocabulary	* Poor social skills
* Advanced ideas and opinions	* High sensitivity to criticism
* High levels of creativity and problem-solving ability	* Lack of organizational and study skills

* Extremely curious, imaginative, and questioning	* Discrepant verbal and performance skills
* Wide range of interests not related to school	* Poor performance in one or more academic areas
* Penetrating insight into complex issues	* Difficulty with written expression
* Specific talent or consuming interest area	* Stubborn, opinionated demeanor
* Sophisticated sense of humor	* High impulsivity

Twice exceptionalism often shows up in school. In their early years, these children often seem bright, with varied interests and advanced vocabularies; and many times parents are unaware that they have a 2e child. Teachers often spot problems in school. During the early years it may be social difficulties. The 2e child may find it hard to make friends and fit in. Academic problems often appear later. As work demands increase, teachers may see a drop or inconsistencies in the student's performance, sometimes accompanied by an increase in problem behaviors. Some 2e students withdraw, showing reluctance to speak out or take other risks in class; while others play the class clown. Some are unable to stay focused, find it hard to sit still and work quietly, and have difficulty controlling anger or frustration.

If these difficulties persist, school personnel or parents may decide that evaluation is needed. Along with a physical examination, children may undergo psycho-educational testing to determine the cause of their struggles. The professionals who take part in the process should be knowledgeable about giftedness. Some characteristics of giftedness can look very much like those of a learning disability or disorder and, as a result, gifted children are sometimes incorrectly diagnosed with disorders.<sup>[3]</sup> Evaluation results should indicate the child's areas of strength and weakness and identify whether any disorders or learning disabilities are present. In addition, the results should include information on what the child needs in order to build on the strengths and compensate for the weaknesses that have been identified.

1. [^](#) Baum, S. & Owen, S. (2004). *To Be Gifted & Learning Disabled: Strategies for Helping Bright Students with LD, ADHD, and More*. Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press.
2. [^](#) Higgins, L. D. & Nielsen, M. E. (2000). Responding to the Needs of Twice-Exceptional Learners: A School District and University's Collaborative Approach. In K. Kay, (Ed.), *Uniquely Gifted: Identifying and Meeting the Needs of the Twice-Exceptional Student* (pp. 287-303). Gilsum, NH: Avocus Publishing.
3. [^](#) Webb, J.T.; Amend, E.R.; Webb, N.E.; Goerss, J.; Beljan, P.; Olenchak, F.R. (2005). *The Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults: ADHD, Bipolar, OCD, Asperger's, Depression, and Other Disorders*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.

# Identification

Twice-exceptional students are difficult to identify because they possess the characteristics of gifted students and the characteristics of students with disabilities. Gifted characteristics may mask disabilities or disabilities may mask gifted potential. Either the strengths, the disabilities, or both may not be identified. To be considered twice-exceptional, the student must be identified for gifted education and special education services or have a 504 plan. Research indicates that 2-5 percent of the gifted population will have disabilities and 2-5 percent of students with disabilities will be gifted (Dix & Schafer, 1996; Whitmore, 1980; & Maker, 1977).

## Gifted Identification

When gifted students begin to struggle in school, their identification for gifted services is sometimes questioned. Just because students have disabilities does not mean they are not gifted. Many eminent people have struggled in school and later gone on to make substantial contributions to society. Not achieving commensurate with ability should raise a red flag that there is the possibility a disability may be impacting learning. Disabilities in gifted students can go unnoticed for years and valuable windows for effective interventions are missed. It is important to utilize a collaborative problem-solving approach as early as possible to prevent the development of behavioral and social/emotional issues. (For more information, see *Gifted Education Guidelines and Resources: Volume I: Identification*, <[www.cde.state.co.us](http://www.cde.state.co.us)>).

## Identification of Disability

A collaborative problem-solving approach should be considered for students who are struggling in school and who may need academic and/or behavioral support. Use of this approach is "effective when multiple perspectives collaborate to identify student needs, implement targeted interventions, utilize data to measure student progress as a result of the interventions, as well as to monitor intervention integrity" (*Response to Intervention [RtI] A Practitioner's Guide To Implementation*, Colorado Department of Education, 2008, <[www.cde.state.co.us](http://www.cde.state.co.us)>).

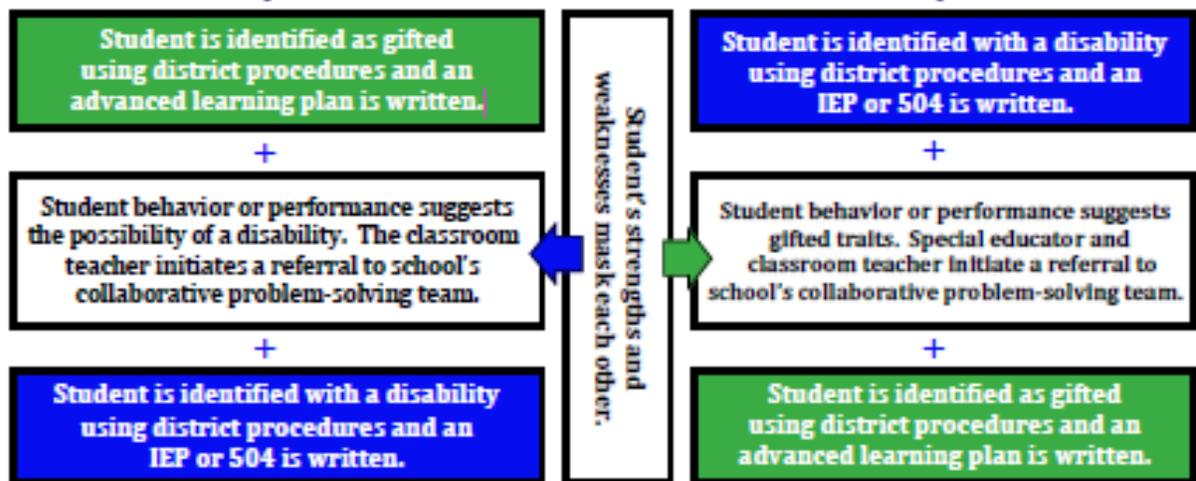
## Students Who Have Inconsistent Academic Performance

Strengths and disabilities may mask each other and the student may appear to have average ability. However, inconsistent performance may indicate the presence of gifted potential and disabilities. It is important to focus on developing potential and providing strategies to help students when they struggle. Research-based strategies for twice-exceptional students can be implemented before formal identification is achieved. Continue to look for indicators of gifted behaviors or behaviors that suggest a disability.

## Identification and Programming for Twice-Exceptional Students

### Identification

Twice-exceptional students are difficult to identify because their strengths and weaknesses may mask each other, creating a unique learner profile atypical of a gifted student or a student with disabilities.



### Programming

In a collaborative effort between the classroom teacher, gifted educator, and special educators, appropriate strategies will be implemented to:

- nurture the student's potential.
- support development of compensatory strategies.
- identify learning gaps and provide explicit instruction.
  - foster social and emotional development.
  - enhance capacity to cope with mixed abilities.

- ⇒ The advanced learning plan and the IEP are reviewed simultaneously.
- ⇒ Identified student is noted as twice-exceptional on district database.
- ⇒ Number of twice-exceptional students in district is reported to the Colorado Department of Education in the Gifted End-of-Year Report submitted by district Gifted Education Director.