

An Educator's Guide Twice Exceptional Learners

Twice exceptional learners are students who have the ability to think, reason, and problem-solve at very high levels but also have special education needs. These students are best served by teachers who recognize and build on their exceptional strengths while at the same time are flexible in areas where the student requires accommodations and support. For example, teachers may modify assignments, offer flexible timelines, provide alternative learning experiences, and employ other strategies that are often used with students with special needs.

The collaboration between the Department of Talented and Gifted Education staff and Special Education Instruction staff has been a key component in efforts to raise teacher, parent, and student awareness of this issue and to design and provide professional development to address it.

PPS embraces the notion of differentiation and the importance of a child-centered approach to delivering instruction that meets the needs of each individual child. Differences are not deficits and differentiation provides powerful language for professional dialogue with parents and teachers on how best to meet the needs of each child and every child. By working closely with special education staff, the Department of Talented and Gifted education shares strategies, practices, and interventions that allow students to be successful in gifted programs. These adaptations provide twice exceptional learners important access to the many advanced learning opportunities that Portland Public Schools provides.

Some of the initial steps include:

- Ongoing professional development/presentations are provided for school psychologists, social workers, special education teachers, TAG Facilitators, and general education teachers on meeting the needs of twice exceptional learners.
- Resources have been added to the Department of Talented and Gifted Education Website.
- Classroom teacher is aware and supportive of the student/s.
- The social/emotional well-being of the student is seriously considered.
- The nomination and identification process begins and ENDS at the school level. The new nomination form tries to honor and capture twice exceptional students.

It takes the expertise of numerous individuals to problem-solve and find out what works best for each child. Parents/guardians play a critical role in this endeavor and are therefore encouraged to meet with school teams if they have a child with twice exception needs. The ultimate goal is to work toward self-understanding for the child as this is the most powerful way for a child to become a successful self-advocate.

Profile of Twice Exceptional Learners

- Posses high level of general academic ability
- May have uneven academic patterns of strength
- Interested in broad based thematic topics
- May be less successful when confronted with input from multiple sources or with tasks that require integration of multiple skills
- Often displays exceptional creativity or problem-solving ability in area(s) of interest
- May have written language difficulties including poor handwriting, poor mechanics, and difficulty with organization of content
- May have sophisticated sense of humor
- May need time to process language and respond
- May be highly sensitive, especially in areas of human need
- Often have difficulty in organizing time and materials
- Possess high readiness to learn and great interest in learning topics when presented in a challenging manner
- May exhibit visual or auditory deficits

Identification of Twice Exceptional Learners

- Often gift masks the exceptionality or vice versa
- One of the most frequently used indicators is a sever discrepancy between potential and performance

Four Variables that Can Facilitate Success

Time

- Modify assignments/extend time if needed
- Give realistic deadlines for completing assignments, offer flexible deadlines
- Use contracts including behavior contracts

Structure

- Present material in a variety of ways
- Provide alternative learning experiences which are not dependent on paper and pencil or reading
- Place the child where the board and the teacher can be easily seen

Support

- Help students set realistic priorities and goals for themselves
- Work on time management techniques
- Use accommodations such as audio tapes (to access content), computer, etc.

Complexity- high level thinking

- Focus on "Big Ideas"
- Use higher level questioning
- Provide instruction that requires advanced reasoning and problem-solving
- Include opportunities for meta-cognition
- Students need respectful, challenging assignments