

California Association for the Gifted A Position Paper

The California Association for the Gifted (CAG) periodically publishes position papers that deal with issues, policies, and practices that have an impact on the education of gifted and talented students. All position papers approved by the CAG Board of Directors are consistent with the organization's philosophy and mission, and the current research in the field.

The position papers support the organization's belief in the value and uniqueness of all individuals, its respect for diversity present in our society, and its commitment to honoring the similarities and differences among all students. CAG encourages the provision of educational opportunities that are appropriate to challenge and nurture the growth of each child's potential. The organization is especially mindful of the need for advocacy for individuals who have developed or show the promise of developing intellectual abilities and talents at high levels.

Twice-Exceptional Gifted Students

Twice-exceptional students have characteristics that are often misunderstood or misinterpreted. While they may be capable of high levels of abstract and critical thinking, an underlying disability can mask their giftedness making it difficult to identify and serve. The disability may come in many forms: learning disabilities, such as problems with attention, judgment, or social-emotional regulation; physical restriction; or perceptual deficits, including deafness or visual impairment.

One of the greatest hurdles facing twice-exceptional students is the presumption that they should be limited to one label. Often, the disability becomes the focus of the child's educational experience, because it stands in the way of reaching proficiency on grade-level standards. When this happens, the student's giftedness may go unserved, and eventually regress to the point that it is no longer identifiable.

Another obstacle for these students is the difficulty of identifying either exceptionality because they may mask each other. Gifted and high ability learners who have social, behavioral, or cognitive disabilities may sometimes learn coping strategies that allow them to perform like average learners. Teachers may feel that students cannot possibly be gifted if they do not easily accomplish grade-level tasks. These preconceptions of students with learning or behavioral disorders or physical disabilities, coupled with misunderstandings or inappropriate stereotypes regarding giftedness, prevent some students from being considered for either Special Education or Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) programs. Left unidentified, the disability often progresses while the giftedness may regress. The longer students go without support in both exceptionalities, the less likely it is that they will develop their full potential.

In addition to the problem of overlooking the dual-diagnosis of gifted students with disabilities, schools often misdiagnose gifted students who have high, uncontrolled energy levels and incessant questions. Our brightest, most creative students might be behaviorally modified or medicated to change their unique way of perceiving and shaping the world, and the gift is lost.

With appropriate dual-diagnosis of giftedness and cognitive, emotional, behavioral, or physical disabilities, educators and family members can make educational modifications that can minimize the affect of the disability while allowing the giftedness to grow and thrive. In order to maximize the student's potential, educators and parents need to create safety nets that might include the following:

- training for parents, and educators, including administrators and counselors in the characteristics of, and appropriate interventions for giftedness and the disability both at home and school
- class schedules that allow these students to be placed in supportive, healthy environments with teachers who will attend to all of the student's special needs
- assistive technologies that allow the students to express their ideas
- individualized learning plans that address the cognitive potential that goes beyond setting goals for grade-level proficiency
- collaboration and coordination between the GATE resource specialists and other case workers, including counselors, occupational therapists, and special education staff to be sure that the student's giftedness is supported
- articulation between elementary and middle schools, and middle and high schools to ensure smooth transition and the continuance of strategies that work
- regional expertise, for example school, district, county and state resources and experts in the field when a school has little experience with the twice-exceptional student.

Ignoring or mis-diagnosing giftedness in students with cognitive, behavioral, or physical disabilities may result in the loss of potential and the perpetuation or exacerbation of the disability. Eventually, the student may become disengaged from the school experience, rebel, and regress. To ensure appropriate growth and development, classroom structure and content must be characterized by flexibility, challenge, and appropriate modifications. Parents and teachers must approach the student's cognitive potential and consider the student's giftedness when making remediation plans and intervention strategies.

The California Association for the Gifted supports the appropriate diagnosis and educational planning for both the remediation of disability and the development of giftedness for students who need intervention for two or more exceptionalities. The giftedness of the students must be considered as families and educators create learning plans and interventions for the twice-exceptional student's future growth and development.

References:

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- Gosfield, M. (Ed.). (Fall/Winter, 2005). *Gifted Education Communicator*, 36(3 & 4).
- Webb, J. (2005). *Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnosis of Gifted Children and Adults*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.