

Twice Exceptional Students – What You Need to Know

A Factsheet for Virginia Parents

What is a Twice Exceptional (2e) Student?

A **twice exceptional (2e)** student is **both gifted and has a learning disability or other challenge**. For example, a student might excel in math or music but struggle with spelling or writing due to a learning disability. Many 2e students go **unidentified** and may not get the support they need to succeed. The **Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)** defines twice exceptional students as:

“Children in kindergarten through 12th grade who are identified as gifted by the identification and placement committee for the school division’s gifted education program and are also identified as a child with a disability as defined by Virginia’s special education regulations.” Virginia follows the federal **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** for special education, but IDEA does not explicitly address gifted students. Virginia does have **state regulations and guidance on gifted education**.

How Are Students Identified as 2e?

If a teacher, staff member, or parent **suspects a disability**, the student should be referred for a **special education evaluation**, even if the student has good grades or scores well on tests. If the student does **not qualify for special education**, they may still be eligible for a **504 Plan**, under the federal Rehabilitation Act, which prohibits discrimination based on disability and allows for instructional accommodations.

2e students are often **underserved** because their strengths can hide their struggles—or vice versa. This can lead to missed learning challenges, unmet academic needs, emotional struggles like anxiety or depression, and misunderstood behaviors or low expectations. Teachers may not be trained to identify both giftedness and disabilities in the same student, which makes the identification process more challenging.

MYTHS About Twice Exceptional Students

(excerpted from Understood.org)

1. Being gifted makes up for having a thinking or learning difference.
2. Students can’t be “gifted” and lack basic skills, so they’re just not trying hard enough.
3. Twice exceptional students aren’t eligible for IEPs or 504 plans.
4. Giftedness and challenges can’t be addressed at the same time.
5. Addressing weaknesses should be the top priority when helping twice exceptional students.
6. Twice exceptional students need accommodations so they can’t be in advanced placement classes.
7. Twice exceptional students should be more mature than other kids their age.

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Signs that a student might be 2e may include (1) **strong talent or high ability** in one area (2) **struggles with basic skills** like reading or writing; (3) big differences between **performance and ability**; (4) **trouble following directions** or staying organized; and (5) **frustration, boredom, or inappropriate behavior** in class.

Supporting 2e Students

A 2e student's supports should be planned by the school's **Gifted Identification and Placement Committee** and the student's **IEP or 504 team**. **Parents and students** play a key role in this process and should be active partners in planning and decision-making. The teams should work together to:

- Provide support for learning challenges
- Offer instruction that encourages intellectual academic growth
- Let the student learn alongside their peers

Helpful Strategies and Interventions

There are **interventions and accommodations** that can help 2e students overcome barriers related to reading, writing, organization, and memory. The *VDOE FAQ document* details potential assistive technology accommodations as well as information on instructional materials and interventions, assessment methods, and student study skills.

Schools can help by:

- Focusing on the **student's strengths**
- Providing **needed supports**
- Being proactive in **evaluating gifted students who are struggling**
- Encouraging **self-advocacy and high expectations**

Twice exceptional students have unique abilities *and* needs. With the right support, they can thrive both academically and socially.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/RESOURCES:

[FAQ Supporting the Identification and Achievement of the Twice Exceptional Student](#)

[Virginia Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted Students](#)

[Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia](#)

[The Challenges of Twice Exceptional Kids Understood.org](#)

[12 Questions to Ask the School about 2e Students Understood.org](#)

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