

National Association for Gifted Children

POSITION PAPER

STUDENTS WITH CONCOMITANT GIFTS AND LEARNING DISABILITIES

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) periodically issues policy statements dealing with policies, and practices that have an impact on the education of gifted and talented students. Policy statements represent the official convictions of the organization.

All policy statements approved by the NAGC Board of Directors are consistent with the organization's belief that education in a democracy must respect the uniqueness of all individuals, the broad range of cultural diversity present in our society, and the similarities and differences in learning characteristics that can be found within any group of students. NAGC is fully committed to national goals that advocate both excellence and equity for all students, and we believe that the best way to achieve these goals is through *differentiated* educational opportunities, resources, and encouragement for all students.

Due to a specific learning disability, an increasing number of students are not achieving up to their potential despite the fact that they demonstrate high ability or gifted behavior. These students exhibit characteristics of both exceptionalities: giftedness and learning disabilities. Their gifted behaviors often include keen interests, high levels of creativity, superior abilities in abstract thinking, and problem-solving prowess. Similar to their peers with learning disabilities, they frequently display problems in one or more of the following: reading, writing, mathematics, memory, organization, or sustaining attention. Because of their dual set of seemingly contradictory characteristics, gifted learning-disabled students may develop feelings of depression and inadequacy and consequently may demonstrate acting-out behaviors to disguise their feelings of low self-esteem and diminished academic self-efficacy.

NAGC recognizes three types of students who could be identified as gifted learning disabled: (1) identified gifted students who have subtle learning disabilities, (2) students with a learning disability but whose gift has not been identified, and (3) unidentified students whose gifts and disabilities may be masked by average school achievement. School policies concerning identification and entitlement to specialized educational services can contribute to the under identification and inappropriate programming for these youngsters. Given that gifted learning disabled students do not necessarily perform below grade level, discrepancy analysis should be based on their potential compared to their classroom performance. Student assessment must include consideration for the time these youth require to complete tasks: the support needed from others to complete each task and the level at which the student can fairly be predicted to achieve based on measures of potential.

Identifying students' abilities and gifts should be based neither on classroom performance nor on total test scores in achievement or intelligence. Rather, to identify students' gifts, schools should analyze individual subtest scores and patterns on tests of intelligence as well as emphasize authentic assessment of talent within specific domains using student products, auditions, and interviews.

Students who have both gifts and learning disabilities require a dually differentiated program: one that nurtures their gifts and talents while accommodating for learning weaknesses. Being dually classified is often key to students' receiving appropriate services. A comprehensive program will include: provisions for the identification and the development of talent; a learning environment that values diversity and individual talents in all domains; educational support that develops compensatory strategies including the appropriate use of technology; and school-based counseling to enhance students' ability to cope with their mix of talents and disabilities. Without appropriate identification and services, the gifts of these students may never be developed.

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