

Common Characteristics and Criteria of Twice-Exceptional Learners

“Twice-exceptional students” means those students identified as gifted by the identification and placement committee for the school division’s gifted education program and identified with a disability as defined by federal and state special education regulations.

Twice-exceptional students are children, kindergarten through twelfth 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. The gifted identification qualifies the student for educational service options that support performance at increasing levels of complexity that differ significantly from those of their age-level peers. Identification as a child with a disability entitles the student to an individualized education program (IEP) in accordance with state and federal guidelines or a 504 Plan. The IEP specifies the individual educational needs of the child and what special education and related services are necessary to meet the child’s educational needs (8VAC20-81-110).

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) defines **gifted students** as “those in public elementary, middle, and secondary schools beginning with kindergarten (through twelfth grade) who demonstrate high levels of accomplishment or who show the potential for higher levels of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment” (8VAC20-40-20).

If your child demonstrates several characteristics common of gifted learners, contact your child's teacher and/or guidance counselor for more information about the referral process.

Common Characteristics

- Shows high verbal ability, but may use language in inappropriate ways and at inappropriate times;
- Demonstrates strong observation skills but has difficulty with memory skills;
- Excels in solving “real-world” problems; has outstanding critical thinking and decisionmaking skills; often (independently) develops compensatory skills;
- Shows attention deficit problems but may concentrate for long periods of time in areas of interest;
- Has strong questioning attitudes; may appear disrespectful when questioning information, facts, etc., presented by teachers, adults, or other authority figures;
- Displays unusual imagination; frequently generates original and at times rather “unusual” ideas; extremely divergent in thought; may appear to daydream when generating ideas;
- May be unwilling to take risks with regard to academics and yet, willing to take risks in nonschool areas without consideration of consequences;

- Can use humor to divert attention from school failure; may use humor to make fun of peers or to avoid trouble;
- Appears immature relative to cognitive ability and chronological age since such students may use anger, crying, and/or withdrawal to express feelings and deal with difficulties;
- Requires frequent teacher support and feedback in deficit areas; highly independent in other areas; can appear stubborn and inflexible;
- May be sensitive regarding disability area(s); highly critical of self and others, including teachers; can express concern about the feelings of others even while engaging in antisocial behavior;
- May not be accepted by other children and may feel isolated; may be perceived as a loner since he/she does not fit a typical model for either a gifted student or a student with a disability; sometimes has difficulty being accepted by peers due to poor social skills;
- Is often a leader among the more nontraditional students demonstrating strong “street-wise” behavior; or conversely, the disability may interfere with the student’s ability to exercise leadership skills;
- Shows a wide range of interests but may be thwarted in pursuing them due to processing or learning problems;
- May have very focused interests, for example, a passion about certain topics to the exclusion of others, often not related to school subjects;
- May be unable to think in a linear fashion; has difficulty following directions;
- May have extreme difficulty in the written language areas;
- May experience reading problems due to cognitive processing deficits;
- May struggle with basic skills due to cognitive processing difficulties;
- May demonstrate exceptional talents in visual and performing arts;
- Often has excellent higher-order thinking skills but struggles with rudimentary activities

Criteria

State regulations and local policy governing the procedures and criteria for the identification of gifted learners and the identification of students with disabilities must be followed by the school division. Many twice-exceptional students are identified as gifted as a result of a gifted screening process and may later be identified with a disability as a result of their inability to demonstrate academic achievement commensurate with their ability. Others are referred for identification as gifted when their superior abilities are discovered as part of the process of identifying their disabilities. Because of the complex profile the twice-exceptional student exhibits, special education eligibility teams and/or gifted identification/placement committees consider both giftedness and disability evaluations when both are suspected. When identifying a student who may be twice-exceptional, many specialists in the fields of gifted and special education have suggested the following considerations:

- Using multiple data sources for gifted programming identification: intelligence and achievement tests, teacher reports, creativity tests, student interviews or self-referral, and family or peer interview;
- Avoid combining multiple pieces of data into a single score; combining scores allows lower scores to depress the total score, thereby disqualifying students with strengths from gifted programs;
- Review achievement and aptitude subscores for strengths and weaknesses;
- Compare expected performance on statewide standardized tests and psycho-educational assessments with actual performance using the student's daily classroom achievement, as well as other authentic assessments;
- Use both formal (such as standardized tests) and informal (such as student classwork) assessments;
- Consult with families about student performance outside of school;
- Be aware that identification is seldom pursued for students whose gifts and disabilities mask one another;
- Be aware of subtle indicators of exceptionality in students; and
- Use culturally sensitive assessment processes to prevent language and cultural differences from creating bias in the identification process.