PARENTING A TWICE-EXCEPTIONAL CHILD
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VIGNETTE

From the time Aaron was a toddler of two or three years old, his parents Maria and Paul realized that he marched to the beat of a different drum. When compared to his older siblings and other children Maria and Paul knew, Aaron exhibited superior verbal skills, advanced vocabulary knowledge, and a seemingly all-consuming grasp on topics of great interest to him such as batteries. However, Aaron had difficulty learning and recognizing letters, and he was easily frustrated and prone to severe temper tantrums that often lasted for hours. As a result, other children generally did not want to have play dates with him and his siblings found him to be an aggravation. He could not sit still in most contexts including pre-school, and he had difficulties taking naps. Aaron was also so highly disorganized that he constantly misplaced his shoes, favorite toys, and other important items – all of which distressed him greatly. Aaron’s behavioral and cognitive patterns confused and concerned Maria and Paul, and they starting expressing their concerns to Aaron’s pediatrician by the time Aaron reached the age of four years old. The pediatrician urged Maria and Paul to monitor his behaviors and to try a variety of behavioral interventions at home such as consistent time outs.

As Aaron started kindergarten and progressed into the first and second grades, his teachers recognized his verbal strengths as he made meaningful contributions to classroom discussions. His teachers were also impressed with his deep knowledge on topics of interest, as well as his evident mathematical skills that were at least two grades above his classmates. Nevertheless, while he could verbally demonstrate comprehension of content covered in class through high memorization skills, his writing was illegible,
his spelling poor, and he engaged in behaviors to avoid assignments related requiring writing. Despite his evident cognitive strengths, Aaron’s teachers found his social and emotional behaviors to be exasperating and time consuming. He struggled to wait his turn. He demonstrated challenges inhibiting the expression of ideas he found important and he regularly blurted out his thoughts out of turn. He often cried, pushed his classmates, and/or broke their materials when he became frustrated. Regular classroom behavioral and academic interventions did not effectively support Aaron’s progress.

By the time Aaron had finished second grade, Maria and Paul had taken him to several child psychiatrists who suggested Aaron likely was a child with ADHD. Maria and Paul participated in numerous meetings with teachers and school personnel about Aaron’s behavioral and learning challenges where they discussed this probable diagnosis. During these meetings, Maria and Paul asked for and received certain accommodations for Aaron such as preferential seating in the classroom and extra time to finish tests and assignments. While they appreciated these accommodations, Maria and Paul often felt frustrated because school personnel seemed focused specifically on Aaron’s cognitive and behavioral difficulties, but were not as attentive to developing his mathematical and verbal skills. At times they felt intimidated by school personnel who they perceived as not valuing their input on interventions that might help Aaron. Based on his increasingly discrepant writing and spelling skills, coupled with his behavioral challenges, school personnel suggested that Aaron get tested for learning disabilities. Maria and Paul agreed, but also encouraged the school to test him to determine eligibility for the school’s gifted and talented program. School personnel expressed reluctance to perform this testing as
they doubted Aaron could handle the academic demands of the program, which
discouraged Maria and Paul.

INTRODUCTION

The vignette above describes a child who is often referred to as “twice-
exceptional” (Foley-Nicpon, Allmon, Sieck, & Stinson, 2011) in that he simultaneously
shows evidence of being gifted in a domain(s) of talent and having a disability(ies) that
impacts the ability to achieve and learn. In Aaron’s case, he demonstrated superior talents
in mathematics and verbal reasoning, yet considerable challenges related to reading,
writing, and behavior. Until recently, many educators, parents, and researchers believed
twice-exceptionality was “paradoxical” in that it seemed implausible that gifted learners
could concomitantly have a learning disability (Kalbfleisch, 2014; Ronksley-Pavia, 2015;
Silverman, 2009). Despite early skepticism that academic gifts and learning disabilities
often coexisted in the same child, the presence of twice-exceptional students in our
nation’s schools is currently widely accepted by many educational researchers (Foley-
Nicpon et al., 2011; Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014) and in federal education legislation
(Individuals With Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEA), 2004).

The vignette also illustrates some of the challenges faced by parents of twice-
exceptional children. That is, many of these parents are initially confused about the
dichotomous learning characteristics of their children who show extraordinary cognitive
strengths in some areas, yet at the same time they exhibit acute learning, behavioral, and
emotional difficulties in other areas (Besnoy, Swoszowski, Newman, Floyd, Jones, &
Byrne, 2015). As they develop an understanding of their children’s complex learning
patterns, parents commonly feel that the educators working with them fail to recognize,
or are unprepared to provide optimal academic interventions for, both the strengths and weaknesses their children present at school (Speirs Neumeister, Yssel, & Burney, 2013). Many parents also perceive their advocacy efforts to be under-valued or dismissed by school personnel (Speirs Neumeister et al., 2013), and a collaborative relationship to be missing (Duquette, Orders, Fullaton, & Robertson-Grewal, 2011).

The purposes of this chapter are to answer several questions that parents of twice-exceptional children might ask including:

1. What are some of the unique characteristics of twice-exceptional students that parents will be able to share with educators in making the best decisions for the education of these students?

2. What unique challenges are presented to parents of twice-exceptional students?

3. How might parents of twice-exceptional students best advocate for their children in academic and social settings? How can parents and educators reach a productive, mutually challenging agreement on educational practice?

4. What resources are available to parents of twice-exceptional students?

DEFINING GIFTEDNESS AND TWICE-EXCEPTIONALITY

Before any discussion of parenting twice-exceptional children commences, it is important to define the term gifted. While definitions of the construct abound, and no single definition has been accepted by all stakeholders in the field of gifted education, the definition articulated by Rena Subotnik, Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, and Frank C. Worrell (2011) in their monograph titled Rethinking Giftedness and Gifted Education: A Proposed Direction Forward Based on Psychological Science is adopted for purposes of
this chapter. The rationale for the selection of this definition is that it offers a
developmental perspective recognized in both gifted and special education which
acknowledges the influence of nature, individual effort, and the need for appropriate
educational programming, training, and support across a variety of cognitive and non-
cognitive factors to reach talent potential (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2015).

Specifically, Subotnik and colleagues (2011) define giftedness as follows:

- Giftedness is the manifestation of performance that is clearly at the upper end of
  the distribution in a talent domain, even relative to other high-functioning
  individuals in that domain.

- Further, giftedness can be viewed as developmental in that, in the beginning
  stages, potential is the key variable; in later stages, achievement is the measure of
  giftedness.

- Psychosocial variables – both cognitive (e.g., intelligence, achievement) and non-
cognitive (e.g., motivation, self-perceptions, task commitment, family and social
relationships, etc.) – play an essential role in the manifestation of giftedness at
every developmental stage.

- Psychosocial variables are malleable and need to be deliberately cultivated. In
other words, giftedness is not a static phenomenon. A child is not born that way
and can not expect to stay that way without development of gifts from the outside
(school and home environments) and the inside (self-perceptions, task
commitment, mindset, etc.) (Subotnik et al., 2011).

This definition is particularly applicable to gifted students with disabilities for
several reasons. First, typically twice-exceptional students show strong academic
potential in their early educational years. However, many also experience a diminishing manifestation of their talents over time due to the increasing impacts of the disability on learning and psychosocial health (Hallahan et al., 2015; Missett, 2013). As a result, early recognition of talent is critical for this population. Additionally, the academic strengths and intellectual needs of twice-exceptional children are often over-looked in favor of a focus on learning, emotional, and behavioral problems leaving many twice-exceptional children unchallenged in the academic setting (Missett, Azano, Callahan, & Landrum, 2016; Webb, Gore, Amend, & DeVries, 2007). Thus, the selected definition reminds us that interventions designed to support pro-social and positive behavioral outcomes promote academic gains across the educational lifespan, and that it is important to acknowledge that non-cognitive variables and their purposeful cultivation are strongly related to demonstrating giftedness for twice-exceptional students (Baum, Schader, & Hébert, 2014; Speirs Neumeister et al., 2013).

In addition to defining giftedness, it is important to offer a definition for the term twice-exceptional which – like giftedness – continues to elude a comprehensive definition that is accepted within and beyond the fields of gifted and special education (Ronksley-Pavia, 2015). The lack of definitional consensus derives from a number of factors. For example, some researchers and theorists (Barber & Mueller, 2011; Reis et al., 2014) define twice-exceptional students as those who simultaneously meet identification criteria for both giftedness and a learning disability that has led to the development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) under the IDEA of 2004, or who are served through 504 Plans under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. However, as many parents of twice-exceptional children recognize, these students frequently will not meet eligibility
criteria for both gifts and disability due to the “masking” which generally reflects a phenomenon in which gifts blur the presentation of disabilities and vice versa (Baldwin, Baum, Pereles, & Hughes, 2015; Foley-Nicpon et al., 2011). More specifically, for some twice-exceptional students, high intellectual functioning masks a full expression of their disability. For others, the disability is recognized but its severity masks the expression of gifts and talents, or providing remedial interventions is prioritized over addressing academic talents. This scenario was evident in the vignette that opens this chapter. For a third group of twice-exceptional students, the combination of gifts and disabilities obscures the expression of both exceptionalities and makes their academic abilities appear to be average, rendering them identified and served for neither exceptionality (Baldwin et al., 2015). Therefore, in order to offer a definition that includes students who might not meet eligibility criteria for gifted programming or a disability label due to the phenomenon of masking, for purposes of this chapter a student is broadly defined as twice-exceptional when he or she simultaneously has demonstrated or has the potential to demonstrate performance that is at the upper end of the distribution in a talent domain and has a learning, emotional, physical, sensory, and/or developmental disability – whether or not the student’s disability is recognized and subject to educational interventions under the IDEA of 2004 or the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

**UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS**

The empiric literature on the psychosocial characteristics of twice-exceptional learners continues to be under-developed and additional studies are needed to better understand the nature and needs of these students (Foley-Nicpon, Assouline, & Fosenburg, 2015; Reis et al., 2014). Nevertheless, some general conclusions about their
unique characteristics have been identified in the twice-exceptional literature. (Further
descriptions of the specific cognitive, social, and emotional correlates of specific sub-
groups of twice-exceptional students are addressed in Chapter ## titled “Twice-
Exceptional Students.”) Specifically, it is clear that significant diversity exists in
diagnostic backgrounds of twice-exceptional students. Gifted students present with
specific learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disabilities, attention deficit
hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, hearing and visual impairments, and all
other categories of disability with the exception of cognitive disabilities (Reis et al.,
2014). As such, students who are twice-exceptional display a complex constellation of
learning, social, behavioral, and emotional characteristics that reflect both strengths and
challenges in the academic setting.

Twice-exceptional students exhibit numerous typical areas of strength. For
example, many twice-exceptional learners show strong capacities in verbal and
mathematical fluency, numerical processing, oral comprehension, fluid intelligence,
visual-spatial areas, creative problem solving, and divergent thinking (Assouline, Foley-
Nicpon, & Doobay, 2009; Fugate, Zentall, & Gentry, 2013; Kalbfleisch & Loughan,
2012). They also show high achievement on academic areas of keen interest. On
measurements of ability, many twice-exceptional students exhibit superior verbal
comprehension, visual-spatial and mathematic abilities. Many gifted students,
particularly those in the autism spectrum, demonstrate self-regulation skills that can be
applied to projects and tasks of interest (Kalbfleisch, 2014; Kalbfleisch & Loughan,
2012).
On the other hand, the literature also shows a variety of cognitive and behavioral traits that hamper learning and positive social outcomes. For example, twice-exceptional students typically exhibit poor spelling skills, weaknesses in written expression, challenges with organization, self-regulation, task commitment and follow through, poor attentional abilities on topics of little interest or for sustained periods, daydreaming, and deficits in emotional and behavioral control. They also tend to have relatively poor social networks (Antschel, 2008; Foley-Nicpon et al., 2011; Kalbfleisch, 2014).

In addition, the empiric literature shows that gifted students without disabilities tend to have higher overall self-perceptions than twice-exceptional students, especially those with specific learning, emotional, and attentional disabilities (Antshel, Faraone, Maglione, Doyle, Fried, Seifman, & Biederman, 2008; Foley-Nicpon, Rickels, Assouline, & Richards, 2012). However, twice-exceptional students often have higher overall self-perceptions than students with disabilities who are not gifted (Grizenko, Zhang, Polotskaia, & Joober, 2012). Similar findings exist related to social relationships and emotional health outcomes (Antschel, 2008). This research suggests that giftedness may well support the psychosocial health of students with disabilities (Mueller, 2009).

Moreover, students with learning disabilities, including those who are gifted, often exhibit a significant discrepancy between measured intelligence and academic achievement and/or they show a significant discrepancy between and among different indices on intelligence measures. Because working memory and processing speed are typical areas of cognitive weakness for twice-exceptional students, whereas verbal comprehension and visual-spatial skills are typically cognitive strengths, these
weaknesses can depress overall IQ scores notwithstanding demonstrable cognitive
strengths (Kalbfleisch, 2014; McKenzie, 2010).

PARENTING GIFTED CHILDREN

There is little debate that parents are pivotal to a child’s cognitive, social,
emotional, and behavioral development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and that healthy parent-
child relationships are among the most important factors in the development of gifts and
talents (Jolly, Treffinger, Inman, & Smutny, 2011). Gifted students with positive parental
relationships generally have higher academic achievement and more positive self-
perceptions, motivation, task commitment, and overall social and emotional health
(Clinkenbeard, 2014; Jolly et al., 2011). Research by Rudasill and colleagues (2013)
suggests this is true particularly where gifted children perceive that their parents employ
a flexible parenting style that reflects high – yet attainable and reasonable – expectations,
maintain open lines of communication with their gifted children, and also embraces the
unique cognitive and emotional characteristics of their gifted children (Rudasill, Adelson,
Callahan, Houlihan, & Keizer, 2013). There is also research suggesting that parents who
enjoy strong and positive relationships with their gifted children more often encourage
high academic performance for the purpose of learning rather than for the purpose of
being “smart”, and they advocate mindsets in their children supporting beliefs that
working hard is more important than being smart (Dweck, 2006; Wu, 2008). Other
research suggests that when parents have unrealistic expectations of their child’s abilities,
this places the child at greater risk for developing emotional and behavioral problems
(Morawska & Sanders, 2009).
In addition to the above broad findings, unique challenges that are faced by some parents of gifted children have been described. For example, concerns about one’s ability to support children who need constant intellectual stimulation have been reported, as have concerns about asynchronous development that is reflected by a gap between the child’s cognitive/intellectual age and emotional age (Morawska & Sanders, 2009). Moreover, some parents report being reluctant to discuss their child’s giftedness with other community members due to the perception that this label may result in negative judgments of them or their children (Matthews, Ritchotte, & Jolly, 2014). Other studies suggest that parents’ overuse of the gifted label may contribute to emotional and social challenges such as anxiety and poor peer relationships (Freeman, 2010). Another typical concern of parents of gifted children is that their academic and social needs are not addressed sufficiently in the academic setting. Due to these concerns, some parents of gifted children may choose to homeschool their gifted child based on the belief that the school environment is insufficiently developing academic gifts and talents, and often after parents have made multiple but unsuccessful attempts to collaborate with schools on ways to meet the academic needs of their gifted children (Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2012; Rivero, 2011).

PARENTING CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY

When a child has a disability, discovering his or her special needs often presents a confusing and painful process for parents (Hallahan, et al., 2015). Initially, many learning challenges can be subtle and difficult to pinpoint, leaving parents wondering whether a child’s cognitive, social, and/or behavioral patterns are typical or “normal.” Consequently, the recognition and acknowledgement that a child has a disability typically
occurs over many months, even years. Once a diagnosis of disability is made, parents might feel a variety of emotions including a sense of guilt that they are responsible for the child’s disability, or fear that their child will face academic and social hardships throughout life (Hallahan et al., 2015). Research also shows that raising a child with a disability can have profound effects on the family and produce stress on the part of parents and families (Singer, Maul, Wayne, & Etheridge, 2011), particularly if a child’s disability is manifested in poor social skills and disruptive behaviors (Bailey, Raspa, Humphreys, & Sam, 2011). Thus, it is essential that parents become informed of ways to proactively advocate on behalf of the child’s best educational, social, behavioral, and emotional interests.

A positive and healthy parent-child relationship is, of course, inherently beneficial to the development of a child with a disability. Recognizing the importance of parents and their role on the educational experiences of children, federal education laws including the *Individuals With Disabilities Educational Improvement Act* (IDEA), 2004) require that schools purposefully endeavor to involve parents in the education of children with disabilities and the development of individualized education programs (IEPs) for them. Under the IDEA of 2004, public schools are required to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities to ensure that they receive appropriate educational services. Parents have the legal right to work closely with a multidisciplinary team of special and regular education teachers, school psychologists, counselors, administrators, and other school personnel to determine the educational services their child will receive. The IEP is the legal document that articulates the services a student receives, and parents also have
legal rights to ensure that the child receives all services and interventions included in the IEP (Hallahan et al., 2015).

PARENTING A CHILD WHO IS TWICE-EXCEPTIONAL

Currently, research investigating the experiences of parents of twice-exceptional children is poorly developed. Therefore, in addition to considering the scant research that does exist, it is necessary to draw from the literature on parenting gifted children and children with disabilities. Based on this combined literature, several primary areas of concern experienced by the parents of twice-exceptional children have been identified (Rubenstein, Schelling, Wilczynski, & Hooks, 2015). They include concerns about school personnel’s ability to provide academic experiences attending to both gifts and disabilities. These concerns often derive from the lack of professional training most general education teachers have in providing strengths-based opportunities as well as those designed to remediate for learning weaknesses, both of which have been shown to be critical for twice-exceptional children (Baum, Schader, & Hébert, 2014). Another typical concern relates to the school’s ability to support social growth for twice-exceptional children, many of whom struggle with socially appropriate behaviors and relationships and show asynchrony in their intellectual and social development (Rubenstein et al., 2015). Additionally, the quality and quantity of communication and collaboration with school personnel on issues related to meeting the child’s educational needs, along with parents’ ability to serve as their child’s case manager, have been identified as typical parental concerns (Besnoy et al., 2015; Rubenstein et al., 2015). Each of these challenges was evident in the vignette that opened this chapter.
As stated, it is well-documented that parents’ involvement in the education of their children positively affects academic achievement, and the quality of the involvement likely affects the social and emotional functioning of children (Duquette et al., 2011). Parental involvement that has been shown to support healthy functioning for twice-exception children includes supervising homework and setting clear, high yet reasonable expectations for academic performance. Additionally, the twice-exceptional literature identifies strong and positive collaboration among all stakeholders (i.e., students, parents, school personnel) as critical to meeting the complex needs of twice-exceptional students. Without such collaboration, a student’s individualized educational program is not likely to provide interventions that will optimize student achievement while simultaneously addressing academic, social and behavioral needs (Besnoy et al., 2015; Duquette et al., 2011).

While it has been recognized that collaborative interactions between parents and school personnel are essential, the research also suggests that relationships between parents and school personnel are often strained and characterized by lack of trust (Besnoy et al., 2015; Duquette et al., 2011). Many parents face opposition on identification and provision of services for both exceptionalities. As a result, frequently tensions exist in the relations between parents and school personnel as they collaborate on selecting appropriate educational programs and interventions for a child who is twice-exceptional, and breakdowns in communication and a lack of trust are not uncommon (Rubenstein et al., 2015).
As noted, it is often the case that parents are the first to recognize the complex learning patterns of their twice-exceptional children (Rudasill et al., 2013). It is also the case that relationships between parents of twice-exceptional students and school personnel are often strained and characterized by lack of trust. As a result, it is vital for parents to become vocal and informed advocates for their children in order to effectively articulate their children’s needs and ensure that appropriate educational services are provided. To that end, many advocacy models have been proposed that address ways parents can best advocate for their children with gifts and disabilities (Besnoy et al., 2015; Duquette et al., 2015; Speirs Neumeister et al., 2013; Trail, 2011). This section articulates several recommendations offered in these parent advocacy models that detail strategies that have shown success in helping parents navigate the assessment, identification, and placement processes for their twice-exceptional children.

Again, parents are typically the first to recognize their children’s gifts as well as disabilities. This generally happens through their own observations of their children, as well as with feedback from others involved in the lives of their children (other family members, siblings, educators, counselors, psychologists, etc.). Thus, parents are typically in the best position to collect information about the learning strengths and weaknesses of their children so that they can work with schools to get the best educational services at the earliest opportunity. Because early and focused academic interventions, including those addressing academic strengths, have been recognized as critical steps in serving gifted students, parents should share information they have collected with educators at the first signs that dual exceptionalities might exist (Antshel, 2008; Hallahan et al., 2012; Missett, 2013).
Most importantly, parents should seek information about both exceptionalities and the academic programs that serve each. In this information seeking process, parents are encouraged to review websites on gifted and talented children, as well as children with disabilities. Many state and federal websites provide current research on populations of students with gifts, disabilities, and dual exceptionalities. Additional websites parents should explore include those related to applicable state and federal laws such as the IDEA of 2004 that pertain to children with disabilities and the rights of parents and children in obtaining educational services for their children. (Several of these useful websites are identified in the Resources section that follows). Parents can also seek information from books, other parents, support groups, and sympathetic and well-informed educators (Jolly et al., 2011).

After parents have had the opportunity to gather information related to their child’s gifts and disabilities, the next task parents will want to assume is ensuring their children are identified for both gifts and disabilities. To these ends, parents are advised to seek privately and/or through the schools the administration of cognitive ability assessments. However, parents should be aware that it is common for the ability and intelligence scores of these students to be significantly discrepant. In other words, some ability scores are likely to be at or near what is usually considered to reflect giftedness, while other scores are likely to be at or below average (McKenzie, 2010). Parents should be aware that a common pattern in the ability scores of twice-exceptional children reveals high strengths on verbal, mathematical, and visual-spatial measures, but low scores on working memory and processing speed tasks.
Consequently, some researchers (Foley-Nicpon, 2016; Kalbfleisch, 2014; Kalbfleisch & Loughan, 2012; McKenzie, 2010) suggest using optional measures of general cognitive ability – such as a General Ability Index (GAI) on the Wechsler Scales of Intelligence (WISC-IV; Wechsler, 2003) – which reflect a student’s higher order cognitive functioning without the depressing influence of working memory or processing speed, rather than a full scale intelligence measure, as part of a comprehensive set of identification assessments to identify twice-exceptional students. Advocates of using intelligence assessments in this way argue that this strategy has the potential to increase the likelihood of strong performance on abilities measures which may promote identification of giftedness, can be helpful in understanding learning patterns of twice-exceptional youngsters, and can provide information to guide programming (McCallum, Bell, Coles, & Miller, 2013). In a similar vein, some researchers (Silverman, 2009) advocate taking the highest index or battery score a twice-exceptional student attains on any measure of ability or intelligence as the most defensible estimate of their cognitive abilities. Thus, parents should be aware of these recommendations and use them when evaluating the ability assessments administered to their children. If necessary, parents also should be prepared to solicit help in interpreting, understanding, and explaining these scores, and then in using them to advocate for the provision of academic interventions that will serve gifts while simultaneously helping to remediate the impacts of the disability.

If the twice-exceptional student’s educational setting does not use the discrepancy formula, it is likely that a Response-to-Intervention (RtI) model is being used. Some (Baldwin et al., 2015; McCoach, Kehle, Bray, & Siegle, 2001) have warned against using
discrepant scores on ability and intelligence assessments to identify gifted students with learning disabilities. These researchers criticize the discrepancy approach as “waiting to fail” because many gifted students might not show a severe discrepancy and/or might respond to interventions in ways that are comparable to underachieving gifted students without disabilities. Due to these concerns, critics of this approach recommend RtI as a more defensible systematic mechanism for identifying disabilities generally, and twice-exceptional students specifically (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; McCoach et al., 2001). RtI is a multi-tiered system of supports and services offered in the general education setting. RtI requires a comprehensive and team-based collaborative approach for implementing research-validat ed instruction, monitoring the academic progress of all students, and recognizing the academic strengths and weaknesses of students in a way that promotes the identification of and provision of services to students with disabilities, including those that are gifted (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). In this context, parents must be engaged with classroom teachers and those involved with RtI interventions to remind teachers of the dichotomous learning profiles of their children, and to urge that interventions be tailored to address them. However, parents must be aware that RtI assumes that teachers in general education classrooms are able to skillfully provide evidence-based, high-quality instruction and academic interventions matched to diverse student needs. Thus, parents should be prepared to question whether general education teachers – who typically lack training in the nature and needs of gifted learners – will recognize the talents of struggling gifted students including those with disabilities. In addition, parents must recognize that due to the phenomenon of masking, twice-exceptional students might not be falling significantly below grade level thus precluding a referral for evaluation in the
RtI context (McCallum et al., 2013; McKenzie, 2010). Thus, while the academic performance of twice-exceptional students may appear to be average, parents should remain in constant communication with their child’s educators to argue that their difficulties expressing talent in fact reflects a “failure to thrive” that the RtI model might not have recognized (Assouline & Whiteman, 2011; McCallum et al., 2013; Morrison & Rizza, 2007).

Parents of twice-exceptional children should also familiarize themselves with their rights under the IDEA of 2004 to most effectively advocate for their child. These rights include, among others, the rights to be fully informed of their child’s right to a free and appropriate public education, independent educational evaluations of their child’s educational strengths and weaknesses, prior written notice of such evaluations, access to student education records, to participate collaboratively with school personnel in the identification and educational placement of their child including the development, implementation, and monitoring of the IEP. They are also entitled to expect the opportunity to present and resolve complaints through procedures for due process (Hallahan et al., 2015).

Once a child’s gift(s) and disability(ies) have been identified through a careful and collaborative assessment process, parents are in a better position to advocate forcefully for the provision of defensible programs and services directed towards both exceptionalities. During this phase of parent advocacy, parents are encouraged to request and attend meetings to discuss their children’s needs with school personnel, to bring other advocates in support of their efforts, and to educate school personnel about twice-exceptionalities. This includes educating school personnel about the influence of one
exceptionality on the other (Baum et al., 2014). They are also entitled to participate fully in the development of the IEP. To the degree that parents feel that school personnel are not receptive to identifying and serving their children, they should feel prepared to pursue their rights under the IDEA.

The type of academic programming for which parents should advocate is one that takes a strengths-based, talent-focused approach. In other words, not only should the child receive interventions that support remediation of the impact of disability on learning, achievement, behavioral and emotional outcomes, but parents should also insist on the provision of those that support and develop the strengths of twice-exceptional students (Baum et al., 2014). For example, acceleration has been shown to a defensible academic placement for twice-exceptional students, particularly where extra supports for disability are simultaneously provided (Foley-Nicpon & Cederberg, 2015). Similar, advanced placement courses are appropriate placements for twice-exceptional students in areas of strength (Schultz, 2012). Twice-exceptional students themselves report that teachers should allow these students to have more ownership over their learning, and more choice and flexibility in topic, method of learning, assessment and pace. The empiric literature also shows strengths-based interventions for twice-exceptional students support achievement and positive social outcomes (Willard-Holt, Weber, Morrison, & Horgan, 2013).

Another avenue for advocacy is in articulating the need for creative problem solving for their child in the school curriculum. Again, there is evidence that gifted students with disabilities often have greater creativity as measured by divergent thinking assessments (Fugate et al., 2013). These findings support the proposition that divergent
thinking assessments should be used to identify gifted students with ADHD who might otherwise go unidentified due to the phenomenon of masking (Fugate et al., 2013). They also support the notion that parents should urge the deployment of educational programs designed to develop creativity, both as pathways to learning and as learning outcomes, for their children and be prepared to request accommodations and academic experiences that use creative problem solving (Abramo, 2015).

Once the IEP has been developed, parents should closely monitor the delivery of and adherence to the educational program designed for the child. The United Stated Department of Education has stated “students who have high cognition, have disabilities and require special education and related services are protected under the IDEA” and that the denial of gifted programs and services is discriminatory (Posny, 2010). This makes it clear that even after the IEP has been created parents need to ensure that its services are consistently being provided.

Beyond the above research findings, it is essential for parents to help educators recognize the diversity that exists in diagnostic backgrounds of twice-exceptional students. As such, parents should be forceful in their advocacy efforts to ensure educators and school personnel such as psychologists and counselors have engaged in a comprehensive academic and psychological evaluation to assess twice-exceptional students in their self-perceptions, resilience, emotional characteristics and areas of academic talent in order to plan the most appropriate individualized curriculum and academic interventions (Assouline & Whiteman, 2011; Foley-Nicpon, 2016).

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS OF TWICE-EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN
The following resources are recommended for parents to support their understanding of the unique characteristics and needs of their twice-exceptional children, and to buttress their ability to effectively advocate on behalf of their children in educational settings.

For the position of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) and the National Educational Association (NEA) on twice-exceptionality, go to: http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/key%20reports/twiceexceptional.pdf


For information about supporting the social and emotional needs of twice-exceptional students, go to: Foley-Nicpon, M. (2016). The social and emotional development of twice-exceptional children. In M. Neihart, S. I. Pfeiffer, and T. L. Cross (Eds.), The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know? Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Guidance for parents of children with disabilities from the United States Department of Education and related entities can be found at:

http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/doe/ or

http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/

References


Foley-Nicpon, M. (2016). The social and emotional development of twice-exceptional children. In M. Neihart, S. I. Pfeiffer, and T. L. Cross (Eds.), The social and
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