

7 Common Misconceptions about 2e Learners

The following are common misconceptions about twice-exceptional (2e) learners. Awareness of and ongoing conversations about these “myths” will help support the academic achievement and social-emotional wellness of 2e students.

Misconception 1: A student cannot be gifted and have a learning disability.

2e learners have high cognitive abilities and learning challenges or disabilities. Understanding the needs of these students can be difficult because strengths may mask disabilities, disabilities may mask strengths, or they may mask each other. It is important to provide instruction based on a student’s strengths while providing support for areas of challenge.

Misconception 2: A student cannot receive special education services in advanced academic programs and courses.

2e learners who need accommodations and/or specialized instruction and services cannot be denied access to appropriate high-level curriculum. Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 Plans can be delivered in a variety of settings, including advanced academic classes. At the secondary level, a student and his or her parents or guardians have the right to select any course for which the student has satisfied the course prerequisite(s).

Misconception 3: A student with good grades is not eligible for special education services.

Teams consider the whole child when making an eligibility decision and grades are not the sole indicator of progress or ability. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires schools to evaluate a student if a disability is suspected using “a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information about the child, including information provided by the parent.” Schools may not use “any single measure or assessment as the sole criterion for determining whether a child is a child with a disability and for determining an appropriate educational program for the child.”

Misconception 4: It is not fair to reduce work or provide extra support for 2e students since they are gifted.

Fairness does not mean all students get the same thing, but rather all students get what they need. Students with disabilities, including those who are also gifted, are entitled to receive accommodations and/or specialized instruction and services as detailed in their IEP or 504 Plan. These documents are written to “level the playing field” and to empower students to learn and demonstrate understanding without the interference of a disability.

Misconception 5: A student's areas of weakness must be remediated before having access to advanced learning opportunities.

A student does not have to master basic skills before engaging in high level curriculum and instruction. Focusing on remediation of skill deficits at the expense of access to interesting, relevant, emotionally engaging activities is typically unsuccessful, and may result in students becoming bored and unmotivated. Rather, a strengths-based approach using advanced curriculum with supports and accommodations is more likely to result in higher achievement.

Misconception 6: 2e students develop cognitively and emotionally at the same level and pace.

2e students have advanced intellect; however, they may be socially and emotionally immature. The best way to address this uneven development is to focus on and further develop the students' areas of strength, while continuing to support the areas of need through explicit instruction and accommodations. Social skills, hypersensitivities, and executive functioning skills can improve with awareness, compassion, time, and strategic instruction and interventions.

Misconception 7: Gifted students are self-motivated, and high achievement comes easily to them.

2e students have high abilities; however, they may appear unable or unwilling to handle challenging academic tasks due to learning disabilities, challenges with executive functioning skills, insufficient academic support, and/or social-emotional challenges. Over time, these students may develop low self-esteem and become less willing to take academic risks. Students who receive needed supports and feel understood by their teachers are more likely to take academic risks, persevere through inevitable challenges, and achieve up to their potential.

REFERENCES

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