

Underachievement in Gifted and 2e



No student wants to underachieve, yet it is common for gifted and twice-exceptional students to experience it at some point during primary and secondary education. Social and psychological issues, undiagnosed learning disabilities, lack of engagement with curriculum, low expectations, and a mismatch with the learning environment can be at the heart of the issue.

Understanding the reasons for underachievement is essential for fostering gifts and supporting the needs of these students. With the appropriate team and plan in place, underachieving students can find success in school and reach their potential.

Underachievement Explained

Underachievement in school is common, and especially so for gifted and twice-exceptional students. An unfortunate reality is that support for the needs of underachieving gifted students are often overlooked, while underachieving twice-exceptional students are more likely to receive support only for their challenges with little attention paid to their gifts. In both cases, the student is at risk for more than disappointing grades in school.

Underachieving gifted and twice-exceptional students often deal with low self-esteem as repeated failure hijacks their motivation to try. In cases where their gifts mask their challenges or their challenges mask their gifts, they are likely to slide through education systems unsupported, disengaged, and frustrated.

The unanticipated difference between what the student accomplishes and what they are perceived to be able to do often confuses the student, parents and teachers alike. An important step toward addressing this is uncovering and understanding the student's learning profile.

Building a team and having a plan are essential for supporting the underachieving student. Ideally, parents, educators, clinical experts, and the student (if they are ready) collaborate to build an understanding of gifts and needs and a plan for supporting both. Effective teams explore the student's strengths and challenges, set reasonable goals, decide on supports to try first, establish timelines for trials, determine next steps and alternative supports, and teach the student to advocate for themselves. In cases where schools are unwilling to offer needed support and services, education advocates become essential team members who help to ensure the school is complying with mandates and laws to address learning needs.

Parents of underachieving students should carefully select the members of the team and determine whether the student is in the right educational setting to foster advanced abilities and appropriately support learning and social emotional needs. A mismatch with the learning environment can produce additional complexities that are difficult to overcome as well as increase the hardship on the student. Finding the right learning environment where the focus is on strengths and needs is of utmost importance if the student for the student to reach their maximum potential.



**SUMMIT
CENTER**

Reach New Heights

Northern California
Walnut Creek / East Bay
925.939.7500

Southern California
Torrance
310.478.6505

WEB summitcenter.us

EMAIL inquiry@summitcenter.us



Signs of Underachievement in Gifted and 2e Students

Although the reasons for underachievement vary greatly, signs to watch for include:

- Social issues such as difficulty making friends, school avoidance, and feelings of not fitting in
- Psychological issues such as debilitating anxiety, depression, and obsessive compulsive disorder
- Lack of support for learning disabilities and disorders such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, and autism
- Lack of engagement with curriculum due to misalignment with abilities and interests (too easy/too difficult)
- Low expectations of self or by teachers and parents, low self-esteem, lack of motivation to try new things, and poor grades
- Mismatch with learning environment due to absence of like-minded peers, ineffective teaching practices, lack of opportunities to work in areas of strength/gifts, or lack of support for learning differences

Identifying gifts and challenges is achieved through cognitive and achievement assessments and neuroeducational and neuropsychological evaluations conducted by clinical experts as well as observation and communication. Resulting recommendations for counseling, therapies, and interventions provide families with the direction and resources needed to help their child both in and out of school. Given underachievement is common in gifted and twice-exceptional students, advocating for their needs is essential.

Supporting Underachieving Students

Schools specializing in learning needs across a wide spectrum of abilities are typically best positioned to serve underachieving gifted and twice-exceptional students. It is important for the learning environment to offer support with a focus on strength-based and talent-based approaches in addition to expertise in learning differences and disabilities.

For parents and advocates, understanding whether specific mandates for gifted education are in place within a given state and school system, what services school systems are required to provide, and how students qualify for access to gifted programming is critical. At the same time, understanding how to qualify for special education services or classroom accommodations to address learning disabilities and differences is equally important. This journey is best traveled by engaging with clinical professionals and education advocates with expertise in assessments and the laws in place to identify and appropriately serve gifted and twice-exceptional youth.

Resources for Parents & Educators

- 2e News
- Bright & Quirky
- Davidson Institute for Talent Development
- GHF Gifted Learners (formerly Gifted Homeschoolers Forum)
- Hoagies' Gifted Education
- Let's Talk 2e
- National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC)
- Renzulli Center at University of Connecticut
- Roeper Review
- Summit Center
- Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG)

About Summit Center

Summit Center, founded by Drs. Susan Daniels and Daniel B. Peters, provides educational and comprehensive assessments, consultations, and counseling for children, teens, adults, and families. We work with clients who are neurodiverse, gifted, talented, twice-exceptional (have both gifted and less developed abilities), and/or are asynchronous in their development. Summit Center has assembled an expert team of professionals and specialists dedicated to using a strengths-based approach to help our clients reach their fullest developmental potential.