

Family Engagement and Advocacy for Culturally Diverse 2E Students

Woods and Davis provide recommendations about how schools can enhance advocacy efforts and increase support for culturally diverse 2E learners.

Gifted students with a disability impacting their ability to learn and/or express knowledge are labeled “twice exceptional” or “2E.” Typical learning disabilities (i.e., ADHD, autism, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and visual or auditory processing disorder) are common categories of 2E students. Raising 2E students who are also high performing or have the potential for high performance in some academic or arts areas can be an overwhelming challenge for parents (Trail, 2013). Parents of 2E students have the dilemma of determining where they will place their advocacy energies—on the disability or the gift. These parents are also challenged as they work with educators who may know more about local, state, and federal laws mandating for services for gifted students with disabilities than do parents. For families of diverse twice exceptional learners, these same issues of advocacy and knowledge of services are accentuated by

inaccessibility to services due to racial and cultural discrimination (Ford, 2013). The role of African American parents as gifted education advocates is beneficial to students accessing appropriate services (Davis, 2014). Despite targeted efforts nationwide to increase the equitable representation of children from culturally diverse backgrounds (particularly African American and Hispanic), under-representation in gifted programs persists and is pervasive (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008).

When cultural difference is added to the impact of the challenges of serving 2E students, students are more likely to be denied access to equitable services. Promoting appropriate services for twice exceptional students from culturally diverse backgrounds has only recently been the subject of scholarly work (Mayes & Moore, 2016). Families of color, particularly African American families, whose children are the

least represented in gifted education programs, face numerous barriers to service when advocating to get school districts to recognize the strengths of their child who may already be identified as eligible to receive federally mandated services for their disability.

When considering the barriers faced by culturally diverse learners who are 2E, research notes that the inaccessibility to academic services for high ability exceptional learners may hinder positive academic achievement and healthy social and emotional development (Galat, 2012; Mayes & Moore, 2016). Moreover, if culturally diverse learners' disabilities are not addressed, their academic performance may become a barrier to their eligibility for gifted services. Thus, improving the involvement of culturally diverse families is essential in improving access to all of the educational services needed for 2E diverse learners, as such engagement is important to all gifted learners to enable them to reach their highest potential (Davis, 2012).

Furthermore, diverse families whose first language is not English and others who are first generation immigrants face numerous barriers accessing services for their 2E children. These families may have language, economic, and other social barriers that pose challenges for their children in

school (Yosso, 2005). The language, social, and educational level of parents influence their children's academic performance (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Carranza, You, Chhuon, & Hudley, 2009). Improving the advocacy role of families can reduce barriers and have potential to enhance services. With the above issues in mind, we offer the following recommendations to enhance family advocacy efforts and increase support for culturally diverse twice exceptional learners and their families:

1. Schools are encouraged to create advocacy libraries, with resources for families and educators, that focus on advocacy strategies, laws, and early childhood developmental strategies.
2. School leaders are encouraged to develop a cultural diversity outreach program to engage parents as "cultural agents" in order to improve relationships between families and schools with a specific focus on 2E students.
3. Families and school leaders should work together to create support groups for immigrant families of 2E learners that can become a platform for (1) allowing families to display their heritage and legacies, and (2) encouraging them to demonstrate to other families how to improve academic achievement orientation in the home and community.

4. School leaders are encouraged to arrange meetings between families and gifted and special education experts at the same time who can teach them strategies when supporting culturally diverse 2E children. Families should be encouraged to seek additional support through professional organizations such as NAGC-Special Populations, GRACE (Gifted Racial Accountability and Community to Equity), the Council for Exceptional Children, and IDL (Individual Difference in Learning Association Inc.).
5. Educators are encouraged to use early learning environments (preK-3) as “talent spotting” venues and to provide both opportunities for the early identification of 2E learners and information workshops for parents of diverse learners.

Summary

In the next 50 years, the number of students who identify as Caucasian, non-Hispanic, will be outnumbered by students from cultural minority groups (i.e. African American, Hispanic, Asian, immigrants) and many whose parents speak a language other than English (Parameswaran, 2007). It is imperative that school leaders prepare culturally responsive programming and employ strategies to invite diverse families into the educational arena (Ford, 2013). Among these families are those raising 2E

students who have very particular intellectual, academic, and psychosocial needs. More effectively engaging with families of culturally diverse learners will lead to school programs that improve student success (Davis, 2014). Twice-exceptional students and their families need school personnel cognizant of their cultural differences, respectful of those differences, and willing to reach out to provide comprehensive services that strengthen students’ weaknesses and extend and enrich gifts that they bring to the classroom. Culturally diverse 2E students deserve the same attention and adaptations in school programs as all 2E learners.

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