



First in a Series about 2e-Friendly Schools

Supporting 2e Students In Prince George’s County

By Rose Blucher, M.Ed., and Sarah Wayland, Ph.D.

An all-too-familiar scenario between parents of twice-exceptional (2e) children and well-meaning educators might go something like this:

Teacher: “Your son is such a talented problem solver; he has the highest reading comprehension score in the class! He’s so bright! But, he can’t put a single thought down on paper. I’m not exactly sure what to do with him....”

Parent (thinking): “I’m at a loss for words.”

What does this bright but struggling student need in order to thrive? Critical to the academic and social-emotional success of 2e students is an appropriate learning environment, one that has these features:

- Advanced educational and talent-development opportunities
- Instruction in compensatory strategy development to address areas of weakness
- Supportive ancillary services.

The learning needs of these students are best met with *dual differentiation*, a collaborative approach to instruction that affirms students’ strengths and talents, while addressing their unique learning needs (Baum, Owen, & Dixon, 1993; Owen & Baum, 2004).

The intent of this article is to give an overview of a service delivery model that provides just such an approach, offering a continuum of support services for

twice-exceptional students grades 2 through 12 within a public school setting. The model was first implemented in Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS) in 1994. This southern Maryland school district is the nineteenth largest in the United States and currently provides Talented and Gifted (TAG) services to approximately 11,000 students. Each year around 260 of the district’s students are 2e learners. A continuum of services is available to them system-wide in over 200 schools, including at TAG magnet centers.

Professional Development

If you were to visit a site school (See below for types of schools.) in Prince George’s County on a professional development day, you might find TAG teachers, special and general educators, and guid-

ance counselors sitting on the floor participating in activities designed to teach them how to incorporate strength-based strategies into daily instruction. You might also see them working as a collaborative team to review actual 2e cases, using school records to identify students’ areas of strength and weakness, and designing lessons and activities using a dual-differentiation approach.

This professional development is the result of the combined efforts of the Special Education and TAG offices and the GSLN (Gifted with Special Learning Needs) Instructional Specialist. The table below shows the professional development offerings related to twice-exceptionality available to PGCPS staff members.



Type of School	School Description	Professional Development Offered
Site school	May be either of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TAG center program (elementary and middle schools that use an accelerated curriculum) • A specialty program school (K-12 that serves children with talents in areas like science and technology, or the arts) 	Staff members may participate in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-day off-site training • On-site trainings for collaborative team members at elementary site schools • Training sessions for academic resource support team members (special educators; TAG, Honors, AP teachers; and guidance counselors) at secondary site-schools
Non-site school	The remaining schools throughout the county, which have a lower incidence of identified 2e students	Annual TAG office meeting introducing TAG coordinators to the characteristics of 2e learners and the necessary supports available throughout the county



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Identifying 2e Students

In Prince George's County, the road to 2e (GSLN) identification might begin by identifying a student as one of the following:

- Talented and gifted
- Having a disability and requiring special education services
- A student with a profile characteristic of a 2e learner.

The next step, GSLN identification, includes:

- Completing a checklist of characteristics of 2e learners
- Doing a comprehensive review of all school records
- Submitting a referral packet to the TAG and Special Education offices for review.

School-based TAG coordinators and special educators are responsible for organizing existing quantitative and qualitative information from the student's records. The TAG specialist enters the world of special education by learning skills in diagnosis and assessment, and the special educator enters the TAG world by searching for characteristics of gifted children.

The expertise of all professionals, including general educators, contributes to a holistic identification process. Indicators of deficits exist in the words of the cumulative records, and the sparks of high potential show up there as well. One only needs to know how to find them! Lacking such specialized training in identification, team members can easily become distracted when the qualitative and quantitative data about a student reveals numerous areas of deficit. The result can be missed clues about a student's high potential.

The 2e identification process continues with the school contacting the Special Education and TAG offices. An Instructional Specialist reviews the data packet and, when necessary, may visit the school to

observe the student. A decision is made to either proceed using the existing data or to request additional assessment data through the IEP process.



A History of Addressing the Needs of 2e students in PGCPs

Prior to 1993, 2e students in PGCPs were serviced in non-public placements, sometimes traveling up to 2 ½ hours each day to receive an education that addressed the complexity of their academic and social-emotional needs. The parents in Prince George's County petitioned PGCPs to provide 2e services within the local public schools. That way, they felt, their children could benefit from academically advanced classes as well as access age-appropriate social and talent-development opportunities, like extracurricular activities and athletics.

PGCPs's Special Education and Talented and Gifted (TAG) offices joined together to pilot appropriate programming for students identified as "Gifted with Special Learning Needs" (GSLN). They used the term GSLN because the pilot provided services to students with ADHD, emotional impairments, and high-functioning autism, in addition to those with learning disabilities. In 1993, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) awarded a grant to PGCPs to implement their proposed program. The initial programming phase included:

- Teacher training sessions taught by Susan Baum, Ph.D., where teachers learned about her *Talent Development Model for 2e Students* (Baum, 2005)
- The development of a teacher resource guidebook that focused on strategies for supporting 2e students (Prince George's County Public Schools, 1994; 1996; 2006)

Within three years, support services for GSLN students were available at:

- All eight TAG magnet elementary schools
- Both TAG magnet middle schools
- Three high schools.

In addition, the office of Special Education designated a GSLN Instructional Specialist with training in gifted education to provide direct support to the schools. This support included assistance and guidance with identification practices and programming strategies focused on the dual needs of these students. Based in part on this work, MSDE provided guidance to school teams by adding a section on identifying 2e students to their *Technical Manual for Identifying Learning Disabilities* (MSDE, 2001, pp 55-57).

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For students with an identified disability that requires an IEP or 504 plan, quantitative assessment data is already available in the form of cognitive and achievement testing. To identify the student’s strengths and weaknesses, the Instructional Specialist relies on the following:

- The results of academic and psychological testing
- Classroom observations
- Portfolio work samples
- A creativity assessment.

For students not previously identified with an area of disability, the data just described will need to be gathered. TAG identification data may already exist for the student, but the school-based IEP team must initiate the collection and compilation of all the other data needed for the central office staff to review.

Delivering Services

Once a student is identified as a GSLN student, a school-based team recommends appropriate support services. The table on the right shows the possible support services available to students. While services are available at both site and non-site schools, professionals highly trained in 2e strategies may or may not be on staff at the non-site schools.

At site schools, the elementary school collaborative team or the secondary academic resource support team identifies the strengths, instructional needs, and



How Services Are Implemented		
At Elementary-level Site Schools	At Secondary-level Site Schools	At Non-site Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GSLN Bi-weekly Forum — pullout sessions that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Teach students about their unique needs as 2e learners – Emphasize the importance of developing their talents while also addressing areas of deficit • Classroom teachers incorporate GSLN strategies into their accelerated instruction • Special educators incorporate GSLN strategies into their specialized instruction. The GSLN Resource Guide (PGCPS, 1994; 1996; 2006) provides guidance to the team as they conduct collaborative team lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A full-day program of advanced or accelerated coursework • Daily Honors Academic Resource Support class, which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provides a highly supportive environment where students develop compensatory strategies based on strengths to ensure high academic achievement and consistent social-emotional development – Depends on coordination between the Academic Resource Support Class instructor and general education teachers to be successful – Provides cyclical instructional modules that embed teaching of self-regulating strategies and explicit skill instruction within the context of the student’s advanced coursework (PGCPS, 2008a, 2008b) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bi-weekly Forums and the Honors Academic Resource Support classes when there are enough identified GSLN students to form and schedule groups • Direct teacher support and training in how to incorporate appropriate GSLN strategies within the classroom setting

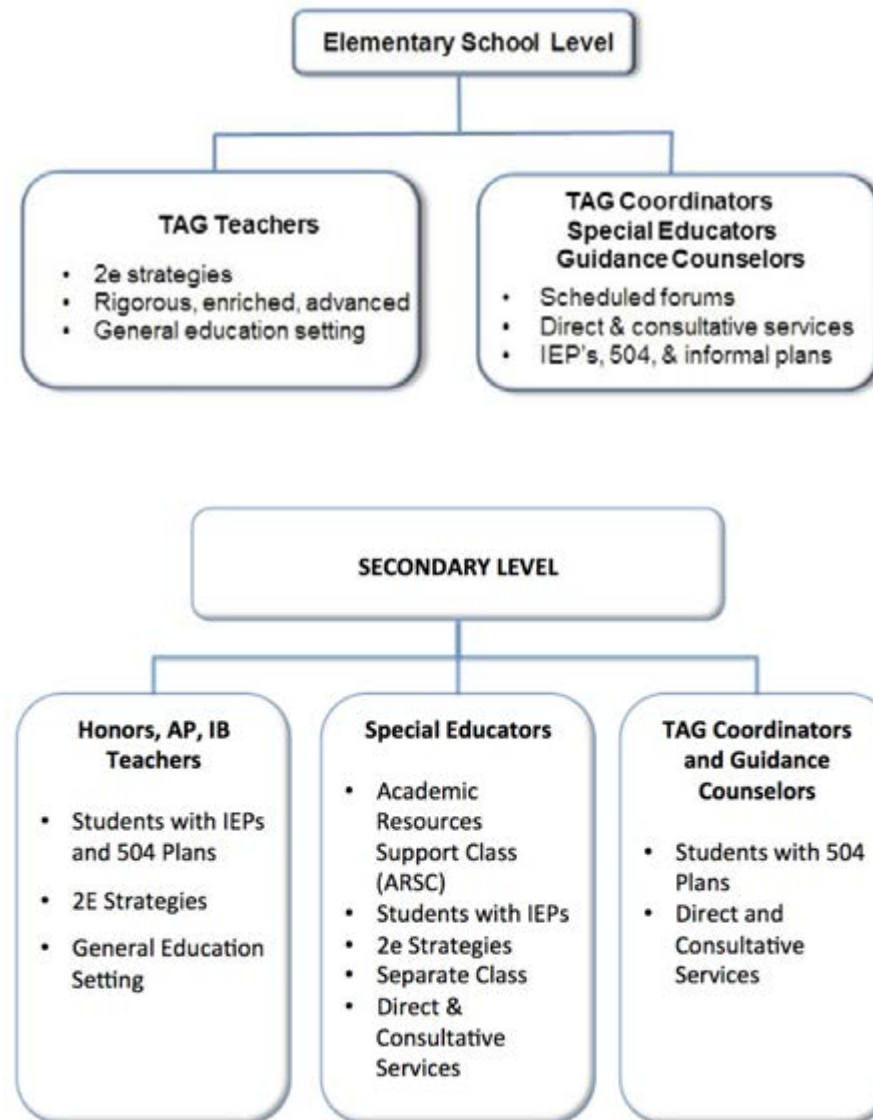
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ancillary supports that will enable a student to perform at an optimal level. This determination allows the student to access advanced classes, coursework, and enrichment/talent opportunities, while ensuring that appropriate specialized services and strategies are in place (Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, 2007). The schemas to the right represent the specialized services in place at designated site schools.

During a Bi-weekly Forum session at the elementary level, or Academic Resource Support Class at the secondary level, students may respond to a review question through a technique called Write, Draw, or Depict (Blucher, 1999). The technique includes such activities as writing an answer on a Post-it Note; drawing a picture; creating a flow chart; building a model with fuzzy sticks, clay, or other art materials; etc. The choice is the student's to make. Not surprisingly, teachers note, they always seem to choose a response method in an area of strength rather than responding in an area of challenge.

Strength-based instructional and compensatory strategies are taught at each site school from grades 2 through 12. There are four modules of instructional focus:

- Cognitive Strategies
- Strategic Strategies
- Technology
- Authentic Investigations, based on Renzulli's Enrichment Triad Model (Prince George's County Public Schools, 2006; 2008a; 2008b).



Graphic courtesy of the authors

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In addition, all service providers make a concerted effort to involve the students in as many of the available talent-development opportunities as possible, both at the school and throughout the community.

At non-site schools, general and special educators are taught to utilize GSLN strategies within the context of their coursework and services. They may even provide small-group instruction when there are enough identified GSLN students in need of specialized services.

Supporting 2e Students and Parents

PGCPS not only supports teachers in identifying 2e students and developing services for them, it also offers direct and consultative support services to the students themselves and to their parents. At times, the central office specialists may be asked to support students in the classroom by teaching model lessons or working individually with them on 2e strategies. In conjunction with case management, both school-based collaborative team members and central office specialists collaborate and consult with parents. Clearly, it's

Case Study

How does the PGCPS model work with a real student? See the case study on page 9.

critical for parents to understand the unique strategies in use at school so that they can provide instructional continuity at home.

Conclusion

There are examples of exemplary programming for 2e students across the nation, and the PGCPS model stands among the best. For more than 20 years it has offered 2e students in an urban public school setting the opportunity to be educated side by side with their equally bright non-disabled peers.

Providing highly specialized instruction through a dual-differentiated curriculum designed to meet the unique needs of twice-exceptional learners has been a collaborative focus and priority for all of the stakeholders in Prince George's County. Clearly, PGCPS recognizes that in order for gifted students with special learning needs to flourish and meet their boundless potential, they require the expertise and extensive support of general educators, teachers of the gifted, special educators, guidance counselors, and parents!

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Putting Theory into Practice: A PGCPs Case Study

By Rose Blucher, M.Ed.

Brandon was a highly creative student. He had amazing verbal abilities and problem-solving skills. Yet, his PGCPs teachers were perplexed. While they knew intuitively that he was a bright boy, his written responses in all academic areas were problematic. Brandon struggled miserably with writing, attention, and executive functioning skills. As a result, his teachers consistently focused on his struggles and regarded Brandon as a student who likely had learning disabilities.

Identification

After attending a GSLN training where they learned about how disabilities can mask areas of high potential, Brandon's teachers experienced a paradigm shift. Newly enlightened, the teachers now saw Brandon not only as a struggling learner, but also as a child with high potential. They gathered after school to try to find enough clues in his records to be able to refer him to the IEP team for an evaluative meeting.

Using a systematic approach to comb through Brandon's existing records, the team of general educators found plenty of evidence of his struggles with executive functioning skills and writing, particularly in the areas of written expression and precision of language mechanics. On the other hand, they also found evidence of the boy's high ability. When the teachers saw that Brandon's records contained no formal assessments, they moved forward with a complete battery of cognitive and academic testing. These findings were part of the referral packet assembled for the purpose of having the IEP school team consider providing gifted education and special education services.

During the meeting to review the assessments, the IEP team members seemed unaware of Brandon's high potential, in particular his amazing facility with scientific concepts. The general educator at the meeting highlighted for the IEP team the child's strengths, especially his advanced knowledge and excellent performance in science class. As a result, the special educator then looked more closely at the quantitative data. There she found superior scores in the areas of science and math problem-solving tasks. Through this process, the IEP team was able to use multi-confirming data to identify Brandon's strengths as well as his areas of deficit. Subsequently, the team determined that he was, indeed, a very bright student with a learning disability, one who qualified for an IEP.

Services

Fortunately for Brandon, his local elementary school was a GSLN site school. Therefore, it was easy for the school team to transfer Brandon from a comprehensive classroom to a TAG magnet classroom. There he was exposed to accelerated learning and also received GSLN support services by attending Bi-weekly Forum sessions.

Once Brandon's potential was recognized, and his teachers began providing specialized services, he made steady progress at his elementary school's TAG center. With the support of his IEP and Bi-weekly Forum sessions, Brandon came to better understand both his areas of strength and his challenges. He soon learned to rely on his strengths to both demonstrate academic mastery and develop compensatory strategies. For example, once Brandon was recognized as

the visual-spatial and mathematical-logical thinker he was, his teachers were able to build on those abilities, teaching Brandon to associate visual images with scientific concepts. With this approach, Brandon was able to create personalized scientific symbols that helped him develop organization and time-management strategies. In addition, Brandon's teachers gave him opportunities to express his answers by building or drawing. For one assignment, the student created a model of a Lego vacuum cleaner using fuzzy sticks, which he later built and entered in a contest for elementary school inventors. Brandon won the competition!

The Outcome

While Brandon continued to struggle with written output, his writing skills steadily improved with the support he received. He attended a TAG magnet middle school where he took accelerated mathematics courses and accessed available academic resource support services. He was admitted to a prestigious science and technology magnet high school where he excelled in technology and graphic arts courses.

Having the ability to access advanced courses in his area of strength gave Brandon the background he needed to go on to a small college with supports for students with disabilities. There he continued to build on his strengths in science and math, focusing on coursework related to engineering. ☐