

Underachievement in Gifted and Talented Students With Special Needs

Sally M. Reis

*Department of Educational Psychology
University of Connecticut*

D. Betsy McCoach

*National Research Center for the Gifted and Talented
University of Connecticut*

Talented students underachieve for many reasons and in many different circumstances. Unfortunately, there is no panacea for how to reverse underachievement in students whose talents are demonstrated in diverse ways. High-potential students with special needs are likely to experience underachievement as efforts to address their needs may focus more on remediation of difficulties and less on development of strength and talent. It is crucial for educators to differentiate between issues related to academic motivation and special needs related to students' disabilities that may be unrecognized by many classroom teachers. This article reviews research about twice-exceptional talented students who underachieve and provides general suggestions for addressing their academic talents and needs.

Why do so many talented students fail to realize their potential? For years, the underachievement of gifted and talented students has troubled both parents and educators. Too often students who show great academic potential fail to perform at a level commensurate with their abilities. Some underachieving students may lack self-efficacy, goal-directedness, or self-regulation skills (Siegle & McCoach, 2002); other low achievers may suffer from either obvious or hidden disabilities. Still others may underachieve in response to inappropriate educational conditions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF DIVERSE GIFTED STUDENTS

Because high-potential underachieving students are a very diverse group, describing them as a population is virtually impossible. Instead of summarizing the negative characteristics commonly ascribed to underachievers, we shift the focus to the positive attributes of students with talents. In their research about gifted students from diverse backgrounds, Frasier and Passow (1994) referred to general/common attributes of giftedness—traits, aptitudes, and behaviors consistently identified by researchers as common to all gifted students. They noted that these basic elements of giftedness are similar across cultures and exceptionalities, though each is not displayed by every student. A listing of these attributes is found in Table 1.

Each of these common characteristics may be manifested in different ways in different students, and educators should be especially careful in attempting to identify these characteristics in students with special needs or exceptionalities or from diverse backgrounds (i.e., disadvantaged, different ethnic or racial backgrounds, etc.) as specific behavioral manifestations of the characteristics may vary with context (Frasier & Passow, 1994).

Defining Gifted Underachievement

Defining gifted underachievement should be a fairly straightforward task. Unfortunately, just as there is no universally agreed definition of gifted and talented learners, no universal definition of gifted underachievement currently exists. Students identified as gifted and talented are not a homogeneous group. Several researchers who have studied gifted and talented learners agree that “There is no one portrait of a gifted student. Talents and strengths among the gifted vary as widely as they do with any sample of students drawn

TABLE 1
Common Attributes of Giftedness

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|---|
| •Motivation |
| •Problem-solving ability |
| •Well-developed memory |
| •Insight |
| •Imagination–creativity |
| •Advanced ability to deal with symbol systems |
| •Advanced interests |
| •Communication skills |
| •Inquiry |
| •Reasoning |
| •Sense of humor |

Note. Adapted from *Towards a New Paradigm for Identifying Talent Potential* by M. M. Frasier and A. H. Passow, 1994, Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut, The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. Copyright © 1994 by The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. This table has been adapted with the permission of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.

from a so-called average population” (Schmitz & Galbraith, 1985, p. 13). The most common component of the various definitions of gifted underachievement involves identifying a discrepancy between ability and achievement (Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1995; Butler-Por, 1987; Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982; Emerick, 1992; Redding, 1990; Rimm, 1997; Supplee, 1990; Whitmore, 1980; Wolfle, 1991). For a thorough review of issues surrounding the definition and identification of underachievement in gifted students, see Reis and McCoach (2000).

Causes of Underachievement in Gifted Students

Determining why some high-ability students demonstrate low levels of achievement is difficult because underachievement occurs for many different reasons. However, practitioners must explore the causes of students’ underachievement if they plan to help these children. Our review of research indicates that in the vast majority of cases, the underachievement of bright students occurs for one of three basic reasons: (a) an apparent underachievement problem masks more serious physical, cognitive, or emotional issues; (b) the underachievement is symptomatic of a mismatch between the student and his or her school environment (Siegle, in press); and (c) underachievement results from a personal characteristic such as low self-motivation, low self-regulation, or low self-efficacy (Reis & McCoach, 2000; Siegle, in press). Each of these causes for underachievement requires a completely different intervention. Therefore, educators should attempt to identify the reason for the underachievement behavior before attempting to reverse the underachievement. The ramifications of mismatching the causes and treatments of underachievement can be serious.

Case Studies of Underachievement in Students With Gifts and Talents

Sara is a fifth-grade student who has recently experienced learning problems in school for the first time. Her teacher and the reading specialist referred her for assessment because of an obvious discrepancy between her verbal skills and her reading and writing skills. A battery of tests indicated an IQ score of 129; however, a large discrepancy existed between verbal and performance areas. Sara has poor decoding skills, below the second-grade level, but manages to read at or slightly below the fifth-grade level. As her textbooks have become more challenging, her reading has become more labored. Her parents are surprised at her sudden decline in school. She always seemed so smart, and they never noticed a discrepancy between her verbal skills and her reading and writing skills until this year. They indicated that Sara was born 7 weeks prematurely. Further assessment indicates that she is a very bright student who has significant learning disabilities (LDs) in reading, information processing, and auditory processing areas. Without this information, Sara’s grades most likely would have continued to slip and her reading would have failed to progress. If she had not been identified as having LDs, she may have been labeled as an underachiever. Perhaps her teachers would have said that she was “bright but unmo-

tivated.” Sean is a third grader who seems bored and disinterested in all academics most of the time in school. He fidgets constantly, is in trouble often for being “off-task,” and has been referred for assessment as having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) for the last 3 years. His teacher reports that he rarely finishes his seatwork, daydreams often, and is in danger of not learning basic information required by the district and state curriculum standards. Sean’s mother, a pediatrician, does not believe that he has ADHD, but rather, that he is not challenged and is not provided enough opportunities for movement in his traditional school environment. Sean and his father, who also has an extremely high energy level, frequently build intricate rockets together. Sean can sit quietly for hours when he is engaged in challenging work of his own selection. Sean tested at the 99th percentile in general aptitude, but his work in school is often below average. Is Sean failing school, or is the school failing Sean?

UNDERACHIEVERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS OR EXCEPTIONALITIES

Recent research indicates that many twice-exceptional students underachieve in school (Reis, Neu, & McGuire, 1995). Unfortunately, “the current conceptualization and the literature on the underachieving gifted and on special populations (such as gifted–learning disabled, gifted–ADD or ADHD, gifted students with physical disabilities or behavioral or emotional problems) appear to treat the two groupings as separate and unrelated” (Lupart & Pyryt, 1996, pp. 39–40). A study of high-ability students with LDs who were successful in higher education found that many had experienced periods of underachievement in elementary and high school (Reis et al., 1995). Some high-ability students have learning or emotional problems or various disabilities that affect or even cause underachievement. Interventions that do not address the special needs of these students could do more harm than good. Therefore, practitioners must consider these possible areas of exceptionality when trying to reverse students’ underachievement behaviors.

Gifted Students With Hearing Disabilities

Children with hearing disabilities were judged by teachers to exhibit similar characteristics of giftedness to hearing peers, except for academic achievement, which may be delayed for 4 or 5 years. Yewchuk and Bibby (1989) concluded that “giftedness in both hearing and hearing impaired populations is manifested in similar ways” (p. 48). An eagerness to learn, acute visual skills, superior recall, quick understanding, superior reasoning ability, and advanced expressive language are traits found in those who are gifted, and in those who are gifted and hearing disabled.

High-Potential Students With Cerebral Palsy

Willard-Holt (1994) explored the experiences of two talented students who had cerebral palsy who were not able to communicate with speech. Using qualitative cross-case methodology, she found that these students demonstrated the following characteristics of giftedness: advanced academic abilities (especially math and verbal skills), broad knowl-

edge base, quickness of learning and recall, sense of humor, curiosity, insight, desire for independence, use of intellectual skills to cope with disability, and maturity (shown in high motivation, goal orientation, determination, patience, and recognition of their own limitations). Several educational factors contributed to the development of these characteristics in these students, such as willingness of the teachers to accommodate for the disabilities, mainstreaming with nondisabled students, individualization and opportunities for student choice, and hands-on experiences. Generally, when faced with an extreme disability such as cerebral palsy, educators are much more likely to focus on the students' areas of weakness rather than their areas of strength. It is important that we allow students with serious disabilities to have the opportunity to show us their strengths and intellectual abilities.

Gifted and Talented Students With LDs

During the last 2 decades, increasing attention has been given to the perplexing problem of high-ability, talented students who also have an LD. The specific research concerning high-ability students with LDs began following the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (1975), when the expanded emphasis on the education of students with disabilities created an interest in students who were both gifted and demonstrated LDs. Although the fields of gifted education and special education have made major steps forward in collaborating to address the needs of gifted-learning disabled students, problems still exist regarding the identification and provision of support services and programs for this population. Research on high-ability students with LDs continues to be difficult because of problems in defining each population, but one thing is certain: High-ability students who experience specific learning difficulties often underachieve.

Baum and Owen (1988) conducted a study of 112 high-ability, average-ability, and high-ability-learning disabled students in Grades 4 through 6. Using discriminant function analysis, they found that the major characteristic distinguishing high-ability-learning disabled students from both learning disabled-average and high-ability (non-learning disabled) groups was a heightened sense of inefficacy in school. The high-ability-learning disabled students in their study displayed high levels of creative potential, along with a tendency to behave disruptively and to achieve low levels of academic success, resulting in underachievement. Also, 36% of the students in their study who had been identified as having an LD demonstrated behaviors associated with giftedness. Baum (1990) later identified four recommendations for gifted students with a LD: (a) encourage compensation strategies, (b) promote awareness of strengths and weaknesses, (c) focus on developing the child's gift, and (d) provide an environment that values individual differences.

After a thorough review of the literature on gifted-learning disabled students and the completion of a study of university students with both high abilities and LDs, Reis et al. (1995) compiled a list of positive and negative characteristics of gifted-learning disabled students, listed in Table 2. The negative characteristics associated with being gifted-learning disabled may hamper students' identification as gifted. These negative characteristics are often the result of the interaction of the students' high abilities and their LDs.

TABLE 2
 Characteristics of Gifted Students With Learning Disabilities

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| Characteristics that hamper identification as gifted |
| •Frustration with inability to master certain academic skill |
| •Learned helplessness |
| •General lack of motivation |
| •Disruptive classroom behavior |
| •Perfectionism |
| •Supersensitivity |
| •Failure to complete assignments |
| •Lack of organizational skills |
| •Demonstration of poor listening and concentration skills |
| •Deficiency in tasks emphasizing memory and perceptual abilities |
| •Low self-esteem |
| •Unrealistic self-expectations |
| •Absence of social skills with some peers |
| Characteristic strengths |
| •Advanced vocabulary use |
| •Exceptional analytic abilities |
| •High levels of creativity |
| •Advanced problem solving skills |
| •Ability to think of divergent ideas and solutions |
| •Specific aptitude (artistic, musical, or mechanical) |
| •Wide variety of interests |
| •Good memory |
| •Task commitment |
| •Spatial abilities |

Note. Adapted from *Talent in Two Places: Case Studies of High Ability Students With Learning Disabilities Who Have Achieved*, by S. M. Reis, T. W. Neu, and J. M. McGuire, 1995, Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut, The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. Copyright © 1995 by The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. This table has been adapted with the permission of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.

Some high-ability students with reading disabilities may display characteristics such as high verbal or visual-motor aptitude, creativity, boredom with grade-level or below grade-level reading, variable scores on achievement tests in reading sections, improved performance with compensation strategies (heard information, word processor, spell-checkers, additional time for assignments), low tolerance for frustration with rote-drill reading tasks, possible inattention, and unrealistically high or low self-concept (Hishinuma & Tadaki, 1996). High-ability students with math disabilities may display characteristics such as high verbal aptitude, creativity, boredom with grade level or below grade-level math, variable scores on achievement tests in math sections, improved performance with compensation (emphasis on word problems, calculator use, additional time for assignments), low tolerance for frustration with rote-drill math tasks, possible inattention, and unrealistically high or low self-concept (Hishinuma & Tadaki, 1996).

Students who exhibit characteristics of both giftedness and LDs pose quandaries for educators. The misconceptions, definitions, and expected outcomes for these students further complicate the issues facing appropriate programming for this population

(Baum, Owen, & Dixon, 1991; Olenchak & Renzulli, 1989; Whitmore, 1986a). Both teachers of the gifted and teachers of students with LDs are more aware of these students' special needs, yet most school districts have no provision for intervention programs for this group (Boodoo, Bradley, Frontera, Pitts, & Wright, 1989). Because gifted and talented students who are underachieving may suffer from undiagnosed LDs (Baum et al., 1991), it is important to exclude the possibility that a specific LD is responsible for the student's underachievement.

Gifted Children and ADHD

Children with ADHD and gifted children may exhibit similar behaviors (e.g., inattention, high energy level, impulsivity). There seems to be mounting evidence that many children being identified as having ADHD are also very bright, creative children (Cramond, 1995; Webb & Latimer, 1993) and that many gifted children exhibit symptoms similar to those seen in ADHD children when they are bored or unchallenged. Bright students may experience inattention when they are not appropriately challenged, but they may demonstrate a high energy level in areas of intense interest. Although similarities exist between the behaviors of gifted students and students with ADHD, some of the defining features of ADHD are not usually associated with giftedness. Children with ADHD usually show variability in the quality of their performance on specific tasks, whereas gifted students are more consistent with their level of effort and performance especially when they are interested and challenged. For example, a defining feature of ADHD is that a child has difficulty sustaining attention in most tasks or play activities, and he or she struggles to persist in tasks to completion (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). In contrast, gifted students may tire easily of boring, repetitive, unchallenging activities; however, they can usually sustain focused attention when they are working on tasks of their own choosing. In addition, to be diagnosed as ADHD, the impulsive, hyperactive, or inattentive behaviors must occur in at least two or more settings (e.g., home and school; *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* [4th ed.; *DSM-IV*; American Psychiatric Association, 2000] TR). Usually, parents of gifted students without ADHD report that their children can concentrate, sustain attention, and behave appropriately for long periods of time at home or during extracurricular activities. To distinguish whether a gifted student may also have ADHD, the school and home situation and settings must be closely monitored because gifted children typically will not display similar behaviors in all settings (i.e., home, school, music lessons, etc.), whereas children with ADHD will exhibit disordered behavior in most or all environments. Giftedness and ADHD may co-occur in the same child. A careful professional evaluation is needed to make this diagnosis, followed by appropriate medical, psychological, and curricular and instructional modifications (Webb & Latimer, 1993). Of course, a physician should consider the behavioral characteristics associated with giftedness when determining whether behavior patterns stem from ADHD.

Gifted Students With Behavioral Problems

Gifted students with emotional and behavior problems are often not referred for gifted programs or they are terminated from gifted programs because of their behavior; these

children often experience periods of underachievement (Reid & McGuire, 1995). Neu (1993) conducted a study of talented students with behavior problems and found a variety of issues that characterize their experiences. Most of the participants in Neu's studies of talented students with social and emotional problems were underchallenged in school, thus escalating their emotional and behavioral problems. Many of these students had the most difficulty during classroom dead time—when they waited for instruction that would challenge them while their chronological peers finished their work. In a review of the sparse research on this population, Reid and McGuire found that many talented students drop out of high school, experience behavior problems, and are not recommended for gifted programs. As a result of their emotional and behavioral disorders, “students often unpredictably engage and disengage in learning opportunities, resulting in inconsistencies in academic skills and knowledge foundations” (Reid & McGuire, 1995, p. 18). Clearly, more research is needed with this population.

Gifted Students With Psychological Disorders

Contrary to myth and popular opinion, the prevalence of psychological disorders is similar within gifted and nongifted populations (Niehart, 1999). Students who are experiencing acute psychological distress may experience sudden, severe underachievement. Students who have a psychological condition may become chronic underachievers. Many serious psychological illnesses such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder begin in early to late adolescence (*DSM-IV-TR*; American Psychiatric Association, 2000). One of the coauthors worked intensively for 3 years with a highly gifted girl who was a chronic underachiever to try to improve her scholastic success. It was not until the girl attempted to commit suicide in the middle of ninth grade that anyone considered taking her to a psychologist or a psychiatrist. A psychological assessment revealed that she suffered from bipolar disorder, and as her treatment progressed, her academic performance improved. It is important for educators to be aware of signs of psychological distress, and to refer students who may be experiencing psychological problems to the school counselor or the school psychologist.

Overexcitability and Underachievement in Gifted Children

Some gifted students have been described as having emotional intensity and emotional sensitivity. Dabrowski (1938) suggested that gifted children release emotional tension through five “overexcitabilities” (intellectual, imaginal, emotional, psychomotor, and sensual). A recent qualitative case study by Tucker and Hafenstein (1997) with 5 young gifted children provides evidence of the existence of the five overexcitabilities in these children through behavioral manifestations of behaviors. These young children displayed the behaviors listed in Table 3.

The results of the Tucker and Hafenstein (1997) study support the work of Dabrowski (1938) and may serve as a guideline for possible behaviors of gifted students with special needs. Some underachievers may exhibit one or more of these overexcitabilities.

TABLE 3
Overexcitability Behaviors

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- Intellectual overexcitability behaviors (e.g., curiosity, asking probing questions, concentration, problem solving, theoretical thinking, etc.)
 - Imaginational overexcitability behaviors (e.g., fantasy play, imaginative thinking, daydreaming, dramatic perception, etc.)
 - Emotional overexcitability behaviors (e.g., concern for others, timidity and shyness, fear and anxiety, intensity of feeling, etc.)
 - Psychomotor overexcitability behaviors (e.g., marked enthusiasm, rapid speech, impulsive actions, etc.)
 - Sensual overexcitability behaviors (e.g., sensory pleasures, appreciation of sensory aspects of experiences, etc.)
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Note. Adapted from "Psychological Intensities in Young Gifted Children," by B. Tucker and N. L. Hafenstein, 1997, *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 41, p. 70. Copyright © 1997 by *Gifted Child Quarterly*. Adapted with permission.

Teachers who understand Dabrowski's theory, and who construct a learning environment that is respectful of these overexcitabilities, may be able to prevent the underachievement of at least some gifted and talented students.

Identifying and Serving Gifted Underachievers

Some professionals may try to gauge an age–performance discrepancy when identifying underachievers (Mandel & Marcus, 1995). In other words, they may not identify a student as an underachiever unless performance in at least one major subject area is at least 1 year below grade level. Although this may be a suitable method for identifying underachievers from the general school population, such an age performance discrepancy will only identify the most severely underachieving gifted students. One would expect a gifted student's performance to be above grade level in some subject areas, especially those areas in which he or she has been identified as gifted. When a gifted student is performing at grade level in those subject areas, there may be cause for concern.

The criteria for identifying students as having an LD usually involves identifying a significant discrepancy between ability and individual standardized achievement test scores. In some states, the achievement test scores must be at least 2 years below grade level in at least one subject area to identify the student as having an LD. The probability of identifying a young gifted student as learning disabled using such a method is miniscule. Using a similar identification method to identify gifted underachievers presents the similar problem of underidentification. For example, Sara, the young girl described in the earlier case study, was identified as gifted in the primary grades because of verbal precocity, high IQ scores, and advanced performance in all content areas. She began to have difficulty in reading as she grew older, and reading became more challenging. In first grade, she had been reading at a third-grade level and in third grade, she was still reading at a third-grade level. Unfortunately, she was not identified as having an LD, or even as an underachiever at that time. By fifth grade, she was slightly below grade

level in reading and beginning to have difficulty in mathematics as well. She was later identified as having an LD despite working at or only slightly below grade level.

INTERVENTIONS

The causes and correlates of gifted underachievement have received considerable attention in recent research literature (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982; Van Boxtel & Monks, 1992; Whitmore, 1986b); however, research on effective intervention models for this population remains scarce. Although conducting case studies and qualitative research on underachieving gifted students has become quite popular, very few researchers have attempted to utilize true quasi-experimental designs to study the efficacy of various interventions. Most of the interventions reported in the literature (Supplee, 1990; Whitmore, 1980) were designed to affect immediate results with a group of acutely underachieving gifted students. Ethically, it may be difficult to have a true comparison group in such studies because the researcher must withhold treatment that he or she believes is valuable for underachieving gifted students.

The documented effectiveness of most interventions designed to reverse underachievement in gifted students has been inconsistent and inconclusive (Emerick, 1992). Furthermore, the majority of interventions have attained limited long-term success (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982; Emerick, 1992). Interventions aimed at reversing gifted underachievement fall into two general categories: counseling and instructional interventions (Butler-Por, 1993; Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982). Counseling interventions concentrate on changing the personal or family dynamics that contribute to a student's underachievement. Counseling interventions may include individual, group, and family counseling (Jeon, 1990). In most counseling situations, the counselor's goal is not to force the underachiever to become a more successful student, but rather to help the student decide whether success is a desirable goal and, if so, to help reverse counterproductive habits and cognitions.

The most well known educational interventions for gifted are either part-time or full-time special classrooms for gifted underachievers (e.g., Butler-Por, 1987; Supplee, 1990; Whitmore, 1980). In these classrooms, educators strive to create a favorable environment for student achievement by altering the traditional classroom organization. Usually, a smaller student-teacher ratio exists, teachers create less conventional types of teaching and learning activities, teachers give students some choice and freedom in exercising control over their atmosphere, and students are encouraged to utilize different learning strategies. Whitmore (1980) designed and implemented a full-time elementary program for gifted underachievers. Supplee (1990) instituted a part-time program for gifted elementary underachievers. Both programs stressed the importance of addressing affective education as well as the necessity of creating student-centered classroom environments. However, neither study used a control or comparison group; therefore, the results of their studies may not be generalizable to the entire population of underachievers.

Emerick (1992) investigated the reasons that some students are able to reverse their academic underachievement without the assistance of formal interventions. Her study examined the patterns of underachievement and subsequent achievement of 10 young adults. Several common factors appeared to play a part in the students' reversal of

underachievement. Participants in Emerick's study perceived that out-of-school interests and activities, parents, development of goals associated with grades, teachers, and changes in "selves" had a positive impact on achievement. All participants in Emerick's study believed that a specific teacher had the greatest impact in reversing their underachievement behavior. In addition, participants were most likely to develop achievement-oriented behaviors when they were stimulated in class and given the opportunity to pursue topics of interest to them. These findings suggest that:

reversing the underachievement pattern may mean taking a long, hard look at the underachiever's curriculum and classroom situation. The responses and actions of the students in this study suggest that when appropriate educational opportunities are present, gifted underachievers can respond positively. (p. 145)

Emerick's study indicates that one type of effective intervention may be based on students' strengths and interests (Renzulli, 1977; Renzulli & Reis, 1985, 1997). Baum et al. (1995) used self-selected Type 3 enrichment projects as a systematic intervention for underachieving gifted students. This approach specifically targets student strengths and interests to help reverse academic underachievement. Five major features of the Type 3 enrichment process contributed to the success of the intervention. These were the (a) relationship with the teacher, (b) use of self-regulation strategies, (c) opportunity to investigate topics related to their underachievement, (d) opportunity to work on an area of interest in a preferred learning style, and (e) time to interact with an appropriate peer group. Almost all of the students who completed Type 3 investigations showed some positive gains in either behavior or achievement during the course of the school year. Eleven of the 17 participants showed improved achievement, 13 of the 17 students appeared to exert more effort within their classes, and 4 of the 17 students showed marked improvement in their classroom behavior. The results of this research suggest that flexible student-centered enrichment approaches may help reverse underachievement in gifted students.

These interventions should be considered in view of the populations that were involved in the studies. None of these interventions, for example, focused solely on high-potential students with other exceptionalities such as those with LDs or physical disabilities who were underachieving in schools. Interventions uniquely designed for students with dual exceptionalities might need to involve a wider variety of strategies such as teaching self-regulatory and compensatory skills and opportunities to develop a stronger sense of self as well as increasing self-concept.

CONCLUSION

We do not know how many students with special needs underachieve nor do we really know how many students with special needs have hidden abilities. It is time for further research and inquiry in this area to enable students with special needs who are underachieving in our nation to receive more attention and programmatic interventions. However, we do know that high-ability students underachieve for a variety of reasons. Educators must explore the various reasons for high-ability students' underachievement if they hope to help combat underachievement. Practitioners should try to determine whether a student's

underachievement stems from more serious physical, cognitive, or emotional issues; a mismatch between the student and his or her school environment; or a personal characteristic such as low self-motivation, low self-regulation, or low self-efficacy. Appropriate intervention strategies must also be developed that are specifically designed to address the specific area of need exhibited by the student in question. When we differentiate treatments to meet the needs of underachievers, we will more effectively combat the problem of underachievement in school and in society.

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