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Ensuring Access to Rigorous Instruction for GT/LD Students

NAGC Conference

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Presenter: Rich Weinfeld, *coordinator of the programs for twice-exceptional students in Montgomery County Public Schools, MD*

Summary: In some ways meeting the needs of gifted students and twice-exceptional students is the same. For both groups, Weinfeld explained, a teacher must ask, "What are the essential questions and the knowledge and skills that I'll need to focus on?" The answers for both groups are the same.

Then the teacher needs to ask "What assessment evidence and learning activities will I require of my students?" Here the answers for each group should be different. For their

Memorable Quotes:

"We need to step back and think: What's our goal – to see how many successes we can get or to set up hurdles?"

"These kids are a puzzle of strands and pieces. Someone has to be looking over this puzzle to make sure they're all working as a team."

"As the level of school rises, teacher support of accommodation decreases, especially at the high school level."

"Many educators fear that accommodations make kids weak – enabling them, not preparing them

twice-exceptional students, teachers need to go beyond reading and writing to find alternatives that allow these students to hear, see, act out, build, and so forth.

for real world. But the majority of students agree with this statement: Accommodations allow students to move from dependence to independence."

Weinfeld offers this advice: Focus on what's appropriate right now for each child, what's been tried in the past, what worked, and what should be changed. He also gives these recommendations:

- Help students understand their strengths and weaknesses.
- Create a safe learning environment.
- Promote the use of assistive technology, and make it an option for *all* members of the class. Examples are:
 - Electronic keyboards
 - Word processors that let children see and hear what they're writing
 - Software organization programs
 - Electronic organizers
 - Electronic spellers
 - Calculators
 - Books on tape

For children with IEPs (Individualized Education Plans), it's important to go back and reevaluate the IEP accommodations. Children should be moving toward more and more independence. For example, once a child can do keyboarding, it's no longer appropriate to have that child dictate to an adult.

Weinfeld explained that it's also important to communicate the reasons for accommodations in a child's IEP. All teachers involved need to know not only what accommodations the child needs but also the reasons for them.

Useful tools that teachers can provide are:

- Graphic organizers
- Rubrics (so that students know what the teacher expects)
- Samples of work products
- The course syllabus (so that they know what's coming)
- Checkpoints on large assignments (so that they can see how they're progressing)
- A webpage where assignments are posted and/or a homework hotline.

Equally helpful are allowing students to email assignments as a backup for lost or forgotten work and providing an extra set of books that they can mark up.

A teaching method that works well with twice-exceptional students is to use multiple modalities. If students hear something first, have them see it next. Use art to reinforce learning as well as outlining, highlighting, underlining, and mnemonic devices.

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