



*Nurturing* Potential | *Inspiring* Excellence



# The Paradox of Giftedness and Autism

*Packet of Information for Families*

*Megan Foley Nicpon*

*Susan G. Assouline*

*Nicholas Colangelo*

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*We gratefully acknowledge the Messengers of Healing Winds Foundation for its support in the creation of this Packet of Information for Families.*

*We acknowledge the students and families who participate in the Belin-Blank Center's Assessment and Counseling Clinic. We obtained invaluable information from parents, which has been critical to the development of the recommendations that comprise this Packet of Information for Families.*



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## Purpose

This *Packet of Information for Families* (PIF) was developed for parents whose children are identified as both gifted/ talented and on the autism spectrum, or twice-exceptional. Parents of twice-exceptional children often search for appropriate and challenging enrichment programs for their child, but the dearth of information available about how best to prepare for this experience can make the process overwhelming. In the past three years, the Belin-Blank Center's Assessment and Counseling Clinic has developed clinical and research expertise in working with gifted students who have been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). As a result of this focus, we are able to offer experience-based information and recommendations for parents of twice-exceptional children.

The purpose of PIF is to provide recommendations for parents that will lead to a positive experience for their twice-exceptional students who participate in specialized programs for gifted/talented students. At the Belin-Blank Center, we have residential programs for junior high and high school students, and non-residential programs for elementary students. Recommendations for preparing your child vary depending on the type of program and age of the student; therefore, some of the information provided in PIF may not be applicable to your specific situation. To help navigate through this process, we have provided a figure in Section II that outlines specific issues related to residential programs and/or non-residential programs. We hope that PIF provides support and guidance to parents who are often in situations of having to advocate for their twice-exceptional child.

PIF is designed to complement the *Packet of Information for Professionals*, (PIP). Originally developed in 2007 (and revised in 2008) by Drs. Susan Assouline, Megan Foley Nicpon, and Nicholas Colangelo, and Mr. Matthew O'Brien, PIP offers recommendations for administrators, educators, and residential staff of university-based programs that are designed to optimize twice-exceptional students' experiences in specialized programs for gifted/talented students. In PIP, professionals are provided with various accommodations related to areas of strength and growth commonly observed in gifted students with ASD. These accommodations are meant to assist professionals in structuring an experience that is as successful as possible for gifted students with ASD.

## Structure of PIF

Section I of PIF introduces general information related to both giftedness and ASD. This section is followed by Section II, which focuses on helping families prepare their twice-exceptional student to attend a summer program for gifted students. Although this section focuses on summer programs at the Belin-Blank Center, the information provided can be applicable to other summer programs for gifted/talented students, although the program structure and accommodations available may not be the same. In order to maximize the student's experience, we have tried to identify multiple ways to effectively accommodate the complex learning and social needs of students who are gifted and also have ASD.

To Families of Twice-Exceptional Students:

As the director of the Belin-Blank Center, I take great pride in the programs that we offer gifted students.

Our summer programs bring together children and adolescents from a variety of geographic regions and backgrounds; however, they all share exceptional potential and a desire for opportunities to learn and be challenged. Students want to be with other kids who have similar values and abilities so that they can just “be themselves.” As you know from experience, parents also want their children to have such experiences.

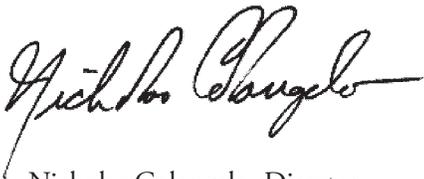
For a gifted student with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the possibility of experiencing a special program for gifted students may not be as likely because ASD presents a number of challenges that could make such special academic experiences unrealistic. We want to change this so that gifted students with ASD are not only encouraged to participate, but also have a fulfilling, positive experience.

The Belin-Blank Center’s motto is “nurturing potential/inspiring excellence.” We don’t have qualifiers on this motto. It has always been our driving force to minimize barriers—whether economic, ethnic, gender, or geographic—that would interfere with bright students enjoying a quality special academic experience. Students with ASD have social and cognitive characteristics that can make being away from home for either a commuter or residential program quite challenging. It is our task to minimize these potential barriers.

In partnership with the Messengers of Healing Winds Foundation, we have developed this *Packet of Information for Families* (PIF) to assist families in preparing their child for a special learning opportunity. Why? Simple: we want specialized programs to be accessible to these young gifted people.

We want to minimize participation barriers everywhere. We will be saying “yes” to students who have not readily heard that word. We all get to nurture and inspire as well as be inspired.

Thank you.



Nicholas Colangelo, Director  
Belin-Blank Center



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*The gifted student who is also diagnosed with one of the autism spectrum disorders (ASD) has many behaviors, skills, and characteristics that are paradoxical in nature. In other words, there are aspects of these areas that are extraordinarily well developed—especially academically—yet, within the same broad area, there are other aspects that, relative to the academic strength, are significantly weak and may create a situation where the regular classroom setting may not be optimal for learning. Accommodations can be used to ensure that the student’s learning experience is commensurate with his or her ability.*

## A Paradox of Strengths and Difficulties

### A Brief History of Gifted Education

For more than three decades, the federal definition of giftedness (see Appendix A) has served as the dominant basis for the definition of giftedness that is used in school settings in most states. This definition came from the first national report on gifted education, *Education of the Gifted and Talented*, which was a product of an effort initiated in 1972 by U.S. Commissioner of Education, S. P. Marland. The report, often referred to as the Marland Report, is credited with giving gifted education national stature by emphasizing the need for programming as well as by suggesting that a failure to meet the academic needs of gifted students would place them at risk for psychological damage. However, validation of gifted students' needs for specialized programming was the extent of the report's impact, because it did not include legislation leading to significant rights for gifted students, their parents, or their teachers.

Shortly after the release of the Marland Report, gifted education programs appeared throughout the nation's schools. Many of the programs were developed according to the Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli, 1976), which is the core of Renzulli's Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM). Because an enrichment model aims to provide a comprehensive menu of challenging opportunities, it is understandably attractive to many educators who want to provide a broad spectrum of gifted-education opportunities to their students. In addition, most enrichment programs use an identification system that features above-average achievement (based on grade-level tests), creativity, and motivation. The first step to participation in an enrichment-focused program often is an evaluation of the student's performance on a nationally-normed, grade-level achievement test. The next step often involves the student taking a group-administered ability test, such as the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT).

Although an enrichment model is an effective intervention for many gifted students, ironically, for gifted students with a disability, the model's emphasis on above-average achievement and demonstrated motivation may inadvertently exclude from participation in the school's gifted program those gifted students who have learning difficulties or social-skill deficits.

An enrichment model also has resulted in a myth that giftedness is very general in its nature. Although we are not sure how this myth originated, even in the most respected school systems its impact is obvious by the global or general approach of gifted-student identification systems and subsequent programming. While scholars have demonstrated that most individuals are not equally talented in the variety of talent areas that are typically addressed in educational settings (e.g., verbal, quantitative, musical, and leadership; see the Marland Report definition of giftedness in Appendix A), schools continue to base entry into gifted education programs on global or composite standardized test scores.

Because of these practices, many do not fully understand the enormous diversity of talent that exists among gifted students. For example, educators may assume that all gifted students love school, read well, process information quickly, or are able to complete work or learn new material independently. Professionals who adhere to this particular myth usually are not open to the possibility that a student can be gifted even though he/she does not process information quickly. These are often the same people who believe that gifted students do not require any special intervention because they will "make it on their own."

The description of enrichment programs begs the following question: Is the generally gifted approach the only way to find and develop programs for gifted students?

There is another system for gifted education programming that has existed since the early 1980s, when programs for high-ability students first were offered through university settings. Typically presented as a benefit of participation in university-based talent searches (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Benbow, Assouline, & Brody, 2003), these programs are almost entirely outside of the K–12 domain. The talent-search model for discovering academic talent is a two-step process, and the first step, as with an enrichment model, often emanates from the student’s performance on a nationally-normed grade-level achievement test; however, this is the only point at which the talent-search programs resemble the enrichment programming. Therefore, enrichment usually serves as the basis for the majority of pull-out programs for gifted students in the K–12 setting and university-based programs (which are founded on a talent-search model) operate in a parallel gifted world. Because these two types of programs rarely intersect, it is not uncommon for students to qualify for university-based programs, yet not qualify for their school’s gifted program.

*Because twice-exceptional students are apt to be misunderstood, resulting in students who remain under-identified and, consequently, under-served, it is an acute necessity for professionals to be aware of the unique needs of these students.*

## **What Model of Giftedness Do University-Based Programs Use?**

Many universities offer pre-college programming and most programs for pre-college students are grounded in the university-based talent search model. As mentioned, one consequence of the parallel nature of the school-based enrichment programming and university-based talent-search programs is that students in university-based programs often are NOT identified for their school’s gifted education programming. In fact, many of students who have been assessed through the Belin-Blank Center’s Assessment and Counseling Clinic (see Appendix B) have not been identified for their school’s gifted education program. For many students—and especially for gifted students with a disability—attending a university-based program may be the first time that their high academic needs are being met.

In general, classes that are part of university-based programs are designed to enhance a specific content area, and students are encouraged to participate in classes that will develop their strengths. These classes should not be viewed as a way to remediate an academic area that is a weakness. The students with a diagnosis on the autism spectrum who are participating in university-based programs can be (and have been) enrolled in any of the classes (e.g., writing, math, science, or visual arts).

## **Who Is the Gifted Student with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?**

While only a small minority of gifted students are considered twice-exceptional, or possessing gifts/talents and a disability (e.g., Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), learning disability, etc.), an even smaller portion are thought to be both gifted/talented and have a diagnosis on the autism spectrum. For this group of students, Bashe and Kirby (2001, p. 364–365) state that the “most pressing problem” is that “their emotional and behavioral challenges are considered ‘side effects’ of being unusually bright, rather than the manifestations of a neurological disorder.” This occurs even though

autism is considered to have the best empirically based, cross-national set of criteria for diagnosis (Volkmar & Klin, 2005).

As a parent of a gifted student with ASD, you most likely are familiar with the definitions associated with various disorders that make up the autism spectrum, including Autistic Disorder, Asperger Syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder NOS (see Appendix C for the DSM-IV-TR diagnostic criteria used to diagnose ASD). The vast amount of literature available to parents thoroughly documents the social, communication, and behavioral difficulties associated with the diagnosis. However, criteria for an ASD diagnosis, as well as how ASDs are conceptualized in clinic and educational settings, continue to evolve. This evolution is relevant to the gifted child with co-existing ASD because of the risk of misdiagnosis due to shifting definitions.

### **How Can Gifted Students Also Have ASD?**

ASD is one of the 13 disability categories (see Appendix A) identified by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA-2004). IDEA is a federal law that was first enacted in 1975. The purpose of IDEA is to assure a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) to all students with disabilities. Because ASD is considered a disability, some educators do not consider that it is possible for a student to be both gifted and disabled. Parents realize that this statement is a myth.

Giftedness and ASD are not mutually exclusive; they can and do co-exist. While there are no data that document the prevalence of gifted and talented children with ASD, there are many clinical cases as well as classroom anecdotes of this co-existence (e.g., Assouline, Foley Nicpon, & Doobay, in review; Lovecky, 2004; Neihart, 2000; Webb, et al., 2005). Also, it has been noted (Gallagher & Gallagher, 2002) that in some individuals, symptoms of ASD can obscure

giftedness; whereas in others, giftedness can mask characteristics of ASD. These two scenarios represent missed identification of giftedness or missed diagnosis of ASD. In other individuals, misdiagnosis occurs. That is, a gifted and talented student may display some behaviors (e.g., extreme interest in facts) that are characteristic of ASD, although upon completion of a comprehensive evaluation, it may be that the behaviors of concern are better explained by giftedness rather than ASD. In these cases, it is preferable to generate recommendations that address the student's difficulties in terms of how they interact with their gifts and talents. The reverse scenario would attribute characteristics typically associated with autism (e.g., socialization difficulties) to giftedness (e.g., a child demonstrates socialization problems because he/she does not have intellectual peers). This scenario is equally unfortunate because the student does not receive appropriate interventions to address difficulties related to ASD.

### **Comprehensive Assessment — Why Is It Important?**

Evaluation of gifts and talents, as well as ASD, is a complex process, and requires a comprehensive assessment that is tailored to the student's specific presenting issues. Only through such an evaluation can one identify the student's particular impairments and academic strengths. As well, an accurate diagnosis drives appropriate recommendations; therefore, from a psychological and educational perspective, it is critical to gather information from every area that could be affected by the student's ASD diagnosis. Specialized training in ASD assessment, as well as a thorough understanding of giftedness, is necessary.

Throughout the years, thousands of twice-exceptional students have successfully attended summer programs for gifted/talented students. Some have received accommodations for their disability or difficulty, and some have not. The following case study provides an example of one student's summer program experience and how having accommodations in place would have made the already positive outcome even better.



Carrie was referred by her parents to the Assessment and Counseling Clinic when she was 11-years-old. Her parents recognized her outstanding abilities and sought a professional opinion about her readiness for academic acceleration. Carrie had many talents early on. She began reading street signs at 30 months of age, chapter books by age 3, and had an aptitude for learning languages very quickly. As a result of the initial evaluation, Carrie's parent's suspicions were substantiated – she earned an overall ability score in the 99.9th percentile. She was subsequently grade accelerated from 6th to 8th (skipped grade 7). While the evaluation results revealed extreme giftedness, they also revealed that Carrie had significant social and behavioral difficulties that were negatively impacting her functioning at home and at school. Parents also reported that Carrie had several additional difficulties, including sustaining attention, following directions, and keeping organized. Despite having quite advanced academic skills, she struggled with attending to day to day activities, such as turning in homework, taking care of personal hygiene, and cleaning up around the house. Parents also described Carrie as not interested in forming social relationships with many children her age, but she was friends with a book store owner with whom she had common interests. It had “always” been difficult for Carrie to make friends but she reportedly was drawn to people with her similar interests.

As a result of these concerns, Carrie was evaluated for a second time to rule-out the presence of an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Assessments were administered that specifically were designed to evaluate for ASD, and findings confirmed that Carrie was a twice-exceptional student with extreme cognitive and academic gifts along with social, communication and behavioral difficulties associated with a diagnosis of ASD.

With this new information that helped clarify Carrie's talents and areas for growth, parents had many decisions to make. They wanted to accommodate for Carrie's difficulties at home and at school, but they also wanted to pay close attention to her extraordinary gifts. Academic acceleration was a good option for Carrie, but parents wanted Carrie to participate in summer programs that would enhance the accelerated learning she was exposed to during the school year. They looked at various summer enrichment programs throughout the country but found that few programs mentioned ways that they accommodated for twice-exceptional students.

Despite their fears that Carrie may struggle because of difficulties associated with ASD, Carrie's parents allowed her to attend an out-of-state, week-long summer program for gifted students. While Carrie reported having an exceptional academic experience learning Greek and computer programming, she also had trouble connecting to other students, attending to personal hygiene needs, and organizing her free-time activities. The experience overall was a positive one, but parents felt that things would have gone more smoothly had there been attention paid to Carrie's needs prior to her arrival. Parents stated that they would have benefited from meeting with a staff person initially to discuss Carrie's strengths and areas for growth, and that Carrie would have gained from several, yet minor, accommodations, such as positing her schedule, having activities to select from during free-time, obtaining specific directions about how to attend to hygiene needs, and receiving “cue cards” displaying staff names and pictures. The take-home lesson for Carrie and her parents was that implementation of minor accommodations that were specific to Carrie's needs would have made major differences in her overall experience away from home.

## Summer Programs

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### Residential

### Non-Residential

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Disclosure of Information to Staff

Disclosure of Diagnosis

Health Forms

Discussing the Program

Choosing Classes

Visiting the Program Facilities and Teachers

Learning Rules and Procedures

Friendship Making

Behavior Management Strategies

Medications

Living in the Dorm

Unstructured / Free time

Morning and Evening Routines

Arriving to Class

Dealing with Breaks

Going Home after Class

## Preparing Your Twice-Exceptional Student for Summer Gifted/Talented Programs

Twice-exceptional students can successfully participate in specialized programs for gifted/talented children. Minor accommodations can make a major impact on the twice-exceptional student's experience. While each student's strengths and difficulties are unique, there are some general practices or modifications that can help ensure that your child's participation is optimal.

Most summer programs for gifted/talented students have residential programs for junior high and high school students, and non-residential programs for elementary students. These opportunities carry with them unique experiences that may or may not require accommodations for the gifted/talented student with ASD. While both programs have many common issues to consider, each has unique concerns that also need to be addressed. To the left is a visual presentation of issues that pertain to both programs (residential and/or non-residential) as well as those that are specific to either the residential or non-residential experience. This visual is intended to guide parents about what areas in which to focus attention in Section II of PIF.

### Considerations for Students Attending Residential and Non-Residential Programs

#### Disclosure of Information to Staff

It is very important to remember that information about your child's diagnosis is considered confidential. This means that access to his or her diagnosis only would be granted if you, the parent, gave permission. This being said, parents may want to ask themselves this question: Are there program staff members (administrators, teachers, residence advisors, teacher assistants) who would be in a position to help my child if he/she knew about the diagnosis? If so, parents may want to consider disclosing their child's diagnosis so that accommodations can be employed to maximize their experience. At the Belin-Blank Center, we encourage sharing information about your son or daughter's strengths and areas of growth so that we can prepare to meet his or her needs.

There are many ways that you can disclose information about your child. One way that may be helpful is to provide staff with a summary of your child's Individualized Education Plan or 504 Plan (See Appendix A). Access to your child's educational programming accommodations would allow staff the ability to review the goals set for your child and become familiar with what has been helpful for him or her at school.

Parents of each student who participates in residential summer programs are required to complete health forms. These forms are the ideal place for parents or guardians to identify environmental factors that are likely to cause their child distress. Parents may also want to create for program staff a list of pertinent skills,

positive and potentially problematic behaviors, tips for positively approaching behavior and social difficulties, as well as a list of your child's interests. We have created a sample disclosure form that could be used to communicate this information to program staff (See Appendix D). Use of this document, or one similar, is a way to provide information about your child's strengths and areas for growth.

### **Discussing the Program with Your Child**

Deciding to send one's child or adolescent to a special program for gifted students is an exciting, yet anxiety-provoking, decision for most parents. For parents of twice-exceptional children, these feelings may be intensified because of their child's unique set of strengths and challenges. For a gifted child with ASD, knowing information about the program prior to attending is essential. This allows students to ask questions and clarify uncertainties. It is important to remember that only general information can be provided to your child before the program begins; specific details will need to wait until the student attends the program. In cases where students have inquiries that are unable to be answered, they should be encouraged to create a list of questions to be asked once they arrive on campus.

It is also recommended that all students, especially those who are twice-exceptional, play a central role in choosing classes and programming options. If students are invested in and motivated about the classes, the likelihood of them having a positive experience increases. In the past, some students with ASD who have attended our programs were enrolled in classes that were outside their interest areas, and they were unable to complete the class due to lack of motivation or behavioral difficulties. Actively involving your child in class and program selection can help prevent these negative results from occurring.

### **Taking a Proactive Approach**

There are other ways that parents can prepare their twice-exceptional child to attend a program. For example, students may benefit from visiting the program facilities prior to the first day of class. This way any ambiguities that the student may have about the program would be minimized. If possible, it also would be helpful to have the student meet with his/her teachers and/or resident hall supervisors. During this visit, students could be given a schedule of events so that they can prepare for what will be in store for them on a daily basis. After learning the program rules and procedures, parents should review them with their child so that expectations are clear.

### **Planning for Social Activities**

Most special programs for gifted/talented students share the goal of providing challenging academics in a supportive learning and social environment. Indeed, the strong social experience is a major component of most summer enrichment programs, especially the residential programs. For many students, participation in a residential program is often the first opportunity to spend five or more nights away from home.

During these programs, students often find intellectual peers with whom they form lasting friendships. For gifted students with ASD, it is sometimes more difficult to make and retain friendships, even though they are very much desired.

As parents, you are aware that there are social and interpersonal circumstances that may be problematic for your son or daughter. You also know that there may be discrepancies between your child's perceptions about a situation and the perceptions of others. Talking through potential social and friendship-making circumstances prior to arrival may be helpful for the student to plan responses. Beginning on page 17 of this guide, there are examples of how to use Social Story interventions to help prepare your son or daughter for these potentially stressful situations.

### **Avoiding Potential Behavioral Problems**

Many parents will have children or adolescents whose exceptionalities include behavioral difficulties that can be problematic in and out of the classroom. Several behavioral management techniques may be of assistance, depending on the particular student and his/her specific needs. As a parent of a twice-exceptional student, consider sharing what behavioral strategies work with your child. Parents may also want to visit with staff and identify a “safe place” where the student can decompress during times of anger or stress. Students should be told how they can initiate the “safe place” policy, and how they can feel comfortable using this option in times of need. Parents can provide input as to what safe environments and time-out procedures have been beneficial in the past so that effective plans can be developed at the onset of the week. If having a comforting object or person available to help calm your child, or if engaging him/her in a familiar and enjoyable activity has been helpful in the past, communicate this information to staff to circumvent any difficulties that your child may have.

If your child has a history of exhibiting difficult behavior, consider joining with staff to develop a behavioral intervention plan. Established guidelines should be discussed with the student in an explicit, rule-governed fashion, and everyone involved should be aware of the plan so that consistency across staff, settings, and situations is maintained.

### **Additional Considerations for Students Attending Residential Programs**

#### **Medications**

Many twice-exceptional students are prescribed psychotropic medications that help manage behaviors associated with their disability. For students in non-residential programs, prescribed medications must be taken either before or after their time on campus. For students in residential programs, prescribed medications likely will be taken while on campus. We recommend providing a list of medications to staff, as well as possible difficulties associated with the medication (e.g., your child forgets to take the medication unless prompted). Information regarding dosages and necessary accommodations for medications that must be stored in specific locations or administered in specific ways should be communicated. Any drug allergies or sensitivities also should be disclosed. Parents need to be aware that their child is responsible for taking their medications. Summer program staff can provide reminders but cannot distribute medications to students.

*As parents, you are aware that there are social and interpersonal circumstances that may be problematic for your son or daughter. You also know that there may be discrepancies between your child’s perceptions about a situation and the perceptions of others. Talking through potential social and friendship-making circumstances prior to arrival may be helpful for the student to plan responses.*

## **Unstructured Time, Roommates, and Routines**

Many parents of twice-exceptional students are concerned about what takes place outside of structured, classroom time, such as how the student will function with a roommate, if the student will follow a morning routine, or what he or she will do during free-time. Most of the time, students attending a residential program will be assigned a roommate, and often this is the first time that they will have shared a room with a stranger. For a twice-exceptional student who has interpersonal difficulties, this can be quite stressful and anxiety-provoking. An effective suggestion to the roommate dilemma is to pair the twice-exceptional student with a peer who has similar interests. In any given week, many, diverse classes may be offered, so a student taking a fine-arts class could be paired with a student taking a calculus class. If a gifted student with ASD is paired with a peer in his/her same program or class, he or she will have more opportunities to practice and learn interpersonal skills. Also, having common interests eases starting conversations and building friendships.

Gifted students with ASD also may have difficulty following morning routines, or knowing what to do during free time. In these cases, parents may want to develop a checklist with their child outlining what needs to be accomplished before breakfast. In the afternoons, gifted students with ASD may not know how to spend their free time. For these students, meeting with program staff each morning to outline potential options available may reduce anxiety and uneasiness that typically develops when students with ASD do not have a set schedule. Communicate with staff your child's preferred activities and areas of interest and make specific suggestions about what he or she may enjoy doing during their daily free time.

## **Program Orientation**

Most summer programs have an orientation scheduled on the first day. This often is when students meet program staff, learn rules and procedures, and tour facilities. For a gifted student with ASD, having ample time to transition to the

new living and learning environment may help circumvent any difficulties associated with this exciting, yet novel opportunity. Twice-exceptional students should be allowed to tour classrooms, dorm rooms, and lounge areas, and meet staff who will provide support throughout their stay. Students should review program schedules and ask staff any questions they may have. It is during this time that classroom rules and procedures can be reiterated.

## **Additional Considerations for Students Attending Non-Residential Programs**

### **Arriving to and Leaving from Classes**

Elementary students who attend one of our summer non-residential classes will arrive at the same time as students from several different classes, and typically students wait at the front of the building until they are escorted inside by a staff person. It is important to prepare your student for this unstructured time. He or she will be expected to (1) wait in the designated area; (2) be respectful of peers; and (3) listen to instructions about when to go inside. At the end of the day, students will be escorted outside to wait for their ride home. During this time, they will be expected to line up with their classmates and walk quietly in the halls as to not disturb others. Preparing your child for what will occur during these transitions will decrease the likelihood of problematic situations for the students and staff.

### **Breaks**

During our summer classes, students will have regular breaks where they will have time to engage in unstructured activities. It would be helpful to discuss with your son or daughter's teacher what is and what is not an acceptable break-time activity. For example some teachers may allow students to play their Gameboy, but others may not. We recommend having available a few, acceptable, enjoyable activities for your student to engage in so that their time spent during break is positive.

## Social Stories as an Intervention

Social Stories is an intervention that introduces potentially challenging or confusing topics and situations to students by presenting the information from the perspective of the child or adolescent. These short stories are most often written for students with difficulties in social functioning and communication, which are central characteristics of students with ASD. The purpose of Social Stories is to help the student learn appropriate ways to react to social situations or to highlight positive achievements.

The following eight Social Stories introduce topics and situations that students in summer enrichment programs may encounter. Some are present in check-list format and others are in paragraph form. We have kept them general so that they can be tailored to the individual student in various ways, such as incorporating the child's name, interests, or particularly troubling situations. Also it is important to know that students who attend summer programs range in age from early elementary to high school. Therefore some stories will not be appropriate for your child or adolescent. In these cases feel free to modify the story so that it is age-appropriate and fits with your student's needs.

For more information on Social Stories, including how to construct them on your own, see Carol Gray's *The New Social Story Book* (2000 edition), published by Future Horizons, Inc.

## Introduction to Summer Programs

1. This summer I am going to a special *Summer Program* for gifted students.
2. *Summer Programs* are different than school. At *Summer Programs* I can learn about specific topics that interest me.
3. Sometimes I will be in a classroom for *3 or 4 hours* learning from a teacher and at other times I will participate in fun activities outside of the classroom.
4. There will be many other students at the *Summer Programs*. Some of the students will have the same interests as I. Some will not be interested in the same things that interest me. I can *learn new things* from other students, even those who do not share my interests. I can do this by listening to them and asking them questions about what they like to do.

## Weekday Schedule

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<b>7:00-7:30 AM</b>	<b>Wake up!</b> Students are responsible for setting their own wake-up time. Early risers may want to get together to do some early morning exercise or read quietly in the residence hall.
<b>7:00-8:30 AM</b>	<b>Breakfast</b> —All meals will be served in the newly renovated Burge Dining Hall. You will have a choice of hot entrees, fruit, juices, cold cereal, and an assortment of breads.
<b>8:30-8:45 AM</b>	<b>Morning Meeting</b> —A daily meeting for announcements.
<b>9:00-12:00 PM</b>	<b>Morning Academic Session</b>
<b>12:00-1:00 PM</b>	It's back to Burge Hall for lunch where you will have the choice of hot entrees, a complete line of vegetarian entrees, soup, sandwiches, and a complete salad bar.
<b>1:00-4:00 PM</b>	<b>Afternoon Academic Session</b> —This early afternoon period usually involves additional academic class work. Sometimes the afternoon session is reserved for class projects, special workshops, lectures, exhibits, field trips, and other activities.
<b>5:00-6:30 PM</b>	<b>Dinner</b> is served in Burge Dining Hall. A complete line of vegetarian entrees is served along with a variety of other meal choices.
<b>6:30-9:30 PM</b>	<b>Evening Activity</b> —Most evenings include special events ranging from arts performances and special guest speakers to student activities and games. Some programs have a mandatory study period during this time. The times of these activities will vary. Check the daily schedule located on your RAs door for details.
<b>10:00-10:30 PM</b>	<b>Curfew</b> —All students must be on their floors by the time designated for their individual program unless directly involved with an activity scheduled by the program staff.
<b>11:00 PM</b>	<b>Bed Check or Lights Out</b> —Students must be in their own rooms ready for bed check if they are junior high students, or in their rooms getting ready for bed if they are high school students. If you want to go to bed earlier, please feel free to do so.
<b>11:30 PM</b>	<b>Lights Out for High School Programs</b> —You may be used to staying up later, but with the busy schedule you will need your sleep. RAs will do bed checks promptly at 11:30 PM for the high school programs.

## Checking My Schedule

1. The *Daily Schedule* is a list of times and locations for each of the activities that I will be participating in for that day. On the left side of this page is an example of a general *weekday* daily schedule:
2. I will receive my *Daily Schedule* each morning from my *Resident Assistant*.
3. Each day before my classes start I need to check my *Daily Schedule*.
4. My *Daily Schedule* will not be the same as all of the students in the summer program. It may not even be the same as that of my roommate.
5. My *Daily Schedule* might change every day so I should look at it daily.
6. I should pay attention to the times listed on the schedule because they will tell me when the activity starts. I can check a clock or wear a watch to know the time.
7. I should also pay attention to the location of the activity so that I know where to go and can estimate how long it will take. It may take as long as 5 minutes to get to an activity, so I need to start walking earlier than the start time listed in my *Daily Schedule*.
8. If I have any questions or if I do not understand the schedule then I should ask a *Resident Assistant* for help before classes start.
9. My *Daily Schedule* will help me get to the places I am supposed to be at the correct times so that I will have a good time at summer camp. It will also help me remember all our activities so I can tell my family and friends about them later.

## Living in the Residence Halls

This summer I will be living in a residence hall for one week while I am participating in special summer programs for gifted and talented students. The residence hall is a big building where older students live when they attend college. I will be assigned to a room that has a bed to sleep on and a dresser for my clothes to be stored. There will also be a sink to wash my face and brush my teeth. A bathroom for me to use will be down the hall.

I may have a roommate who will share the room with me. There will be enough room for both of us to store our belongings and we will each have a bed. I should not touch any of my roommate's things unless I am given permission to do so. Touching other people's possessions may make them angry and I want to respect their privacy. If I do want to share an item with my roommate, I can ask permission first. Also I can offer to share something with my roommate that I think he (she) may like, such as a new book or video game.

At night my roommate and I will both be sleeping in the dorm room. Therefore, I need to be quiet when it is time to go to bed so that my roommate and I can get enough sleep to be fully rested for the next day. If I wake up in the morning before my roommate I need to be quiet so that I don't wake my roommate up.

## Eating in the Cafeteria

1. When I attend a residential program for gifted kids at the Belin-Blank Center, I will eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner *in the Cafeteria*.
2. *The Cafeteria* is called the Burge Dining Hall.
3. I will have lots of choices of what to eat *in the Cafeteria*. For breakfast, there will be hot entrees, fruit, juices, cold cereal, and breads. For lunch, there will be hot entrees, vegetarian entrees, soup, sandwiches, salad bar, and deserts. For dinner, there will be choices similar to what there was at lunch.
4. I will fill up my plate one time and only get as much food as I can eat *in the Cafeteria*. I will make sure to only get one desert.
5. I get to chose where I sit *in the Cafeteria*. I can eat with a staff person or a classmate.
6. After I am finished eating *in the Cafeteria*, I will put my tray in a designated area. My *Resident Assistant* can show me where if I am confused.
7. I will not bring food out of *the Cafeteria*.

## Taking Care of Myself

Sometimes people get dirty or sweat a lot and they start to look dirty or smell funny. Other people might not want to be around me if I look dirty or smell funny. Every day that I am at the summer program I need to make sure that I am clean and smell good. It is a good idea to take a shower or bath every day and to use soap to clean off any dirt. I should also wash my hands whenever they are dirty and before I eat food.

Other things need to be cleaned as well. Clothes can become dirty and smell funny, so I should wear a clean set of clothes each new day. My teeth need to be brushed every day too so that they are clean and my breath smells good.

I might become sick while I am at my summer program. When I am sick I may spread germs to other people and make them sick and other people do not want to be sick. If I become sick I should tell my resident assistant or my teacher. If I feel fine but have a cough I should cover my mouth with my hand or cough into the middle of my arm when I feel like coughing. I should wash my hands each time I cough or sneeze into them.

## Personal Space

1. Sometimes people need *Personal Space*. This means that I should not get too close to them.
2. Getting too close to someone or invading his or her *Personal Space* may upset that person or make them feel uncomfortable.
3. To keep good *Personal Space*, I can always give a high-five, thumbs up, or a handshake to others, but I should not hug someone else or invade his (her) *Personal Space*.
4. I should also make sure that there is enough *Personal Space* between me and my friend. When I give other people their *Personal Space* they will not feel upset or uncomfortable.

## In the Classroom

1. When I go to summer programs I will be *Learning in a Classroom*.
2. There will be many other students *in the Classroom*.
3. My teacher will help us *Learn* new things.
4. When the teacher is talking I will try to be quiet and listen so that I can *Learn*.
5. Teachers like it when the students use an inside voice *in the Classroom* and when they listen to what is being said.
6. If I want to say something *in the Classroom* or if I have a question for the teacher I will raise my hand so that the teacher knows that I would like to talk. When the teacher calls my name I will know that it is my turn to talk.
7. I have to remember that other students may also raise their hands to talk *in the Classroom* so I may not be the first person the teacher calls on. This is okay.

## When I am Upset

When I attend summer programs I will participate in many activities in and out of class. Some activities may be easy and some activities may seem difficult. When things seem difficult people sometimes get frustrated or angry. Everyone gets angry at one time or another. People can also get angry at other people.

When I get angry at summer programs it is **NOT** okay to hit, push, or yell at other people. Instead I will have several good options. One option is to ask my teacher or resident assistant for help. If I am in the classroom, another option is to tell my teacher that I need “a break” from class for awhile and I can go to the quiet place that I identified with my teacher.

The quiet place is a room where I can go to calm down and feel better. I can talk with a staff member in the quiet place about what happened. I should only use the quiet place when I feel it is necessary.

### **Finding Someone to Help**

At the summer programs I will meet many students and adults. Sometimes it is hard to remember everyone's name and recognize everyone's face. If I am in trouble or if I am lost I should look for an adult wearing a **white t-shirt with a blue ringer and the letters, STAFF written in blue on the back**. That person is a safe person who can help me with my problem or show me where to go. If I cannot find a person wearing the **white t-shirt with blue writing** I should find another adult and tell that person who I am and what I need help with.

### **What to do when Your Son or Daughter is Attending a Summer Program**

For many parents of twice-exceptional students, concerns do not end once they drop off their child – they are only just beginning. There are ways that parents can ease their anxiety and stress during this time. For example, parents should feel comfortable communicating with their child on a daily basis during regularly scheduled opportunities. Also, many programs have email accounts where parents can send their child a message every day. If your child has a cell phone, find out what times are appropriate for contacting him or her. If available, parents also may want to consider asking a staff member to check in regularly with them regarding their child's successes and areas of difficulty. Taking this approach allows parents, who know their child best, to have a central role in problem-solving ways to optimize their child's experiences.

### **After Summer Programs Have Ended**

Parents can play a key role in assisting programs to improve service provision for gifted students with ASD. At the conclusion of the summer program, consider discussing with your child what was positive about the experience, and what he or she hoped would have been different. Some students may be more forthcoming than others, so it would be helpful to have a similar conversation with a program staff member. Once this information is gathered, share it with staff so that changes can be considered in light of the multifaceted needs of a gifted student with ASD.

### **Questions Parents May Have About Enrichment Programs for Gifted Students**

#### **How do I know my child will be safe?**

As a parent or caregiver of a gifted and talented child with ASD, enrolling your child in a special program for gifted and talented students may be an anxiety-provoking experience. The goal of all programs is to provide your child with a safe and comfortable learning environment, while at the same time allowing him or her an opportunity to experience the numerous positive aspects associated with advanced learning opportunities.

Supervision is a key to safety. Summer residential program participants are regularly supervised during all activities and classes. Resident hall coordinators and advisors will supervise all participants outside of classes and will live on the same residence hall floor as your child.

Although some programs involve off-campus trips with resident hall advisors and classroom teachers serving as chaperones, the vast majority of the time will be spent in the Blank Honors Center and the attached Daum Residence Hall. Meals are served in the Burge Residence Hall, which sits next to the Blank Honors Center.

Our programs are highly structured with daily schedules available to the students so that they are aware of all activities and their corresponding times and locations (please visit <http://www.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank/summer/handbooks/Summerhandbook.pdf> for a general schedule of activities). We have implemented additional safety measures to assist the twice-exceptional students joining us. We have asked our resident advisors to wear white t-shirts with STAFF written on the backs in blue in order for their respective students to identify them better. We hope to provide your child with a picture of his/her resident advisor and classroom teacher, as it is sometimes difficult for children to remember faces. Most teachers' pictures are on either of the following websites: <http://www.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank/summer/programs/3%2D6/chess/> or <http://www.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank/summer/>. Additionally, designated staff will be available specifically for the purpose of working with twice-exceptional students who may encounter an emergency or who need a chance to decompress from a stressful situation.

We recommend talking with your son or daughter about the prospective experiences, rehearsing safety techniques (e.g., walking with classmates during off-campus trips, asking "safe" individuals for help), and encouraging him or her to follow all summer program rules.

### **I worry that my child may be teased or bullied. How does your staff deal with teasing and bullying?**

Unfortunately, many children with ASD (as well as those without an ASD) have experienced teasing and/or bullying by other children. In our experience, for many parents and caregivers teasing/bullying and their child's reaction to teasing/bullying are constant concerns. While teasing/bullying are hard to prevent, we take many steps to decrease the likelihood of it occurring. We provide clear behavioral expectations of all students, including explicit rules against teasing and bullying and consequences for engaging in such behavior. We ask all children to report to a staff member (i.e., program administrator, resident advisor, classroom teacher) any occurrence of teasing or bullying. Additionally, our staff is aware that teasing may occur and they are expected to be sensitive to situations where it could happen.

Teasing and/or bullying that is reported or witnessed by a staff member is dealt with immediately to prevent future incidents. Based on the individual case, this may involve simply working out an agreement between two children or, for more serious occasions, removing the child who is initiated the teasing/bullying. Incidents of physical aggression and/or intimidation are grounds for immediate dismissal from summer programs.

We recommend talking with your child about reporting incidents of teasing/bullying to an adult staff member.

## Is there a way to contact my son or daughter or a staff person to find out how he/she is doing?

Like all children who attend our summer programs, we will contact parents of children with ASD in the case of an emergency. Additionally, many of our participants will have access to computer labs, which allows them the opportunity to communicate via email. You may want to set up times of the day to check and send emails to your child. There are also daily designated times when students can make personal phone calls. For emergencies, we recommend you call the Belin-Blank Center at (319) 335-6148 or (800) 336-6463 during the hours of 9:00 AM-4:30 PM. You may leave a message if contacting our office at other times. The Burge desk is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and their number is (319) 335-3091.

## My child struggles with hygiene and grooming issues. How can we best prepare him/her?

On page 20 of this packet, we have provided a general Social Story that addresses personal care issues, which we recommend you read with your student. If your student is attending a residential program personal hygiene and grooming activities are tasks that we expect him or her to do independently. Therefore, if your son or daughter struggles with these responsibilities we ask that you practice them prior to arrival and express the importance of good hygiene and self-care. Remember to send all hygiene materials (e.g., toothpaste and toothbrush, deodorant, soap) for your son or daughter to use. Creating lists of expected tasks and detailed instructions on how to complete the tasks may be helpful for learning what to do and it can be used as a reference while at summer programs. The following is a sample personal hygiene list:

## Morning Routine

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- Step 1** Use the bathroom
- Step 2** Shower time
  - Wash my hair with shampoo
  - Wash my body with soap
  - Dry off all parts of my body
- Step 3** Put on deodorant
- Step 4** Get dressed with clean clothes
- Step 5** Comb my hair
- Step 6** Clean my teeth
  - Brush my teeth
  - Rinse my teeth
  - Floss my teeth

## During the Day Reminders

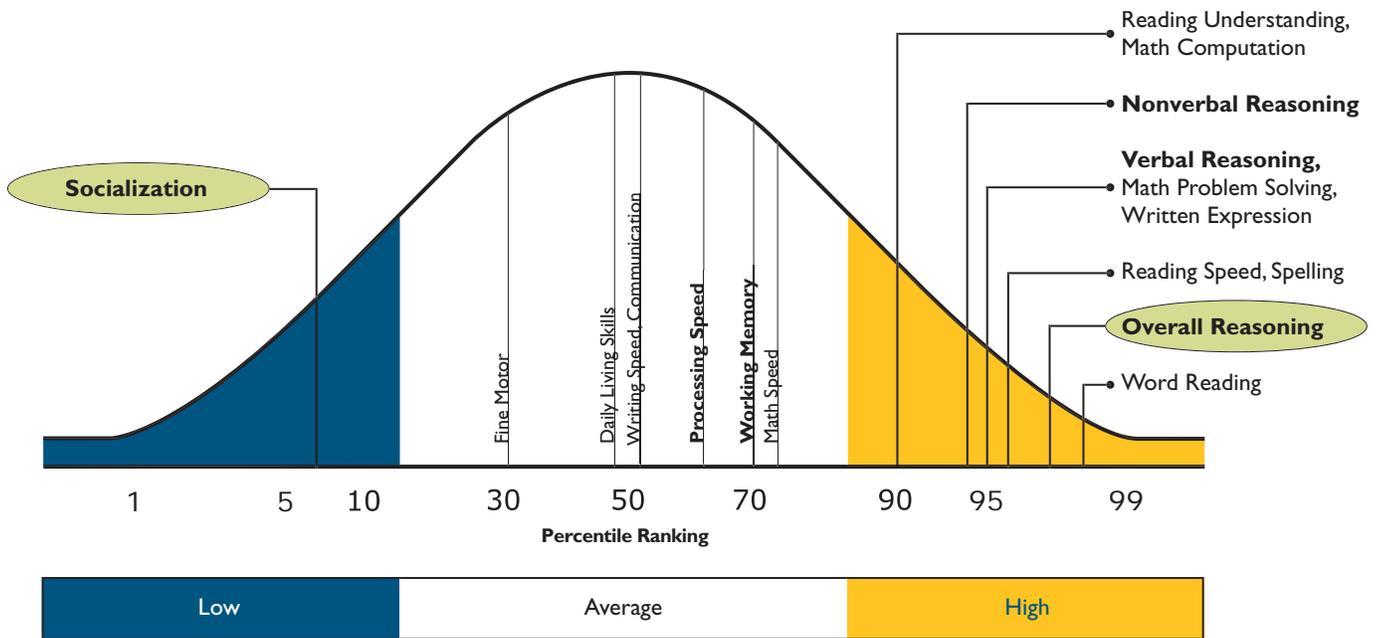
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- Wash my hands before and after meals
- Wash my hands when they are dirty
- Blow my nose when it needs to be cleaned
- Cover my mouth when I cough

## Evening Routine

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- Step 1** Use the bathroom
- Step 2** Clean my face using soap and water
- Step 3** Change into pajamas
- Step 4** Clean my teeth
  - Brush my teeth
  - Rinse my teeth
  - Floss my teeth



### Summary of Preliminary Gifted/ASD research Conducted through the ACC

*The following section summarizes recent research conducted at the ACC as a part of a larger JAVITS grant specifically examining assessment and intervention needs of twice-exceptional students. The information is included here to demonstrate that the accommodations and programming ideas suggested in PIF are based on empirical research with gifted students with ASD.*

Drs. Foley Nicpon and Assouline (in press) have summarized the results of an extensive research study involving the comprehensive assessments of 18 gifted/talented students diagnosed with ASD. Of the 18 students with ASD, 14 were in elementary school, two in middle school, and 2 in high school; their ages ranged from 6–17. Therefore, all 18 participants were administered a battery of tests that were designed to identify areas of academic and cognitive strength, identify social-emotional needs, as well as confirm or rule out a diagnosis of ASD.

The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children–Fourth Edition (WISC-IV; Wechsler, 2003) was used to measure the students’ intellectual ability. Specifically, we determined each student’s General Ability Index (GAI), which is derived from the

Verbal Comprehension Index (VCI) and the Perceptual Reasoning Index (PRI). The GAI allows the psychologist to estimate the child’s general level of ability without the effects of working memory or processing speed on performance. The average GAI for our 18 gifted/talented students with ASD was in the 97th percentile. Such a high percentile ranking is very rare, and fewer than 3% of age-matched students have such outstanding overall verbal and nonverbal abilities.

Because the GAI is comprised of the VCI and PRI, it is not surprising that these two index scores were also outstanding; the VCI average score was in the 95th percentile, and the PRI average score was in the 94th percentile. (Please note that it is an artifact of the statistical procedures used to compute the scores that results in a GAI score that is actually higher than either the VCI or the PRI.) Thus, in our sample, participants’ overall verbal and nonverbal skills were quite advanced in comparison to what would be considered “normal” or “average” for age-matched students. Conversely, participants’ average scores on the Processing Speed Index (PSI), which measures how quickly a student can process information, was in the 63rd percentile, which is considered average in comparison to age-mates. Similarly, participants’ scores on the Working Memory Index (WMI), which measures

a student's short-term memory, were again considered average (70th percentile).

Whereas it is typical for gifted students to have lower scores for the Processing Speed and Working Memory Indices (Sparrow, Pfeiffer, & Newman, 2005), the degree to which the scores from our sample differ from the Verbal Comprehension and Perceptual Reasoning Indices is not typical. Thus, for the gifted/talented child with ASD, it appears to take relatively longer for him/her to process information, and long-term auditory memory is overall stronger than short-term auditory memory. These large score discrepancies also help explain why educators, parents, and students become easily frustrated by the fact that some cognitive tasks are quite easy to learn, while others are significantly harder.

Several achievement tests were administered to determine the students' overall levels of academic achievement. These measures included tests of reading, mathematics, and written language. In our sample, students demonstrated outstanding word-reading skills (98th percentile), reading speed (96th percentile), and reading comprehension skills (90th percentile) in comparison to other students in their grade. While many students with ASD are thought to have advanced ability to decode words [the skill measured by Letter-Word Identification on the Woodcock Johnson III (WJ III)] with more average-range reading comprehension (Grigorenko, et. al., 2002; O'Connor & Hermelin, 1994), this was not the case for our sample, because reading for understanding was also quite advanced.

Overall math performance was indicative of strong computation (90th percentile) and problem-solving skills (95th percentile). Students' ability to complete simple math facts quickly was more similar to the performance of the average student for their grade (73rd percentile). This means that some gifted/talented students with ASD may not be able to demonstrate their true math knowledge under timed circumstances because their difficulties (completing basic math

quickly) would mask their talents (completing advanced math effectively).

A similar pattern unfolded on the written language tests. Here, the ability to quickly compose sentences was grade-appropriate (50th percentile), but spelling and creative writing and composition skills were advanced (96th and 95th percentiles, respectively). For many of the students with fine-motor skill difficulties, accommodations, such as dictation, were employed, which seemed to help performance. Surprisingly, however, because it has been documented that many students with ASD struggle with fine-motor skills (sometimes referred to as dysgraphia) (Rogers, Cook, & Meryl, 2005), only 29% of our students produced scores on a separate fine-motor test that were outside of what would be considered average for their age. Nevertheless, for the majority of students, fine-motor skills were well behind most of their other academic skills and abilities, creating a discrepancy that can be potentially frustrating for the educator and the student. Thus, written language appears to be another academic area where high abilities can be masked if a disability is not identified and accommodated.

To gain a sense of the students' daily functioning, the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales, Second Edition (Sparrow, Balla, & Cicchetti, 2005) was administered. The Vineland – II, which examines communication, daily living, interpersonal, and motor skills, is used in a variety of medically- and psychologically-based settings to aid in the clinical diagnosis of various disorders, including ASD, for which it is important to know how symptoms affect a student's everyday life. For the students in our sample, average scores on the Communication scale, which measures expressive, receptive, and written language skills, were considered age-typical (50th percentile), as were average scores on the Daily Living Skills scale, which measures personal, domestic, and community skills (47th percentile). Most notable was that for all 18 participants, scores on the Socialization domain were substantially lower (the average for the group was in the 6th percentile). This pattern of performance on the Vineland –II is, however, typical for students diagnosed

with ASD. That is, when there is such a notable comparative discrepancy between Socialization (very low) and Communication and Daily Living Skills (average), this discrepancy alone is a strong predictor of ASD (Gillham, Carter, Volkmar & Sparrow, 2000).

The corresponding figure provides a visual display of students' abilities, and emphasizes the significant differences in the cognitive, academic and adaptive functioning skills of these gifted/talented students with ASD.

## Conclusion to Sections I and II

Section I of PIF offered an extensive discussion of giftedness and autism spectrum disorders (ASD). It concluded with a case study that outlined the importance of accurate diagnosis and subsequent intervention for gifted students attending summer programs. In Section II, we addressed ways that parents can prepare their twice-exceptional student to attend summer gifted/talented residential and non-residential programs. We also provided examples of Social Stories that can be used as interventions, as well as answers to questions parents may have. Section II concluded with a summary of current research upon which the recommendations were based. Section III includes the appendices, an extensive list of resources, and an annotated bibliography. We hope that you will find the final section to be as informative as Sections I and II.

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Marland Report (1972) Definition of Giftedness

The Thirteen IDEA Disability Categories

Explanation of Federal Protections for Students with Disabilities

504 Plans

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

Marland Report (1972)  
Definition of Giftedness

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differential educational programs and/or services beyond those provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and the society.

Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:

1. General intellectual ability
2. Specific academic aptitude
3. Creative or productive thinking
4. Leadership ability
5. Visual and performing arts
6. Psychomotor ability\*

It can be assumed that utilization of these criteria for identification of the gifted and talented will encompass a minimum of 3% to 5% of the school population.

*\*This was later removed.*

The Thirteen IDEA  
Disability Categories

- Autism (A required category for reporting beginning in 1992)
- Deaf/Blindness
- Emotional Disturbance
- Hearing Impairment
- Mental Retardation
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- Specific Learning Disability
- Speech or language Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment
- Developmental Delay

## Explanation of Federal Protections for Students with Disabilities

Professionals who work with individuals who are diagnosed with ASD typically have clinical responsibilities (i.e., they are licensed psychologists or psychiatrists who make the diagnosis) or are educators who must address both cognitive and social-emotional needs of the student. In addressing these needs, there are two types of legal protections (Individualized Educational Programs, IEP; and 504 Plans) for individuals with disabilities, including the disability category of autism. An IEP and a 504 signify different applications in an educational setting; however, each set of protections serves as a bridge between the clinical diagnosis and the educational program.

### Explanation of Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs)

The IEP specifies for each individual the explicit disability-related needs and the way in which the educational setting must meet the needs. The IEP is a formal acknowledgment that the student's diagnosis results in an individualized need to establish the program of instruction, which includes goals and objectives that are evaluated annually to determine the effectiveness of the plan.

The plan is written and must be agreed upon by parents. There is some federal funding for services offered to children with an identified disability. An IEP is created in response to the legal requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004, and focuses on a written plan detailing intervention strategies for the student.

### Explanation of a 504 Plan

A 504 Plan refers to a section of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) that prohibits discrimination against individuals based upon his or her disabilities. It offers protections in a school setting that are similar in nature to protections provided by Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973. A 504 Plan is much less precise than an IEP. If a student has an IEP, it will supersede the 504.

In essence, the 504 specifies the accommodations that are needed to ensure that the student has access to an appropriate education. These are accommodations that may structure the environment or the mode of instruction to assure that the student has an optimal learning experience. The suggestions that were presented in Section II are more typically found in 504 Plans.

Finally, the 504 Plan does not require a written plan that is agreed to by parents. As well, 504 Plans do not include funding for the services.

## The Belin-Blank Center's Assessment and Counseling Clinic

The Assessment and Counseling Clinic (ACC) is dedicated to providing clinical services to gifted and talented students, their families, and school personnel. These services include, but are not limited to, identification of ability levels, determination of psychological and educational needs, assistance with adjustment and emotional difficulties, and outreach and consultation services.

The ACC is staffed by highly trained professionals with experience in working with gifted individuals from various backgrounds and a wide variety of concerns. The entire staff works in collaboration with Belin-Blank Center Director, Nicholas Colangelo, Ph.D., and Associate Director, Susan Assouline, Ph.D, both well-known experts in the field of gifted education. Megan Foley Nicpon, Ph.D., Supervisor of Psychological Services, and Claire Whiteman, Ph.D., serve as the ACC's licensed psychologists. The ACC staff also includes advanced-level doctoral graduate students and advanced practicum students in the School Psychology and Counseling Psychology programs.

Although the ACC has established itself as a leader in assessment and counseling for gifted individuals, more recently the ACC has developed a one-of-a-kind focus on services for and research with twice-exceptional students (i.e., gifted students who have a co-existing disability). Of particular importance are a variety of services available to students who are both intellectually gifted and have some form of autism spectrum disorder (ASD):

- **Assessment.** In addition to the ACC's psychoeducational assessments to determine levels of ability and educational achievement, Drs. Assouline and Foley Nicpon have completed extensive training in the use of the ADI-R and ADOS, which are autism spectrum diagnostic instruments considered the "gold-standard" in the field. Additional assessment in the areas of social-emotional development and

behavior also help to round out the assessment process, which culminates in a written report with interpretation of the assessment results and individualized recommendations to improve the student's social, psychological, and educational well-being.

- **Group Counseling.** Doctoral-level counseling and school psychology students who are supervised by Dr. Foley Nicpon facilitate group counseling sessions for gifted students with ASD who fall into specific age ranges. These sessions are primarily focused on developing social skills and relationships. We have applied for grant funding to determine whether we will be offering ongoing groups starting Fall 08.
- **Consultation.** The ACC offers consultation to students and their families on a variety of topics; some examples include acceleration planning, decision-making for college, and second opinions regarding diagnosis.
- **Research.** The Belin-Blank Center, in partnership with the Iowa Department of Education, was awarded a competitive federal Jacob K. Javits grant to study twice-exceptional students, including gifted students with ASD. This research is focused on establishing best practices for discovering twice-exceptional students and providing evidence-based recommendations that are relevant in schools. We also have submitted a grant to obtain funding to initiate social skills groups starting Fall 08.

The ACC accepts Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Midland's Choice, and United Behavioral Health Insurance. Qualified individuals and families may be eligible for a sliding fee scale and/or payment plan. To learn more about the clinic, please visit our website at: <http://www.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank/clinic>.

## APPENDIX C

### Diagnostic Criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

As listed in the DSM-IV, the diagnostic criteria for autistic disorder are as follows:

1. Qualitative impairment in social interactions, which could include difficulty using nonverbal behaviors, such as gesturing, during social interactions; failure to develop peer relationships at his/her developmental level; lack of spontaneously seeking to share enjoyment, interest, or achievements with others; and/or lack of social and/or emotional give and take in a relationship.
2. Qualitative impairments in communication, which could include delay in spoken language; difficulty initiating or sustaining a conversation; repetitive or idiosyncratic use of language; and/or lack of varied, spontaneous play or social imitative play that would be expected given the student's developmental level.
3. Restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviors, interests or activities, which could include encompassing preoccupations that are abnormal in their intensity or focus; inflexible adherence to nonfunctional routines or rituals; motor mannerisms, such as hand or finger flapping or twisting; and/or a preoccupation with the parts of objects.

These delays cause significant impairment in social, occupational, or other areas of functioning, and the delays in social interactions, social communication, or imaginative play need to have occurred prior to age three.

The DSM-IV-TR criteria for Asperger's Disorder, also referred to as Asperger Syndrome, are very similar:

1. Qualitative impairment in social interactions, which could include difficulty using nonverbal behaviors, such as gesturing, during social interactions; failure to develop peer relationships at his/her developmental level; lack of spontaneously seeking to share enjoyment, interest, or achievements with others; and/or lack of social and/or emotional give and take in a relationship.
2. Restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviors, interests or activities, which could include encompassing preoccupations that are abnormal in their intensity or focus; inflexible adherence to nonfunctional routines or rituals; motor mannerisms, such as hand or finger flapping or twisting; and/or a preoccupation with the parts of objects.

Again, the delays cause significant impairment in social, occupational, or other areas of functioning; however, there is no general delay in language, cognitive development, adaptive behavior (with the exception of social delays), or curiosity about the environment in childhood. ***It is important to note that Asperger's Disorder is not diagnosed if criteria are met for autism.*** Further distinctions are outlined in the DSM-IV-TR. For example, it is more common to witness an all-encompassing circumscribed interest in a student with Asperger Syndrome than it is to see stereotyped motor mannerisms, preoccupation with the parts of objects, rituals, and/or distress with changes in

the environment — these are more common in students with autism. Additionally, students with autism are more likely to be socially isolated or rigid in their social interactions than are those with Asperger Syndrome, who are typically motivated to talk to others but in a one-sided, verbose, and egocentric manner.

There are many students who have communication and social delays, as well as stereotyped behaviors and restricted interests, but who do not meet full diagnostic criteria for autism because the difficulties were not observed prior to age three. Other students may exhibit characteristics within each category but not to a level that a diagnosis of autism would be appropriate. For these children, Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) is the diagnostic term that is most appropriate, according to the DSM-IV-TR.

Currently, the assessment protocol for a gifted student who visits the Belin-Blank Center ACC in order to rule-out ASD is as follows:

### **Minimum Requirements**

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- Cognitive Ability Measure
- Achievement Measure
- Psychosocial Screening Measures
- Developmental Measures of ASD characteristics
- Adaptive Behavior Measure
- Fine-Motor Measure

### **Other Possible Assessment Tools**

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- Memory Measure(s)
- Executive Functioning Measure(s)
- Specific Psychosocial Measures (depression, anxiety screeners)
- Auditory Processing Measure(s)
- Language Measure(s)

**APPENDIX D**

**Belin-Blank Center Summer Program Optional Student Information Disclosure Sheet**



**The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development**

The University of Iowa College of Education

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Program Name \_\_\_\_\_ Dates of Attendance \_\_\_\_\_

My child has the following special needs that I would like summer program staff to know: \_\_\_\_\_

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The following strategies have been effective in dealing with my child's special needs: \_\_\_\_\_

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*I understand that I am providing this information voluntarily, and that the Belin-Blank Center and the University of Iowa rely on its accuracy. This information will be disclosed to those necessary to work effectively with the Summer Program participant. By providing this information, I understand that the disclosure carries with it the potential for unauthorized re-disclosure and once information is disclosed it may no longer be protected by federal privacy regulations. I understand that I may review this information or ask questions about its use by contacting the Belin-Blank Center Director at 600 Blank Honors Center, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242. BY signing below, I also agree to release the University of Iowa, the Belin-Blank Center, the State of Iowa, and the Board of Regents, State of Iowa, as well as each of their respective officers, directors, employees, and volunteers from liability of any kind resulting from their use of this information in connection with the Belin-Blank Center Summer Program.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Web Sites for Parents with a Child with ASD

**For General Information on Asperger Syndrome or high functioning autism****<http://info.med.yale.edu/chldstdy/autism/index.html>**

This is the Yale Developmental Disabilities Clinic/The Yale Child Study Center webpage, which offers information on AS/HFA and current research being conducted, as well as links to other informational websites.

**<http://www.autism.org/>**

This is the homepage for The Center for the Study of Autism (CSA), an organization that provides information about autism to parents and professionals, and conducts research on the efficacy of various therapeutic interventions.

**<http://www.maapservices.org>**

This is the homepage for MAAP Services for Autism and Asperger Syndrome, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing information and advice to families of individuals with some form of autism. This site includes a great information section on autism and Asperger syndrome.

**<http://www.aspergersyndrome.org>**

This is the website for the Online Asperger Syndrome Information & Support (OASIS). Founded by the mother of an AS child, this website has a wealth of information regarding AS. The site is comprehensive and includes information on recent research, upcoming conferences, legal resources, and a lot more.

**<http://www.autism-society.org>**

This is the website of the Autism Society of America, which is aimed at promoting opportunities for persons with autism spectrum disorders and their families.

**[www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)**

Autism Speaks is an organization dedicated to autism awareness and research. This website includes general information on autism, as well as a description of recent research on autism, and a calendar of public awareness and fundraising events.

**<http://www.asatonline.org/>**

The Association for Science in Autism Treatment is a non-profit organization of parents and professionals committed to improving the education, treatment, and care of people with autism. This site includes information on autism, its causes, and scientifically-validated treatments for autism.

**<http://www.aspennj.org/>**

This is the homepage for the Asperger Syndrome Education Network (ASPEN), a nonprofit group dedicated to providing education, support and advocacy to those affected by autism. This site includes descriptions of Asperger's disorder and other ASDs, as well as recommends books and articles.

**Specifically for Individuals with Asperger Syndrome or high functioning autism****<http://www.wrongplanet.net/>**

Wrong Planet provides an online community and resources for those with Asperger Syndrome.

**[http://www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/teens\\_reflection.html](http://www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/teens_reflection.html)**

On this page an AS teen shares his thoughts on Asperger Syndrome.

**<http://www.aspergia.com/>**

This is an interesting site developed by an individual with Asperger Syndrome. It provides a different perspective on Asperger Syndrome.

**<http://www.angelfire.com/amiga/aut>****<http://www.freewebs.com/assupportgroup>**

Personal websites of individuals with AS, including biographies and discussions of important aspects of life with AS.

## APPENDIX F

### Books on Asperger Syndrome/High Functioning Autism

Ariel, C. N., & Naseef, R. A. (2006). *Voices from the spectrum: Parents, grandparents, siblings, people with autism, and professionals share their wisdom*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Is a diagnosis on the autism spectrum a puzzle to be solved, or is the child with the diagnosis someone to be embraced and accepted just as she is? The editors of this collection of essays draw upon their professional and personal experiences and firmly believe that both are essential—with many lessons to be learned.

Ghaziuddin, M. (2005). *Mental health aspects of autism and Asperger syndrome*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

The aim of this book is to present an overview of the mental health aspects of autism and Asperger syndrome. It is not generally known that several types of behavioral and emotional problems occur in persons with autism spectrum disorders, of which autism and Asperger syndrome are the main categories. In fact, there is a common misperception among professionals and caregivers alike that people with these disorders do not develop additional psychiatric conditions. The purpose of this book is to dispel this myth. Although written primarily for parents and care-givers, specialists working in the field, such as psychiatrists and pediatricians, will also find it useful.

James, I. (2006). *Asperger's syndrome and high achievement: Some very remarkable people*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

This book describes the lives and personalities of twenty of the most remarkable people of the past who may well have had Asperger's syndrome (AS). Famous in the fields of art, literature and science, among others, they illustrate vividly how highly intelligent people are able to surmount some of the problems that AS causes and achieve so much—more than might have been possible without it. From Michelangelo to Andy Warhol, from Jonathan Swift to Patricia Highsmith, from Bela Bartok to Glenn Gould, from Isaac Newton to Albert Einstein, from Philip of Spain to Thomas Jefferson, these individuals show us how much the world owes to people with Asperger's syndrome and similar conditions.

Klin, A., Volkmar, F. R., & Sparrow, S. S. (2000). *Asperger syndrome*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

This book discusses what is currently known about Asperger syndrome (AS) and highlights promising leads in research and clinical practice. It sifts through the latest developments in theory and research, discussing key diagnostic and conceptual issues and reviewing what is known about behavioral features and neurobiology.

Leventhal-Belfer, L., & Coe, C. (2004). *Asperger's syndrome in young children: A developmental guide for parents and professionals*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

This book focuses on how Asperger's Syndrome (AS) presents in young children. An essential guide for parents coming to terms with their child's AS diagnosis and for the professionals who work with this age group, it is unique in answering pressing questions specific to younger children. How can parents help their child with AS to develop speech and language? What help is available at school and home? When, if at all, should a child be informed about AS?

Mesibov, G. B., Shea, V., & Adams, L. W. (2001). *Understanding Asperger syndrome and high functioning autism*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Explores the high functioning group of people within the spectrum of autism disorders. This book examines the history of high functioning autism, diagnosis of the disorder, assessment, and treatment for individuals and their families. It may be a resource for both seasoned clinicians and concerned lay persons.

Molloy, H., & Vasil, L. (2004). *Asperger syndrome, adolescence, and identity: Looking beyond the label*. New York, NY: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

This book is based on interviews with adolescents diagnosed with AS. It includes six life stories, as distinct from clinical case studies, written in collaboration with the teenagers themselves. These present an authentic look at the lives of the teenagers and how AS has shaped their growing identities.

Newport, J., Newport, M., & Dodd, J. (2007). *Mozart and the whale: An asperger's love story*. New York, NY: Touchstone Books/Simon & Schuster.

A memoir about a couple who fell in love, fell apart, and finally overcame the pressures of fame, family, and Asperger's syndrome to build a life together.

Ozonoff, S., Dawson, G., & McPartland, J. (2002). *A parent's guide to Asperger Syndrome and high-functioning autism: How to meet the challenges and help your child thrive*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

This book was written to help parents of children with Asperger syndrome or high-functioning autism (AS-HFA), or parents concerned about a child's unusual behaviors, interests, and difficulty relating to others. Psychologists explain how to work with the child's paradoxical combination of precocious talents and social difficulties to help him or her learn to engage more fully with the world.

Prior, M. (2003). *Learning and behavior problems in Asperger syndrome*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

As increasing numbers of children are diagnosed with Asperger syndrome (AS) or high-functioning autism, new questions—and new opportunities—face mental health professionals and educators. While written primarily for professionals, the volume will also be of interest to many parents.

Ritvo, E. (2006). *Understanding the nature of autism and Asperger's disorder: Forty years of clinical practice and pioneering research*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

This book traces the historical development of understanding about autism and Asperger's Disorder, from the centuries of misdiagnoses and the first recognition of the characteristics of the disorders to the author's own highly-regarded methods for making a diagnosis. Drawing on case histories from forty years' of clinical practice, he explains their basic nature, what the causes are, what is different in the brain, treatments that work (and those that don't), what a child with a diagnosis might be like when he or she grows up, and what future research may hold.

Rosaler, M. (2004). *Coping with asperger syndrome*. New York, NY: Rosen Publishing Group.

This book presents information about Asperger's syndrome, including theories concerning its cause, its various characteristics, and management of the condition.

Szatmari, P. (2004). *A mind apart: Understanding children with autism and Asperger syndrome*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

This book is structured as a collection of clinical tales that illustrates imaginatively the lives of children with autism and Asperger syndrome. This book is an attempt to lay out the foundations for understanding the minds of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs)—how they think, how they perceive things, what they can and can't do as a result. Its goal is also to change the way we "see" these children.



*The Belin-Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development empowers and serves the gifted community through exemplary leadership in programs, research, and advocacy.*



*Nurturing Potential* | *Inspiring Excellence*



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