

Use of the WISC-V for Gifted and Twice Exceptional Identification

Comprehensive, individual intelligence tests can be invaluable when used as part of a multi-faceted approach to identify gifted and twice exceptional children. The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) is a popular cognitive assessment for this purpose. This statement addresses guidelines for use of the WISC-V in the assessment of gifted and twice exceptional children.

For giftedness and high potential to be recognized, valued, and nurtured to support children from all backgrounds, respecting their asynchronies, it is essential for users of the WISC-V to be made aware of new scoring options that are more sensitive to gifted strengths, and to incorporate them into admission and planning procedures. Several concerns arise when the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Fifth Edition (WISC-V) is used in gifted program identification: (a) large score discrepancies may render the Full Scale IQ score uninterpretable, (b) an overemphasis on processing skills (especially processing speed) confounds gifted identification, and (c) structural and administration changes may pull down scores. Using new scoring options, some of which were developed with gifted identification in mind, can help to mitigate such problems. These scoring options offer more flexibility to document the diverse strengths found in gifted and twice exceptional children. This position is not intended to narrow the choice of tests in the selection of gifted students. Rather, NAGC recommends broadening the guidelines for use of the WISC-V to optimize its use with gifted and twice exceptional children, consistent with prior similar recommendations for use of the WISC-IV (NAGC, 2010; Rowe, Dandridge, Pawlusch, Thompson, & Ferrier, 2014). NAGC recommends that examiners use available WISC-V expanded and ancillary index scores that emphasize reasoning to document giftedness, clarify complex patterns of strengths and weaknesses for twice exceptional children, and ensure that gifted programs are accessible to children with disabilities.

Full Scale Score (FSIQ) May be Uninterpretable

Use of the **Full Scale IQ** score of the WISC-V for admission to gifted programs undermines the identification of many gifted students. Because gifted children—including those who are highly gifted, culturally diverse, bilingual, or twice exceptional—often show significant score discrepancies on multi-scale cognitive tests, the Full Scale score may not be an interpretable unitary construct. Reliance on this singular score, even when statistically uninterpretable, can exclude otherwise eligible gifted children from needed services. Only when the Full Scale score is **not required**, and assessment is broadened to include WISC-V expanded index scores, can a more accurate picture of the child's potential and needs emerge. Especially with twice exceptional children, the ability to document strengths and weaknesses separately is crucial for both gifted identification and acquisition of services for disabilities.

Inclusion of Processing Speed Scores Hinders Gifted identification

Gifted children, as a group, earn a broader range of scores on the WISC-V than typical learners, with distinctive highs and lows. Specifically, they may show higher mean scores on WISC-V cognitive domains (indexes) most heavily loaded for abstract reasoning (Verbal Comprehension, Visual Spatial, and Fluid Reasoning) and relatively lower mean scores on domains focusing on processing skills (Working Memory and especially Processing

Speed).¹ Weaknesses in areas less relevant to advanced academic programming (e.g., slower speed on timed paper-and-pencil tasks) may lower the Full Scale score below cutoffs for gifted identification. Use of Full Scale scores with twice exceptional children, whose discrepancies may be pronounced due to weaknesses, can block their access to gifted programs.

Structural/Administrative Changes Decrease the Probability of Gifted Identification

The WISC-V introduces important structural changes from the WISC-IV. The 16 WISC-V subtests fall into five indexes instead of four: Verbal Comprehension, Visual Spatial, Fluid Reasoning, Working Memory, and Processing Speed. Each index contains only two primary (core) subtests, instead of three, and not all indexes have supplementary subtests. Substitutions are no longer allowed within indexes to accommodate disabilities; only one substitution is permitted within the Full Scale IQ score. The use of five indexes skews the longtime balance between verbal and visual reasoning toward visual, reflected in both the Full Scale IQ score and the General Ability Index. Yet, children may often be referred for testing for giftedness based on articulate verbal expression, and such children (including those who are bilingual/multilingual) need robust measures of verbal intelligence. Administering WISC-V Verbal Comprehension supplementary subtests to utilize the broader WISC-V Verbal (Expanded Crystallized) Index meets the need for attention to this area.

Other structural changes include adjustments to discontinue criteria and to timing. Discontinue criteria on the WISC-V (compared to the WISC-IV) are shortened from four or five items missed in a row to three, except in Block Design, which changed from three items to two. Use of timing on subtests has increased on the WISC-V. Visual Puzzles and Figure Weights were added to the Visual Spatial and Fluid Reasoning core tests, and each allows only 30 seconds for the most difficult items. The addition of heavily timed subtests with short discontinue criteria may underestimate gifted abilities (Silverman, 2018, pp. 193-196).

Recommendations for Use

In comprehensive assessment of gifted and twice exceptional children, the WISC-V Full Scale IQ score should **not** be required. The Full Scale score may be disadvantageous for such students and may impede efforts to ensure that gifted classrooms, programs, and schools are accessible to children with disabilities.

Instead, NAGC recommends that any one of the following WISC-V scores (subtests in parentheses), should be acceptable for use in the selection process for gifted programs if it falls within the confidence interval of the required score for admission:

- the **Verbal (Expanded Crystallized) Index (VECI)** (SI, VC, IN and CO),
- the **Nonverbal Index (NVI)** (BD, MR, CD, FW, VP, and PS),
- the **Expanded Fluid Index (EFI)** (MR, FW, PC, and AR),
- the **General Ability Index (GAI)** (BD, SI, MR, VC and FW),
- the **Full Scale IQ Score (FSIQ)** (BD, SI, MR, DS, CD, VC, and FW), and/or
- the **Expanded General Ability Index (EGAI)** (SI, VC, IN, CO, BD, MR, FW and AR).

The **Quantitative Reasoning Index (QRI)** (FW and AR) serves as a good indicator of mathematical talent.

Information about scores is available in test manuals and WISC-V Technical Reports #1 and 5.

¹ Members of the NAGC Assessments of Giftedness Special Interest Group examined WISC-V data on 390 gifted children from 7 U.S. sites.

References

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, fifth edition*. Washington, DC: Author.

National Association for Gifted Children. (2010). *Use of the WISC-IV for gifted identification*. Retrieved from <http://www.nagc.org/about-nagc/nagc-position-statements-white-papers>

Raiford, S. E., Drozdick, L., Zhang, O., & Zhou, X. (August, 2015). *WISC-V Technical Report #1: Expanded Index Scores*. https://images.pearsonclinical.com/images/assets/WISC-V/WISC-VTechReport1_FNL_v3.pdf

Raiford, S. E. (2018). *WISC-V Technical Report #5: Expanded General Ability Index (EGAI) [report in progress]*

Rowe, E. W., Dandridge, J., Pawlusch, A., Thompson, D. F., & Ferrier, D. E. (2014). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of the WISC-IV with gifted students. *School Psychology Quarterly, 29*, 536-552.

Silverman, L. K. (2018). Assessment of giftedness. In Pfeiffer, S. J. (Ed.), *Handbook of giftedness in children: Psycho-educational theory, research, and best practices, Second Edition*. Springer Science. (pp. 183-207)

Wechsler, D. (2014). *WISC-V Administration and Scoring Manual*. Bloomington, MN: PsychCorp.

###

The [National Association for Gifted Children \(NAGC\)](http://www.nagc.org) is a membership organization whose mission is to support those who enhance the growth and development of gifted and talented children through education, advocacy, community building, and research.