



Ohio's Diverse Gifted Populations

White Paper Compiled by the Diversity Committee of  
the Ohio Association of Gifted Children

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Abstract

Although Ohio's rate of gifted identification surpasses the national average, some groups of students in grades kindergarten through 12 remain underrepresented in both identification and service. Students who are racially or ethnically diverse, come from low socioeconomic environments, reside in rural settings, are English learners, or have a coexisting disability are at highest risk of not being properly identified as gifted or receiving needed gifted services. Strategies such as universal screening and talent development programs can improve identification rates.

Professional development, interventions sensitive to the unique needs of each population, and talent development can improve educational outcomes for diverse gifted learners.

*Keywords:* gifted, culture, diverse, economically disadvantaged, English learner, race, rural, special education, twice exceptional

### Statement of Purpose

In an effort to increase understanding about recognizing and responding to characteristics and needs of students from traditionally underrepresented populations who are gifted and to create safe and culturally responsive learning environments, the Ohio Association of Gifted Children (OAGC) developed an ad hoc committee to research and compile information to address this specific Ohio Department of Education competency. While not inclusive of all underrepresented populations, the principal areas of focus included students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, low socioeconomic backgrounds, and rural areas, as well as English learners and twice-exceptional students. The information compiled by the committee was shared with attendees at the 2017 OAGC Annual Fall Conference as a preliminary summary presentation. A second review of the information was shared at the 2018 OAGC Teacher Academy and again at the 2018 OAGC Annual Fall Conference.

For research purposes, the Ohio Department of Education has created a classification system for school districts. Referred to as *typology*, it has evolved several times from the initial classification in 1996 to the most recent revision in 2013. This typology classifies Ohio school districts into eight categories, as specified in the table and depicted in the map below. These typologies are useful when referencing students from various types of school districts in Ohio.

Table 1

2013 School Districts Typology

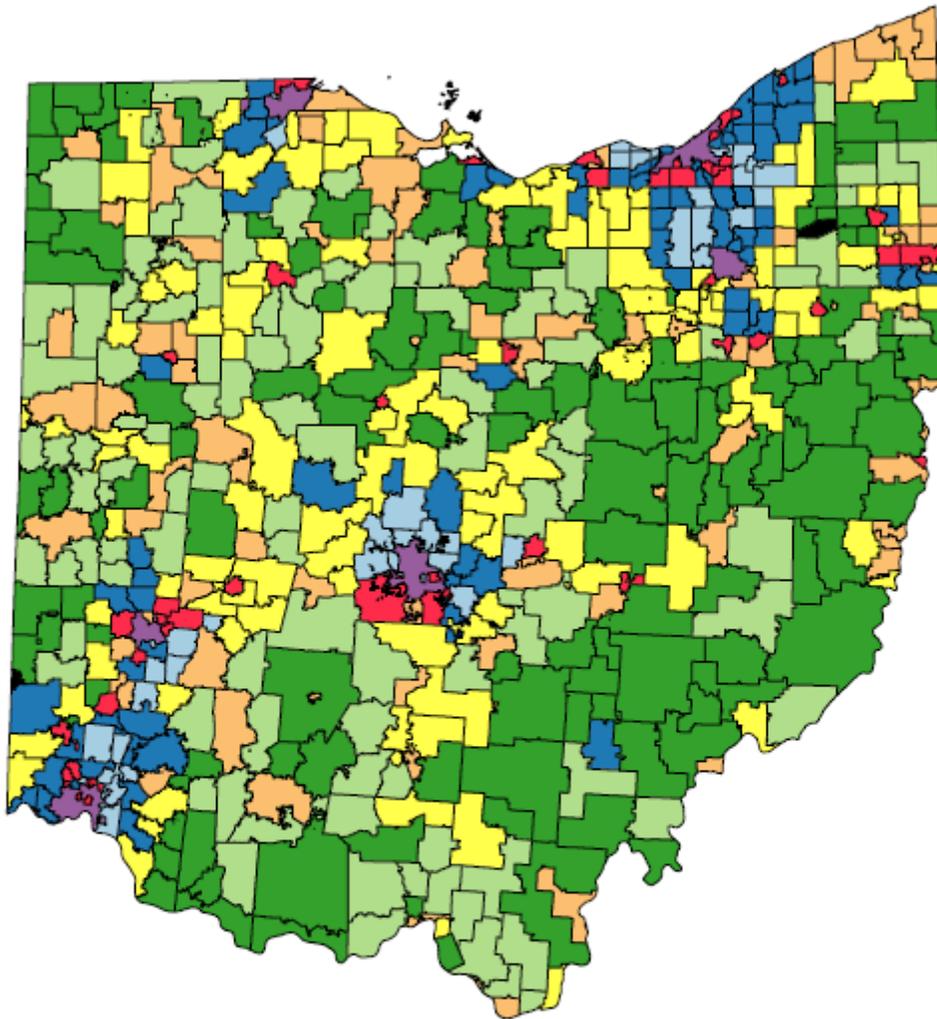
2013 Typology Code	Major Grouping	Full Descriptor	Districts Within Typology	Students Within Typology
1	Rural	Rural - High Student Poverty & Small Student Population	124	170,000
2	Rural	Rural - Average Student Poverty & Very Small Student Population	107	110,000
3	Small Town	Small Town - Low Student Poverty & Small Student Population	111	185,000
4	Small Town	Small Town - High Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size	89	200,000
5	Suburban	Suburban - Low Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size	77	320,000
6	Suburban	Suburban - Very Low Student Poverty & Large Student Population	46	240,000
7	Urban	Urban - High Student Poverty & Average Student Population	47	210,000
8	Urban	Urban - Very High Student Poverty & Very Large Student Population	8	200,000

Amended January 2015

(Ohio Department of Education, 2015)

Figure 1

## 2013 School District Typology



### Legend

<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #008000; border: 1px solid black;"></span> [1] Rural - High Student Poverty	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #0056b3; border: 1px solid black;"></span> [5] Suburban - Low Student Poverty
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #90ee90; border: 1px solid black;"></span> [2] Rural - Average Student Poverty	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #add8e6; border: 1px solid black;"></span> [6] Suburban - Very Low Student Poverty
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #ffff00; border: 1px solid black;"></span> [3] Small Town - Low Student Poverty	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #ff0000; border: 1px solid black;"></span> [7] Urban - High Student Poverty
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #ffa500; border: 1px solid black;"></span> [4] Small Town - High Student Poverty	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #800080; border: 1px solid black;"></span> [8] Urban - Very High Student Poverty

Note: The typology codes used in this legend are from the 2013 typology update.

Map does not reflect change of Canton City and Youngstown City from type 7 to type 8

(Ohio Department of Education, 2013)

## **Gifted Learners from Diverse Racial and Ethnic Backgrounds**

### **Summary of Ohio Data**

The 2015 Digest of Education Statistics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016) noted that in 2011 and 2012, there were 50,044,522 elementary and secondary school students in the United States. Of those students, 6.4 percent were identified as gifted and talented. However, only 3.6 percent of black students and only 4.6 percent of Hispanic students were identified as gifted, while 7.6 percent of white students were identified. Ohio's identification rates surpass those at the national level, and the percentage of reported identified gifted and talented students has remained fairly steady from 16.53 percent in 2014 to 16.43 percent in 2017, despite a small dip in 2015 and 2016 (Ohio Association for Gifted Children, 2017). A review of the data showed rates of identification for students of color are significantly lower than the state average, with only 10.22 percent of minority students identified as gifted in 2017.

Since there are eight large urban districts in Ohio, this discrepancy in identification rates is a troublesome revelation. Relative to the total school-aged population, black, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander students are underrepresented at alarming rates. White students are five times more likely to be identified as gifted and talented than are black students and three times more likely than are Hispanic students. As a subgroup, Asian students have a higher-than-average rate of identification, which skews the minority identification data upward.

Table 2

*Gifted Identification Status by Race in Ohio: 2010–11 vs. 2015–16* (Ohio Department of Education, 2016)

<u>Student Race</u>	<u>% ID as Gifted 2010–11</u>	<u>% ID as Gifted 2015–16</u>
American Indian or Alaskan Native	11.4	10.5
Asian	27.5	28.4
Black, non-Hispanic	5.4	3.9
Hispanic	6.7	6.2
Multiracial	11.2	10.4
Pacific Islander	8.2	6.9
White, non-Hispanic	18.3	17.4

Table 3

*Percentage of Students by Race in Ohio Receiving Gifted Education Services: 2010–11 vs. 2015–16* (Ohio Department of Education, 2016)

<u>Student Race</u>	<u>% Served 2010–11</u>	<u>% Served 2015–16</u>
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2.2	4.8
Asian	8.7	13.8
Black, non-Hispanic	1.0	1.5
Hispanic	1.2	2.4
Multiracial	2.4	4.7
Pacific Islander	2.0	3.1
White, non-Hispanic	3.5	7.7

### **Summary of Data and Research**

Minority students are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs across the United States (Frasier, 1997; Davis & Rimm, 1998; Ford, Moore, & Whiting, 2006). There are several reasons for this problem: the teacher referral process, test bias, types of testing instruments, a curriculum not sensitive to and/or congruent with diverse cultural learning references, deficit thinking, and gaps in access to opportunities to develop talent prior to assessment for identification.

Although the recently added state requirement for whole-grade testing will benefit students (Ohio Department of Education, 2017), the teacher referral process lags behind in helping identify students for gifted screening. For some, it is a lack of exposure to or knowledge of gifted criteria. Some teacher referrals may be based on myths of how gifted students act, behave, and look, with no real understanding of the characteristics of diverse gifted learners (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). Davis and Rimm (1998, p. 71) acknowledged that “there is a tendency for teachers to favor students who are cooperative, smiling, and anxious to please, and there is a likelihood these students will be perceived as gifted but may not be.” To address this problem, Ford et al. (2008) suggested professional development workshops to enhance teachers’ understanding of gifted students and their traits. Because teachers may not understand or identify with students from culturally diverse backgrounds, Davis and Rimm (1998) posited that teachers may overlook gifted students who underachieve or are atypically creative because those students do not fit the ideal that teachers have come to expect.

Teachers’ expectations of students and the gifted referral process are closely related. Students cannot benefit from the referral process if teachers have low expectations of culturally

diverse students. Such low expectations can be rooted in deficit thinking. Teachers who hold deficit ideologies may believe that students from diverse backgrounds cannot be gifted.

According to Ford and Grantham (2003), “Deficit thinking exists when educators hold negative, stereotypic, and counterproductive views about culturally diverse students and lower their expectations of these students accordingly” (p. 217). This can lead to low expectations or expectations of failure from minority students. Teachers may tacitly convey how they feel about students and their abilities and either make students feel good about their classroom experience or make them feel inadequate; it is imperative, therefore, that teachers hold high expectations for all students in their classrooms. Additionally, implicit or explicit bias reflected in the words and actions of those in authority, from policy makers to classroom teachers, create microaggressions and at times outright discrimination that results in avoidance of programs by diverse students who are gifted (Ford, 2014). Siegel et al. (2016) posited a combination of high expectations, positive personal relationships with educators, and an opportunity to exercise their voice raises the achievement levels of students of color and all students who are culturally diverse.

Another factor in the underrepresentation of minority or culturally diverse students in gifted education is test bias and the types of instruments used to identify students. Best practice suggests using more than one type of assessment to identify students (Davis & Rimm, 1998; Ford, 2011; VanTassel-Baska, 1998). Naglieri and Ford (2015) suggested using nonverbal assessments, which are less influenced by cultural bias introduced through language. By eliminating verbally laden questions, the instrument assesses students’ knowledge and does not act as a secondary verbal indicator. Sometimes, verbal assessments can adversely influence test scores of students who have poor language skills and live in poverty. Naglieri and Goldstein (2009) emphasize that the use of technically sound instruments that are free of the bias inherent

in tests reliant on language is best practice when assessing students who are culturally different or have English language deficits. In addition to using nonverbal instruments to screen and identify culturally diverse learners, districts can employ a variety of ability instruments, as well as achievement and creativity instruments, to identify culturally diverse learners.

Curriculum that is not sensitive to or congruent with diverse backgrounds can also influence underrepresentation of students of color in gifted programs. Ford (1996) and Banks (2006) shared that culturally diverse students will be more engaged and motivated in school if they see themselves acknowledged and affirmed in educational materials. This engagement can positively impact a student's overall educational experience. "A primary rationale for multicultural education is the promise it holds for engaging students and giving them opportunities to identify with, connect with, and relate to the curriculum. It is deliberate, continuous, planned, and provides systematic opportunities to avoid drive-by teaching, to make learning meaningful and relevant to students, and to give students of color perspectives to reflect the gifted educational curriculum" (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005, p. 174). A multicultural curriculum is enhanced when the teacher exhibits cultural competence and appreciates that students come to school with their own rich histories. According to the National Education Association (2017), cultural competence is an awareness of one's personal cultural identity along with an openness to that of others in the community and school as a building block to learning. These two concepts complement one another when cultural differences are seen as just that: differences and not deficits. Milner and Ford (2005) encouraged teachers to be aware of past and present issues in order to understand their students' experiences while embedding that knowledge in curriculum to help learners make personal connections.

Finally, underrepresentation may be attributable to limited enrichment experiences outside the school setting, which may negatively impact educational outcomes (Siegle et al., 2016). Early access to informal learning opportunities helps create background knowledge and skills, which later allow talent to surface. Without those opportunities, some gifted learners may remain undiscovered or may show their abilities in unexpected ways. Others may choose not to display their talents at all because of a perceived lack of value. When combined with the other factors described above, it is not surprising that so many of these gifted learners go unrecognized and unserved.

### **Summary of Strategies and Other Recommendations**

The first step in addressing issues of underrepresentation is identification. To increase the number of racially and ethnically diverse minorities identified as gifted, districts need to employ a variety of testing instruments and to offer more opportunities for students to take these tests (Davis & Rimm, 1998; Ford, 2011; VanTassel-Baska, 1998). The implementation of whole-grade testing statewide casts a wider net, offering students multiple opportunities to test and bypassing teacher referrals and potential biases that might influence such referrals (Davis & Rimm, 1998). Districts should employ a variety of assessments to capture students who are culturally diverse. School districts should use at least one nonverbal instrument to identify students who might fall into this category (Naglieri & Ford, 2015). Finally, to catch students who may move into a district between whole-grade screening opportunities, districts should ensure that all teachers engage in meaningful professional development that includes instruction about the characteristics of racially and culturally diverse gifted learners (Ford et al., 2008). This will increase the likelihood of referrals of students of color.

Second, recruitment and retention of diverse gifted learners into gifted programs can be improved by developing a scholar identity among participants (Whiting, 2009). Giftedness, at times, competes with other aspects of culturally diverse students' identity and sense of self. Expanding their view of who they are and of their abilities will allow such gifted learners to find their place in gifted services and other academic settings. Through counseling, mentorships, and other personal supports, educators should focus on building up students' academic self-confidence, self-awareness, internal locus of control, future orientation, and self-efficacy. Additionally, adults can assist students with balancing their need for achievement and need for affiliation while maintaining their racial identity.

Finally, districts and teachers can address underrepresentation of racially and ethnically diverse students in gifted services by modifying curriculum and using a variety of instructional practices (Banks, 2006; Ford, 1996; Milner & Ford, 2005; Moore et al., 2005). Once educators have reviewed policies to ensure inclusivity, they can make other modifications to further encourage diverse representation and participation in gifted education.

Specific curriculum features should include the following:

- supplementary texts that feature diverse individuals and perspectives;
- interdisciplinary connections with identifiable images to which students can relate;
- bibliotherapy and biographies to help students connect with others who have traveled difficult or precarious roads;
- “gifted education–like” learning opportunities prior to screening as a form of talent development for those students who may have had limited enrichment experiences outside of school or whose performance may regress toward the mean without further intervention; and

- tasks to cultivate spatial abilities in young students.

The following instructional practices are shown to support diverse gifted learners:

- concrete, active, and experiential learning strategies, such as simulations, projects, and case studies;
- flexible grouping based on readiness for a specific lesson or unit;
- independent study options within class and in place of classes, including credit flexibility at the secondary level;
- honors classes to complement Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and College Credit Plus course offerings;
- cluster grouping with other high-ability students, including high-ability racially and culturally diverse students; and
- extended day and summer learning opportunities to minimize regression during breaks and provide enrichment opportunities to promote high achievement. These may possibly be funded using Title I funds based on language in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

### **Gifted Learners from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds**

#### **Summary of Ohio Data**

Low socioeconomic status (SES) is most often measured by a combination of family income, education, occupation, and sometimes even social perception. As expected, students from low SES families are often affected by an inequity in access to opportunities often afforded to more privileged classes (American Psychological Association, 2018). The rates of identification of gifted students from low socioeconomic households and of students from

diverse backgrounds correlate very closely. The connection between poverty and ethnicity is relevant, as many students fall into both categories, making gifted identification even more challenging. Often referred to as a “double minority” (Gibbons, Pelchar, & Cochran, 2011), these low SES students have low rates of gifted identification. Although 16.43 percent of students are identified as gifted in Ohio, only 8.01 percent of students categorized as economically disadvantaged were identified as gifted in 2017 (Ohio Association for Gifted Children, 2017). As shown in table 4, this is a slight increase from 2016 (Ohio Department of Education, 2016), likely due to a recent requirement for universal screening for giftedness at two grade levels. However, the rate is still significantly below the state average for all students.

Table 4

Identified as Gifted 2010-11		Identified as Gifted 2015-16	
Economically Disadvantaged	Non-disadvantaged	Economically Disadvantaged	Non-disadvantaged
7%	22.7%	6.4%	22.5%

Gifted Service 2010-11		Gifted Service 2015-16	
Economically Disadvantaged	Non-disadvantaged	Economically Disadvantaged	Non-disadvantaged
1.3%	4.5%	2.7%	10%

(Ohio Department of Education, 2016)

### Summary of Data and Research

Challenges for this group of children begin early in life, before formal school experience (Plucker & Peters, 2018). Students from low SES backgrounds are less likely to have access to a literature-rich home environment or to experiences that nurture the acquisition of vocabulary and

oral development (American Psychological Association, 2018). In addition, these students have their own unique educational and learning support needs, making them very different from other identified gifted students (Gibbons et al., 2011). Low SES students are more likely to have restricted educational and cultural opportunities and resources, limiting their ability to develop potential (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018). They are also at greater risk for social-emotional concerns (VanTassel-Baska, 2018) and physical health issues (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018).

Gifted education has failed many students from culturally diverse or low socioeconomic backgrounds, as demonstrated by the underrepresentation of students from these subgroups in advanced coursework and gifted programs (Tomlinson, n.d.). Identification practices that rely on teacher referrals or achievement tests reduce the likelihood of gifted identification (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018).

Even once identified, students from low SES households are less likely to have access to rigorous coursework, such as college prep, honors, and AP coursework (Gibbons et al., 2011; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018). Even when such courses are available, students from impoverished backgrounds are often enrolled in schools with less structure and more chaos, which can hinder learning (Cross, Frazier, Kim, & Cross, 2018). Teachers are more likely to focus on deficits and remediation than on the strengths of this group, thus not recognizing traits of giftedness. These students are often first-generation college students, an additional obstacle to success, as families may not have the knowledge or resources to provide support for additional academic pursuits (Gibbons et al., 2011). It is no surprise, then, that gifted students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who are high achieving early in their academic careers often

experience significant declines in achievement over the course of their educational journey (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Plucker & Peters, 2018).

Peer group influence is equally as and sometimes even more powerful than family and school influence. These students may be marginalized by classmates who come from higher-income backgrounds or excluded by peers of similar income status due to gifted behaviors and abilities (VanTassel-Baska, 2018). As a result, they may avoid participation in advanced coursework, further hindering their success.

### **Summary of Strategies and Other Recommendations**

Identification is the first step to improving outcomes for gifted learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of the recommendations regarding identification for culturally diverse populations apply to students from low socioeconomic status homes, as well. Universal screening increases opportunities for finding gifted learners from impoverished backgrounds (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Plucker & Peters, 2018). Though not permitted in Ohio, the use of local norms also allows a greater percentage of students from low-income backgrounds to be included in gifted programming (Plucker & Peters, 2018). Finally, talent development programs that provide enriched experiences early in students' academic careers can also support the development of skills related to areas of giftedness, thus increasing the likelihood of eventual gifted identification (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018).

Curriculum design is also important when recruiting and retaining students from poverty in gifted programs. As these learners often demonstrate their giftedness in day-to-day problem solving, offering a curriculum rich in real world problem-based learning allows students to demonstrate and develop their talents (VanTassel-Baska, 2018). While scaffolds for deficits are

needed, the focus of curriculum should be on exercising and enhancing strengths with higher-level thinking and creativity in order to sustain motivation and build a sense of self-efficacy. Curriculum should also include social-emotional supports to help students develop the skills needed to build a bridge from K–12 learning to higher education when the time comes (Plucker & Peters, 2018; VanTassel-Baska, 2018).

Instructional settings should provide sustained opportunities for high-ability students to work together (Plucker & Peters, 2018; VanTassel-Baska, 2018). This practice provides both social-emotional and academic benefits through positive identity development and peer motivation, along with a greater likelihood of access to advanced thinking within the curriculum.

Strategies and other recommendations to promote success include the following:

- Provide opportunities to support early identification and academic support to ensure student success early in formal educational life.
- Incorporate screening and assessment instruments that include options to identify students from underrepresented populations.
- Provide extensive and ongoing professional development for educational staff to address working not just with bright or gifted students from low socioeconomic backgrounds but with all students to better recognize gifted characteristics.
- Foster a collaborative approach—families, schools, and community supports all working together toward the same goal of ensuring success for this vulnerable group of students.
- Provide and encourage peer group support to ensure that students thrive in gifted or accelerated programming.
- Incorporate real-world problem solving into gifted curriculum.

- Foster participation in extracurricular opportunities; necessary resources, such as transportation, should be provided to ensure that students with financial needs can participate.
- Use adult educational mentors to provide support and advocacy.
- Maintain a focus on changes in students' home environments and provide opportunities to nurture giftedness rather than focus on deficits and remediation.

### **Gifted English Learners**

#### **Summary of Ohio Data**

English language learners are students for whom English is not the primary language. Ohio's English learners may be immigrants, refugees, or born in the United States. Some students come to Ohio having little or no formal education. Some may know no English at all, while others may be almost bilingual. Several terms have been applied to these students: limited English proficient, English as a second language, and most recently, English learners.

Ohio's foreign-born population has grown by nearly 20 percent since 2000 and its growth is outpacing that of the nation as a whole (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). In Ohio, approximately 4 percent of students are categorized as limited English proficient. Predominant languages include Spanish, Somali, and Arabic, though the mix of languages varies among school districts. While the greatest numbers of English learners are found in Ohio's urban centers, rates are increasing in adjacent suburbs, as well.

School districts are required to screen students (preschool through grade 12) who speak another language within ten days of enrollment to determine eligibility for English learner services (Ohio Department of Education, 2018a). Schools are legally required to provide English

language services for students who have recently arrived in the United States (Ohio Department of Education, 2014a). In Ohio, these services range from bilingual immersion programs to small group pull-out or push-in services.

Ohio is a member of ELPA21, a consortium of seven states that share resources for producing assessments that measure English language proficiency (Ohio Department of Education, 2018b). ELPA stands for English Language Proficiency Assessment. The ELPA is administered annually to Ohio's English learners to measure English language acquisition in four domains: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The assessment measures English acquisition relative to the English Language Proficiency Standards adopted by Ohio. The standards are based on the language acquisition critical to college and career readiness. The ELPA used to be paper and pencil but is now online. Students who have attained English proficiency based on the ELPA are eligible to exit English learner services.

### **Summary of Data and Research**

It is often difficult to determine whether an English learner may be gifted. Teachers tend to focus on the deficits experienced by an English learner and to overlook evidence of giftedness (Ford et al., 2008). Most assessments rely heavily on the use of language, which includes both vocabulary and cultural experiences unfamiliar to many English learners (Harris, Rapp, Martinez, & Plucker, 2007). Because of this, many coordinators scrutinize nonverbal components of assessments, such as the Cognitive Abilities Test, and look for students whose scores in the nonverbal sections are much higher than those in the other sections. Additionally, English learner families may be unfamiliar with why assessments are given or with the concept of gifted services because of a familiarity with either their own, dissimilar native school systems

or because of unfamiliarity with U.S. educational systems. In addition, there may be higher educational expectations for boys, a desire for conformity that does not recognize special education needs at either end of the spectrum, or a total lack of knowledge of educational systems because of refugee status or other extenuating circumstances.

Even when identified, gifted English learners may not participate in available gifted programs. Families may struggle to navigate paperwork or procedures required for placement. More disturbingly, students may feel pressure to abandon their native language or culture in order to participate in the programs, or they may lack real connection to adults who can support and encourage them (Shaunessy, McHatton, Hughes, Brice, & Ratliff, 2007). Biases held by teachers may be off-putting. Lack of involvement in such programs may lead to self-doubt and further reduce the likelihood of future program enrollment.

### **Summary of Strategies and Other Recommendations**

It is important for school districts to provide professional development in gifted education so that educators can become more attuned to English learner students who exhibit gifted characteristics, such as creative thinking, rapid acquisition of English language skills, and problem-solving abilities (Brulles, Castellano, & Laing, 2011; Ford et al., 2008). Teachers who lack a fundamental understanding of how to identify gifted students are doubly challenged when looking for an English learner who may be gifted. Without training in identifying both gifted students and English learners, teachers may be left to their own resources, or they may simply reflect on their own experiences. This professional development should include strategies and recommendations for meeting the needs of these students along with cultural awareness training to increase overall understanding of the specific needs of English learners. Designing

professional development for teachers in gifted education and English learners underscores a common challenge: teachers rarely have opportunities to see students in multiple settings.

Furthermore, teachers seldom have opportunities either to collaborate or to learn from colleagues outside their own areas of expertise. Increased communication among educator groups during and following professional development is critical to fostering greater understanding of diverse student groups (Harris et al., 2007).

Identification practices must be inclusive of English learners. Universal screening that is inclusive of English learners automatically increases opportunities for identification. While it is not permissible in Ohio to use subscores or nontest measures, considering a variety of evidence—including observations in a variety of settings, classroom performance, portfolios, and nonverbal and quantitative subscores—can assist in the identification of English learners who are gifted (Harris et al., 2007). Further, districts should consider use of nonverbal instruments to reduce the cultural bias that comes with reliance on language (Ford et al., 2008).

Finding students who need special programs can be daunting. As with most special education programs, early identification is critical to front-loading interventions to increase student achievement at an earlier time and rate. Similarly, front-loading enrichment and advanced content can have additional benefits for students who do not otherwise have access to those opportunities (Briggs, Reis, & Sullivan, 2008; Ford et al., 2008). Teachers commonly fail to understand why an English learner would need enrichment prior to gaining proficiency in the English language. However, that student needs the same access to higher-level content as a gifted native English speaker.

Many teachers are unaware that English learner programs, while they focus on English language acquisition, do not exclude the student's own native or home language. A curriculum

that honors the native culture and language, even allowing for bilingualism, may encourage participation in such programs and increase self-efficacy (Shaunessy et al., 2007).

Equally important is building parent and school connections with English learner families (Briggs et al., 2008). Districts that embrace diverse cultures often have parent nights where these cultures may be shared for the benefit of all. Parent engagement is critical to student success at school. Teachers who can enlist the support of English learner parents often see those students acquire English proficiency at faster rates. Communities that offer classes or resources for English learners help support the efforts of the schools.

Just as all students benefit from multiple instructional strategies, universal modifications, and accommodations, English learners also benefit from these recommendations. Teachers who adapt their lessons for multiple cultures and use sufficient visual manipulatives will often be successful with English learners. Teachers need to be sensitive to how culture is used in lessons. As well, teachers need to help convey that TV and Hollywood are often not realistic depictions of the dominant culture.

Strategies and other recommendations to ensure success include the following:

- opportunities to promote early identification and academic support to ensure student success early in the formal educational life of the students;
- screening and assessment instruments that incorporate options to identify students from underrepresented populations;
- extensive and ongoing professional development for educational staff to address working with English learners who may be gifted;
- focus on changes in students' home environments and opportunities to nurture giftedness versus focus on deficits and remediation; and

- curriculum and classroom environments that honor diverse cultures and allow for bilingualism.

### **Rural Gifted Learners**

What exactly is rural? Although most people have a broad understanding of the term, defining exactly what constitutes a rural area can be challenging. In fact, the term is often defined by what it is not rather than what it is. For example, according to the United States Department of Commerce (2016), the Census Bureau identified two types of urban geography: (1) urbanized areas of 50,000 or more people and (2) urban clusters of at least 2,500 but less than 50,000 people. Rural encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area. Rural, in this context, simply means not urban. The Ohio Department of Education (2015) divides districts into four categories; urban, suburban, small town, and rural. Within this system, 231 school districts serving approximately 280,000 students are classified as rural. In both cases, the term rural indicates an area with relatively less population density compared to other, better defined areas.

### **Summary of Data and Research**

Rural areas are culturally and economically diverse, making it challenging to create definitions or strategies that will work for all of them. For example, Lawrence (2009) noted, “gifted students in stable farming communities face different challenges than those living on the edge of suburban encroachment, in extremely isolated areas, or places in which extractive resource development has ravaged the land” (p. 464). It can be difficult to generalize about rural areas because of the diversity of the communities in this category.

Rural areas are also diverse in their approach to the problem of educating students in thinly populated areas. One key variable mentioned by Cross and Dixon (1998) is school population. Large consolidated high schools may serve thousands of students who are transported long distances, while other schools may have small enrollments drawn from a single community, though they may still be transported farther than urban or suburban students. Grade configurations may differ from their suburban and urban counterparts. In some places, multi-age classrooms are the norm, as there are not enough students to form full classes of only one grade level.

One thing that rural areas do seem to share is a set of common values. Stambaugh and Wood (2015) explained that people living in rural areas are more likely to have a strong sense of place, especially in agricultural communities, and may be more connected to the land around them than their urban and suburban counterparts. Family, religious, and community ties are especially strong in rural areas, as is concern for tradition. Hard work and self-reliance are highly valued, while status and wealth are less important. These cultural traits and tendencies can have both positive and negative interactions with education in general and with gifted education in particular. Several issues contribute to both the underachievement and underrepresentation of gifted students from rural settings. One major factor is poverty. Schaefer, Mattingly, and Johnson (2016) reported that child poverty is more prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas: 77 percent of counties experiencing high child poverty lie outside of urban areas. As a result, gifted students in rural areas often face challenges similar to those of students from low socioeconomic areas.

In areas relatively distant from population centers, schools may have small enrollment numbers. Since gifted students are only a small percentage of this already low number, there may be only one student in a given grade who has been identified as gifted. Programs and courses for

gifted students are not practical for some rural districts from a staffing and scheduling standpoint, so gifted students' academic needs go unmet. For example, the opportunity to take Advanced Placement courses in high school is a common service for students with gifts and talents and other high-achieving students. However, Gagnon and Mattingly (2016) found that rural schools are much less likely to offer any AP courses, especially if the rural district is remote, small, or poor. In rural districts that do offer these courses, students were less successful than their suburban peers; of students tested, 45.5 percent of suburban students enrolled in an AP course passed at least one AP exam, while only 31.8 percent of enrolled rural students passed at least one exam. Lacking the types of early service options and rigorous coursework available to suburban peers, rural students struggle to make up ground later in the secondary years.

Offering appropriate curriculum to help young gifted students flourish in the classroom is a challenge to rural teachers. Rural districts often have limited financial resources with which to provide specialized services. This lack of resources also affects teacher training. According to Stambaugh and Wood (2015), only 27 percent of rural schools offer professional development in any area to their teachers, compared to 40 percent of districts in urban and suburban areas. In addition, fewer highly qualified teachers are available in rural districts. These districts are more likely to have first-year teachers or teachers teaching outside their subject area. This may explain why Stambaugh and Wood (2015) also found that rural gifted students report having less challenging courses than did urban and suburban gifted students.

As a result, many rural districts do not employ any professionals licensed in the area of gifted education, making it extremely unlikely that teachers in these districts have knowledge of characteristics of gifted students, especially those less common characteristics exhibited by children from poverty. Those who do have this training and awareness are likely to be the only

gifted education professional in the entire district (Azano, Callahan, Misset, & Brunner, 2014). This person is often faced with time constraints, such as large caseloads, splitting time in multiple school buildings, and vast geographical distances between buildings. Therefore, they have little time to enact an identification reform plan. When these factors are considered, it is no surprise that students from rural areas are underidentified.

Although gifted students in rural areas often develop talents through extracurricular activities such as 4-H, they may find it difficult to access some resources that urban and suburban students enjoy (Stambaugh & Wood, 2015). Geographic isolation or limited district resources may curtail their opportunities to participate in programs geared toward gifted students' intellectual needs.

Geographic isolation has other implications, as well. In Ohio, gifted identification relies on standardized tests, which may be biased against students from rural areas. Examples and items on some standardized tests may reference cultural experiences more common in suburban and urban life, which puts students in rural areas at a disadvantage (Lewis, 1999). Thus, relying solely on standardized tests to determine giftedness may unfairly penalize students in rural areas for cultural, rather than academic, differences. According to Stambaugh and Wood (2015), certain types of evaluation are even more likely to penalize rural students. They found that checklists and nonverbal tests identify students less often than individual ability and achievement tests. Rural students are also more likely to score in the gifted range on only some subtests, with average ability in other areas.

Rural cultural values can provide both challenges and opportunities for gifted education. Stambaugh and Wood (2015) found that traditional values of self-reliance and hard work, as well as strong interpersonal and community relationships, can support gifted students' efforts by

helping them persevere and build relationships with mentors. On the other hand, suspicion of outsiders, reluctance to leave the community to pursue intellectual careers, ties to the land, and preference for tradition may keep both students and districts from choosing to invest in gifted services.

### **Summary of Strategies and Other Recommendations**

Siegel et al. (2016) recommended using a talent development process to increase the identification of students from underrepresented populations, including those in rural areas. In this process, a district establishes criteria to determine which students would benefit from emergent talent experiences. These students then participate in learning activities specifically designed to develop abilities to a level where formal gifted identification could occur.

Gifted students in rural areas have some advantages that those in more densely populated areas may not. Stambaugh and Wood (2015) reported that people often know everyone in smaller communities and that those communities are tightly knit. This means that adult mentors and role models can be particularly helpful in supporting the social and emotional needs of gifted students and that community partnerships may be especially effective (VanTassel-Baska & Hubbard, 2016).

These students are also likely to have a strong work ethic and the ability to manage independent work, an advantage for distance learning or independent study where students have limited access to adults with the content knowledge to help them. Smaller districts without the resources or staffing to provide specialized gifted classrooms can tap into this student work ethic by offering virtual learning opportunities or facilitating academic acceleration in a single subject

or by a whole grade level to provide advanced learning opportunities to students (VanTassel-Baska & Hubbard, 2016).

On the other hand, rural cultural values may present challenges to gifted students as well as to districts that want to provide services. One important issue is the tendency for gifted programs to focus on higher education and commercial success. These goals may not align with the goals of a student who values being close to family and who may associate “hard work” with physical labor. Programs should provide opportunities that both align with community priorities and provide experiences outside the community, supporting community values while offering new choices to talented students. An approach that combines advanced learning opportunities, enrichment, lessons on entrepreneurial thinking, and meaningful relationships and guidance can help students learn to use their interests and skills to honor their values and contribute to their community in a way that is meaningful to each specific child (Paul & Seward, 2016).

Finally, teacher training is imperative. Since the recommended practice of cluster grouping may not always result in a meaningful cluster size in small school districts, teacher training is paramount to give any hope of appropriate instruction for a gifted learner. The focus of that training should be on the nature and needs of gifted learners and on strategies for individualizing curriculum and instruction for students with exceptional needs (Davalos & Griffin, 1999; VanTassel-Baska & Hubbard, 2016). Careful selection of teachers to fill this role is critical, as the teacher must be motivated to carry out such individualization and be comfortable with allowing the student to have more ownership and direction over his or her learning.

Strategies and other recommendations to ensure success include the following:

- Addressing test bias. Implement a talent development model for students who would benefit from emergent experiences in order to raise the level of identification. Administer tests that are less biased toward rural students.
- Addressing geographic isolation. Take full advantage of digital opportunities, including online AP and other courses aimed at gifted students.
- Taking full advantage of the resources within the rural community. Set up mentorships and business partnerships and incorporate the student's extracurricular interests into the school day.
- Addressing cultural resistance. Focus on student need rather than student talent. Avoid setting up a conflict between the students' desire to stay in the community and their academic and career goals. Emphasize ways that the students' talents can be an asset to the community.
- Addressing low population density. Create services that take advantage of lower populations, such as cluster grouping and acceleration. Use tiered assignments, independent study, and other forms of differentiation even when official service cannot be offered to improve the student's performance.
- Addressing teacher training gaps. Provide training through online modules or in small cohorts. Partner with other districts to create a community of support for gifted teachers.
- Addressing poverty and diversity. Gifted specialists who hope to work in rural areas should not only understand the special characteristics of rural students but also be familiar with the needs of other diverse populations, particularly students living in poverty and those from diverse cultural backgrounds.

### **Twice-Exceptional Learners**

Twice-exceptional learners, or 2E students, are defined as having a gifted designation according to state guidelines and federal definitions. These students may be exceptional in the areas of academics, cognitive ability, creativity, and superior artistic talents. At the same time, these students may qualify for a special education designation under federal law. This special education designation may include an intellectual disability, a specific learning disability, emotional disturbances, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, hearing impairments, visual impairments, multiple disabilities, speech or language impairments, other health impairment (major or minor), orthopedic impairment, or traumatic brain injury (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004).

### **Summary of Ohio Data**

In Ohio, statistics indicate that only .4 percent of the total school enrollment in 2012–2013 were twice-exceptional students (Ohio Department of Education, 2014b). The Ohio Department of Education also indicated in the same report that among those students, the top three disability categories were specific learning disabilities, other health impairment (minor), and speech or language impairments. Students with disabilities were most likely to be identified as gifted in the area of math. Twice-exceptional students were also more likely to be white, male, and come from nondisadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. This suggests that identification of twice-exceptional students is likely hindered by compounding demographic factors described previously in this paper.

### **Summary of Data and Research**

The greatest challenge with twice-exceptional learners is identifying them. Webb et al. (2016) concluded that the competing existence and needs of both giftedness and a disability within the same individual may cause both exceptionalities to be masked. In other cases, one exceptionality may overpower and hide the other, resulting in only one need being met by any services provided. Educators untrained in the presentation of dual exceptionality may make inaccurate assumptions about a twice-exceptional child's abilities (Barnard-Brak, Johnsen, Hannig, & Wei, 2015). For example, a student identified as gifted but who does not achieve due to an undiagnosed disability may be considered lazy or unmotivated when not producing work at the level expected of a gifted learner. A student with a diagnosed disability may not even be considered for referral for testing for giftedness because of a focus on weaknesses in the special education services or beliefs that students with disabilities cannot also be gifted.

Even for experienced gifted educators, finding twice-exceptional students can be daunting. Common issues with identification include the processing speed of students when being assessed, either individually or in groups. The slower processing speed may impact the final score used for identification purposes (Barnard-Brak, Johnsen, Hannig, & Wei, 2015). Sometimes behavioral problems can inhibit learning or assessment. For example, if a student refuses to attend or sit through an assessment, it is very difficult to capture a valid result. Likewise, students considered for potential identification of giftedness or disability through a response to intervention (RTI) process may be achieving at the average performance level and be disregarded for further testing. Webb et al. (2016) also noted that with limited funding, schools are hard-pressed to meet the needs of all of their special education students. So, a twice-

exceptional gifted child on track for basic proficiency will rarely be regarded as a candidate for special education intervention.

Other specific challenges may be present, depending on the nature of the coexisting disability (Webb et al., 2016). Students with attention deficit disorder or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder may struggle with sustaining focus long enough to gain background information needed to achieve at levels appropriate for a gifted learner. A learner with oppositional defiant disorder or other behavioral disorder may engage in behaviors that distract from learning. Students on the autism spectrum may become singularly focused on a particular topic to the exclusion of others presented during the school day. Children with orthopedic limitations may have poor handwriting, making it difficult for them to produce written work. Learners with traumatic brain injuries may have delays in processing speed that lead to incomplete classwork during limited class times or to frustration and low self-esteem on the part of the student when they need a longer time than equally gifted classmates. These are just a few of the challenges that can be faced by twice-exceptional learners.

Familial frustrations are common with the parents of twice-exceptional children (Dare & Nowicki, 2015). Parents are often the first to see discrepancies in their child's ability and their outcomes in school. However, parents may find it a struggle to communicate that observation with their child's school and to have their findings acknowledged (Besnoy et al., 2015). Parents may also face additional challenges at home as their twice-exceptional learner displays frustration, anger, and other emotional distress after struggling through the school day (Dare & Nowicki, 2015). Families may need to seek outside supports in the form of assessment for diagnostic purposes, tutoring, or counseling. For families from low socioeconomic backgrounds, this can be challenging or even impossible to pursue.

### **Summary of Strategies and Other Recommendations**

When looking for the best strategies to use with twice-exceptional students, it is often profitable to begin by looking for a pattern of strengths and relative deficits. These may be observed through a careful RTI review process or by examining intraindividual discrepancies in test scores (Bernard-Brak et al., 2015). This will help all involved recognize when further testing is required. It also will help educators begin to focus on strengths as a means of supporting the disability and nurturing giftedness. The nature of the disability should certainly be considered, as that will determine the most appropriate modifications and accommodations for a particular student. But using a strengths-based approach is critical to ensure giftedness is not ignored.

Clark (2012) recommends that collaboration is needed between teachers of children with disabilities and teachers of gifted children. Resources from both programs should be made available to the student. Typically, educators should focus on a student's strengths and then examine compensation strategies for addressing weaknesses. Collaboration with parents will also give educators a fuller picture of a twice-exceptional learner's capabilities (Dare & Nowicki, 2015).

Strategies effective with the general gifted population can be equally effective with students who are twice exceptional (Willard-Holt, Weber, Morrison, & Horgan, 2013). Tapping into student interests and offering choices in the delivery of content and display of knowledge both increase motivation and provide opportunities for students to shine. Modified pacing accommodates a need for extra time or a need for acceleration as appropriate, and instruction on specific compensation strategies can equip students to thrive. Finally, using collaborative learning in a purposeful manner with a variety of groupings based on ability and the incorporation of individual accountability promote student achievement.

Strategies and other recommendations to ensure success include the following:

- carefully examining discrepancies among subtest scores of formal intelligence and achievement assessments;
- following required accommodations and modifications on the individual education plan but not making more accommodations than necessary;
- incorporating multiple modalities within learning experiences to provide greater access to new content; and
- providing professional development related to both giftedness and special education to classroom teachers, gifted and special education intervention specialists, school psychologists, and counselors.

### **Summary and Next Steps for Practitioners**

Not surprisingly, many of the challenges that each of these subgroups experiences are similar. These students are consistently overlooked in both identification and programming options and are at extreme risk for being unintentionally ignored as they progress through the educational system. While varied identification measures can be both costly and time consuming, it is imperative that appropriate measures be used to identify students from all unique subgroups. Program options should meet the needs of all students and should not be designed to address the range of needs of gifted learners from all diverse populations.

While awareness is increasing, numbers of gifted students from all subgroups of underrepresented populations continue to be a challenge across the state, as evidenced by the recent release of the district report cards (Ohio Association for Gifted Children, 2018). Students in districts classified as rural, urban, or high poverty are less likely to be identified as gifted or to

participate in services as indicated by the gifted input points in table 5 below. These students also have, on average, lower rates of academic growth, as shown by gifted value-added indices, and lower performance on state tests, as indicated by the gifted performance index.

Table 5

<b>2017-2018 Gifted Performance Indicator Breakdown by District Typology</b>			
	<b>Gifted Value- Added</b>	<b>Gifted Performance Index</b>	<b>Gifted Input Points</b>
<b>Type 1</b>	.44	113.42	50.33
<b>Type 2</b>	1.11	114.21	47.58
<b>Type 3</b>	1.30	115.40	56.16
<b>Type 4</b>	.54	113.78	52.03
<b>Type 5</b>	3.25	115.40	61.29
<b>Type 6</b>	7.87	117.59	69.80
<b>Type 7</b>	-.88	110.48	49.26
<b>Type 8</b>	-4.95	106.93	53.81
<b>State Average</b>	<b>1.58</b>	<b>114.24</b>	<b>53.81</b>

(Ohio Association for Gifted Children, 2018)

In summary, common strategies to ensure that the needs of students in this population are not overlooked include the following:

- ongoing high-quality professional development (HQPD) for staff addressing the characteristics and needs of underrepresented gifted populations;
- district policy development to enhance and formalize gifted identification and service options addressing needs of underrepresented gifted populations;

- early identification and program opportunities, including talent development programs, for gifted students targeting underrepresented populations;
- using a variety of screening and identification instruments to cast a wide net through universal screening procedures;
- fostering student and family relationships to encourage advanced educational opportunities;
- offering extracurricular opportunities to foster peer group support and success in academics;
- providing necessary resources, including transportation, to ensure that students with financial needs can participate fully in school-day and afterschool options; and
- cognizant and deliberate grouping of students to nurture peer group support.

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