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Equity in Gifted and Talent Development

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Equity in Gifted Services and Talent Development

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of this Study

Children from low income or racial/ethnic minority families are underrepresented in United States gifted and talented programs. Students served in gifted and talented programs in U.S. schools are predominantly from white, Asian, and higher-income families (Peters, 2016). Talented low-income students are not achieving to their full potential. Despite being academically talented, these students fall out of high-achieving groups over the course of their K-12 education. Very few of these students graduate from college or go on to graduate school (Wai & Worrell, 2016). All students deserve equitable access to the highest quality of learning to maximize student potential.

Explanation

Cross (2013) used a baseball metaphor to illustrate the opportunities of gifted students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. It is an efficient way to compare similarities and differences of students. Cross found most of the students who pay to attend his programs at the Center for Gifted Education came from financially wealthy families. The mean income was more than $100,000 and the modal range income was $100,000 to $150,000. Some schools work to provide funding for poor students to attend. At William and Mary, where Cross teaches and directs, they are fortunate to obtain funding from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation to run a program for financially disadvantaged students of high ability. They call it Camp Launch. Here are a few baseball terms Cross used:

- Baseball = life
- getting home = being successful

- potentially gifted = students from impoverished backgrounds who do not tend to score as highly on standardized tests of achievement but can develop academically when provided appropriate opportunities

Scenario

Several gifted students are going to play baseball. While they all have similar IQ scores, they began the game in the following manner. The first example of a successful student is one who does well in school and attends summer programs from various Universities. He puts down his bat and walks to third base. He begins there because of all the advantages he enjoys; he is White, male, and wealthy. He enjoys every advantage, including a fine school experience costing $40,000 a year where he rubs elbows with children of the socially elite of the United States including future senators, judges, and presidents. He has had tutors as needed. His parents have paid hundreds of dollars for SAT prep courses. What does it take for this student to get home from third base? This will not be difficult, getting home from third requires little to no effort on the part of our wealthiest gifted students.

The second batter begins at first base. He or she comes from a low-middle- to upper-middle-class background. He or she speaks English as a first language. This student received adequate or better educational opportunities including access to AP, IB, or Honors courses. This student had books to read at home and was taken to museums and libraries. She or he may have attended a summer program. This student has also been able to participate in the district's gifted/talented program. To get home, she or he can steal a base, rely on the next batter for help, or the pitcher can make an error throwing the ball, or the catcher, receiving the ball. In other words, this batter is in good place to move forward, especially with the help of others. It takes

longer and sometimes they get left on base (i.e., a school situation that does not help them develop).

The third student is financially poor and/or speaks English as a second language. Whether they have a bat is contingent on whether they have access to appropriate instruction, and if appropriate, ELL instruction. If they do, they will receive a bat of any size. It might be way too large, too small, or even a whiffle ball bat. This potentially gifted student (achievement will be dropping the longer they are in school without appropriate adaptations being made) must get to first base virtually alone. She can get a base hit, or get hit by a ball, or someone could make an error. However, the error could go against her and she could lose her chance at bat. For example, not knowing all the rules of the game, she steps out of the batter's box with her swing. She is called out by the umpire. This could be an example of not knowing the nuances about rules in school and being suspended for an offense. Should she get to first base, appropriate educational services will greatly influence her chances of getting further in the game. The lack of opportunities to develop baseball skills outside the diamond will also influence her chances of success. She might hear the infielder yelling, "Easy out!" when she comes to the plate, or in school terms think that she does not deserve to be in the gifted program. These types of comments have a negative impact on self-concept, lessening the likelihood that she will persevere. Imagine how many of the potentially gifted students would score a run if they had all the same advantages of those who start the game on third base (Cross, 2013). Educators need to come to grips with their own privilege so they can successfully help those with less privilege. Developing talent is in everyone's best interest. All children are possible future leaders in this country.

Significance of the Study

This is an area I want to support in my school district as an academic coach and district leader. I teach, coach, and lead in the St. Cloud School District. District 742 has made changes in gifted services and talent development in recent years. During the 2014-15 school year, I served as a representative on the talent development task force for District 742. The group consisted of district leaders, teachers from various grade levels, parents, principals, and community members. Our goal was to create a vision for talent development in District 742. We read articles, held discussions, reviewed other Minnesota district gifted and talented programs, and participated in a book group.

Statement of the Problem

After participating on this task force, it was clear that St. Cloud District 742 needed to move forward to make changes in the way they were implementing gifted services and talent development. The task force came to consensus that talent development in District 742 should strive to have an equitable access, needs-oriented program for students who have demonstrated gifted and talented traits and behaviors, high achievement, or the potential for high achievement. My research questions will be grounded in this philosophy.

Research Questions

I will be exploring two specific research questions to ground my research on this topic.

1. Is there equity in United States gifted and talented programs?

2. What is the current state of District 742's gifted and talented program?

Use of Findings

The findings in this study will be used to improve the gifted services and talent development of St. Cloud Schools. These findings will be shared with key district leaders so changes or improvements can be made to the existing program. Thus, the study will directly impact student achievement and equity.

Method

The method used in my action research:

1. Review literature from various sources.

2.   Review current district protocol for gifted and talented services at the elementary level.

Definition of Terms

Equity. For the purpose of this study, equity refers to being close to the same: balanced, comparable.

Gifted. For the purpose of this study, gifted refers to students with exceptional abilities in a particular area.

Talent development. For the purpose of this study, talent development refers to advancing and fostering talent that exists in students

Potentially gifted. For the purpose of this study, potentially gifted refers to students from impoverished backgrounds who do not tend to score as highly on standardized tests but can develop academically when provided proper opportunities.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this literature review was to examine the effectiveness of gifted programming and talent development in U.S. schools. In Chapter 1, the background information and a baseball metaphor were used to enhance understanding. This chapter cites research to show a lack of equity in gifted services and talent development. This chapter also discusses research-based methods to improve equity in gifted education and talent development.

Is There Equity in Gifted and Talented Programs?

All students deserve equitable access to the highest quality of learning to maximize student potential. There are many research reports proving that students of color and students living in poverty do not have equal access to the highest quality of learning. One area of focus is the gifted and talented (GT) services and resources in United States schools. Gifted and talented children are found in all demographic groups. However, those who live in poverty, from racial/ethnic minority groups, or English learners are often overlooked for gifted programming. A summary report by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights published in 2016 shows that there is unequal access to gifted programming for Black and Latino students. The report shows that black and Latino students represent 42% of student enrollment in schools offering gifted and talented education programs; yet, only 28% of the students enrolled in the gifted and talented programs (Rene Islas, 2017). The report also offered findings that, while 11% of students are English learners in schools offering gifted and talented programs, fewer than 3% of gifted and talented students nationwide are English learners. An idea that is challenging our nation is that many are misinformed about the reasons for this disproportionality. Some may think that the reason children living in poverty, from racial and ethnic minority groups, or

English learners are absent from gifted programming is that they are not qualified. This is definitely not the case.

Another study done in 2007 by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation shows talented low-income students are not achieving to their full potential. Despite initially being academically talented, these students fall out of the high-achieving groups. There are fewer of these students who graduate from college or go on to graduate school (Wai & Worrell, 2016). Children living in poverty, from racial and ethnic minority groups, or English learners are 2.5 times less likely to be identified for gifted and talented programs, despite achieving at the same levels as their peers in these programs (Rene Islas, 2017). This research proves that there is not equity in United States gifted and talented programming.

Research shows that educators (teachers and principals) care and want to fight for equity in education (Rene Islas, 2017). How can educators help change the fact that some children are overlooked for gifted and talented services? Principals and teachers need effective, ongoing, relevant professional development to help them improve their ability to address the needs of diverse learners. Without sufficient professional development, too many children with untapped potential will be left behind. Teachers and administrators also need to know the real reasons behind the inequities. However, sometimes they are misinformed about the reasons for this preferential treatment. The reasons for the inequity are complex; there is not one sure fire way to fix this issue.

One factor related to inequity is lack of opportunity for the lower-income families. Some of these opportunities include the ability to take summer enrichment courses, benefit from tutoring by professionals, SAT and ACT prep courses, trips to museums and libraries, and books

to read at home. Unfortunately, access to high-quality preschool, full-day kindergarten, and higher education are all strongly correlated with income. Financially advantaged students can access opportunities outside of school to develop their talent. However, financially disadvantaged students rely on public education programs to develop talent (Wai & Worrell 2016). The cumulative disadvantage that low-income and students of color face throughout their K-12 education then carries over to higher education. This causes wide gaps in the educational system. High-achieving, low-income students are less likely to apply to elite schools (Wai & Worrell, 2016). This group of students does not have the academic preparation required for selective institutions. One example of this is the ACT and SAT prep courses. These courses are usually offered outside of the school day and they cost money. In fact, they can be expensive for even middle class families to afford. Students need transportation, course fees, and materials fees to take these courses. Another example of this is the Advanced Placement (AP) courses in many high schools. These courses are free to enroll in at public schools; however, to take the culminating AP exam to get the possible college credit for future education, students must pay the fee. If students do not pay the fee to sign up for this exam, then they do not get an official score and will not be able to get college credit.

In a study by Levy (2017), it was found that current discrimination has the potential to affect students' futures after high school. Between 2000 and 2010, five states adopted mandates requiring all high school juniors to take a nationally standardized college entrance exam. In two of the states, nearly half of all students took tests, and 40% to 45% of them earned scores to qualify for selective colleges. The enrollment of students in those states at selective institutions

rose by 20%. This shows that students may underestimate what they're capable of when not given the chance to prove themselves (Levy, 2017).

After studying the screening process for gifted and talented abilities in Florida's Broward County school district, researchers found that black and Latino students, students with free or reduced lunch, English-language learners, and female students were under referred to gifted and talented programs (Levy, 2017). This needs to change. All students need to be given the same opportunities to excel at the proper level for that individual student. Students are often selected for gifted and talented programs in a discriminatory manner. For instance, is it fair to give an English learner the same standardized test as a native English speaking student? This is frequently practiced in United States schools. Should the data from this test be used to identify the gifted and talented students? Even though EL students do not have a fair chance to get a high enough score to be placed in the gifted and talented group, many school districts still depend on this data. Districts may use this as one piece of data to look at, but educators must have several other formative or summative assessments to qualify students effectively.

Another essential part of the problem is that gifted low-income and students of color are not being identified systematically. The identification of gifted and talented students is sometimes left to the discretion of the parents, teachers, or administrators. This method sometimes leaves out talented children who do not show their academic talent and/or potential in typical ways. There needs to be a systematic way to identify academic strengths and talent development. We cannot rely exclusively on standardized test scores and teacher/parent judgement.

An issue that surfaces in the discussion of equity in gifted and talented services is the idea of balancing excellence and equity. Students served in gifted programs are most commonly white, Asian, and from higher-income families (Peters, 2016). This is a problem since the majority of American students now come from low-income or racial/ethnic minority families. The United States needs to develop the talents of African American, Latino, and low-income students as well. There is sometimes tension between the two implied goals of gifted education: developing excellence and promoting equity. Some gifted and talented development programs lean too far one way toward equity at the expense of developing excellence. Other programs have the opposite effect. Most often, gifted programs lean too far the other way toward high achievement despite leaving out the low-income and diverse racial/ethnic groups. Gifted and talented programs should not focus solely on one or the other. There needs to be a balance of the development of excellence with efforts to address equity. Our K-12 gifted education needs some type of identification system that balances both priorities. What would this look like? Peters (2016) stated that students would be identified based on how they perform relative to peers with similar educational opportunities. He stated that the best way to accomplish this would be to compare low-income students only to other low-income students, or English language learners (ELL) to other English language learners. This avoids comparing apples to oranges. This regards low-income students or ELL students differently in order to strive for the goal of equity while also using the same identification processes that was used for all students to balance equity with excellence (Peters, 2016).

Another point we need to consider is the allocation of funds that go to gifted and talented services in U.S. public schools. It costs money to run a comprehensive gifted and talented

program. Currently, programs aligned with gifted education get little federal funding. The Jarvis Act is the only federal law aimed at gifted students. This pays for research and pilot programs. It is currently funded at $5 million, down from a peak of $11 million several years ago (Crawford, 2014). Gifted students have an advocacy group called the National Association for Gifted Children. This coalition has a mission to support those who work with gifted and talented children through education, advocacy, community building, and research. The Talent Act requires states and districts to set policies for gifted education and report the performance of advanced students. Ideally, the federal government would require gifted students be identified early and would fund schools' efforts to train teachers and provide enrichment or accelerated learning programs.

Research-Based Options

One way to help alleviate this inequity is to implement a universal screening process for all students when looking at gifted and talented services. When every student is tested for entrance into gifted and talented programs, the number of minority and low-income students drastically increases. In Broward County, the school district saw an increase of 130% for gifted identification among Latino students and 80% increase among black students (Levy, 2017). The data show that universal screening is the way to go if educators want to be inclusive of all students when placing them in gifted and talented services. However, one disadvantage to this is the extra cost incurred by testing this large number of students. This is something that local school communities would need to find funding to sustain year after year.

Another study with similar research results was done by Card and Giuliano (2016). They used longitudinal records of students who were enrolled in a District in Florida for third grade

between 2004 and 2011. The research was approved by the Institutional Review Boards of the

District and the National Bureau of Economic Research. They tested this hypothesis using data

from a unique natural experiment conducted by a large and diverse school district. The state law

dictated students must achieve a minimum of 130 points on a standard IQ test to qualify for

gifted status. English language learners (ELLs) and free-or-reduced price lunch (FRL)

participants are subject to a lower 116 point threshold, known as "Plan B" eligibility. Even with

this lower bar, however, the District's gifted student population in the early 2000s mainly

comprised White children from higher-income neighborhoods. Only 28% of gifted students in

third grade were Black or Hispanic, compared with 60% of all students in the District. Thirteen

regular elementary schools in the District had no gifted children in third grade in 2004 or 2005,

but the gifted rate was nearly 10% at the 13 schools with the lowest fraction of FRL students.

In response to these disparities, the District introduced a universal screening program in

spring, 2005. Before this, candidates for gifted status were identified through parent and teacher

referrals, mainly occurring in first and second grades. Under the new program, all second-

graders completed the Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test (NNAT), a nonverbal test intended to

assess cognitive ability independent of linguistic and cultural background. The NNAT takes less

than an hour to complete and was administered by teachers in the classroom. The NNAT scores

were used to construct a nationally normed index similar to a standard IQ test. All students

scoring at least 130 points on the test, and ELL/FRL students scoring at least 115 points, were

automatically eligible to be referred for full evaluation and regular IQ testing by District

psychologists. Since students could still be nominated for testing by parents or teachers as in

earlier years, the aim of the screening program was to supplement the traditional referral system

and boost referral rates for underrepresented groups. Card and Giuliano (2016) focused on simple "pre/post" comparisons between third graders in 2004–2005 (the two cohorts before the introduction of universal screening) and those in 2006–2007 (the two cohorts after). They confirmed that the 2004–2005 ("pre") cohorts form a valid comparison group for the 2006–2007 ("post") cohorts. They used between-cohort differences to measure the impact of the program on gifted participation rates.

The analysis produced three main conclusions. First, the introduction of the screening program led to a large increase in the fraction of students classified as gifted. Second, the newly identified gifted students were disproportionately poor, Black, and Hispanic, and less likely to have parents whose primary language was English. They were also concentrated at schools with high amounts of poor and minority students and low numbers of gifted students before the program. Consequently, the experiences of the District confirm that a universal screening program can significantly broaden the diversity of students in gifted programs. Third, the distribution of IQ scores for the newly identified students was similar to the distribution for those identified under the old system, particularly among students who qualified under the Plan B eligibility standard. The newly identified group included many students with IQs well above the minimum eligibility threshold, implying that even high-ability students from disadvantaged groups were being overlooked under the traditional referral system (Card & Giuliano, 2016).

To identify all the potentially gifted children in the United States, we must look closely at our own advantages and realize what is needed by the less fortunate (Cross, 2013). We must do some reflecting on the array of privileges we take for granted, such as White privilege, male privilege, and health privilege.

What is the Current State of District 742's
  Gifted and Talented Program?

      In St. Cloud the gifted and talented program is called Talent Development and

Accelerated Services (TDAS). I have 2 years of experience in some of the TDAS areas in

District 742. I have also interviewed teachers and the District 742 TDAS coordinator, Laura

Steabner. It is District 742's belief that in fulfillment of the district mission and core belief that

everyone deserves equitable access to the highest quality of learning to maximize individual

potential, St. Cloud Area School District provides talent development programming. Talent

development programming strives to be an equitable access, needs-oriented program for students

who have demonstrated gifted and talented traits and behaviors, high achievement or the

potential for high achievement. After interviewing Ms. Steabner, I found the following lists of

beliefs and commitments.

      District 742 Beliefs:

- Talented students are found in all age, gender, cultural, socioeconomic, and racial
  groups.

- Demonstrated or potential high achievement includes achievement in general
  intellectual, specific academic subjects, creativity, leadership, and visual and
  performing arts.

- Talented students have different educational and social and emotional needs than
  their peers of similar age, experience or environment.

- Differing levels of academic need require different levels of support. Talent
  development programming is to be accessed by all students at varying levels based on
  learner needs.

- Identified students require differentiated instruction and specialized programming taught by staff who receive ongoing training in research-based talent development strategies.

- Talent Development programming requires an ongoing financial commitment to ensure success and sustainability.

District 742 Commitments:

- Provide a variety of opportunities and programming to meet the educational, social, and emotional needs of students who have demonstrated high achievement or potential ability.

- Build capacity in all educators in the area of talent development through ongoing professional development.

- Provide challenging and supportive educational experiences and environments.

- Identify talented students using multiple criteria to ensure equitable access.

- Assess program outcomes to ensure continuous improvement and equitable access and representation.

- Partner with parents and community to support students in reaching their full potential.

There are many strengths in the District 742 gifted and talented programs. In addition to having a vision and core beliefs, the programs being implemented are showing academic growth for the targeted groups of students. The district is striving to balance excellence with equity.

Table 1

District 742 TDAS Elementary Programs

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION	PROGRAMMING
One	Services for All	School-wide Enrichment
Two	Services for Some	Academic Achievement programming (Knowledge Bowl, Spelling Bee, United States Academic Triathlon, Geography Bee, Math Masters, Word Masters) Young Scholars
Three	Services for Some	Total School Cluster Grouping placement in a high-achieving cluster classroom
Four	Services for Few	Grade or subject-level acceleration Early entrance to Kindergarten

District 742 TDAS Elementary Programs

Young Scholars. Young Scholars is a TDAS level two program for students with high potential who may need access, advocacy, and/or affirmation of their abilities. Students will have opportunities to participate in whole class lessons designed to highlight high potential tendencies. Students who demonstrate high potential tendencies and are part of the target group may be served though Young Scholars programming. The target group for this program is students with free or reduced lunch, culturally diverse students, and English learners (Table 2). The following are the guidelines District 742 uses for student placement in Young Scholars.

- Students must be on free and reduced lunch (FRL), culturally diverse, or an English learner to qualify for Young Scholars.

- If a student qualified for Young Scholars based only on FRL status and does not qualify for FRL the following year, a transition year of Young Scholars will be provided for the student.

- Young Scholars will be reserved for students who are FRL, Culturally Diverse, and EL with the exception of students who are receiving a transition year because it is their first year of non FRL status.

Outcomes of a Young Scholars Session:

- Short Term Goals: Identify students who may not be considered for advanced academic programming and who, without opportunity, are less likely to pursue advanced level academics on their own.

- Long Term Goals: To nurture high academic potential at an early age so that students who have historically been underserved in advanced academic programs will be prepared to engage in challenging subjects and rigorous courses through their school years.

- Outcomes of Social and Emotional Learning:

- Students will apply learned self-regulation strategies.

- Students will develop resiliency by being faced with difficult challenges in their strength area in a small group supportive environment.

- Students will be given opportunities to see themselves as learners and as academic leaders.

Outcomes of Academic Learning:

- Students will transfer new social and emotional learning to the regular classroom setting to increase student's individual achievement.

- Each Young Scholars session will incorporate a literacy component to increase high level academic vocabulary acquisition.

Table 2

District 742 Young Scholars Qualifying Groups

TARGET GROUP	RATIONALE FOR SERVICE
Free and Reduced Lunch	Students from low income households typically have less access to both educational and recreational experiences. This lack of access may mask a student's ability to perform at high levels.
Culturally Diverse Students	Culturally diverse students are more likely to experience less academic growth and be part of the district's achievement gap. Additionally, these students may have fewer models in their community engaged in advanced academics.
English Learners	The language barrier for English learners may limit their ability to perform in classrooms and may prevent them from accessing rigorous course content.

Total School Cluster Grouping (TSCG). The TSCG is a Level 3 program. It places a group of high ability, high achieving, or high potential students in a classroom with a teacher trained in differentiation and gifted education pedagogy. Not only are these students purposefully placed, but the needs of all students in a grade level are considered when determining classroom placements. In a TSCG school, all staff receive training on gifted strategies which have been shown to improve academic achievement for both gifted and other ability level students.

Benefits of Total School Cluster Grouping:

- Proven to help all students improve their academic achievement.

- Helps teachers more effectively and efficiently meet the diverse needs of their students.

- Improves representation of traditionally underserved students identified over time as above average and high achieving.

- Provides full-time services to high-achieving and high ability-students.

After interviewing the TDAS district coordinator, Laura Steabner, I learned a solid structure is a cornerstone to creating a successful product. Whether it is a building, bridge, or an academic classroom, a well thought out structure is a key component in increasing the likelihood of success. Total School Cluster Grouping provides that solid structure for classroom teachers to further enable them to meet the academic and social and emotional needs of their learners.

As any parent or teacher knows, a student's grade level in school is not necessarily indicative of their current academic performance. In any given grade level, the performance of students can easily span two or more grade levels above and below the assigned grade of the students. Some of our elementary schools certainly experience a large range of student performance within a grade level and, as students progress through the grades, the gap only widens.

For example, in one of the District 742 elementary schools, during the 2016-2017 school year, second grade teachers had a range of around 400 points for reading Star test scores within their classrooms, that range expands to 500 (third grade level), 700 (fourth grade level), and a range greater than 950 points (fifth grade and higher). Teachers in these classrooms are asked to

provide instruction that spans multiple grade levels. Structuring classrooms so all ability levels are in every classroom creates an environment in which meeting all students where they are at can be difficult.

A Solid Structure

Decreasing the range of student ability for classroom teachers may seem like an easy answer. Placing all the students who perform closely in the same classroom would certainly shrink the range for the teacher, but would also have negative effects. All students need academic role models. If all low performing students are placed together, students are not in the same environment as others who challenge them or push them to new academic levels. Students who achieve slightly above grade level are often outshined by students who are able to complete grade level content with little or no effort. Additionally, the highest achieving students have needs that extend beyond grade level curriculum. This small group of students typically will not have their needs met even if they are placed with other above average students working on grade level content. This structure also limits the interactions students have and essentially creates a system where students only work with others who are like them academically, which does not mimic the real world.

Total School Cluster Grouping is an organizational structure that decreases the range a teacher has in the classroom while also maintaining academic role models in each classroom allowing above average students an opportunity to be classroom leaders and giving students experiences with both similar academic peers and peers who are not at the same level academically. Teachers and administrators use multiple forms of data to identify who should be in the high achievement group. To determine a student's achievement level, the current

classroom teacher along with support teachers that work with the child including Special

Education staff and English Learner staff determine the child's level for placement. Elementary

teachers and administrators also use the student's Star scores for reading and math, MCA scores,

classroom work and assessments, teacher input, parent input, and CoGAT results. The CoGAT

(Cognitive Abilities Test) is given to all students in grades 2 and 4. This test is similar to the

Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test (NNAT) mentioned in Chapter 2. It is a nonverbal test

intended to assess cognitive ability independent of linguistic and cultural background.

Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM). This is Level 1 of the TDAS programming. The

major goal of the SEM is to use gifted instructional strategies for total school improvement. All

students are able to experience high level thinking and highly engaging learning experiences.

Joseph Renzulli, the creator of the model, identifies three main goals for school wide enrichment.

They are: to develop the talents of all children, provide a wide range of advanced enrichment

experiences for all students and provide advanced follow up opportunities for students to allow

them to advance demonstrated strengths. Instructional Seminars, based on the philosophy of the

SEM, is a structure for middle schools to offer seminars based on student interests such as film

or debate. These enriching experiences are available for all interested students to allow a wide

variety of students the opportunity to experience enriching courses that they find personally

interesting. The elementary schools that have a differentiation specialist and offer TSCG

programming are utilizing the Schoolwide Enrichment Model. This includes four out of the

eight elementary schools in District 742.

Acceleration. This is part of the level four programming in District 742. The school

board approved policies for grade and subject level accelerations. Before any student can be

promoted to a different grade level or be placed into a course in another grade level, the acceleration process must be completed. Parents contact the TDAS district coordinator to facilitate this process. The coordinator looks at multiple formative and summative assessments, spends time with the student, and interviews teachers and parents before determining if the student will be best served through acceleration services. There is a similar process for early entrance to Kindergarten.

District 742--A Day in the Life

Understanding the structure is not quite the same as experiencing a classroom environment. The following vignettes are based on fictional students, but are meant to provide context about what a student may experience on a day to day basis.

Student 1: Valerie. Valerie is a fifth-grader who excels in math. She is performing at the 93rd percentile on STAR testing for math. Valerie does well in reading and is slightly above grade level. She reached the fifth grade end-of-year target for reading in the middle of her fifth grade year.

Valerie's classroom is made up of students who are above grade level, on grade level, and below grade level. Valerie has a reading group made up of other above level readers. During the day, the grade level content in social studies and science meets her academic needs. She loves thinking deeply about her new knowledge and is able to be a leader for group assignments and class discussions. For math, Valerie travels to another classroom that is co-taught with the differentiation specialist. She is able to move at the pace that meets her needs.

Valerie enjoys learning and is able to take advantage of enrichment opportunities provided by the differentiation specialist. She participates in Word Masters competitions, United

States Academic Triathlon, and has also chosen to participate in an optional book group led by the differentiation specialist that was provided for any students interested in being a part of the group.

Student 2: Jonathan. Jonathan is a third grade student who is at grade level in both math and reading. Jonathan is a hard worker and loves school. He is meeting all the grade level expectations on his assessments.

Jonathan's classroom is made up of students who are significantly above grade level, students at grade level, and students who are slightly below grade level. Jonathan's teacher works to engage all students in growing academically. She provides tiered activities that allow all students in the class to work on the same content, but at differing levels of depth and complexity. Jonathan works in a reading group with students at his level stays with his teacher for math instruction.

Jonathan has benefited from some of the school wide enrichment opportunities provided by the differentiation specialist. He is a creative student and has enjoyed a digital storytelling unit the differentiation specialist taught to all third grade classes.

Student 3: Jamal. Jamal is a third-grader who excels in reading and math. He is currently reading at a 10th grade level and has mastered all the math content for fourth grade. At home, Jamal likes to use online sites to learn new math concepts and is currently working on algebra.

Jamal is in the same classroom as Jonathan. His teacher routinely pretests Jamal on the upcoming math and reading units. When Jamal shows that he has mastered content, he works with the differentiation specialist to apply the content to real world situations. He also receives

instruction in standards that are beyond his grade level in math. In reading, Jamal spends time analyzing difficult text. He is reading nonfiction articles written at an 11th grade level and is asked to think deeply about broad concepts and make connections across content areas. During whole group activities, Jamal is sometimes paired with another student who is at his level. At times, the teacher provides him and his partner with slightly different tasks or discussion questions to engage them at their academic level. At other times, Jamal works with students who are not at his academic level. For example, when learning about new science concepts, Jamal and Jonathan completed plant observations together and worked as a team to make predictions about what would happen to their plant.

Structure for Success

In each of these cases, students were able to access instruction that met their academic needs, work within and outside of an academic peer group and were part of a diverse learning environment. By using the Total School Cluster Grouping Structure, classrooms are structured in a way that increases student success.

Guidelines for Core Instruction

All of the above components are crucial to the gifted and talented program in District 742. In addition, there are guidelines for core instruction and high achieving students. They are posted on the district website and teachers are expected to refer to these guidelines when making instructional decisions for high-achieving students.

Literacy:

- High-achieving students should be pretested on Wonders units to determine if they have mastered any of the skills in the upcoming unit.

- High-achieving students who have mastered concrete skills can be provided an extension or application of the skill or the skill may be replaced with instruction in another area of need as determined by STAR assessment information.

- High-achieving students should participate in all core lessons that focus on comprehension strategies or literature discussion regardless of their performance on a pretest.

Math:

- High-achieving students should be pretested on My Math units using the identified pretest (not the "Am I Ready" assessment) to determine if they have mastered any of the skills in the upcoming unit.

- High-achieving students should participate in any core lesson they have not mastered as well as any core lesson that focuses on a problem solving strategy. They should also participate in the Problem of the Day" component of all core lessons.

- Students who demonstrate mastery on the pretest, should engage in all of the "Beyond Level" activities for the unit before moving on to other skills. This will ensure that the students can think deeply about the content.

- Upon completion of the "Beyond Level" activities, high achieving students may move to other content and skills that meets their academic needs as identified by STAR assessment information. The use of ALEKS online is a strongly encouraged vehicle to meet high achieving learner needs of students in grades 3-5.

Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this research paper was to evaluate equity in United States gifted and talented programs. Another purpose is to evaluate the equity in St. Cloud elementary schools gifted and talented program. Chapter 1 provided background information on the topic, and Chapter 2 presented a review of the research. In Chapter 3, I discuss conclusions, recommendations, and implications from research findings.

Conclusion

After studying and reviewing both research questions carefully, I have an informed conclusion. The District 742 gifted and talented program only partially qualifies as equitable education. District 742 has quality gifted and talented programs scattered throughout the district. However, there are gaps in the current programming for elementary schools. The school district developed the preceding programs to address the quality and equity issues in gifted and talented throughout St. Cloud schools. This is an improvement from a few years ago when none of this programming existed. However, all four levels of the TDAS programs are not offered at all the elementary schools (Table 3). For example, I work at Westwood, where we are fortunate to have most of the talent development and accelerated services programs. Despite these programs, we do not have the Young Scholars program. It is likely Westwood is missing some students from this targeted group (free/reduced lunch, culturally diverse students, and English learners). To have comprehensive and equitable programming, all schools need to reach the various targeted student groups. Since this is not the case, there are voids in the District 742 TDAS program.

Recommendations

District 742 has some strong, research-based programs in place at some of the buildings, but this is not enough. District 742 must prioritize all the TDAS levels of programming in every building to reach the goal of equity in St. Cloud schools. The use of the CoGAT is used as a universal screening tool at grades 2 and 4. Ideally, the CoGAT should be given at each grade level. This would increase the success of identifying potential high achievement students who do not test well on other standardized tests.

Another area in gifted and talented that needs to improvement is the curriculum for the TDAS program. Although there is a TDAS coordinator and a differentiation specialist in four of the eight elementary schools, there is not a set curriculum for teachers to use on a regular basis. Teachers who participate in the Total School Cluster Grouping are trained to differentiate existing curriculum and given additional books and online supports. There is not a purchased or district written curriculum at this time for all teachers to use as a resource for differentiation. Differentiating for low, average, above average, and high academic levels is not something that comes naturally for all teachers. They need explicit professional development and curriculum to guide them as needed.

Finally, the area I address is the funding to continue and grow the TDAS program that is currently being used. Two years ago, when District 742 implemented the above programs, money was used from the surplus of gifted and talented funds that existed in the district. Since nothing had been done for years to support gifted and talented in elementary schools, District 742 had enough funds to hire a coordinator, differentiation specialists, Young Scholar teachers, and provide professional development to targeted teachers. This money is almost gone now.

The district needs to be creative to come up with sustainable funds they can use each year to keep up with the current programs and grow the additional programs that are not in every elementary school. As with many school districts, St. Cloud school district is implementing continued programming without the financial planning to sustain and grow the programs needed in each school.

Table 3

Reality of Current TDAS Programming in District 742

ELEMENTARY BUILDING	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4
Clear View	NO	Academic Achievement Programming (Knowledge Bowl, Math Masters, Word Masters, USAT, etc.) & NO Young Scholars	NO	Possible acceleration or early entry to Kindergarten
Discovery	NO	Young Scholars	NO	Possible acceleration or early entry to Kindergarten
Kennedy	Differentiation Specialist to provide school wide enrichment	Academic Achievement Programming, but NO Young Scholars	TSCG	Possible acceleration or early entry to Kindergarten
Lincoln	NO	Young Scholars	NO	Possible acceleration or early entry to Kindergarten
Madison	NO	Young Scholars	NO	Possible acceleration or early entry to Kindergarten
Oak Hill	Differentiation Specialist to provide school wide enrichment	Academic Achievement Programming, but NO Young Scholars	TSCG	Possible acceleration or early entry to Kindergarten

Table 3 (continued)

ELEMENTARY BUILDING	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4
Talahi	Differentiation Specialist to provide school wide enrichment	Young Scholars	TSCG	Possible acceleration or early entry to Kindergarten
Westwood	Differentiation Specialist to provide school wide enrichment	Academic Achievement Programming, but NO Young Scholars	TSCG	Possible acceleration or early entry to Kindergarten

Summary

The research around gifted and talented education overwhelmingly supports my starred paper. I reviewed new insights into the causes of the inequities in gifted and talented education. I have also uncovered some research based suggestions to take to District 742 leaders. Researching and writing this paper gave me the background, insight, and passion to share some of the recommendations previously mentioned with District 742 leadership. It is imperative to discuss sustainable funding for the district TDAS programs. These funds are also important to continue the growth and development of existing programs.

Suggestion for Future Research

I have two meaningful research suggestions for anyone interested in pursuing this topic. One suggestion is to keep accurate data regarding the programs being implemented. In District 742, there is some positive data and feedback to support the TDAS programs; however, it is still too early to make conclusions. Another suggestion is to use multiple forms of data to interpret results when comparing and contrasting the effectiveness of various programs. Which program is getting the biggest bang for the buck; total school cluster grouping, Young Scholars, school-wide enrichment, after school academic achievement teams, acceleration, or maybe another

program? I t is important to collect data over the years to see which programs are truly increasing academic achievement. The data should be more than just standardized test scores. The comprehensive data should include: classroom assignments, teacher feedback, parent feedback, student feedback, standardized tests, CoGAT test results, EL Access test results, and quality of various projects done at school, and anything else that will show the capabilities of the students.

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