Recognizing Potential in the Early Grades: Supporting Opportunities for Access

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NAGC Conference
November 2018

Thinking about Gifted Services in Your Experience...

• What are some of the key levers or resources that facilitate access to gifted programming for students?
• To what degree does affirmation of potential and effort influence student success?
• Who are some of the groups or individuals who serve as advocates for gifted learners?
The Challenge

• Rates of identification for gifted programs among students from traditionally underserved populations
• Need for approaches that support finding high potential across demographic groups
• Need for approaches that provide students with supports to prepare for the challenges of advanced programs
• Recommendations around early intervention, yet limited programming

Key Point of Tension

What are some of the barriers to gifted programming for children from underserved populations?
Barriers to Participation (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012)

- Conception of giftedness that emphasizes only already-developed ability
- Misconceptions about learners
- Pedagogy and curriculum that fail to support talent development
- School identification policies
- Gifted program policies that hinder participation and performance
- Lack of access to supplemental programs
- Gifted label
Who are the **Young Scholars**?

Students with gifted potential who may need:

- Advocates
- Affirmation
- Access

**Short Term**

To *identify* students who may not be considered for advanced academic programs using traditional methods of identification, and who, without that opportunity, are less likely to pursue advanced levels of learning on their own.
Project SPARK: Supporting and Promoting Advanced Readiness in Kids

• Focus on early awareness/identification/intervention to support high potential
• Emphasis at grades K-2 in schools with high populations from underserved groups
• Application/scaling up of the Young Scholars Model in 4 Connecticut school districts
  • Access to advanced learning opportunities
  • Affirmation of high academic potential
  • Advocates for students

This project is supported under the Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Grant Program, PR/Award Number S206A1404017, as administered by the OSE, U.S. Department of Education.
Major Elements of SPARK

- Working with teachers to recognize advanced potential in diverse populations
  - Goal to support recognition and increased response
- Conducting assessments to follow students referred by their teachers to the project
- Providing summer program access in treatment schools
- Comparing treatment and comparison schools on achievement data and later identification for gifted programs

Guiding Principles

- Advanced potential exists across demographic groups.
- Early attention to high potential is critical for engaging student growth and academic success.
- Teacher support and opportunities for teacher learning in classroom settings are important to guide recognition of how high potential may manifest in students across diverse backgrounds.
- Curriculum and instruction designed to yield and develop high potential behaviors are valuable tools for identification and programming in response to advanced learner needs.
Evidence of Effectiveness

• Research Evidence
  • Achievement data in math and reading
  • Identification for local gifted programs
  • Observation data

• External Evaluation
  • Teacher surveys and focus groups
  • Parent surveys
  • Administrator interviews
GBRS

Contains 4 categories:

- Exceptional Ability to Learn
- Exceptional Application of Knowledge
- Exceptional Creative/Productive Thinking
- Exceptional Motivation to Succeed

GBRS Sample

Exceptional Ability to Learn:

- Exhibits exceptional memory
- Demonstrates in-depth knowledge
- Displays persistent, intense focus on one or more topics
- Is highly reflective and/or sensitive to his/her environment
- Learns and adapts readily to new cultures
- Learns quickly and easily
- Acquires language at a rapid pace
- Learns skills independently and makes connections without formal instruction
### Ratings

Each category is assigned a rating based on how often behaviors are observed:

1. Rarely
2. Occasionally
3. Frequently
4. Consistently

Note that only whole numbers from 1-4 are used, no fractions or decimals.
Sample Lesson: Colorful Categories
What kinds of behaviors might we observe?
Research Questions

• How do the number of students treatment and comparison schools referred to the project differ?

• How does the diversity of the students referred in treatment and comparison schools differ?
Participants over the First Three Years

- 4 districts
- 22 schools
- 953 students

Number of Students Added to the Project by Year

- 2015: 150 students
- 2016: 250 students
- 2017: 150 students
Demographics of Students in the Project

- Female: 43.9% (Comparison), 53.0% (Treatment)
- Black or Hispanic: 39.2% (Comparison), 48.7% (Treatment)
- ELL: 53.0% (Comparison), 48.7% (Treatment)
- FRL: 48.7% (Comparison), 39.2% (Treatment)
- Special Education: 43.9% (Comparison), 53.0% (Treatment)
- Identified Gifted: 53.0% (Comparison), 48.7% (Treatment)

Nurture, Guide, Support
**SPARK Summer Program**

- Project M2 units
  - 2015 and 2017: Geometry
  - 2016: Measurement (+ pilot of Number)
  - 2018: Number (+ Geometry at K)
- Professional development for teachers
- 3-4 weeks, 3 hours per day
- 4 districts, 5 schools, ~16 classrooms per year
- Cross-age grouping

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Summer Program Resources – Project M²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Project M² Characteristics (Gavin et al., 2013)</th>
<th>Alignment with Emphases in Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2010, 2015)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important and advanced mathematics</td>
<td>High-quality, high-status knowledge made available to students from all backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth of understanding and complexity</td>
<td>Access to and support for engaging with complex instructional materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated instruction</td>
<td>“Diversity among students demands plurality in instructional practices” (Gay, 2015, p. 135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematical communication</td>
<td>Specific modeling and practice around communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing classroom environment</td>
<td>Emphasis on story; emphasis on positive beliefs and support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Summer Teachers Who Also Teach K-2 in Treatment Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Summer 2015</th>
<th>Summer 2016</th>
<th>Summer 2017</th>
<th>Summer 2018</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>3/3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>1/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Priority for summer hiring given to K-2 teachers from treatment schools
Achievement Test Growth for SPARK Students (NWEA Mathematics)

Math Growth Spring to Fall 2017

Average Change in MAP Scores

- No Summer 2017 (Comparison) (n = 197)
- No Summer 2017 (Treatment) (n = 154)
- Summer 2017 Only (n = 101)
- Summer 2017 & At Least One Other (n = 68)

Demographics of SPARK Students Later Identified for Local Gifted Programs (32 as of Fall 2017)

- Female: 21.1% (Comparison) vs. 47.8% (Treatment)
- Black or Hispanic: 16.7% vs. 61.3%
- ELL: 3% vs. 47.8%
- FRL: 16.7% vs. 47.8%
- Special Education: 0% vs. 47.8%
Results

• Larger pool
  • Served students
  • Students later identified gifted

• More diverse pool
  • Students served
  • Students later identified gifted

Key Take-Away Points

• Role of curriculum in supporting access for learners as well as teacher recognition of emerging potential
• Importance of specific supports for discourse moves among a diverse range of learners in the early grades
• Linkage to positive achievement outcomes for students following participation in high-level summer learning experiences
• Evidence of influence on later identification for advanced programs