



POSITION PAPER – CULTURALLY/ LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE GIFTED STUDENTS

The *Colorado Association for Gifted and Talented* supports the needs of culturally/ linguistically diverse gifted learners in our Colorado schools.

In Gifted Education, terms such as at-risk, underidentified, underserved, and underrepresented are often used interchangeably. For the purpose of this statement, the term underrepresented which is defined as insufficiently or inadequately represented, will be used for consistency when addressing the needs of culturally/linguistically diverse gifted students.

Current data suggests that learners who are of low socio-economic status (SES), English Language Learners (ELL), culturally diverse, and/or students with disabilities continue to remain underrepresented in gifted programs (Castellano & Frazier, 2011). While progress is being made, there continues to be a need for increased research, awareness, resources, and efforts aimed at improving diverse representation in gifted education programs.

According to the NAGC Gifted programming Standard 2: Assessment: At-risk children who possess diverse characteristics and behaviors that are associated with giftedness might otherwise be overlooked in our traditional screening processes.

Appropriate identification can significantly improve opportunities for these learners. The earlier you adjust the instruction to meet cognitive needs, especially with at-risk children, results in higher achievement. If gifted students do not receive the proper interventions early in their primary careers, they are at-risk of underachievement and unrealized potential. (Smutney, 2012). The ramifications of inadequate early intervention for talented development are likely to be the most severe for students from poor and cultural minority backgrounds. (Brighton, 2007).

Other Factors Contributing to Underrepresentation:

Environment: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse students (CLD) and low SES students may have high potential, but environmental factors such as parental unemployment, mobility, family structure, homelessness, and/or level of education may interfere with the nurturing of potential. These factors may be compounded by limited access to early interventions such as quality preschool options. Therefore, young students may start school with underdeveloped cognitive skills (Ford, 2012). Additionally, students from poverty may come to school with language issues and cognitive structures that are not fully developed, both of which are needed to learn at the levels required by state tests.

School staff preparation: Teachers and other school staff often have limited training in gifted education or multi-cultural education, thus making it difficult to recognize giftedness in diverse students: “Teacher referral (and its rating checklists and forms), intentionally or unintentionally, serves as a gatekeeper, closing doors to gifted education classrooms for CLD students” (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008).

Identification process: Test bias can contribute to underrepresentation as most tests are primarily in English; this may inadvertently measure English language ability or background knowledge rather than academic or intellectual ability. Careful consideration of test limitations can assist to minimize this problem.

Access to and opportunity for appropriate curriculum: Often, due to local, state, and national pressures, schools in low SES locations focus on test-taking skills; therefore, students from these areas may have limited opportunity to explore a high-level creative, critical and analytical thinking and problem-solving curriculum. Gifted students in rural areas may also experience limited educational resources and isolation due to distance or geographic barriers.

Communication and involvement with parents and family: According to Warne (2009) differences in culture and/or language may impact family involvement: “Culturally diverse gifted students’ parents are much less likely to be able to navigate a school system’s bureaucracy and may feel alienated by the unfamiliar terminology and procedures of a gifted program”(p.x). Barriers may exist that pertain to language, a school staff’s lack of familiarity with culturally and linguistically diverse families and a lack of understanding of the challenges regarding working more than one job and the availability of childcare and transportation.

Language: Cultural and linguistic behaviors associated with various levels of English language acquisition may be misinterpreted as characteristics associated with special learning needs that can mask student strengths (Klingner, Hoover, & Baca, 2008). Even native English- speaking diverse students may be unfamiliar with academic language or speak a non-standard dialect.

Cultural/Ethnic differences (CLEd): A lack of sensitivity and/or understanding of differing cultures, norms, and expectations may lead to a mismatch between a student’s culture and the school culture in the areas of communication, behavior, values, and learning styles (Zion & Kozleski, 2005). Characteristics of giftedness may be manifested differently from the mainstream culture in CLD and low SES students; therefore, these students may be perceived through a deficit lens rather than a strength-based lens. Attitudes toward time, gender roles, family roles, space/proximity, taboos, autonomy, age, grooming, and spiritual beliefs can vary greatly from the dominant culture. For example, gender roles may be different based on cultural expectations, such as female participation in the education system and parent contact with teachers.

Additional considerations for underrepresented populations:

In addition to understanding the main factors that contribute to underrepresentation, it is important to understand the needs of specific populations. Additional information related to the various underrepresented groups in gifted education including ELL is in the Resources and References pages of this section.

Support student identity and culture in the school and curriculum (Ford & Milner, 2005). Review school practices, environment, climate, selection of texts and curriculum, expectations, and celebrations and holidays. Use instructional examples relevant to students’ culture and experience.

Provide a culturally responsive, non-threatening, informal, and welcoming school environment. The environment should be inviting and should reflect the children and the diversity of the school; diverse families should feel comfortable volunteering and providing input; communications should be frequent and translators and interpreters should be used when needed.

Provide staff development in cultural awareness as well as in the academic and affective needs of diverse gifted students. Administrators should promote hiring and mentoring of culturally and linguistically diverse staff, supporting them in their work with all learners. “Professional development that raises cultural awareness may help refute stereotypes and result in more equitable representation in gifted/talented programs by students of all cultures.” (Iowa Department of Education, 2008, p.16).

Focus on student strengths. Develop curriculum around student interests and strengths so that students are better able to connect to the learning and in order to support diverse learners who require remediation in areas where performance is less successful.

Respect unique cultural needs; learn about, honor, and build upon the cultural heritage that students bring with them from their homes and communities. Cultural groups are not homogeneous. Get to know each family on an individual basis. Become knowledgeable of the unique and diverse needs of specific cultures. Seek out opportunities to learn and share with each other. Involve community members and parents as mentors and resources (Moll et al., 1992).

Foster community engagement. Create community connections with diverse groups including mentorships, college and university partnerships, and opportunities for advanced learning within community contexts.

As we strive to close the achievement gaps between racial and economic groups, we will not succeed if our highest-performing students from lower-income families continue to slip through the cracks. Our failure to help them fulfill their demonstrated potential has significant implications for the social mobility of American's lower-income families and the strength of our economy and society as a whole.

Current research data regarding the identification and representation of CLD (culturally, linguistically diverse) gifted students indicates that policies, procedures and practices must change in Colorado, as well as throughout the United States. Providing appropriate gifted and talented programs for students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds is a challenge that must be addressed. This statement highlights some of the factors that contribute to the low numbers of unidentified underrepresented populations, and makes recommendations that address ways to identify and support the needs of CLD students. While it is true that all students, including minority language students and culturally diverse students deserve a rigorous, challenging education; it is clear that these students historically have been under-identified in gifted programs.

Culturally and linguistically diverse students currently represent an increasing percentage of the total public school population in Colorado. It is therefore vital that attention be directed to developing the strengths and abilities of this special population through more effective assessment procedures and program models.

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- Source: Brighton (2007) *Primary grade teachers' conceptions of giftedness and talent: A case- based investigation*. Storrs: National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, UCONN.
- Source: Smutney (2012) *Discovering and Developing Talents in Spanish-Speaking Students*.

Source: **Achievementtrap**: *How America Is Failing Millions of High-Achieving Students from Lower-Income Families*. A report by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation & Civic Enterprises with Original research by WESTAT.

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