

# BRIDGING MONTANA'S GIFTED PROGRAMS: A PROPOSED DIRECTION FORWARD



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# What We Know



- The federal government neither provides guidance or meaningful funding, nor requires any programs and services for gifted students at the state level
- Students encounter a range of services from state to state and even district to district

# What We Know



## Most gifted students

- receive the majority of their K-12 education in a regular classroom
- taught by teachers who have not been trained to teach high-ability students
- covering material they have already mastered
- in schools administered by folks who have not been trained in defensible programming for gifted learners!!!

# Recent Research



- In 2013, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation examined state-level interventions intended to foster high academic achievement among low-income students, with the goal of identifying policies that could be implemented more widely.
- **BROAD FINDING:** Vast majority of states unprepared to serve needs of poor gifted children.

# Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Research



- Significant “excellence gaps” which varied across states.
- Excellence gap = the disparity in the percent of lower-income versus higher-income students who reach advanced levels of academic performance.
- The “gap” appears in elementary school and continues as students move through middle school, high school, college and beyond.
- Gaps increase over time.

# Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Research



- Deficiencies in state programs and services to develop gifts and talents were identified.
- “Inputs”
- Each state awarded a grade.

# Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Research



**MONTANA WAS AWARDED A**

**D-**

# Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Research



- **MT** deemed **ill-prepared** to serve the needs of most gifted children **AND** especially poor gifted kids
- Consistent with findings from the NAGC State of the States Reports
- [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

# INPUTS -- Districts



- **Identification is mandated.**
- **Services are mandated.**

# MT Policies Related to Gifted Education



- Montana mandates **identification** for GT Education
  - Children of outstanding abilities
  - Capable of high performance
  - Require differentiated educational programs beyond those normally offered in public schools
- Intellectually Gifted

# MONTANA REGULATIONS



- Each school district must have comprehensive plan to identify and serve gifted (high ability/high potential) students
- State provides **guidance/guidelines** for processes of **identifying** GT students
- **HOWEVER,**
- Criteria and methods for identification left to LEAs
- Nature of the services provided are left to the LEAs

# MT Policies Related to Gifted Education



- While state mandates **identification** and **services** for GT education, classroom differentiation often constitutes services (if at all)
  
- **Montana does not monitor or audit LEAs**

# INPUTS -- Districts



- **Acceleration** allowed?
- **Early entrance** to Kindergarten
- Middle School/High School **concurrent enrollment** and credit in High School

# MT Policies Related to Gifted Education



- State has no policies related to **acceleration**
  - Early entrance to kindergarten
  - Grade acceleration
  - Early entrance to college
  - Concurrent enrollment
  - Dual enrollment
- State has no policy on middle school/high school **concurrent enrollment** with credit received for high school

# Accelerative Strategies Continued



- BUT, MT does identify accelerative strategies as defensible academic interventions in its Program Planning Guide.
- Accelerative strategies are rarely utilized!

# INPUTS -- Districts



- Gifted coursework required in **teacher and administrator training**
- **Certificates/Endorsements** for teachers

# INPUTS -- Teachers



- Know the Research - translate research to practice
- Advocate Smartly
- Remember, **gifted programs and services are not “treats” or “privileges”**

# MT Policies Related to Gifted Education



- Montana does not require **general education teachers** to receive **training** on gifted students during or after initial teacher certification
- No **certificate** or **endorsement** in gifted education is required or even recognized
- Montana no longer recognizes a Special Competency for teachers in Gifted Education

# MT Policies Related to Gifted Education



- State does not require **administrators** to receive **training** on nature and needs of gifted students
- State does not require **counselors** to receive **training** on nature and needs of gifted students

# INPUTS -- State



- **Funding** per student
- Governor or Magnet **School(s)** for advanced learners

# MONTANA



- 150,000 public school students in MT
- Number of identified gifted students in the state is not reported
- If roughly 8% - 10% of MT students are gifted in one or more domains, 12,000 – 15,000 gifted students

# FUNDING



- MT gives \$250,000 to LEAs for GT programs
- Let's do the math:
- → → →

# FUNDING



○ \$17 - \$21 per gifted student

# FUNDING CONTINUED



- MT spends 15.5% of 6B budget on primary and secondary schools
- Roughly = \$930,000,000

Less than .03 percent of budget is spent on programs specifically to develop talents and gifts of high ability students

# FUNDING CONTINUED



## **Constitution of the State of Montana:**

Article X, Section 1. Educational goals and duties.

(1) It is the goal of the people to establish a system of education which will develop the **full educational potential of each** person. Equality of education opportunity is guaranteed "to each person of the state".

# Ask Ourselves Why Montana Has A D-



- Elitism
- Gifted kids will make it on their own
- Our limited resources need to go elsewhere, to more needy students
- All kids are gifted
- How do we define giftedness

# Bottom Line



- Gifted programs and services matter!
- Gifted Programs and services are **NOT ELITIST!**
- Every student is **NOT** gifted!

# MOVING FORWARD



- Definition offered by Rena Subotnik, Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, and Frank Worrell (2011) in *Rethinking Giftedness and Gifted Education: A Proposed Direction Forward Based on Psychological Science*

# MOVING FORWARD



- Giftedness is the manifestation of performance that is clearly at the **upper end** of the distribution in a **talent domain**, even relative to other high-functioning individuals in that domain.

# MOVING FORWARD



- Further, giftedness can be viewed as **developmental** in that in the beginning stages, **potential** is the key variable; in later stages, **achievement** is the measure of giftedness....

# MOVING FORWARD



- **Psychosocial variables** play an essential role in the manifestation of giftedness at every developmental stage.

# MOVING FORWARD



- Both cognitive and psychosocial variables are **malleable** and need to be deliberately cultivated.

# Psychosocial Variables per Subotnik et al. (2011)



- **Cognitive Variables**
  - ability
  - achievement
- **Psychosocial or Non-cognitive Variables**
  - Perceptions and beliefs about self
  - motivation, task commitment
  - resilience, grit, growth mindset
  - social supports
  - educationally enriched environments

# Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius and Worrell



- Giftedness is not a static phenomenon; one is not born that way and cannot expect to remain that way always
- Must be developed from the outside (e.g., school and home environments) AND inside (self perceptions, task commitment, mindset, etc.)

# Positive Emotional Outcomes



**Because positive self-perceptions, motivation, etc. are so strongly** linked to numerous desirable academic and affective outcomes, researchers in the field strongly recommend targeted guidance and interventions over the course of a student's academic life to support the development of positive achievement outcomes

# Questions for Researchers



- What are first signs of talent in a domain?
- How do we best develop psychosocial correlates (self-perceptions, maximizing working memory, commitment, growth mindsets)?
- How do we embody developing these variables in schools and educational practice especially for kids with less educational capital?



## **Beyond Gifted Education: Designing and Implementing Advanced Academic Programs**

- Formal definitions of giftedness are not useful
- Question should not be “Who is Gifted?”  
**Rather**
- “Who can thrive in the advanced academic programs we have designed?”

# One Possibility



- What about identifying traditionally underserved students?
- Use multiple measures/indicators of giftedness
- David Lohman advocates using traditional measures (ability and achievement tests) in nontraditional ways.
  - Local norms
  - Take into account student's opportunity to learn when making inferences about talent
  - → avoids underestimating abilities

# What Can We Do?



- What can we do together, in Montana, to effect greater change?
- How can we increase knowledge about giftedness and access to quality programs and services?

# What Can We Do?



- Work with **Administrators, supervisors, and principals** to change their beliefs, increase and encourage their advocacy efforts → enact change!

# Administrator Research



- The beliefs and perceptions of administrators (district and school level) can determine the success of their district's/school's gifted programming.
- Few GT programs succeed without principal buy-in.

# Administrators Research



- Effective administrators with rigorous GT programs.....
  - Do NOT believe all students are gifted
  - Believe gifted students demand challenge beyond regular education classroom
  - Have positive perceptions of gifted students
  - Do NOT believe gifted programs are elitist

# Administrators Research



- Effective administrators with rigorous GT programs.....
  - Look to Evidence-Based Practices to guide policies and programs in their schools
  - Believe they are responsible for the development of ALL learners
  - Advocate (to districts, policy makers, parents, teachers) on behalf of gifted kids and programs

NAGC Task Force on Advocacy (2003)

# Administrators Research



- Effective administrators with robust gifted programs.....
  - Have had training in defensible identification methods, programs, and services for gifted learners AND
  - Training leads to more support for gifted learners and gifted education

# Administrators Research



- Effective administrators with effective/ rigorous gifted programs.....
- Believe that professional development programs for teachers are essential for the implementation of evidence-based practices in their schools

# Administrators Research



- Successful principals have been found to play a key role in teachers' willingness and ability to differentiate instruction for high-ability students.

(Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 20098)

# Administrators Research



- Effective administrators with effective/rigorous gifted programs
  - Make it their responsibility to know **evidence-based practices** related to gifted programming
  - **Value** the expertise of their gifted **teacher(s)** and support **professional development**
  - Gifted programs are at the top of the care list
  - Passion and **advocacy** for **gifted** students are evident (putting money where the mouth is)

Grantham, Collins, & Dickson (2013)

# MT GIFTED PROGRAM PLANNING GUIDE



## **Administration/School Board**

- “Involvement of the administration and school board is essential for program support (recognition that there is a need for a program), and commitment to meeting the needs of *every* student. Develop an atmosphere of expectation, asking “How are you meeting the needs of the gifted children in your classroom?” Administrative support includes providing staff, time, funding, training and materials.”

# Administrators



- Administrators need professional development!
- We need our administrators to be ambassadors for gifted students, gifted programs and services, and the teachers who work with gifted students.

# OUR JOBS



- Let's work together to advocate on behalf of gifted students and those invested in their education by educating administrators.
- Go to conferences
- Persistent persuasion from all stakeholders
- Visits to districts
- Forwarding relevant research
- What can we help our administrators understand....?

# Elitism



- Gifted education programs are meant to help all high-ability students.
- Gifted learners are found in all cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic groups.
- However, many students denied the opportunity to maximize their potential because of the ways in which programs and services are funded, and/or flawed identification practices.

# ELITISM



- Move beyond single score identification of potential or high ability
- Use local norms (Lohman)
- Encourage development of programs/ research in rural, poor, Native American populations

# Acceleration



- Bust myths about acceleration
- This is among the most robustly supported interventions in the education literature
- *A Nation Empowered (A Nation Deceived)*

# Cluster Grouping



- Involves placing a group of students identified as gifted, high achieving, or high ability together in a classroom with other students.
- Use the achievement performance levels of all students to create classes of students characterized by a reduced range of student achievement levels. But including students that achieve at above average levels in all classrooms.

# Research For Us



- **Assess Administrator beliefs**
- **Assess Administrator practices**
- **Developing psychosocial variables to mediate achievement**

# At The State Level



- Storm the Statehouse
- Advocate for more funding
- Advocate for reinstatement of Special Competency License, or recognize a Certificate in Gifted
- Gifted Lab School (Fairfax County Virginia)
- Assess policy maker beliefs and practices