Talent Development: An Entryway to Gifted Programming

Advanced Academics and Gifted/Talented Programs

Overview

Identification of gifted and talented students has been an issue since the beginning of programs and services. Specifically, under identification of certain racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and students who come from economically disadvantaged households has led to large inequities within programming. Maryland recognizes gifted students in all demographic groups and hopes to provide greater access for appropriate and proportionate representation in programs. It is necessary for Maryland schools to provide additional access points for gifted and advanced learning opportunities because every student deserves to be appropriately challenged, the security and long-term competitiveness relies on such efforts, and greater accessibility to gifted/advanced programs better prepare students for college and career plans which will strengthen our state, nation, and society.

The excellence gap, the difference in percent of low-income versus high-income students who reach advanced levels of academic performance, is a continuously growing issue in American. The educational equity or social justice issue starts with the acknowledgement of Maryland's definition for a gifted student which states, "Gifted and talented student means an elementary or secondary student who is identified by professionally qualified individuals as: Having outstanding talent and performing, or showing the potential for performing, at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with other students of a similar age, experience, or environment;" This definition shows that a gifted student does not have to currently demonstrate high levels of accomplishment, but they may also show the potential for performance at high levels. Additionally, the purpose of Gifted and Talented Education law is to provide local school systems with direction to help students meet their full potential. Recognizing that gifted and talented students are found in all Maryland schools and in all cultural, ethnic, and economic groups, it is imperative that we are attentive and responsive to properly supporting talent development in all those groups.

It is important to note that there are gaps within gaps. For example, Hispanic students are a reported underidentified group in gifted programming; however, Hispanic students who are also facing economic hardship have even lower representation in programming. All racial and ethnic groups are less represented when also accounting for economic hardship. Beyond the moral obligation set forth in the law, we also have a societal obligation to ensure continued growth, economic prosperity, and national security.

CURRENT APPLICATION OF TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Below are some definitions that help create a collective understanding of current practices regarding talent development.

Talent Development: This refers to all activities involving cultivating student potential. Traditional classroom teachers develop talent or potential in students every day through various instructional lessons and supports. Also, LEAs may provide enrichment opportunities for groups or universally to a grade level that are not structured or monitored to follow success over time. These opportunities often provide exposure to enrichment outside of the traditional curriculum. While all these activities are acknowledged as growing potential in students, they do not lead to identification within gifted programs. An example of an experience that could develop talent is a field trip with an accompanying activity.

Primary Talent Development (PTD): This refers to the current PreK-2 MSDE created and approved program to cultivate early learners' potential. PTD is an example of a structured protocol that might be used to find students eligible for Promising Potential Ability. The three major goals of PTD are listed below.

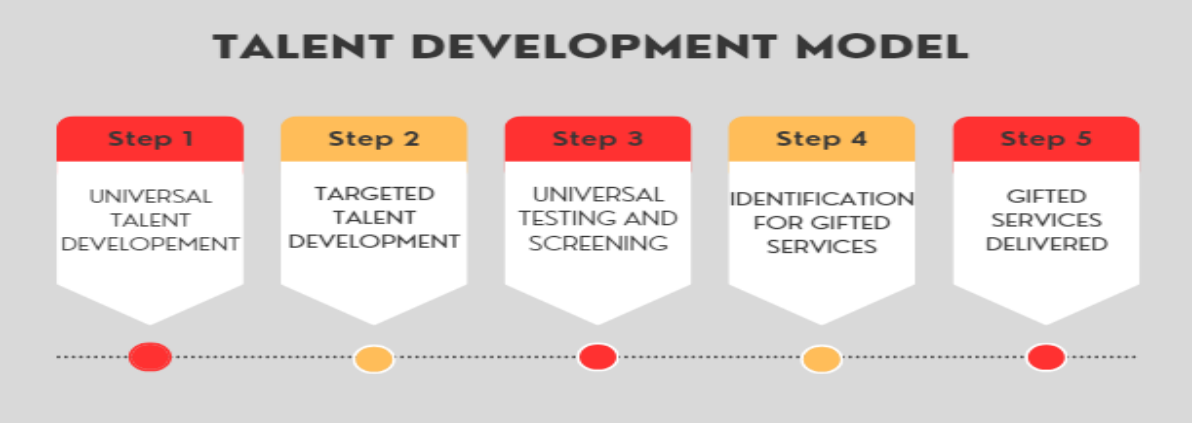
1. Provide opportunities for all children to develop and demonstrate advanced learning behaviors, including children from groups underrepresented in advanced programs.
2. Build a profile of student strengths over time, prekindergarten – second grade, which can be used to document the need for differentiated instruction and gifted/talented education.
3. Provide models of the essential strategies of analyzing attributes, questioning, and creative problem-solving scaffolded across the early learning years which are transferable to new learning situations.

Promising Potential Ability (PPA): This refers to targeted talent development focused on an identified student group from relevant structured protocol and other data sources. Maryland recognizes demonstrating potential as well as currently showcasing high abilities as gifted and talented students. PPA programming encourages the development of students who show potential for gifted identification but may not demonstrate abilities testing or other measures for formal identification directly into the traditional gifted program. These students require additional support and instructional guidance to succeed in traditional programs. Formal PPA programming should be under the guidance of a teacher trained to work with gifted students and may last 1-3 years.

Structured Protocols: These are activities designed to allow students to demonstrate potential talents. Specifically, they often target groups that might not traditionally have a wealth of enrichment opportunities or experiences that allow them to manifest talents. Used as alternatives to traditional assessments, structured protocols help expose students to opportunities, thus contributing to eliminating differences in educational experiences. Below are two examples of structured protocols.

a. USTARS: The Teacher Observation of Potential in Students (TOPS) protocol allows educators to utilize lessons that encourage critical thinking. Higher-ordered questions and creative activities elicit responses that demonstrate potential talents.
b. Young Scholars Model: This model is most associated with Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia. To successfully implement this model, teacher specialists deliver whole-class lessons to students in the early grade levels. Data is then collected regarding student behavior during these lessons. This data is then used alongside other quantitative and qualitative measures to determine which students need additional challenges through their educational journey. This model has seen positive gains regarding the inclusion of underserved student groups.

Below is a visual demonstrating a process for utilizing talent development to identify students for gifted programs.



Recommendations for Increasing Underserved Students in Gifted/Advanced Programs

The following recommendations focus on talent development and are tied to research and current best practices within the field. If schools want to create more equitable representation within their programs, the following list, which is not all-inclusive, is a great starting point.

1. **Establish an Equitable Identification Task Force:** Programs should have a task force with multiple stakeholders included that assesses the equitable identification practices of the LEA.
    a. Example Membership Includes: School/LEA Leadership, Teachers, and School Counselors. This task force should define a network of students, staff, and parents/families for feedback during their review.

2. **Provide High-Quality Targeted Professional Learning:** These opportunities should include working with advanced students from a culturally responsive perspective. Experiences should include peer observation and planning sessions. Educators must confront bias to create more inclusive programs.
    a. Learning Forward provides professional learning standards that can be utilized as a foundational tool when providing high-quality professional learning.

3. **Create Culturally Responsive Services:** These services should be customized and periodically reevaluated. The goal is to ensure an appropriate level of challenge through education plans. As student talent develops, their need for additional advanced programming opportunities may grow. Additionally, schools should be ready to scaffold support for students who are relatively underprepared.
    a. Gifted Individualized Education Plans (GIEPs) can be implemented to ensure that services are most appropriate, especially for those students who may be underprepared to participate in programs.

4. **Create a Talent Development Entryway:** Develop a separate path for participation in GT programming that does not rely on a cognitive abilities test score for participation but is tied to programming outcomes.
    a. Utilizing a comprehensive PTD portfolio and other indicators (i.e. Grades, Student Interviews) for participation in programming.
    b. Monitor student success in GT programming to determine if more underserved students participate and stay in GT/Advanced programs.
    c. Suggested parameters or guardrails to build programming include but are not limited to the following list:
        i. A minimum of two years (enrichment-based)
        ii. At least 6 student work products, across the duration of the talent development program, scored on a standardized rubric (Atypical performance rated)
        iii. Student narrative/interview of passions and interests (intense curiosity in a particular area matching programming outcomes)
        iv. Grades (Atypical top scoring or progress throughout program)

5. **Include Front-Loading Programming:** Providing enrichment and advanced learning opportunities to a broad group of students is considered front-loading programming. These opportunities should begin as early as possible, starting in pre-K or Kindergarten. If more students, especially those from underserved communities, are given more opportunities to show potential, then their talents will be found and cultivated.
    a. Exposing students to the type of opportunities that will be tested through gifted screening processes before the event with significant practice as shown promising results. Analytical reasoning skills should be a focus of development at the primary level.

6. **Introduce Conditional or Monitored Performance Placements:** Students who demonstrate potential but may not completely fit the profile of a traditionally accepted student may be admitted on a conditional basis. This means the eligibility team concluded that the student could do well in the program. The conditional placement should be monitored with frequent check-ins and a deadline for an official eligibility decision and inclusion in the GT program.
    a. Monitor student success to determine if programming matches increased access, achievement, and other program outcome goals.

7. **Identify Clear Programming Outcomes Tied to Data:** These programming outcomes should match the services and identification procedures. An example chat is included below.

Identification Tools	General Services	Outcomes
CogAT	Math and Reading enrichment, extension, and enhancement (E3) lessons provided as intervention with GT Specialist	Increased academic growth in Math and Reading as measured through statewide assessments
I-Ready Math & Reading	M3 Units taught through cluster grouping enrichment lessons by the classroom teacher and supported by the GT Specialist	
Math and Reading Specific Portfolios	Jacobs Ladder supplemental reading resource taught through cluster grouping enrichment lessons by the classroom teacher and supported by the GT specialist	
Scales for Identifying Gifted Students (SIGS) -Math and Reading only	Targeted or individualized support	
Comprehensive Arts Portfolio	Summer/outside of school time enrichment experiences targeting promising performers/artists	Increased enrollment of advanced comprehensive arts classes
Comprehensive Arts District, State, and/or National Awards and Accomplishments	Mentorships with an accomplished individual in the field and/or students mentoring other students	
Teacher Rating Scales	Special classes focused on specific disciplines to develop talent (i.e. Elementary Jazz Band)	
Student Interviews	Targeted or individualized supports	

8. **Targeted Program Outreach:** Additional outreach and engagement activities should take place at Title 1 schools and within underserved areas in the community. More effort should be made to connect with parents and families that are underrepresented in GT programs. This should happen early and often.
    a. An example activity could be central office Advanced Academic and Gifted/Talented leadership presenting and sharing information at school-based activities such as back-to-school night, open houses, and other events.

9. **Targeted Enrichment:** Programming should be designed to engage underserved student groups specifically. These could include enrichment lessons developed by Gifted/Advanced Programming and Multilingual Learner Offices targeting a group with a specific proficiency level.
    a. Young Scholars: A Talent Development Model for Finding and Nurturing Potential in Underserved Populations explains Fairfax County Public Schools model which has shown promising results since its creation.

10. **Stakeholder Engagement:** There should be consistent collection, analysis, and action planning related to underserved stakeholder groups. Program evaluation should be tied to this feedback to ensure actions are responsive to issues addressed by underserved communities.
    a. Including more underserved students in programming involves working closely with these groups to identify issues. An example activity could be creating a student advisory group at the high school level focused on a sense of belonging in advanced programs.