

KEY THEMES AND
RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM
The Dream Unencumbered

NAGC Invitational Colloquium

May 22, 2023



For more than 50 years, NAGC, and the field of gifted education at large, has been committed to equitable access to programs and services for all students capable of advanced learning, regardless of their race, income, or geographic location. Yet despite efforts of advocates, researchers, and educators within the field, inequity in access to gifted programs persists. One reason this problem is intractable is the lack of communication between gifted education and other educators and advocates. Few people outside of the field are aware of the history of research and advocacy on behalf of gifted children of color or gifted children in poverty. Conversely, experts in gifted education do not always benefit from the perspectives of others who advocate for students of color or students in poverty.

The aim of *The Dream Unencumbered** was to begin to bridge the gap that separates gifted education from the rest of the education community. Convinced that equity in gifted education can only occur with the involvement of the broader education community, the NAGC Board of Directors invited advocates and educators invested in the lives of culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse (CLED) students, but outside of gifted education, to spend a day in conversation about how to improve equity and access to gifted programs. During a day where attendees experienced everything from surprise to solidarity, key themes emerged to form the basis for a new, cross-disciplinary coalition for action.



Selection of *The Dream Unencumbered* Attendees

- American Federation of Teachers
- Association for Career and Technical Education
- Association of Latino Administrators and Supervisors
- Association for Middle Level Education
- Elev8 Baltimore
- Latinos for Education
- Morgan State University
- National Association of Bilingual Education
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Association of School Psychologists
- National Council on Teacher Quality
- National Education Association
- National Head Start Program
- National Indian Education Association
- National Science Foundation
- Quality Education for Minorities
- UMBC McNair Scholars Program

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Key Themes and Recommendations: Preparation

The absence of universal personnel preparation in gifted education perpetuates misconceptions about the prevalence of gifted students in all populations and the aims of gifted education.

- All teachers and principals should receive significant preservice preparation in gifted education, including the ways giftedness manifests in different populations and how they can support its development in the classroom.
- Preservice learning should be followed by regular in-service training to ensure all school personnel have up-to-date knowledge about best practices in equitable gifted education.
- School districts should also ensure that all teachers receive in-service learning to create an accurate mindset regarding the presence of advanced ability in diverse populations.

“We are ready to hear your perspectives and consider new ideas. We want to know what we’re not seeing.”—**NAGC President Lauri Kirsch**

“It’s both fascinating and problematic that students who have giftedness can be seen as a problem instead of a possibility.”—**Sarah Elwell, American Federation of Teachers**

All students benefit from seeing intellectual leaders of color teaching in gifted programs.

- School districts should encourage teachers of color to acquire credentials in gifted education.
- School districts should take advantage of local, state, and federal programs to build advanced knowledge and instructional skills among teachers of color.

Key Themes and Recommendations: Practice

Diverse students with advanced ability are identified when districts cast a wide net and use an empowering mindset.

- Despite prevailing misconceptions, students with advanced abilities exist in places as diverse as the social service system, Title 1 schools, English Language Learning programs, and rural America. Administrators, teachers, and counselors should be aware of and alert to signs of advanced intelligence and creativity.
- Schools should use universal screening strategies as a baseline identification strategy to ensure that all students have opportunities to be screened for advanced and gifted programs. Schools should also investigate whether using local school and district norms to evaluate test scores would result in a more equitable identification process. The assessment process should include multiple measures that capture strengths based on a student’s culture, native language, and ethnicity.
- States and districts should review their definitions of gifted and talented to ensure that the local definition allows for either advanced aptitudes or high achievement.

“Every single school has students working above grade level, but in many schools, stereotypes are so strong about what talented students look like that we look right through them.”—**Jonathan Plucker, Johns Hopkins University**

- States and school districts should ensure students have opportunities to qualify for advanced and gifted services multiple times during their school careers.
- Assessment instruments used in the identification process should align with available program options.

Key Themes and Recommendations: Programming

The excellence gap in advanced learning is large and has increased over the past decade.

- Administrators and teachers in every school in the nation should identify students who are ready to learn at a higher level than their peers and provide them with additional challenge.
- Students identified via local norms should receive substantial advanced program opportunities so they can bridge the local excellence gap.

“We don’t want gifted education used to create or sustain racial or economic divides. We are ready to work to end those practices.” —[Shelagh Gallagher](#), NAGC President-Elect

Early childhood gifted education is essential to closing the excellence gap.

- Waiting until third grade to begin advanced programming allows the excellence gap to grow unabated during crucial developmental years. All schools should regularly offer learning experiences in K-2 that challenge students ready for advanced literacy, numeracy, and reasoning to minimize or prevent an excellence gap.



The school and community must ensure that participation in advanced courses does not result in a child's alienation within and outside the gifted program.

- An integral part of the equity problem in gifted education is the cultural association of intelligence with “acting White.” Parents, schools, and communities must help break this myth, which perpetuates an underachievement cycle among Black, Hispanic or Latino, and Native American students with advanced abilities.
- Placing a child in a gifted classroom where they are the only person of a particular race or socioeconomic class may be counterproductive. Identify cohorts of diverse students so students have a broadly representative peer group within the gifted program.
- Many cultures value educational goals beyond academic achievement. Gifted programs should integrate curriculum models that address individual development and positive cultural identity.
- Advocacy organizations such as NAGC should gather and disseminate examples of program and service models that are successful in identifying and supporting gifted students from diverse backgrounds to audiences beyond the gifted education community.

Key Themes and Recommendations: Policy

Poor, ethnically diverse, and rural students with advanced abilities suffer most when schools, districts, or states decide against offering advanced courses or gifted programs.

- The nation would benefit from federal legislation requiring equitable programming for gifted students in every school. At minimum, advocates should work to promote passage of the Advanced Coursework Equity Act and also push for federal and local legislation requiring universal personnel preparation in gifted education and early childhood gifted education.

“Why is undereducation the definition of Black culture?”—**Jeffrey Blount, Award Winning Author/Former Television News Director**

“We know it’s more than grades, we know it’s more than test scores. It’s character, it’s potential, it’s desire. It’s our job, it’s our duty, to restore that sense of hope, that sense of possibility.”—**Darryl Peterkin, City University of New York**



“... you have to understand we’re talking about this opportunity gap ... funding is at the forefront ... a huge focus for Navajo Prep is going after funding dollars.”—**Shawna Becenti, Navajo Prep IB School**

Key Themes and Recommendations: Partnership

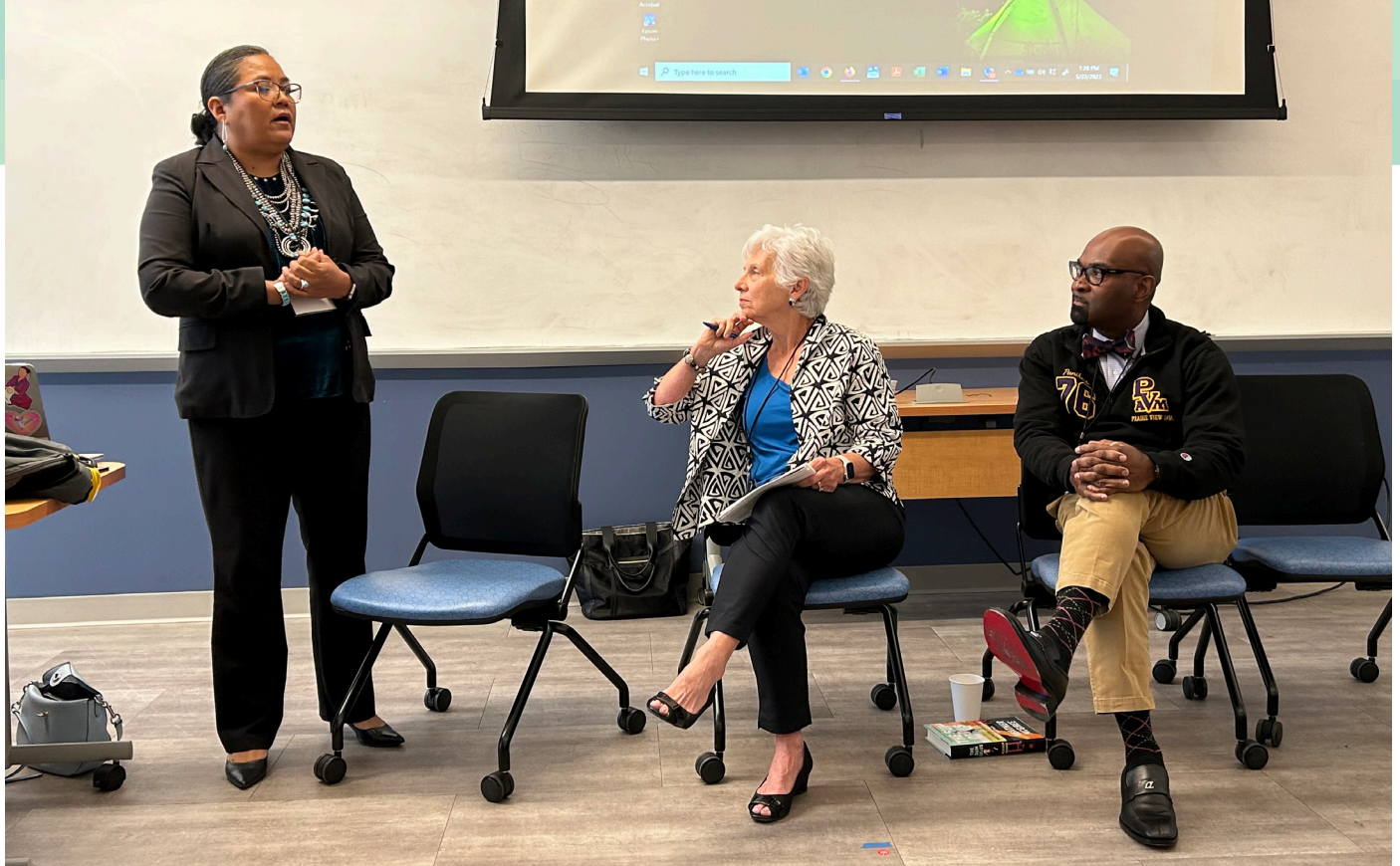
The causes of inequities in gifted education are systemic and multifaceted, requiring involvement of educators and advocates from outside gifted education.

- Advocacy for gifted, diverse learners will be more successful with a coalition of leaders including gifted education professionals, content area specialists, school administrators, higher education, advocates for Black, Hispanic, Native American, poor, and rural students, policy experts, and business leaders who are concerned about the pipeline of America's talent.
- Organizations like NAGC and its affiliates should continue to conduct conversations and build opportunities for collaboration with leaders and educators from outside of the field of gifted education.

"[We need] many individuals who can help move the needle."—**Tarek Grantham, University of Georgia**

"... what I heard this morning [was very interesting] but ... how do we get beyond words? What are the action steps?"—**Stephen Linkous, Arlington County Schools/Association of Latino Administrators and Supervisors**





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