Best Educational Practices
with Low-Income, High-Ability Students

Gifted students from low-income backgrounds, including those who are culturally or linguistically different, share many of the personal traits and characteristics of gifted students who are not. However, because they may have had fewer opportunities to gain the academic background knowledge needed to be successful in school and may have unique psychological and social issues as a result of poverty and marginalization, different and distinct approaches to identification and programming are sometimes necessary to fully develop their talents and abilities. After presentations and discussion at the 2012 NAGC National Summit on Low-Income, High-Ability Learners, participants who work closely with these students developed the following list of recommended best practices that is informed by research and practice and follow these general assumptions:

- Poverty and minority status are not the same. Although there is overlap, poverty manifests differently based on geography, ethnicity, and race.
- Poverty is pervasive and includes students from rural, White, urban, African American, Hispanic, Asian, and other cultural backgrounds.
- Typical characteristics of gifted students may manifest differently in low-income, high-ability learners.

Identification Practices

Identification practices should be inclusive, culturally responsive, cast a wide net, and begin early to get a holistic assessment of students. Other recommendations include:

- Use multiple and varied types of assessments including tests, observational data, and rating scales with adequate technical qualities (see NAGC position paper on assessment, www.nagc. org,) that are appropriate to students' cultural backgrounds and language.
- Provide multiple entry points into gifted programs (e.g., offer opportunities for students to retest or qualify for programs at later times as their skills develop).
- Create multiple pathways (e.g., qualify on the basis of test scores and/or a portfolio) into gifted programs.
- Evaluate students' potential for advanced study in view of previous learning opportunities by using local and subgroup norms.
- Mine assessment data for patterns of performance that indicate upward trajectories and rapid growth and improvement.
- Present students with challenging curriculum and monitor response as a means to identify and collect evidence of advanced academic potential.
- Identify giftedness for subsequent talent development but also develop talent to subsequently identify giftedness.
- Provide training to all teachers that focuses on the importance of respecting and valuing cultural differences, irrespective of socioeconomic status, and prepare them to become better talent spotters for all gifted students.

Programs and Services

Programming and services for low-income, high-ability students must be culturally responsive, should always include challenging curriculum and opportunities for extended contact with peers, and should have a strong focus on the development of both cognitive and psychosocial skills. Recommendations include:

- Provide challenging, enriching learning experiences to all students as early as preschool.
- Create preparatory programs that intensely

frontload challenging curricula aimed at preparing students to succeed in gifted programs.

- Use challenging and enriched instruction with underperforming, high-ability students that is designed to develop advanced skills, rather than remediation, in order to fill in skills or content gaps.
- Provide training in advanced content in areas in which teachers lack a strong background.
- Increase learning time and provide further opportunities for advanced learning through after-school and summer programs.
- Include as a critical aspect of programming opportunities for gifted students to be together so they can form friendships and receive support from peers.
- Create talent development paths for students that are comprised of continuous opportunities for appropriately advanced and enriched curriculum (e.g., pre-AP to AP, Middle Years IB to IB).
- Create partnerships with local institutions of higher education or community organizations in order to provide more comprehensive services such as internships and mentorships to students and augment students' social networks with supportive adults and peers.
- Ensure that curriculum is multicultural and enables students to make connections to their lives.
- Infuse learning opportunities into the curriculum that cultivate psychological skills that support continued commitment to high achievement, including attitudes towards effort and learning.
- Create parent programs that simultaneously build cultural and social capital among families and capitalize on the strengths of families to support their child's talent development.

Supportive School Cultures

School cultures that exalt individual differences of all kinds and value and reward high academic achievement create contexts in which low-income, high-ability students from all backgrounds can thrive. Recommendations to create such environments include:

- Create a school culture that values individual differences of all kinds, including cultural and linguistic differences, and sees these as assets rather than deficits.

- Create a school culture that values and rewards intellectualism and academic achievement in all students.
- Provide multicultural training (e.g., racial, geographical, socioeconomic) to all educational staff focused on eliminating deficit thinking.
- Examine policies and procedures regarding the identification of giftedness, selection for advanced programs, and curriculum within programs to ensure that they do not inadvertently present obstacles or disincentives to low-socioeconomic students.
- Create a school culture that views parents and the community as partners in the education of their children and values and actively cultivates their input and participation.

A list of best practices will remain just that unless it is coupled with a commitment to looking at low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse students from a different lens and from a perspective that emphasizes strengths instead of weaknesses, differences rather than deficits, possibilities as opposed to limitations, and solutions instead of obstacles.