

# A CALL TO ACTION

Supporting Equity, Diversity,  
and Access  
for Gifted Students



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for the Gifted  
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The Association for the Gifted (TAG) has had a focus on equity, diversity, and access for two decades. In 2001, the original document issued by TAG was entitled *Diversity and Developing Gifts and Talents: A Call to Action*. This call to action was updated and reissued in 2009. Thus, TAG's current document *A Call to Action: Supporting Equity, Diversity, and Access for Gifted Students* continues the priority and restates the continuing need to address these important issues in the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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# A Call to Action: Supporting Equity, Diversity, and Access for Gifted Students

In a diverse society, it is critical that we find and develop the gifts and talents of all children and youth in our nation. Equity, diversity, access, and excellence are essential to high-level academic achievement. Diversity has been a topic of discussion in America for decades. Embedded in discussions of equity, diversity, access, and excellence are race, culture, class, ethnicity, income, gender, sexual orientation, linguistic differences, and learning differences.

Our Mission Statement speaks directly to this:

The Association for the Gifted (TAG), a division of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), embraces and supports the needs of students with gifts and talents, focusing on multi-exceptional and other diverse learners, through advocacy, professional learning, and resources.

CEC-TAG values working collaboratively and respectfully to advocate for quality education and service for all children with gifts and talents, especially those who are twice-exceptional (2e) and from other diverse populations. Given TAG's emphasis on equity, diversity, and inclusion, this document is a call to action for all stakeholders, as there is shared responsibility for providing schools where all students thrive, including gifted and talented students from racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically different (RCELD) populations who are too often underrepresented. In order to achieve diversity, equity, and inclusion, action is required in six areas:

- professional learning,
- equitable access,
- culturally responsive curriculum and instruction,
- research in equity and diversity,
- parent and community partnerships, and
- policy.

This call to action presents key data points, recommendations, resources to learn more, and research references in each of the six action areas. Developing the strengths of all gifted and talented and high-ability learners requires purposeful actions by all stakeholders to ensure a bright future for our nation and our world.

*Please note, researchers often use the terms “Hispanic” and “Latinx” interchangeably. For consistency, the term “Latinx” is used more frequently in this resource. In addition, the authors believe the phrase “racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse” (RCELD) student is the most inclusive of the populations most often underrepresented in gifted and talented services and advanced courses.*

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## Professional Learning

After earning a certificate, licensure, or endorsement in gifted education, educational professionals typically participate in annual professional learning to increase their effectiveness and enhance learning for students with gifts and talents. Professional learning should bring awareness to disparities in identification and services and suggest actions to overcome them. Ideally, preservice teachers and all other educators would be offered similar professional learning because these students are gifted and talented all day long, every day.

### The Data

The underrepresentation of racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically different (RCELD) students, as well as students who are twice-exceptional (2e), has been an ongoing discussion in gifted education for decades. The underrepresentation data are persistent, pervasive, and overwhelming; underrepresentation is a loss, not only for the students, but also for the nation. Effective, ongoing professional learning focused on equity, diversity, and inclusiveness proves critical to move the nation's schools toward increasing these populations' participation in gifted education services.

- Only five states require gifted coursework as part of preservice teacher and administrator training, and only four states require gifted coursework as part of counselor training (Plucker et al., 2018).
- A 2019 survey conducted by Education Week Research found that “most ... general education teachers receive training on working with gifted students but only a minority report that the training is mandatory” (p. 4).
- There is a “cultural mismatch between our predominantly White, female, middle-class teaching force and our increasingly culturally diverse population of students” (Davis, 2019, p. 52).
- Many educators feel unprepared to serve and teach students from diverse backgrounds even after having one or two courses on the topic (Nieto, 2013). If giftedness is added to the equation, educators feel even less prepared.
- According to the National 2e Community of Practice, “working successfully with this unique population [2e students] requires specialized academic training and ongoing professional development” (AEGUS, n.d., para. 4).

### Recommendations

What professional learning strategies for gifted and general education personnel can improve identification, enrollment, and retention of students receiving gifted services, particularly students who are RCELD or twice-exceptional (2e)? Gifted education researchers, theorists, authors, practitioners, and advocates committed to this question have identified recommendations:

- Develop system-wide equity, diversity, and inclusion policies and frameworks for professional learning for schools and districts.

- Provide quality foundational training in special and gifted education to increase the chance of educators meeting the needs of students who are twice-exceptional (2e) (Baldwin et al., 2015)
- Incorporate gifted education, particularly training and experiences in differentiating for high-ability learners, in educator preparation programs so that preservice teachers are better prepared to address the needs of students with gifts and talents (Brevik et al., 2018).
- Design professional learning experiences for teachers, counselors, and administrators about identifying and serving RCELD gifted students that are specific to the school's and district's student body and includes culturally relevant content, a safe space for candid conversations, and a collaborative approach (Lewis et al., 2018).
- Conduct an annual evaluation of gifted professional learning practices, including an equity audit.

### Resources to Learn More

- “Reframing Professional Learning to Meet the Needs of Teachers Working With Culturally Diverse Gifted Learners” (a chapter by Joy Lawson Davis in *Best Practices in Professional Learning and Teacher Preparation Series: Special Topics for Gifted Professional Development [Vol. 2]*)
- “Administrative Leadership in Gifted Education” (a chapter by Tarek Grantham, Kristina Collins, and Kenneth Dickson in the second edition of *Critical Issues and Practices in Gifted Education: What the Research Says*)
- Learning Forward (<https://learningforward.org/>)

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## Equitable Access

Despite considerable academic conversation and study, underrepresentation of racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically different (RCELD) students and those who are twice-exceptional (2e) persists in gifted and talented services and advanced courses. Although a few programs across the country are making strides in this area, the problem continues to be pervasive, and the performance divide is growing.

### The Data

Educators and the public tend to be aware of the Achievement Gap, but few are well versed in the Excellence Gap. According to Plucker and Peters (2016), “Excellence Gaps are differences between subgroups of students performing at the highest levels of achievement” (p. ix). Despite an increase in the number of students scoring at advanced levels on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, there has not been an increase in students from low-income backgrounds scoring at advanced levels. Therefore, the Excellence Gap has continued to increase over time and is present at all educational levels (Jack Kent Cooke Foundation [JKCF], 2019). Patrick et al. (2020) found several factors contributing to this disparity. Their research focused specifically on students who are Black and Latinx, but what they learned applies to all students who are RCELD and/or twice-exceptional (2e).

- Students who are Black, Latinx, or from low-income backgrounds are underrepresented in gifted and talented services.
- Many schools offer little to no advanced coursework, such as Algebra I for eighth graders, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual credit courses.
- Students who are Black and Latinx are disproportionately less likely to be in advanced courses even when their schools offer it. Schools that predominantly serve Black and Latinx students have fewer seats in advanced courses, and other schools that offer advanced courses do not enroll Black and Latinx students in those courses in representative numbers.

The JKCF (2020) reported that despite scoring in the top quartile academically, one quarter of students from the bottom economic quartile do not take college entrance exams or apply to college.

### Recommendations

The inequity illustrated by the Excellence Gap must be addressed in numerous ways. All stakeholders play a role in solving this educational crisis. The following recommendations may help a community address the Excellence Gap:

- Employ best practices in the identification of children and youth as gifted and talented.
  - Utilize local norms in schools in which few children are identified as gifted and talented (Plucker & Peters, 2016).
  - Utilize universal screening to cast a wide net for the identification of children as gifted and talented (Patrick, et al., 2020; Plucker & Peters, 2016).

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- Utilize multiple measures, including alternative assessments, to ensure opportunities for advanced learning (Plucker & Peters, 2016).
  - Employ open enrollment/access to advanced coursework within a school and district, and ensure the policy is well known to students and parents.
  - Prepare students to participate in advanced learning opportunities by frontloading, which includes scaffolding skills and concepts (Plucker & Peters, 2016).
  - Increase the number and sections of Advanced Placement courses to accommodate larger numbers of students (Patrick et al., 2020).

### **Resources to Learn More**

- Acceleration Institute at the Belin-Blank Center (<https://www.accelerationinstitute.org/>)
- Jack Kent Cooke Foundation (<https://www.jkcf.org/>)
- The Education Trust (<https://edtrust.org/>)

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## Culturally Responsive Curriculum and Instruction

RCELD refers to students who are racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically different—all historically underserved groups of children in the U.S. educational system (Artiles et al., 2010). They include students who are Black, Latinx, and Native American descent; English learners; and those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. Their academic achievement in gifted services relies on instructional and curricular support provided by classroom teachers. RCELD students and students who are twice-exceptional (2e) need curriculum and instruction that develop and hone their strengths. Current research, action steps, and resources can be used to incorporate culturally responsive curriculum and instructional support for diverse populations receiving gifted services.

### The Data

Culturally responsive curriculum and instruction within gifted services afford RCELD students opportunities to experience academic success because the curriculum and instruction utilize cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and product and performance preferences of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them.

- Researchers have concluded that culturally responsive practices are helpful for all students and should not just be targeted towards RCELD students in schools within special programs like gifted education (Ford, 2014; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014).
- Culturally responsive educators are adept at motivating all students, including those with gifts and talents, and understand that students of color may face more challenges than their White classmates and peers (Wright et al., 2017).
- Gifted students of color want, need, and deserve to see themselves mirrored in curriculum and literature (Ford et al., 2018).
- In order to appropriately serve culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional students, educators must demonstrate cultural responsiveness when interacting with the learners and families (Obiakor, 2012).
- A culturally responsive curriculum benefits all children, including those with gifts and talents, by building on the richness of varied lived experiences and cultures to make learning more meaningful (Bergeron, 2008).

### Recommendations

The inequities experienced by RCELD students and students who are twice-exceptional (2e) must be addressed. The following recommendations may help stakeholders address those inequities:

- Implement culturally responsive curriculum which is characterized by the following:
  - thematic organization (Nieto, 2013);
  - real-world application and relevant current event integration (Gay, 2010);
  - ongoing and diagnostic assessment (Ladson-Billings, 1995);
  - high expectations for all groups with support to mirror the expectation (Ladson-Billings, 2014); and

- cultures incorporated into the curriculum (Ford et al, 2018).
- Implement culturally responsive instructional practices, which include the following:
  - modeling and scaffolding (Gay, 2010);
  - cooperative and flexible grouping (Santamaria, 2009);
  - inquiry-based classroom environment (Linan-Thompson et al., 2018);
  - graphic organizers and highly visual creative student outputs (Nieto, 2013); and
  - student ownership of the learning process (Gay, 2010).

### Resources to Learn More

- Teaching Tolerance Lesson Plans and Teacher Guides (<https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks>)
- A Culturally Responsive Equity-Based Bill of Rights for Gifted Students of Color (<https://www.nagc.org/blog/culturally-responsive-equity-based-bill-rights-gifted-students-color>)

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## Research in Equity and Diversity

Renzulli (1999) identified the lack of equity in gifted education as “a time bomb that is slowly ticking away in our field” (p. 129), and added that this time bomb would “erode political support” for gifted education and that the field needed to act on these concerns in “specific and concrete ways” (p. 130). We see this prediction coming to fruition. Equity and diversity in gifted education are currently in the limelight as states are restructuring or even eliminating gifted education services altogether. Claims that services are inequitable and facilitate racial and ethnic segregation in education are the crux of the issue. Misdiagnosis and underidentification of children and youth with gifts and talents, in general, occur for many reasons and are especially prevalent among learners from RCELD populations and students who are twice-exceptional (2e). Dreilinger (2019) reported that “in addition to the 3.3 million U.S. public school children identified as gifted, there are as many as 3.6 million gifted children being overlooked in school” (para. 1). Although these issues are clearly known within the field of gifted education, there is little research establishing evidenced-based practices to address them.

### The Data

There is a critical need for research regarding strategies to support equitable identification and services.

- Plucker and Callahan (2014) stated that the current status of research in the field of gifted education “involves theory and model generative essays, research studies, and applied/advice pieces; ...within the research category, the bulk of the research in gifted education has been descriptive and correlational” (p. 393).
- In a content analysis of the literature relevant to 2e students, Hughes-Lynch and Troxclair (2019) found very limited research-based data.
- Ford and colleagues (2008) stated, “Little attention, if any, has focused on the concept of ‘racially, culturally, and linguistically responsive research’” (p. 82). This is a significant issue related to cross-cultural research.

### Recommendations

The lack of research focused on identifying evidence-based practices to better serve RCLED students and students who are twice-exceptional (2e) must be addressed. The following recommendations may help stakeholders address those inequities:

- Increase replication of existing studies on the Excellence Gap and the use of nonverbal assessments to identify RCLED students (Plucker & Callahan, 2014).
- Increase experimental research on interventions, assessment that aligns with outcomes, the use of new designs and statistical analyses, and involvement of government regarding data collection (Plucker & Callahan, 2014).
- Partner with local school districts, universities, and educational support organizations to study the effectiveness of program changes made to better identify and serve gifted RCLED students and 2e students.

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- Evaluate every aspect of research projects from a cross-cultural perspective, and utilize strategies that are appropriate for diverse groups (Ford et al., 2008).
  - Develop cross-cultural competence by being self-aware, socially responsible, culturally aware, and recognizing researcher biases (Ford et al., 2008).

### Resources to Learn More

- Council for Exceptional Children, The Association for the Gifted (<http://cectag.com/>)
- *Journal for the Education of the Gifted* (<https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jeg>)
- National Center for Research on Gifted Education (<https://ncrge.uconn.edu/>)
- Research on Giftedness, Creativity, and Talent Develop Special Interest Group, a part of the American Educational Research Association (<https://www.aera.net/SIG091/Research-on-Giftedness-Creativity-and-Talent-Development>)

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## Parent and Community Partnerships

Potential giftedness in racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically different (RCELD) children as well as children who are twice-exceptional (2e) are often overlooked or misinterpreted (Henfield et al., 2014). As a parent, then, being aware of common gifted characteristics is especially important (Luckey Goudebeck, 2019) as is understanding the nature and needs children with gifts and talents. Seminal research by Dr. Mary Frasier and her colleagues at the University of Georgia explain how traits and behaviors can look different in different populations (Frasier et al., 1995). Parent and community members need to understand the nature and needs of RCELD and 2e children in order to partner with schools more effectively.

### The Data

Parents play a critical advocacy role for their RCELD and 2e children, and they need support to fulfil this role.

- Children need exposure to peers who share their interests and passions, which further ignites their intellectual growth and love of learning (Amend & Joerg, 2019).
- Most gifted children socialize and make friends with those more related to their mental age rather than their chronological age (Cross, 2011).
- Parents and teachers do not always see eye-to-eye when it comes to behavior concerns because behavior may vary depending on the environment (Thompson & Winsler, 2018).
- Families of gifted children often feel that they do not relate to families of nongifted children mainly due to their unique academic needs. Consequently, parents of gifted children may find it difficult to access support groups within gifted or other communities (Jolly & Matthews, 2013).

### Recommendations

Children can grow socially, emotionally, and cognitively in settings intentional in supporting RCELD and 2e students with policies, procedures, and instruments (Ford, 2015). Parents can use the following recommendations to identify creative and personal strategies to better support their children's growth:

- Model and explain how to move forward after making mistakes (Amend & Joerg, 2019).
- Reflect on the stressful moments with other parents of gifted and 2e children. This interaction may provide comfort in talking to other parents with similar experiences (Zanetti et al., 2019).
- Demonstrate a comfort with personal strengths and weaknesses to help children become comfortable with their own giftedness and areas of weakness (Amend & Joerg, 2019).
- Enroll their children in enrichment programs to broaden interests within a community where students feel emotionally safe and accepted. Invitational learning is culturally responsive; it includes compassion, empathy, and a focus on justice for students (Ford, 2015).

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## Resources to Learn More

- Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (<https://www.sengifted.org/>)
- National Association for Gifted Children Parent TIP Sheets (Timely Information for Parents) (<https://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources-parents/parent-tip-sheets>)
- Our Gifted (<https://ourgifted.com/>)
- Hoagies' Gifted Education Page (<https://www.hoagiesgifted.org/parents.htm>)

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## Policy

Effective policies can make a significant impact on closing Excellence Gaps and increasing access so that students from all populations can thrive. States and districts that have implemented specific policies to address access have seen marked progress toward their goals in advancing equitable access to students who are racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically different (RCELD) or students who are twice-exceptional (2e) (Patrick et al., 2020).

### The Data

The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation regularly completes a state-by-state review of policies that support advanced learners. The latest report (Plucker et al., 2018) assigned states a grade based on 15 indicators that address both excellence in supporting advanced learning outcomes and closing Excellence Gaps. In addition, The Education Trust (Patrick et al., 2020) studied RCELD students' access and success in advanced coursework.

- Regarding excellence, states' grades ranged from B+ to D (Plucker et al., 2018).
- Regarding closing Excellence Gaps, states' grades ranged from C+ to F (Plucker et al., 2018). "Every state in the nation has Excellence Gaps—in grade 4, grade 8, and high school; in math and in reading" (Plucker et al., 2018, p. 8).
- Only 7 states required universal screening for at least one grade level, despite universal screening being a key step toward closing Excellence Gaps (Plucker et al., 2018).
- Black and Latinx students are not fairly represented in advanced courses due to systemic barriers (Patrick et al., 2020).

### Recommendations

Numerous recommendations could be made to impact closing Excellence Gaps and increasing access. A few of those recommendations are included here:

- Enact policy at the highest level possible in order to affect more students.
- Disaggregate achievement data and participation in advanced coursework by subpopulation, so that all stakeholders, including decision-makers, are informed (Patrick et al., 2020). This should include students who are twice-exceptional (2e).
- Be cognizant of state regulations and policies as well as district policies that may impact children with gifts and talents. Also be knowledgeable about policies that cross district departments such as the special education department and English Learners.
- Establish a state accountability system that focuses on growth (Plucker et al., 2018).
- Before passing policy, ask these two questions:
  - "How will this affect our brightest students?"
  - How will this help other students begin to achieve at high levels?" (Plucker et al., 2010, p. 30)

### Resources to Learn More

- Jack Kent Cooke Foundation includes specific state data as well as other information and resources (<https://www.jkcf.org/>)

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- The Education Trust (<https://edtrust.org/>)
  - National Association for Gifted Children, Gifted by State (<https://www.nagc.org/information-publications/gifted-state>)

### References

- Patrick, K., Socol, A., & Morgan, I. (2020, January). *Inequities in advanced coursework: What's driving them and what leaders can do*. The Education Trust. <https://edtrust.org/resource/inequities-in-advanced-coursework/>
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- Plucker, J. A., Glynn, J., Healey, G., & Dettmer A. (2018). *Equal talents, unequal opportunities: A report card on state support for academically talented low-income students* (2nd ed.). Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. <https://www.jkcf.org/research/equal-talents-unequal-opportunities-second-edition-a-report-card-on-state-support-for-academically-talented-low-income-students/>