Barriers that Impact Low-Income Gifted Students

There are several factors that have an effect on gifted education programs and these factors often affect low-income gifted students across the United States. These impacts include the lack of identification, low socioeconomic status (SES), and differences due to rural or suburban environmental influences. Due to these varying factors, it can be challenging to set identification standards as the gifted definition varies from state to state. Although these barriers remain a major concern for gifted advocates as they directly shape services, there are increasing efforts to overcome these obstacles.

High potential/gifted and talented students exhibit different aptitudes and backgrounds. Educators should adopt the use of assessments that are both objective and subjective to ensure more accurate identification. Changes in identification practices might include providing students with several opportunities to explore and develop talents prior to beginning the identification process. Using universal screenings to avoid under-identifying talented students, adopting flexible cut-off scores, and ensuring that we are using culturally appropriate assessments can also help to increase identification.

One major concern for many educators where identification is concerned is the startling gap between high SES students and low SES students. In the United States students who come from higher SES areas are seven times more likely to qualify for gifted services. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are much less likely to be considered for identification. The evidence also suggests that this gap could be narrowed through an increase in testing, and more culturally appropriate testing. As we learn more about addressing all students for potential, modifications in assessments may help to address these significant gaps.

Strategies that help promote equity in gifted education include multiple assessments, training of all teaching staff on common traits and characteristics of high potential/gifted students and ensuring a diverse school staff. Early identification of giftedness improves the likelihood that a student will fully develop their talent. When individuals are denied equal access to assessment for potential, they lose opportunities for future development. Development that could open educational and professional doors and ultimately make them more successful as adults.

Teachers play a vital role in the identification process and can help to increase the number of students who are tested for giftedness. To aid educators in recognizing their own biases, they must be more intentional in their effort to increase awareness of cultural differences and equity. Teachers who come from different backgrounds contribute to a broader recognition and understanding of the abilities of diverse student populations. Students from marginalized groups navigate challenges which other students do not face. Most agree that we must cast a wider net to ensure identification of all high potential/ gifted and talented students.

If educational leaders do not take steps to mitigate differences in identification opportunities, schools will continue to overlook gifted students from marginalized groups. We must have a better understanding of why these SES gaps occur. Knowing this information is critical to designing more accurate assessments which address current assessment limitations. Providing identification of potential growth is often hindered by the shortage of high quality, gifted/talented trained teachers and staff in many districts. Aside from having more accurate assessments, all students must have equity of opportunities that promote academic and intellectual growth, creativity, and leadership.

Resources:
1. Grissom, J. A., Bleiberg, J. F., & Redding, C. (2019). Low-income students are profoundly underrepresented in gifted programs. Low-income students are profoundly underrepresented in gifted programs | National Association for Gifted Children