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Expanding the Federal Role in Gifted Education

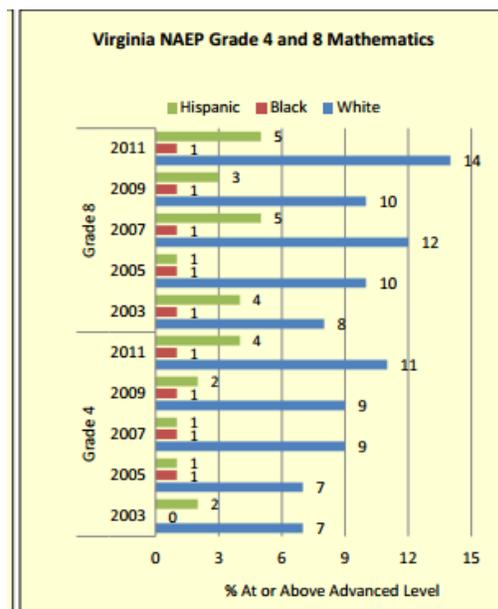
SUMMARY

- There are more than 3 million students with gifts and talents who require specialized instructional services to reach their potential. Unfortunately, access to these services depends solely on state and local funding, which is highly variable.
- There is a significant “excellence gap” at the top achievement levels between minority and Caucasian students and between low-income students and their more advantaged peers in every state of the nation. This educational crisis receives little attention among policymakers in Washington, D.C.
- CEC-endorsed bi-partisan legislation, the *TALENT Act* (H.R. 2338/S.512), proposes comprehensive revisions to the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind* to close the “excellence gap” by providing tools for educators and schools.
- Increased investment is needed in the *Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act* to support research and development in identifying and serving students with gifts and talents, particularly from underserved populations.

There is a clear national need to develop the talent of the more than 3 million high-ability learners in the United States, whose performance is falling behind that of students in other industrialized nations. It is well-documented that students with gifts and talents have learning needs requiring specialized educational services if they are to reach their potential. Unfortunately, a lack of federal investment in this population means that access to these services depends solely on state and local funds, which is highly variable and unpredictable.

The students hurt most through this scenario are those high-potential students in underserved urban and rural districts who go unidentified and unserved. This under-investment in excellence has resulted in a new and widening achievement gap – the gap between minority and economically disadvantaged students who are gifted and talented and their more advantaged, high-ability peers. Researchers have documented a growing gap on both statewide assessments and on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that, at current achievement rates, will take decades to close.ⁱ

In Virginia, for example, 14% of 8th-grade white students reached the “advanced” level on NAEP reading while only 1% of 8th-grade African American students reached this level. This large achievement gap at the advanced level between African American and white students mirrors “excellence gaps” between low income and more advantaged students. Similar excellence gaps exist in every state.



Source: Indiana University, Center for Evaluation & Education Policy
<https://www.iub.edu/~ceep/Gap/excellence2/VA.pdf>

Furthermore, recent studies have revealed:

- High-achieving students from disadvantaged backgrounds, when compared to their more advantaged peers, are twice as likely to drop out of school; more likely to lose ground as they move forward in their schooling; and are less likely to attend or graduate from college.
- 55% of all high schools offer calculus classes, whereas only 29% of high schools with the highest enrollments of African American and Hispanic students offer calculus classes.
- African American and Hispanic students are underrepresented in gifted education programs. African American students represent 17% of the total student population, while their enrollment in gifted programs is 9%; Hispanic students represent 20% of the total student population while their enrollment in gifted programs is 12%.

The future of our students and the nation’s future competitiveness rely on federal leadership that addresses the “excellence gap.” CEC has endorsed the *TALENT Act*, bi-partisan legislation that was introduced by Representatives Polis and Latham (H.R. 2338) and Senators Grassley, Casey, and Mikulski (S.512). All Congressional offices are urged to co-sponsor the *TALENT Act*.

Bi-Partisan TALENT Act (S. 512/H.R. 2338)

Introduced by Reps. Polis (D-Colo.), Latham (R-Iowa), Sens. Mikulski (D-Md.), Grassley (R-Iowa), Casey (D-Pa.)

- ✓ **Changes to Assessment & Accountability Systems:** Revisions to the assessment and accountability system to ensure that assessments more accurately measure the knowledge and skills of high-ability students and changes to the accountability system to emphasize the highest performance levels.
- ✓ **Increases in Professional Development:** Recognizes the critical role of teachers as the catalyst for learning and academic growth and as such expand professional development opportunities in gifted education pedagogy for teachers nationwide.
- ✓ **Focus on Underserved Populations:** Address research demonstrating a growing “excellence gap” at the top achievement levels between students from low-income backgrounds and their more advantaged peers by directly addressing this population of students: students who are economically disadvantaged, English language learners, individuals with disabilities, and individuals from rural geographic areas.
- ✓ **Emphasize Research and Dissemination:** Recognize the expansion of research in gifted education as the foundation on which the success of our nation’s high-ability students depends by expanding research grant opportunities, developing best practices and expanding the mission of the National Research Center for the Gifted and Talented.