GIFTED AND AT RISK: A CROSS-DISTRICT COMPARISON OF GIFTED STUDENT GROWTH AND SOLUTIONS FOR URBAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract:
In this study, the researchers highlight differences in district level value-added growth data of gifted students in urban and suburban districts, as categorized by the Ohio Department of Education. In addition to analyzing the difference between the academic growth of urban and suburban gifted students, the researchers sought to synthesize existing literature to compile best practice strategies focused on bolstering the academic success of gifted urban students. Results confirmed the researchers' hypothesis that gifted students in urban districts exhibit significantly lower growth scores than their suburban counterparts. The authors conclude with strategies from existing literature that may prove useful for professionals serving gifted urban student populations, particularly ethnically diverse gifted students.

Keywords: gifted; urban; value-added; student growth; counseling

Introduction

There has been ample research examining the urban achievement gap; scholars and practitioners have cultivated a rich, multifaceted dialogue studying ways to enrich the educational experience of urban students. Yet, there has been little research examining whether this urban achievement gap can be also found in gifted student populations, a special student population with both the potential for great success but also at risk for underachievement and marginalization. Still, as the educational landscape becomes increasingly equity-minded, it is imperative that all practitioners maintain awareness of the special needs of potentially marginalized student populations in order to maintain the professional responsiveness needed to ensure the continued success of all students.

Invoking Abraham Maslow, Ford (2004) contends, "in order to reach our full potential, we must have our basic needs met. This includes the need for safety, belonging, identity, and esteem. For diverse gifted children to develop optimally, they must be challenged and appreciated" (p. 27). Indeed, the ideal learning environment for gifted students is both cognitively stimulating as well as emotionally nurturing, a place where they can find understanding, belonging, and support. For gifted students in urban environments, however, a supportive, safe school climate can be challenging for faculty and staff to consistently maintain.

According to Nelson (2008), "While school personnel are the individuals that are there to teach all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, or ability level, many are ill-trained for working with a diverse population" (p. 4). In other words, racially diverse student populations often found in urban schools are at risk of experiencing stunted relationships with their teachers and other school personnel because of a dearth of cultural understanding and professional resources, thereby increasing the probability of underachievement and exacerbating students' at risk status, regardless of their cognitive abilities. The American School Counseling Association names teachers as the primary facilitators of social and emotional growth for gifted students; however, school counselors and administrators are also in positions to implement program reforms aimed at kindling the supportive school environment gifted urban students need to succeed and flourish (Colangelo & Wood, 2015). Therefore, there exists a need to examine the unique characteristics and challenges of gifted students so as to learn more about what (if any) potential gaps in service exist and how best to address them.

The present study will examine the factors that can place gifted students at risk for underachievement as well as how gifted students in urban schools could be doubly impacted by these risk factors. While both internal characteristics as well as environmental risk factors will be explored in the literature review, the empirical portion of this study will focus primarily on how the external environment can influence the success of gifted urban students, particularly students of color, much in the same way previous research has identified an urban achievement gap in general student populations.

Literature Review

Challenges of Gifted Students: Causes and Effects

Historically, the term *gifted* has referred to exceptional cognitive ability as assessed by various measures of intelligence. Throughout the twentieth century, gifted identification relied primarily on IQ tests. More recently, however, scholars and practitioners often identify giftedness using the same standardized assessments used by school districts to measure reading or math proficiency (Robinson & Clickenbeard, 2008), typically identifying scores two standard deviations above the norm as "gifted" (Ohio Department of Education, 2014).

Literature exploring classroom behavior and achievement of gifted students has historically been contentious. Numerous studies attest to gifted students' emotional and scholastic resilience (Amini, 2005; Baker, 1995; Pufal-Struzik, 1999, Kong & Zhu, 2005). Research in this area often finds that due to their advanced cognitive processes, gifted students are better equipped to cope with turmoil, both internal and external, and are less at risk for academic underachievement than their non-gifted peers. Contrasting research, however, provides evidence that gifted students are especially at risk for underachievement and socio-emotional issues due to cognitive and emotional incongruence and isolation from peers or family (Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000; Seely, 2004; VanTassel-Baska, 2000). In other words, this research finds that giftedness does not protect students from social and academic difficulties; in fact, it could be the cause.

Regardless of whether the majority of gifted students are resilient or vulnerable, gifted students are still a rather heterogeneous group (Ryan & Coneybeare, 2013), and research demonstrates that at least some gifted students suffer from gifted-specific academic issues, most notably underachievement, which stifle their potential for academic and community leadership.

Gifted students can underachieve due to lack of engagement and may fail to complete their schoolwork (Ryan & Coneybeare, 2013), especially if they tend toward creative giftedness (Seely, 2004). Gifted students may ask questions or shift the focus of classroom discussion to a topic that deviates from the lesson plan. Furthermore, if gifted students do not receive encouragement or enthusiasm from teachers and peers, they may become discouraged and stop asking questions all together, becoming disinterested in all lessons and schoolwork (Ryan & Coneybeare, 2013). In addition, gifted students are often sensitive perfectionists who tend to internalize both successes and failures (Blaas, 2014), which can make every assignment very high stakes for the student. This type of *maladaptive perfectionism* can remove all value from schoolwork as a coping mechanism on the part of the student to protect their emotional well-being.

As a result of these classroom behaviors, gifted students also face an increased risk of strained relationships with teachers (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013; Geake & Gross, 2008), which may be exacerbated by a cycle of disruptive behavior brought on by lack of engagement or overcompensation for peer relationships that suffer due to cognitive incongruity between gifted students and their same-age peers (Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Thomson, 2012). This phenomenon, also known as asynchronous development, occurs when gifted students' high cognitive capabilities do not match their social capabilities (Elijah, 2007) and can often result in behavior teachers and other adults perceive as challenging or disruptive as gifted students search for ways to relate to their peers. Geake and Gross (2008) suggest that teachers may even possess a negative affect toward gifted students due to their perceived propensity for social non-compliance, a bias which ultimately places gifted students at risk for exclusionary discipline that further isolates them from classroom learning, especially if the gifted students are in an urban school where exclusionary discipline is much more common (Allen & White-Smith, 2014 Wilson, 2014).

Gifted Urban Students at Risk

Gifted students from urban communities can be especially at risk because many of the factors that negatively impact gifted students in general are often exacerbated by the structure and environment of urban schools. For example, according to Allen & White-Smith (2012), educators in urban schools are most often White women from suburban backgrounds that may have limited experience interacting with diverse student populations. These limitations paired with a lack of professional experience can often cause teachers and administrators to resort to exclusionary tactics when faced with challenging students (Wilson, 2014), pushing said students out of the classroom and abandoning attempts to facilitate growth, making them more likely to underachieve, experience exclusionary discipline, or even drop out. These barriers to the facilitation of meaningful relationships in urban schools can carry over into gifted populations specifically because gifted students are "often keen observers of the human condition," (Delisle, 2012, p. 66), and may be acutely cognizant of others' apprehension or refusal to form meaningful

relationships with them, making them more withdrawn and isolated. Furthermore, urban districts are less likely to employ highly experienced teachers with extensive subject-specific certifications (De Luca, Takano, Hinshaw, & Raisch, 2009; Jacob, 2007), which could impact gifted students' growth and achievement, although observable teacher characteristics like certifications and educational level account for only a small amount of the quality gap between urban and non-urban schools (Sass, Hannaway, Xu, Figlio, and Feng, 2012). Instead, a disparity in quality may very likely be due, at least in part, to unmeasured characteristics that can impact student growth, such as teacher-student relationships and overall school policies and climate, factors that greatly impact school bonding, or the feeling of attachment and security students experience at school (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

This interpersonal dynamic between gifted students and educators is a useful, albeit understudied component of academic achievement in gifted students, especially urban gifted students. Most research focusing on gifted students in urban districts specifically focuses on how policy and classroom practice can negatively impact gifted urban students. For example, urban districts can lack robust gifted identification and placement programs (Borland & Wright, 1994; Nelson, 2008) due to a lack of funding, focused leadership (Gentry, Rizza & Gable, 2001; VanTassel-Baska, 2010) or cultural awareness (Nelson, 2008; Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2010). Even assessment for giftedness itself is based on intelligence or achievement testing at which economically underprivileged students are at a disadvantage (Ford, 1998; Sanders, 2000; Sandy & Duncan, 2010). Even if they are identified, gifted urban students are at risk of performing considerably lower than their ability level because urban schools catering to a largely minoritized student body are often less likely to offer rigorous academic curricula and high-ability tracks (Ford, 1998). Additionally, according to Seely (2004), teachers in urban districts often unconsciously have lower academic expectations of students of color, more specifically African American and Latino students, which may lead to less rigorous instructional methods or inattention to student accountability.

The experiences of gifted students are unique in that the predominant theme regarding gifted students' success lies within supportive classroom relationships paired with stimulating academic material as instrumental in the facilitation of optimal learning and growth. In addition, challenges of gifted students such as asynchronous development, maladaptive perfectionism, and underachievement are exacerbated by the urban setting because gifted students attending an urban school are often less likely to form supportive relationships with teachers and other school personnel, making them especially at risk for poor educational outcomes. Ultimately, gifted urban students can suffer from an absent or poorly constructed socio-academic support structure which, despite their cognitive gifts, they cannot overcome to reach levels of achievement similar to their more adequately supported peers in non-urban environments. Although much previous research has explored the achievement gap between urban and non-urban students in general (Barton, 2003; Ferguson, 2002; Mickelson, 1990; Peske & Haycock, 2006), the need to examine the outcomes of gifted urban students remains. As such, the focus of the current study is to deepen understanding gifted urban students' success and shortcomings.

Research Problem and Objective

Despite mounting attention regarding the role of inclusivity and community in regard to student success, due largely in part to the misconception that gifted students can "fend for themselves" (Nelson, 2008, p. 2), there is little empirical research examining how gifted students fit into the well-established research narrative of urban students' underachievement. Further, there are few resources on which practitioners can draw to provide gifted students the emotional and academic support they need and mitigate the potential consequences of ineffective school-based relationships and climate.

The present study seeks to spark discussion about an under-studied at-risk student population: gifted students in urban schools. To this end, we compare differences in the academic growth of gifted students in urban and suburban school districts. It is our hope that this research will foster awareness about any potential areas of need for gifted urban students and dispel any notion that cognitive ability alone can generate academic success in at risk student populations. We discuss how gifted students are impacted academically by their school environments (e.g. quality of relationship with teachers and feelings of community overall) as well as the ways educators can bolster the socio-academic well-being of gifted urban students in their schools. Our findings illustrate that by expanding our understanding of the challenges faced by urban students educators can better understand how to maximize the successes of urban gifted students. In doing so, we seek to contribute to the rich dialogue concerned with boosting urban students' success.

Research Questions

The researchers aim to address the following questions:

(1) What is the difference in the value-added scores of gifted students in urban and suburban school districts in the state of Ohio?

(2) What strategies does existing literature indicate could maximize the service of gifted urban students?

Data and Variables

Data were retrieved from the Ohio Department of Education's 2013-2014 Report Cards' Gifted Indicator dataset. These data include gifted-specific achievement information, including gifted students' mean scores of Ohio Achievement Assessments (OAA) by district, value-added growth scores, value-added letter grades, and value-added statewide ranking. District demographic data were retrieved from the Ohio Department of Education's 2013 School District Typology dataset, which provides each district's typology, median income of district, and percentage of students in poverty. The variables used for this research were (1) value-added score and (2) typology.

Value-added

The value-added score has been adopted by state departments of education in hopes of gaining a clearer picture of student learning outcomes. Value-added models are intended to measure the effects of instruction on student growth from one year to the next (Hill, Kapitula & Umland, 2011; Tekwe et al., 2004) and are often considered more comprehensive than instructional observations alone, which can be subjective and may lack the validity of value-added assessments (Harris, Rutledge, Ingle & Thompson, 2010).

The state of Ohio adopted the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) instrument to measure student growth. According to Sanders (2000), this instrument was designed to measure student growth independently of non-school factors such as ethnicity and socio-economic status. Therefore, an analysis of students' growth is compared to their own previous measurements of individual achievement, which is especially valuable for researchers and practitioners attempting to understand the quality of instruction and school services, such as counseling and intervention, apart from the detrimental effects of student poverty.

In Ohio, value-added scores are actual growth measures, which are first compared to values of expected growth calculated by EVAAS, and then assigned a letter grade reflective of how well students fulfilled expected growth measures. While scoring varies slightly from district to district, value-added scores of 2.00 and above are rated an A, which means that the students showed more than one year's growth; a score of 1.00 is rated a B, which means that students met the expected one year growth measure; a score less than 1.00 but greater than 0.00 is rated a C because students made some growth even though they did not meet the full year expected growth measure; any score less than 0.00 indicates a failure to show any growth throughout the year and is rated an F (Ohio Department of Education, 2015).

Gifted value-added. In addition to district-wide value-added measurements, Ohio provides value-added scores and rankings for the subset of students identified as gifted. Gifted students statewide are assessed for superior cognitive ability and/or specific academic ability by exhibiting outstanding performance (two standard deviations above the mean) on a general norm referenced assessment of cognitive ability as approved by the Ohio Department of Education (Ohio Department of Education, 2014). Value-added scores for gifted students are based on math and reading proficiency results for identified gifted students and are found by dividing the district's value-added gain score by the district's value-added standard error (Ohio Department of Education, 2015).

The researchers chose district-level gifted value-added scores as the variable from which to evaluate the academic success of gifted urban students, and to understand how school communities and overall institutional climate might impact academic growth. According to Sass, et al. (2012), the primary factors impacting value-added measurements designed to assess the somewhat nebulous concept of instructional "quality" are not tangible qualities at all, much like teachers' educational levels and certifications. Instead, the value-added score seems to capture more ambiguous features of the school environment, like teachers' demeanors, their abilities to relate to students, and the supportiveness of staff and administrators. Furthermore, district-level data may elucidate a greater understanding of student growth, such as the potential impact of district level policy and the local environment across a metropolitan region.

Isolating the value-added score from other state achievement measures to indicate academic success may also prove useful for understanding quality of learning for gifted students. Achievement data, such as Ohio Achievement Assessment scores, are typically high for all gifted students because they are designed to measure minimum state standards and are negatively impacted by student poverty. However, value-added scores provide insight into how much gifted students have grown throughout the school year using their own capabilities as the basis for measurement. Therefore, value-added measurements provide a much-needed level of insight into non-measurable qualities, such as schools' social climate and supportiveness, shedding additional light on the complexities of challenges that gifted urban students face.

Typology

Ohio stratifies district typologies of rural, suburban, and urban classifications using demographic data from the Ohio Department of Education's Education Management Information System (EMIS), the American Community Survey (2009), the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), and the Ohio Department of Taxation (2011) (see Ohio Department of Education, 2013). Notable measures used to determine school district typology include: Average Daily Membership (ADM), Percentage of students flagged as economically disadvantaged, median income of the district, percentage of population with a college degree or more, percentage of population in administrative/professional occupations, population density, and percentage of nonagricultural property value (Ohio Department of Education, 2013).

In 2013, Ohio identified eight typologies to classify school districts ranging from very low population rural districts to very high population urban districts. For this study, the researchers used data from the two suburban typologies with "low to very low poverty" and "average to high population" and combined these two typologies into one suburban sample. Similarly, the researchers combined the two urban typologies with the characteristics of high to very high poverty and high to very high population into one urban sample. The researchers selected the typology groups that were identified as either urban or suburban because the state of Ohio subcategorizes urban and suburban classifications based on the combined factors of population and economic status.

While the Ohio Department of Education criteria does not include ethnicity as a factor for determining the extent to which a district is considered urban, the districts included in the urban sample had an average non-White student population (characterized as Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Multiracial) of 61.3%, with Black students the most common non-White ethnicity represented (72% of non-White urban students). The average non-White student percentage in the suburban sample was less than 10% across districts.

Analysis and Results

The researchers conducted a t-test comparing the mean gifted value-added scores of the aforementioned urban (n=37) and suburban (n=121) Ohio school districts that reported a gifted value-added score. The mean gifted value-added scores for the two district groups were 2.05 for the suburban group and -0.98 for the urban group (Table 1). The t-test indicated a difference between the urban and suburban groups that was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), with an insignificant Levene's test score, indicating equal variance among sample districts (Table 2).

Table 1. *Group Statistics*

Typology	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean

Gifted VA	Urban	37	-.9819	2.00669	.32990
	Suburban	121	2.0466	2.41877	.21989

Table 2. *Independent Samples Test*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Gifted VA	Equal variances assumed	.288	.592	.000	-3.02850	.43774
	Equal variances not assumed			.000	-3.02850	.39646

Discussion

Ultimately, it is perhaps not surprising that gifted students in suburban districts outperform those in urban districts, as this is the trend with virtually all measures of academic achievement (Barton, 2003; Ferguson, 2002; Peske & Haycock, 2006). However, these results support the supposition that gifted students are not immune from the array of factors that negatively impact students in urban schools, reinforcing the notion that even exceptional cognitive ability is not a guarantee of academic success. In fact, academic success seems to be heavily impacted by the environment, even for gifted students. For instance, measures of identifying gifted students in Ohio are universal across geographic areas. While gifted identification assessments utilize achievement measures that tend to be biased against urban populations, all students statewide who score high enough to be identified as gifted did so at the same level as all others assessed by the same universal measure regardless of school district typology. It can, therefore, be inferred that the academic potential of all identified gifted students should be relatively similar statewide. However, gifted students in urban districts with high levels of poverty and a significant non-White student population are not only learning less than their suburban peers, but with a negative mean score of -0.98, they are failing to make any growth throughout the year.

One explanation for the lag in growth of gifted urban students is urban schools' lack of comprehensive gifted curricula and few opportunities for growth beyond existing curricular knowledge (Olszewski-Kubilius, & Thomson, 2010), although additional district-level research is needed to expound upon this effect. However, as mentioned in the literature review above, evidence suggests that the school environments and quality of support gifted students experience can greatly impact academic growth positively or negatively. As research has shown, this can be especially true in urban schools where quality of support has been shown to significantly impact student success. Ultimately, the results of this study spark the need for targeted discussion about how educators can cultivate school environments that are sensitive to gifted urban students' needs.

As a note, although the researchers used district-level value-added data to reach the above results, the remaining discussion will be focused primarily on building-level policy and practice. More research is needed to address district-level service for gifted students. Classroom level teaching strategies targeting gifted urban students will also not be addressed in the proceeding discussion, as additional research is necessary to better understand the impact and efficacy of specific teaching strategies on urban gifted students.

Building School-Wide Supportive Learning Environments for Gifted Urban Students

As the problem of poor learning outcomes of gifted urban students becomes more apparent, there is a growing need for the education community to identify and fine-tune tools to better serve this population. The lack of growth in gifted urban students is likely the result of a complex combination of cultural, socioeconomic, and academic/administrative factors that requires closer investigation. As such, no panacea can help all at risk gifted students. However, one way to improve the academic success of gifted urban students involves creating culturally-responsive classroom instruction that targets the needs of gifted students, thereby impacting their emotional well-being as well as overall academic engagement (Colangelo, 2002; Seely, 2004). The following strategies address issues that are conducive to creating learning environments most conducive to supporting the success of gifted urban students. The following discussion will focus on approaches that school can implement such as fostering student bonds, addressing challenges that arise, recognition of cultural differences, and advocacy efforts for urban gifted students.

Foster strong bonds and community. The value-added data used in this research are meant to measure academic growth independent of student socioeconomic variables. However, even if student poverty is not a factor in the calculation of value-added scoring, socioeconomics could still impact external factors that influence academic growth, such as school climate (Marshall, 2004) and the types of relationships gifted urban students enjoy with their teachers, administrators, and counseling and intervention staff. It is difficult to quantify student bonds within the school environment, but these relationships are integral in formulating a clear picture of a student's learning experience.

Administrators, teachers, and school counselors in urban schools can spearhead efforts to build a support network for gifted students in the form of student learning communities. Student learning communities are mostly school-based groups or clubs in which consistent interaction among members "bonds participants into a true community that maximizes their learning" (Lenning, Hill, Saunders, Solan, & Stokes, 2013). While it is a common misconception that gifted students do not need learning support because of their cognitive gifts (Nelson, 2008; Seely, 2004), gifted students, like all students, can benefit from a firm support system focused on learning and growth

Acknowledge and confront challenges. By and large, gifted students experience the same types of social and emotional issues as their non-gifted peers. School personnel working with gifted students must maintain awareness that cognitive gifts are not an antidote for emotional struggles. In fact, as explored in the literature review portion of this research, giftedness can be the cause of or further exacerbate emotional turmoil, as asynchronous development and social isolation often coincide with giftedness (Delisle, 2012). Practitioners can combat the social and emotional challenges of gifted students by using gifted identification as an opportunity to build a relationship with the student and monitor student's emotional growth alongside with his or her academic growth.

Practitioners in urban schools should also be aware of and seek to mitigate the academic challenges faced by gifted students. Even though gifted urban students exhibit the cognitive ability to excel in school, they may lack experience or confidence in accelerated gifted curricula, so even if urban schools attempt to bolster their gifted programs, gifted students still may underachieve. Olszewski-Kubilius & Thompson (2010) suggest that counselors and administrators in urban schools implement supplementary intervention programs focused on academically preparing gifted urban students for the kind of accelerated learning with which they might not be familiar. These programs could serve as bridge between academic curricula for general student populations and accelerated gifted programming. Some possible program emphases could be material that facilitates critical thinking, task management, and emotional intelligence, such as reflection questions that supplement existing coursework, study skills discussions, and individual or group journaling and/or online discussion boards. These intervention programs can be dual purposed as far as building a learning community among gifted learners, as mentioned previously. These intervention-based gifted student learning communities could also mitigate emotional issues as well.

Recognize cultural differences. Research suggests that gifted programs are designed mostly with a suburban White student population in mind (Olszewski-Kubilius & Thompson, 2010). Culturally diverse students in urban schools often feel torn in their identity (Ford, 2004)—urban Black students can equate high academic achievements to "acting White" (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008), spurning academic success in favor of peer acceptance, while Hispanic students experiencing similar dissonance may try to reconcile their academic selves with their social selves as they struggle to find role models that share their academic *and* cultural values (Flores & Heppner, 2002).

Urban schools catering to a diverse student population can respond to these disconnects by fostering a culturally-responsive

environment, including curriculum materials that showcase the achievements and challenges of culturally diverse people. School counselors and teachers can allow gifted urban students to unpack their multiple identities by promoting a cultural dialogue among all urban students, thereby creating a school-wide community from which strong socio-academic bonds can be formed. Perhaps most importantly, school personnel must simply be sensitive to the challenges of culturally diverse gifted students, understand how the various circumstances faced by students in urban schools can impact how receptive they are to traditional support strategies, and adapt accordingly.

Be an advocate. School counselors are among the team members responsible for student academic advising and can ensure that gifted urban students receive academic and career counseling sensitive to their needs. Helping gifted urban students become aware of academic options early on, by late middle school, can be one avenue to ensure successful student outcomes. All gifted students, but especially gifted urban students, need guidance in academic planning in order to meet academic and career goals as well as to find congruence with social and emotional needs. Contrary to popular belief, not all gifted students are best served by enrolling in a litany of accelerated and highly challenging coursework. Rather, finding a balance that matches student interests and abilities that allows time for obligations outside of school to be fulfilled can often best meet the complex needs of gifted students.

In 2002, the Ohio Task Force recommended that services for gifted students be provided by educators who are trained to deliver services to gifted students, instruction should be differentiated; the Written Education Plan (WEP) should address the social and emotional skills and needs of gifted students, and services should be provided in supportive classroom settings. Furthermore, this document states, "Without a system that supports accelerations, differentiation options and other appropriate services, the probability increases that children who are gifted will become alienated from school" (Ohio Task Force, 2002, p. 2). Administrators can work toward maximizing these recommended support systems by researching and developing professional development focused on supporting gifted students specifically for both faculty and staff. Additionally, given the myriad of barriers to best meet the needs of gifted urban students, maximizing service ultimately requires that teachers and school counselors also advocate for specialized training in working specifically with gifted urban populations.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

First, though there is substantial research attesting to the significant impact of school-based relationships and climate on student learning outcomes, few studies utilize district-level value-added data as a way to discern pertinent aspects of school climate. While it is clear that the value-added scores of urban districts with diverse student populations are significantly lower than those of predominantly White suburban districts, conclusions regarding the cause(s) of this discrepancy are speculative and open to interpretation. Second, the validity of value-added measurements hinges on several factors, primarily the test instrument itself classroom patterns (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010), which may vary from district to district. Additionally, Ohio's EVAAS measurement was developed without a substantial amount of transparency, so the exact formula of projected growth scores is unclear.

Gifted students as an at-risk population is still an area of research in need of more detailed analysis. This paper examines the learning outcomes of gifted students on a statewide level and therefore lacks the specificity of localized student populations and their experiences. The urban districts selected for this study have a majority non-White student population, so generally discussing gifted urban students as non-White ethnic minorities is a reasonable judgment. However, because gifted data do not specify ethnic demographics on the district level, more closely dissecting outcomes and experiences on the basis of ethnicity is a research focus that could be more closely examined. Additionally, the researchers did not examine gifted data from rural districts or high poverty, predominantly White urban districts, which may experience similarly anemic gifted programs and possible learning outcomes. Lastly, this study only addresses gifted urban students who have been successfully identified but does not address the glaring problem of the under identification of urban students and racially minoritized students as gifted. Additional research is needed to fully understand and often non-inclusive nature gifted assessment and the subsequent underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted programs.

Conclusion

The success of gifted urban students relies heavily on building meaningful relationships with adults who can understand their unique needs and help nurture their cognitive abilities. factors affecting schools, social relationships, and administrative vision all interact to create the unique culture of a school, which in turn impacts the academic success of students in ways that are difficult to measure. Mounting research supports the notion that urban students are at risk of being negatively impacted by the complex dynamics of urban schools. Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to examine all available measures of success

of urban students as well as to discuss how best to maximize those successes and minimize the institutional shortcomings that have stifled the success of far too many. With awareness and the right tools, educators can begin to challenge the issues faced by gifted urban students and perhaps even spearhead a cultural change focused on understanding and inclusion of all at risk populations.

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