

Black and Gifted in Rural America: Barriers and Facilitators to Accessing Gifted and Talented Education Programs

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Nationwide, Black students are underrepresented in gifted and talented education and advanced learner programs. These tragic outcomes occur in all demographic communities: urban, suburban, and rural. As a result, the academic and psychosocial supports needed by gifted Black students are overlooked, disregarded, and underdeveloped. Rural communities are frequently depicted as remote, lacking in social and academic experiences and opportunities, and predominantly White and economically disadvantaged. For gifted and talented Black students, these characterizations contribute to feelings of isolation and alienation in school on a daily basis. Despite their high intellectual potential, they are constantly victimized by racially oppressive conditions in society that cause stress and anxiety. The Black rural community, including Black gifted and talented students, is almost invisible in scholarship that discusses rural education in the United States. This article explores the nature of the rural communities where these students reside; shares intellectual, academic, and cultural characteristics that make Black gifted students from rural communities unique; and delineates recommendations for research, curriculum, and specific programming to meet their intellectual, academic, cultural, and psychosocial needs with an emphasis on access, equity, and excellence.

Keywords: Black gifted, access to rural gifted and talented education, culturally responsive, teacher expectations

Rural communities are very complex and sometimes difficult to distinguish from suburban communities or small towns.¹ In rural communities, education systems are faced with a unique set of challenges that stem from circumstances within the

surrounding environment and often require specialized solutions (Lavalley, 2018). In this article we explore the needs of Black students in rural communities, focusing on the academic, intellectual, and psychosocial needs of Black

¹ **Authors' note:** This article expands and reexamines previous work presented in Davis et al. (2020).

students with high intellectual abilities or who should be defined as “gifted and talented” according to typical definitions of that label. According to the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2019a), *giftedness* is defined as

students with gifts and talents perform—or have the capability to perform—at higher levels compared to others of the same age, experience, and environment in one or more domains. They require modification(s) to their educational experience(s) to learn and realize their potential. Student with gifts and talents:

- Come from all racial, ethnic, and cultural populations, as well as all economic strata.
- Require sufficient access to appropriate learning opportunities to realize their potential.
- Can have learning and processing disorders that require specialized intervention and accommodation.
- Need support and guidance to develop socially and emotionally as well as in their areas of talent. (p. 1)

In this article, we delineate several of the factors that create challenging circumstances for Black gifted students as they seek to access specialized program services and coursework that match with their advanced intellectual abilities. We also make recommendations to add to the limited research and specific best practices that may guide researchers and practitioners with an interest in the needs of Black gifted students who originate from rural communities. We conclude by considering how gifted education as a field can become more inclusive, ensure that talent from all communities becomes a focus for all our work, and produce innovative outcomes for Black gifted students, regardless of their geographic location.

The Nature of Education for Black Students in Rural America

Several states in the U.S. Southeast are noted as having sizable populations of Black students attending rural schools (Snyder et al., 2019; U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation & U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2015), such as Mississippi,

Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee. Students in these states and others are drastically lagging behind in performance compared to their peers across the nation (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation & U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2015). Mississippi has the highest percentage of students attending rural schools of any state in the nation (Showalter et al., 2017). Black rural students attending schools in these states face daily challenges that limit their access to equitable, high-quality educational opportunities. Among these students are those who should have access to gifted and talented education (GATE) and advanced learner opportunities. Additional challenges faced by rural area students include (a) the multifaceted definitions of rural areas, (b) the complex nature of distance and isolation in rural areas that impact access to higher education opportunities, (c) extreme poverty levels, and (d) a high number of low-performing schools in rural communities across the nation.

As we explore the needs of Black students in rural communities (with some attention to other students of color), we focus on communities defined as rural. Rural communities are very complex and sometimes difficult to distinguish from suburban communities or small towns. Herein, *rural* is defined as the complex range of geographically isolated communities with populations between 2,500 and 20,000 (per Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008). Nationally, one-fourth of all public school students are enrolled in rural area schools (Showalter et al., 2017). In three states, more than half of their students attend rural schools: Vermont (57.5%), Maine (57.2%), and Mississippi (56.5%). In Mississippi over 49% of the student population is Black, and Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia also have sizable populations of Black students (Snyder et al., 2019). In rural communities, education systems are faced with a unique set of challenges that stem from circumstances within the surrounding environment and often require specialized solutions (Lavalley, 2018).

Isolation and disconnectedness from metropolitan areas are two of several key factors associated with many of the problems experienced by Black students living in rural America. Being isolated and disconnected from urban area

resources may limit student access to cultural and enrichment opportunities that have much potential to expand their educational experiences. Distance and funding also pose challenges for rural area families in accessing resources that may be located in metropolitan areas. A classic example are summer and weekend opportunities hosted on urban or metropolitan college campuses, which may be inaccessible to rural area students, including programs for gifted and talented learners. With such limited access, even Black gifted and talented students have the potential to fall behind and be disadvantaged when it comes to competing with their urban or suburban peers who come from communities with better resources.

In addition to these problems, the tragic effects of poverty are undeniably a significant factor in the challenges and complexity schools face in equitably meeting the needs of rural students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds. The impact of poverty on educational engagement has been documented (e.g., Alsbury et al., 2018; Jensen, 2013). Living in the South places Black rural students at a particular disadvantage. Due to the impact of race and income inequities, Black rural students are doubly disadvantaged (Ford, 2013). Twelve of the top 15 states noted as having the highest percentage of low-income students are Southern states—which also have the highest percentage of schools located in rural areas (e.g., Mississippi, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Louisiana). There is a higher concentration of free and reduced lunch schools in rural areas than in urban districts. According to Showalter et al. (2017), a significant and disproportionate number/percentage of students in poverty attend schools in rural communities. Based on a report published by the Southern Education Foundation (2015), for the first time in the nation's history most public school students are living in poverty.

Poverty in rural schools is further complicated by the lack of qualified educators available to meet the needs of students living there. Many of the personnel found in rural schools are forced to take on multiple roles in the school and district to meet students' varying needs, albeit with significantly less funding compared to schools in more affluent and

densely populated areas (Howley et al., 2009; Superville, 2020).

Lack of Access to Opportunities

Literature is very limited on the presence and educational needs of Black students who are or have potential to be identified as gifted and talented while living in rural communities. Scholarly work on high-potential and gifted and talented students in rural schools focuses primarily on White students in rural communities (Howley et al., 2009; Stambaugh, 2010). All too often, educators hold low expectations for rural, Black students and fail to create equitable opportunities for them to demonstrate their abilities and thereby be considered viable candidates for gifted programming and services (Floyd et al., 2008).

Ong's (2011) and Singer's (2011) research in rural, low-income communities found a lack of appropriate resources in schools to help students compete with their counterparts in wealthier and better-resourced school districts. Equity and excellence are compromised, hindering the potential of Black and other minoritized students. While this work continues to draw attention to the needs of rural-area gifted and talented White students, little work has been directed to the intellectual, academic, cultural, and affective needs of gifted and talented Black students attending schools in rural communities. This lack of scholarly attention presents an incomplete view of life as Black students growing up in a rural community seeking higher-level educational opportunities, and in some cases suggests that these students do not exist (Ford, 2015).

Meeting the Intersectional Needs of Black Students in GATE Programs

Black students are systematically underrepresented in GATE programs nationwide. While Black students comprise 19% of schools nationally, only 10% of students in GATE programs are Black (Ford, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Estimates of national data (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) indicate that Black students are consistently underrepresented at a rate of 40–55% each year. According to Ford, Wright et al. (2018), when equity is quantified, Black

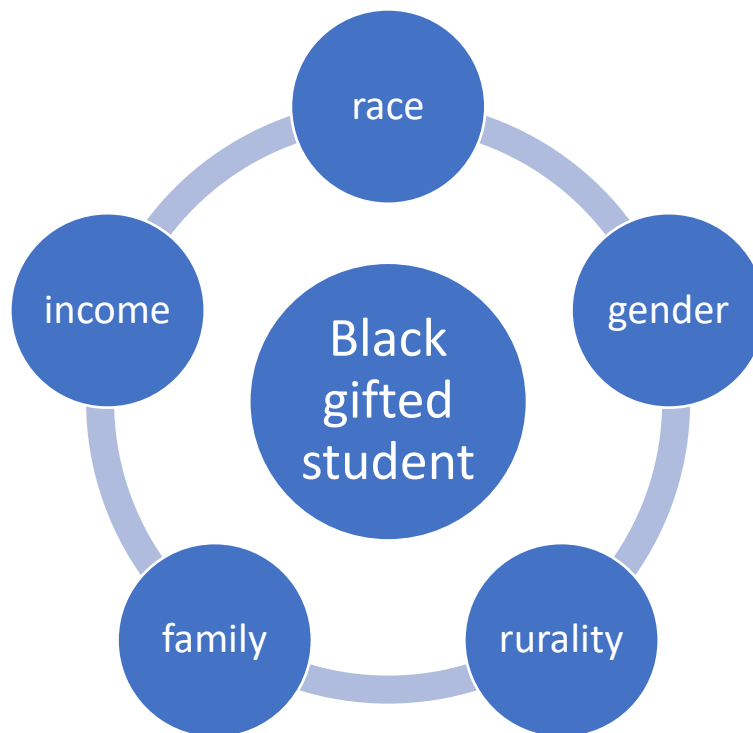
students should represent a minimum of 15.2% of students in GATE programs nationwide. These data clearly note an egregious problem that thousands of Black students continue to lack access to high-end, advanced-learner programs, GATE programs, and other offerings typically made accessible to White and Asian students daily (Ford, Wright et al., 2018). A disaggregation of the Office for Civil Rights data for rural districts is needed to allow school personnel, families, and advocates to better understand the full scope of underrepresentation in rural GATE programs.

From an intersectional viewpoint, to better understand the needs of Black gifted and talented students, we must more clearly understand the impact of race, gender, culture, rurality, community, and income on functioning (see Figure 1). Being Black places students in a historical and contemporary oppressed group. The Black

community typically has less access to a quality education, has the highest percentage of incarcerated individuals, and has more students disproportionately suspended, pushed out, and expelled from schools (Crenshaw et al., 2016; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Smith & Harper, 2015). Such unjust practices occur nationwide, but especially in the Southern states. Concomitantly, students with a poor discipline record are less likely than others to access services offered in GATE programs. Noteworthy, Black students are also less likely to be referred for GATE programs compared to their White peers with similar achievement levels and family backgrounds (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Some scholars have examined the nature of rural living as an additional construct to understand what differentiates rural students from their counterparts in other geographic communities and the specific academic needs of rural students aspiring to attend college (Chambers et al., 2019).

Figure 1

Intersectional View of Black Gifted Students From Rural Communities



Source: Davis et al. (2020), used with permission of the authors.

To rectify these conditions, educational leaders must provide specific, culturally responsive professional learning for educators, engage in focused engagement with the Black community, and hear about the lived experiences of Black gifted and talented individuals in rural communities. In rural communities, Black students are more likely to live in closer proximity to family. These individuals also may be a source of support that school leaders may draw on in developing responsive structures within the school for Black gifted and talented students (Davis, 2008, 2010, 2016). Based on this work, establishing effective school and home

partnerships with Black community to enrich the GATE experiences for Black students is highly recommended.

The numerous access and equity barriers to GATE faced by rural Black students are much the same as those faced by their urban peers (Biddle, 2011), but there are also important differences (see Table 1). Rural students are at risk for low motivation, low academic efficacy, and poor school success and have decreased chances of success in postsecondary education (Byun et al., 2012; Hardré et al., 2009; Stambaugh, 2010). A disproportionate

Table 1.

Educational, Social, and Cultural Characteristics of Urban Versus Rural Schools

Characteristic	Urban	Rural
Preponderance of low-performing schools	X	X
Geographically remote		X
Cultural discontinuity between teachers and students	X	X
Physical isolation from concentrated group of academic and intellectual peers		X
Limited access to technology		X
Limited access to highly trained teachers	X	X
Limited family engagement with schools	X	X
Presumption of low intelligence	X	X
Low teacher expectations	X	X
Historical legacy of segregated, low-resource schools		X
Limited availability of social and academic enrichment	X	X
Distance from concentrated enrichment resources (arts, corporate, sciences)		X
Distance from resources of higher education		X
Economically impoverished communities	X	X
Low educational attainment of parents	X	X

Source: Davis et al. (2020).

percentage of students whose parents did not attend college are Black, as noted by Falcon (2015), who delineated barriers facing students, including being prepared for and adjusting to college. These students have other unique challenges as they contend with negative perceptions based on their oppressed group status; living in isolated communities with fewer cultural enrichment experiences; originating from communities that continue to suffer from vestiges of systemic racism and discrimination from the Jim Crow era, which especially impacted Southern states; and the risks associated with living in poverty, including being first-generation college students (Hébert & Beardsley, 2001; Hines, 2012).

One case study of a third-grade gifted and talented Black male, Jermaine, who attended a rural school provides evidence of the challenges faced in rural schools for high-potential black students. Being a rural area gifted and talented Black male in his environment, Jermaine suffered from challenges of being isolated, fitting in, racial identity, and being misunderstood as a complex racially diverse student with gifted abilities and talents. According to the researchers, too few of Jermaine's teachers recognized his gifted potential (Hébert & Beardsley, 2001). A case shared by Davis (2016) demonstrates how a rural Black student in a GATE program suffered from bullying by his gifted counterparts and peers in high school programs and athletics teams.

Gifted youth from rural areas are also at risk for underachievement due to the limited experiences of family members in advanced learner settings and the likelihood of being a first-generation college student. Those living in poverty are particularly challenged as they attend poorly resourced schools daily. Rural schools, like those in other communities, have a responsibility to serve and identify all gifted and talented students and should make necessary changes that enable educators to identify more minority gifted and talented students (Howley et al., 2009).

Role of Black Educators in Promoting Aspirations of Gifted and Talented Black Students

In a study of the school experiences of rural Black students, Hines (2012) found that Black students faced low expectations from teachers and, subsequently, high rates of school failure. A larger and more recent study by Grissom and Redding (2016) had similar findings, not only reporting low expectations and under-referrals for Black students who were performing at the same level as White students, but also reporting that Black students were more likely to be referred to GATE screening if they had a Black teacher. Noteworthy is that only 7% of teachers in the United States are Black (Taie & Goldring, 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b); in rural communities, only 3.6% of teachers are Black. To say that these data are troubling is an understatement. Having more Black teachers in rural schools would dramatically increase Black students' chances of academic success and successful life outcomes. This has been found in the important work of Easton-Brooks (2019) on ethnic matching: students who share the race or ethnicity of their teachers often achieve at higher levels.

Teachers in rural schools also often lack access to specialized training about the nature of gifted and talented learners within their communities (Howley et al., 2009; Stambaugh, 2010). Further, nationally, teachers have little or no training (e.g., professional development and/or coursework) on being culturally responsive/competent. In short, as more attention is drawn to the needs of diverse populations in all schools, including rural schools, and the multiple and complex challenges of increasingly diverse populations, educators will face more difficulties in meeting their specific needs (Davis, 2019). Bryan and Ford (2014) recommended increasing the presence of Black male teachers across all districts to impact student success.

More problematic is the role of classroom teachers in the identification of gifted and talented students and as providers of related service options. Chambers et al. (2019) posited that educators categorized as "dreamkeepers" were needed in schools to empower and encourage rural students

aspiring to attend college. Some educators presuppose that rural students are less intelligent and have lower aspirations than students in other demographic communities. Thus, for highly able, gifted and talented Black students in rural schools, low teacher perceptions can have a negative impact on their school success, despite their high level of potential. Dreamkeeper teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2009) are critical to Black student success. Chambers et al. (2019) noted that such teachers are “percolators of student dreams but also actively convey their hopes and dreams, catalyzing student dreams of further education. Within rural education contexts, there are not enough Dreamkeepers” (p. 7).

In a study of developmental factors associated with rural area Black adolescents, Murry et al. (2016) described positive peer influences and the role of families who encourage academic achievement. The authors also discussed the impact of caring teachers who hold high expectations for the youth’s abilities as important to school success. Davis (2010) also described the use of social and cultural capital of immediate family members, extended family, and the church community as substantive means of support for Black gifted students.

Mediating Isolation in Rural Schooling

Being geographically disconnected from a concentrated culturally and socially enriched community often leads to feelings of isolation with rural students. Feelings of isolation from a common peer group can be detrimental to students’ performance (Harris, 2006). Being Black *and* gifted in a rural school environment exacerbates these feelings of disconnectedness. When racially and culturally different gifted and talented students enter new programs with a group of students who are markedly different from them in income, race, ethnicity, language, culture, and experiences, their self-esteem, self-concept, and racial pride may suffer. Students need to feel a strong sense of belonging and acceptance to be recruited and retained in GATE programs, even more so for Black and Hispanic students due to underrepresentation. Cohort groups combat the effects of isolation and increase assurance of a more comfortable “fit” for

students of color to focus more on the academic challenge and less on their need for acceptance. Educators are encouraged to develop service models to identify small groups of students and cohorts who can move through programs together with their social, cultural, and intellectual peers (Davis, 2015).

Cultural mismatch may also cause Black gifted and talented students to feel disconnected and isolated from their peers. Recruiting, training, and retaining a highly qualified teaching force composed of teachers of color is a national issue, along with too few educators, especially those with backgrounds in gifted education and training in cultural competence (Davis, 2019; Sleeter et al., 2015). This cultural mismatch affects student performance and success outcomes. To bring more clarity to this point, Easton-Brooks (2019) emphasized the importance of highly qualified teachers of color in classrooms with students of color. His contention is supported by interviews with teachers of color who have been instrumental in leading their students of color to academic success.

Theorists suggest that, in the absence of teachers of color, the use of culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy can mediate the effects of cultural differences and improve student achievement (Ladson-Billings, 2014). School district leaders must ensure that all teachers, including those responsible for working with gifted and talented students and GATE programs, are trained in cultural competency. This training helps educators understand how their perceptions and conscious and unconscious biases affect students and how they interact with their entire educational community (Davis, 2019). Appropriate professional development is the first step to addressing the needs of Black and other students of color in our schools and ensuring their access to GATE programs (Ford, 2011).

Distance learning and the correct use of technology can help alleviate challenges found in rural areas by bringing people together. Use of distance learning and online learning technologies in rural schools has enriched curricular opportunities for students previously relegated to studies available only in the general education

curriculum (de la Varre et al., 2010). Technology helps connect students in rural schools with the world outside their isolated communities through videoconferencing, advanced classes, and research (Floyd et. al., 2008), and online and distance education programming has the potential to provide enhanced curricula, academic peer grouping, and access to highly trained classroom teachers (Hébert & Beardsley, 2001). While these options are becoming more readily available to students living in rural communities, ensuring that high-potential Black students have access to emerging technology remains a challenge. This inequality has been further highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for virtual learning for students. As noted earlier, in districts that rely solely or extensively on teacher recommendations for GATE and advanced learner programs, Black students are less likely to be referred and therefore may continue to be shut out from enriched and higher-level curriculum available to non-Black students, including online and distance education programming for advanced students.

The challenges of regional programs designed for rural area gifted and talented students, including transportation, enabling students to have a sense of connectedness to the home school, and establishing a community of learners, are all issues of concern that need examination as accessing effective options are considered for Black rural area gifted students (Howley et al., 2009; Stambaugh, 2010). Currently, 15 states offer statewide or regional academic-year high schools for gifted and talented students (NAGC, 2019b), including states with significant rural populations: Alabama, Kentucky, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and Texas. Of these states, Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee also have sizable populations of Black students attending rural schools. Ensuring equitable admissions procedures for regional programs remains a challenge, as identification procedures likely mirror local district identification models. As such, Black students may continue to be overlooked and lack access to sophisticated regional programs designed for gifted and talented students. Improving the capacity of teachers to recognize gifts, talents, and high potential in Black rural students will

remove barriers to the more sophisticated teaching and learning environments provided through online learning and other types of high-end regional school programs.

Regional programs and online programs have potential to mitigate the effects of geography and small class size and provide expertise that is often not available to Black rural area students in low-funded, low-performing school districts (Hines 2012; Redding & Walberg, 2012). The cost of such programs may be a burden, however, to very small schools on limited budgets that attempt to provide service options for a few students. In some cases, rural districts have formed sophisticated regional consortiums with local universities to provide access through technologies not available to single schools or districts. The advantage of these online distance learning models is that they are more feasible and learner centered, thus more attractive to district leaders responsible for curriculum planning and delivery (de la Varre et al., 2010). Nonetheless, the challenge remains of ensuring that Black gifted and talented students have access.

Dual-enrollment models that allow high school students to take college-level courses for high school and college credit simultaneously are available in some districts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b; Zinth, 2014). These models enhance the capacity of GATE programs to reach more students attending rural schools. Zinth (2014) discussed strategies used by rural schools to lessen burdens of cost, transportation, and other challenges. Efforts to alleviate logistical challenges are encouraging. A recent report from the National Center for Education Statistics (2019b) indicates that nationwide only 27% of Black students were enrolled in dual-enrollment courses compared to 38% of White students. This low representation may indicate access difficulties that Black students experience in schools nationwide.

Importance of a Culturally Responsive Education for Gifted and Talented Black Rural Students

Ford (2011) conceptualized five components of multicultural education (here referred to as culturally responsive education), based on the works of Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (2009): (a) philosophy,

(b) learning environment, (c) curriculum, (d) instruction, and (e) assessment. When curriculum and instruction are culturally responsive, it permeates all aspects of education and endeavors to reach all students. Culturally responsive education is not colorblind; rather, it affirms the dignity and worth of students by attending to their lived experiences, interests, and needs as cultural beings (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Similarly, in a reframing of professional learning needs of teachers of diverse gifted and talented students, Davis (2019, p. 56) suggested three key features that professional learning experiences should address: (a) understanding the gifted traits, intellectual strengths, and unique psychosocial needs of diverse gifted and talented students; (b) knowing and being able to implement culturally responsive curriculum and instruction in their gifted classes and specialized programs; and (c) understanding the cultural norms and traditions of culturally diverse families and communities.

A common misperception is that Black students, because they are not immigrants or international students, do not have a specific culture (Ford, 2011). This colorblind or culture-blind view presents serious misunderstandings and clashes between Black students and their teachers. Stated another way, when teachers fail to recognize the culture of their students, in this case what it means to be a Black rural student, it will be difficult to see their gifts and talents. Colorblindness is a form of racism and can deeply impact relationships between teachers and their students (Williams, 2011). When teachers do not understand the importance of traditions, cultural norms, and belief systems of their Black students, their relationships are very limited. With Black gifted students, who may be more sensitive and insightful, this lack of teacher understanding can be problematic and also contributes to their underreferrals for GATE screening and retention in programs once identified.

A culturally responsive philosophy supports classroom and learning environments that are welcoming and personally engaging (Davis, 2019; Ford, Dickson et al., 2018). When classrooms are more welcoming and inclusive, gifted and talented Black students, who tend to feel alienated and isolated, feel more like they are a part of the

classroom community. This sense of belonging is essential when there are few culturally different gifted and talented students in their classes, schools, and related activities (e.g., competitions) in a small school, as is usually the case in rural districts.

For Black students in rural communities, the church family has also been identified as a historically strong and stable source of spiritual, psychosocial, and academic support (Davis, 2010). Inclusion of faith leaders in community engagement programs has been recommended as an effective source of collaborative support for rural area Black students for whom economic and social capital are often limited (Davis, 2010). Understanding the distinct culture of being rural also has an impact on teacher expectations of student ability and capacity for high performance. Teachers whose educational experience is not in a rural community may have a distorted view of the ability of Black students (Broadhurst & Wright, 2004). Just as low expectations of urban students tend to be the norm, so are the expectations of some teachers regarding the potential of rural area Black students (e.g., Riel, 2019).

Culturally responsive education differs from traditional mainstream educational pedagogy. It is a philosophy and a process based on the fundamental belief that all cultural groups must be accorded prominence in our schools and given equal respect and value for their traditions, values, and legacies. Just as important, regardless of gender, class, religion, or physical and mental abilities, all students should be recognized in the teaching and learning process (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Culturally responsive education affirms the value of individual and cultural differences through the act of reducing or, better yet, eliminating prejudices, biases, microaggressions, and stereotypes based on sociocultural demographic variables.

In the GATE classroom, it may be assumed that students have a higher and more advanced understanding of the worth of all human beings. Gifted and talented learners possess an accentuated sense of empathy and justice. Thus, a culturally responsive curriculum aligns well with the

needs of Black gifted and talented students and with those of their peers. The truth and sanctity of cultural contributions to society cannot be overlooked or disregarded in a setting where students are more apt to question potentially false and/or questionable instructional content, such as in gifted education settings, where students are more apt to be insightful and sensitive to hypocrisy or contradictions in behavior.

Educators of gifted and talented students who teach using culturally responsive pedagogy and philosophy encourage their students to be empathetic critical thinkers—to challenge and interrogate assumptions, biases, prejudices, and stereotypes. Likewise, they examine resources and content material from a broader, more inclusive perspective that encourages gifted students to become more proactive and assertive in their approach to questioning tenets of the varied disciplines with which they interact.

Black students in rural areas, in particular those in GATE classes where they are racially isolated, benefit from seeing themselves reflected and affirmed in lesson plans and instructional materials. Children’s multicultural literature expert Rudine Bishop (1982) coined the phrase “mirror and window books” to literally and figuratively reflect the crucial impact multicultural curriculum and materials can have on students of color. The obvious representation of cultural norms, contributions, historical content, and literature increases engagement, racial and cultural pride, and potentially student achievement (Bishop, 1982). White students also benefit from lesson plans that are multicultural; they learn about other groups and increase their regard for these groups. To reiterate, culturally responsive education improves relationships (harmony and understanding) among students from different backgrounds and their teachers (e.g., Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014). The curriculum is incomplete if it is polemic and fails to promote empathy and inclusion—if students are not taught to think and learn beyond the scope of themselves, and if they cannot see others and the world from viewpoints other than their own.

Recommendations for Research and Improved Practice in Schools

There is an urgent need for specific systematic research and exemplary models that reflect the needs of Black students in rural schools and the GATE programs that serve them. This research will contribute greatly to the skills and ability of school leaders to improve their programming to ensure equity, access, and excellence in educational service options for these gifted and talented Black students. School districts willing to form regional consortiums or partner with universities are in a promising position to develop models that serve students in intense targeted summer programs that provide advanced instruction, giving Black rural students opportunities to be exposed to university life and engage with peers from other localities. The state of Virginia offers summer residential programs on university campuses for gifted secondary students. In these environments, college faculty are often engaged as instructors and potential partners with the state-level accelerated programs. University partnerships help secure resources for professional learning and networking opportunities for educators working in rural areas while providing collaborative spaces for researchers to address the issues facing rural schools and educators (Superville, 2020).

Given the dearth of information in the literature about families of Black rural students who are gifted and talented (identified and not identified), it is highly recommended that ethnographic studies of family impact on student achievement in rural communities also be conducted. Such research will extend the understanding of the historical role of the Black community and families in promoting student achievement in various contexts. Existing programs engage the Black community and families to expose their children to advanced coursework and support services. These programs vary, but most have a primary goal of preparing Black students for success in high school and college and closing the opportunity gaps that exist between Black students and their White peers in schools across the nation. Three of these programs are described below:

1. A Black Education Network (ABEN) is an enrichment program that operates using an

ethnocentric philosophy (e.g., teaching about African culture and integrating cultural norms into courses and support services) to teach and empower Black students by offering a series of workshops for students and their parents (ABEN, 2017). The program also hosts annual professional development institute in partnership with Stanford University in California. The institutes reach audiences of educators and community leaders nationwide. The on-site sessions for students are held in schools and community centers. The science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses offered provide advanced instruction for students on Saturdays and during the summer.

2. My Brother's Keeper Alliance (MBK) is a program initiated in 2014 by President Barack Obama to help Black male youth reach their full potential. MBK was launched to address opportunity gaps for boys and young men of color through specifically designed activities to meet the following goals: (a) graduating from high school ready for postsecondary education or training, (b) completing college or postsecondary training, and (c) keeping participants on track and giving them second chances (MBK, 2014). MBK is part of the Obama Foundation and has developed 250 programs across the nation. The MBK program in rural Oktibeha, Mississippi, focuses on helping its members complete college or postsecondary training.
3. Tuskegee University (2020), in partnership with Verizon Communications, hosts Innovative Learning programs for minority males. These programs serve middle-school minority male students on several historically black colleges and universities, including Tuskegee University in Alabama, through entrepreneurship and tech innovation courses during the summer, with ongoing support in the academic year. One of these programs' goals is to increase

minority student participation in STEM-related coursework in preparation for college and careers in STEM areas.

These program models provide extended support for high-potential Black students, whose needs are often unmet in their schools and communities. Providing these services through university and community collaboration demonstrate the level of interest and concern Black universities and community leaders have for ensuring the success of Black students, who may not be adequately served in school district programs. It is highly recommended that educational leaders examine possibilities for replication of these programs in rural communities across the nation.

The urgency for culturally competent teachers in all schools is greater now than ever. Teachers of Black students must engage in training that enables them to understand the daily challenges that students face and the systemic discrimination and personal prejudices that negatively affect the ability of Black students to reach their highest potential (Davis, 2019). In rural communities especially, where staffing is inherently challenged due to funding constraints and workload demands, educators must endorse culturally responsive policies and practices and display appropriate skills and dispositions to work effectively with Black gifted students. The literature does not presently provide examples of districts that are successfully integrating culturally responsive practices in gifted education programs. As these models are developed, replication of these best practices is recommended in rural communities serving Black gifted students (Floyd et al., 2008). Effective teachers of culturally different students understand and respect cultural differences and have a high degree of tolerance and respect for behavioral characteristics of Black gifted and talented students, which often do not fit traditional conceptions what it means to be gifted or talented (Davis, 2019; Ford, 2011, 2013).

As has been discussed, poverty adds another layer of complexity to problems facing rural students and their families. African American children in the rural South have borne a disproportionate share of

the burden of poverty in America for decades. A more thorough examination of how poverty impacts the lives and opportunities of Black gifted students is recommended. While the overall rate of rural poverty is higher than urban poverty, the difference in rural and urban poverty rates varies significantly across regions. Neither genes nor zip code is cause for inequitable treatment and ignoring specific student needs (Ford, 2013).

Summary and Conclusion

Immediate attention is needed to fully understand and address the unique cultural, intellectual, psychosocial, and academic needs of Black gifted students who live in rural American communities. Given the 50-plus years of research and attention to the needs of intellectually gifted students in this nation, the fact that the needs of a sizable population of gifted and talented students, particularly students from rural areas, are almost completely absent from the literature is unacceptable. Due to this absence, very little is known about the most effective practices that would address the complex, intersectional, affective and intellectual needs of Black gifted and talented students who live in isolated rural areas across the nation.

From what has been reviewed, ironically, even with the uniqueness of their geographic communities, Black gifted and talented students in rural areas have more similarities with than differences from those our nation's urban centers. This article shares a glimpse into the barriers, challenges, and the unique facilitators of talent that exist for this special population of gifted and talented students. A targeted focus on cultural competency training for educators, increased funding for sophisticated technologies, and recruitment of highly qualified Black teachers are of critical importance. Inclusion and application of these practices will ensure that Black rural gifted students have access to the best curriculum experiences so they can be poised to compete with their academic, economic, and racial peers across regional groups. The fact that so many challenges in equitable identification and access to opportunities persists in the twenty-first century is

telling of a field that has not dedicated itself to fully seeking out talent in all communities.

The material presented in this article makes a strong case for a much-needed research platform, improved practices, and funding to provide services for this unique population of students: Black gifted and talented students from rural communities. Concomitantly, as programmatic responses to specific student needs are generated, we suggest that the most productive innovations in the field of gifted education will come when complete inclusion of all populations' intellectual and psychosocial support needs are considered and strategically implemented on a wide scale. Rural communities comprise a substantive group of geographically important set of students; to dismiss their importance because of their racial makeup or geographic location is unethical to say the least. The giftedness in small isolated rural communities that is properly discovered and nurtured may yield the innovative solutions to our society's most complex problems.

Providing support for research and development of comprehensive best practices that can be replicated nationwide specifically targeting Black gifted students holds promise for a better outcome not just for the Black community but all who may be recipients of their productive outcomes. To say that the research in comprehensive best practices for rural Black gifted is limited is an understatement. Black students with gifted and talented potential exist in all communities. These students, their families, communities, and the educators responsible for their futures need support and guidance to develop exemplary models that can be replicated in their rurally isolated schools across the nation. Perhaps the limited number of students in sparsely populated rural communities is seen as a rationale for overlooking this population. However, the physical number of students should be of no regard to the educational policy, research, and practitioner community. The loss of even one gifted and talented mind is too much for any community, our nation, and our global community.

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