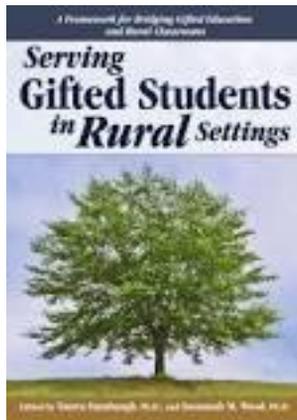# *Serving Gifted Students in Rural Settings*
NAGC Webinar

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Serving Gifted Students in Rural Settings

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Questions to Consider

- What is rural?
- How can educators utilize the uniqueness of various philosophies and status of "rural" in order to facilitate gifted student success?
- What are some practical strategies and evidence-supported approaches for identifying and serving rural gifted students?
- How do we identify and create necessary support structures for gifted education in rural schools and the community?

What is rural?

What is rural?

- Where a rural population was once defined as those communities with less than 2,500 people in 1910, this definition is now more fluid.
- Every state in the nation has a rural population
- A rural characterization is applied to areas with populations between 2,500 and 50,000 people, depending on the situation.
  - (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008)
- Levels of rural classifications and beliefs/values change based on the landscape
  - Fringe
  - Distant
  - Remote

What is rural?

- Residents in rural areas are not as concentrated as those of their urban counterparts, and they do not find themselves within a reasonable commuting distance to urban cores for employment and other necessities.
- Four types of rural communities:
  - amenity rich
  - declining resource-dependent
  - amenity/decline;
  - and chronically poor
    - » Hamilton, Hamilton, Duncan, and Colocousis (2008)

What is rural?

- Changes in diversity and socio-economics:
  - despite some rural places characterized by large minority concentrations, many other rural places have been disproportionately White including across Appalachia and the Ozarks.
  - Recently, however, scholars have noted increasing racial-ethnic diversity in rural America, particularly as Hispanics reach new destinations in large numbers.
    - (Lichter & Johnson, 2009)
  - Lesser skilled residents seeking opportunities in the service and agricultural sectors: jobs that are low paying and unstable but may be the only ones available.
- Traditional communities are faced with accommodating new residents who look different and may have a different cultural heritage.

Mattingly & Schaeffer, 2015

How can educators utilize the uniqueness of various philosophies and status of rural in order to facilitate gifted student success?

The Essence of Rural – Defining Characteristics

Sense of place

Family

Tradition

Spirituality

Differing definitions of success

Community

Family and Sense of Place

- Ties to the lands in which people were born and raised. Home and personal histories are valued for the powerfully informative role they have on one's self—past, present, and future.

- The pull to return "home" is strong and the rural area is always likely to be referred to as "home," regardless of how long the individual has been living elsewhere.
  - (Jones, 1994)

- "When individuals bear a special connection to the land they inhabit, they perceive themselves embedded in that place and its history, all its dilemmas, and the possibilities inherent within it. Indeed, fostering such a perception proves promising for the benefit of rural communities."

Richards & Stambaugh, 2015

Family and Sense of Place

- "Where familial relationships constitute a key thread in the rural fabric, investing in rural families is not only an investment in rural students, but their communities as well."
  - (Richards & Stambaugh, 2015)

Tradition

- Tradition may mean that families provide the structure and mentorship around careers within the community.
  - Mentorships play an informative role in developing ambition when they instill in rural students the idea that they can realize their achievements with dedication and hard work.
  - As families face economic pressure, rural students are more likely develop negative opinions of their parents and siblings.
- Tradition of assuming the same occupation as one's parents is not always a viable option.
  - (Duncan, 2010)

Values, Spirituality and Community

- Concern for tradition – balancing an advancing, changing world with a commitment to the way things have always been done.
  - being seen as "back woods" or not embracing change.
- Neighborliness and communal cooperation
- Rural communities find ways to organize themselves in meaningful ways around nexuses like family and religion

Richards & Stambaugh, 2015

4/20/2016

Values, Spirituality and Community

- Church is the hub of many rural areas and is relied upon as a foundation for shaping the culture, beliefs, and traditions of several rural communities.
  - The church is a place for families to gather and for a sense of community to be established.
  - Strong beliefs in God helped rural Appalachians make it through difficult times and find meaning and purpose
  - Even if rural individuals do not go to church, faith and a strong reliance on and trust in God is an integral part of many rural communities.

Richards & Stambaugh, 2015

Values, Spirituality and Community

- Principles of independence, self-reliance, and pride; community sociability; strong ties to family; personability; religion; modesty; love of place; patriotism; and senses of beauty and humor (Jones, 1994).

- Communities may be more concerned with who you are instead of what you do, what you have attained, or how much money you have.

- "Where the issues facing rural communities are already unpronounced, abandoning such traditions in favor of material possessions contributes to a lack of an identifiably rural aesthetic, metaphorically voiding rural communities of a readily recognizable culture."

Richards & Stambaugh, 2015

Values, Education and Success

- The definitions of success
  - Overemphasis on national policies related to schooling—many of which do not favor or consider rural schools
  - What is real wealth?
  - Discredit the traditional values associated with a rural way of life—like self-provisioning, neighborliness, and diverse farming—in favor of the cosmopolitan mainstream.

Richards & Stambaugh, 2015

Values and Success

From a mathematics professor who grew up in a rural area

"I think the engagement with my rural community, particularly in the form of many leadership opportunities, paved the foundations for me to feel confident about disciplining myself to reach any goal that I set…I dropped out of university with no intention to return. My grades were fine, and the academics weren't challenging, but my career path (engineering, at the time) didn't seem to be fulfilling much of a "purpose of life" for me."

"Rural is in my blood, to the point where I (often subconsciously) view rural places as valuing relationships as opposed to urban and suburban places valuing money and power…During the times I have lived in cities some of my most poignant memories were the times I spend at the parks which was my connection with nature, and with rural areas. I've also developed a strong sense of spirituality and of spiritual things being more valuable than material things; I think it all stems from the community in which I was raised."

Potential Conflicts for Gifted Students in Rural Areas

- Poverty
- Teacher Quality and Preparation
- Access
  - Areas of Interest
  - Courses, mentors, role models, advanced mainstream curriculum
- Transportation

- Competing Values and Priorities
- The Role of Family
- Staying or Leaving
  - Returning or Staying Away
- The Job Market
  - Population decline
  - Diversified local economy
  - Brain drain
- Critical Mass
  - Double or Triple Minority …gifted AND ethnically diverse, of poverty
  - Windows and Mirrors

Education and Rural Communities

- Highly qualified teachers are less available in rural vs. urban/suburban areas
  - More likely to have first year teachers or teachers teaching outside their subject area
  - 27% of rural teachers had PD available in their schools compared to 40% in cities and suburbs
- Fewer higher level courses are offered in rural schools
  - 3-4 courses more advanced math courses offered in suburban and urban areas than in rural
- Rural students do not score as high on advanced assessments even if enrolled in advanced courses
- Gifted students report less challenge in their courses than their urban and suburban counterparts

Rural Poverty

- Recent official poverty statistics suggest that 26% of rural children lived in poor families in 2013, as did 29% of children residing in central cities. By contrast, poverty rates were much lower in the suburbs, where 17% of children were growing up poor.
  - (Mattingly, Carson, & Schaefer, 2014)
  - high child poverty is common in the United States, particularly across the South and less so in parts of the Northeast and Midwest. Children growing up across rural America have a higher probability of growing up in a high poverty county than do their urban peers.
  - Not only is rural child poverty high, in many places it has **persisted for generations**.

Mattingly & Schaeffer, 2015

Reflections on Poverty

Now college professor and gifted student who grew up in a poor rural area:

I was a "have not" child. This is how adults in my community viewed me….I didn't speak properly, didn't wear the right cloths, and didn't display the proper behaviors. Being Black was not an issue in my community because we were all Black. I was set apart by my family make up and social class….
"People viewed me through a stereotyped lens of being a poor Black child of a single mom. Based on their expectations I was supposed to be a high school dropout raising six kids of my own by the age of 18 (someone actually told me that was what they thought would happen to me). People were surprised I was so smart, or as it was often said, then, that I had "book learning". Because I didn't have anything else I focused my energy on school. School, specifically fiction books, math, and science, became my best friends. In these, I could leave reality and be another person. Computing complex math problems and understanding science meant I wasn't thinking about what I didn't have…."

Staying or Leaving

- A prevalent belief is that most rural children, especially bright ones, should abandon their home places for opportunities elsewhere
  - (see Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Gibbs & Cromartie, 1994; Haller & Monk, 1992; Hektner, 1995; Huang, Weng, Zhang, & Cohen, 1997).
- An opposite position is that rural life is not limiting and restrictive, but is instead inclusive and generative.
- Practical problem solving
  - represents an asset in many rural communities and therefore offers a resource to rural schools, many of which lack other resources for establishing and sustaining meaningful talent development programs.
  - entails complex and sophisticated intellectual work that is productive of significant cognitive growth. Third, rural and urban communities need technicians with well-honed skills who are capable of problem solving and innovation (Crawford, 2009).
- Communities need local entrepreneurs who are willing to invest resources and whose locally centered efforts contribute to sustaining rural places (Theobald, 1997).

Rural communities boast the most STEM innovators when compared to those who grew up in urban and suburban settings.

Howley, Howley, & Showalter, 2015

Staying or Leaving

- A rural first generation college student, identified as gifted

"At first, my family couldn't have been more proud......Now, they often have a negative attitude toward me because they feel as if I am choose the world over them, as if I have gotten too good for them. It's a heartbreaking experience, but .....it gets easier."

"When living for your family is what you have been raised for and all you have ever known, it is hard to see them struggle as you continue to do your own thing away from them. I find myself in situations where I am torn between my family and my schooling. Having 'high family morals' is something that is very engrained in those coming from small towns, so I often feel as though I am abandoning my family just by leaving."

Staying or Leaving

A gifted college student who recently graduated from an elite university….

- *As it seems to me now, I will not be returning to my rural community any time soon. I genuinely find myself happier in urban areas. The jobs I want for my future are not found in the rural communities. This decision is not without reservations, and there are still many ties to my rural community I want to maintain.*

Common Issues for Teachers of Gifted and School Counselors Working in Rural Areas

- Isolation
- "Organizational smallness"
  - Pearson & Sutton, 1999
- Role confusion
- Autonomy
- Privacy vs. Visibility
- Restricted Professional Development and Professional Peer Group
- Community Pride
- Community Trust

Recommendations

- The meaning of life is not embedded in personal wealth. **Develop talents, not greed.** The simple advice can be very difficult to follow because the noise is pervasive and seems convincing.

- **Recognize talents as connecting to higher purposes that can be addressed anywhere**. For gifted rural students that anywhere is an actual known and often beloved somewhere.

- **Foster rural gifted students so as to realize their talents as more a responsibility than a gift.** Identification of talent in order to bestow privileges is in fact mistreatment of talent.
  Howley, Howley & Showalter, 2015

- **The small scale of rural America offers in ideal laboratory for testing new approaches**, and relatively small investments can reach all students in given places (Jimerson, 2006).

- **The changing faces of rural America might also provide new opportunities for doing things differently.** Communities transform, new residents may bring new ideas, new energy, and a desire to do better for their children.

- **Identify industries that are lacking employees and infrastructure– and prepare rural students to enter these underserve fields,** and then reward them for returning to rural places that they have received their training.
  Mattingly & Schaefer, 2015

"The key to creating education policy that works for rural schools is to capitalize on the expanded role that rural schools play in their towns....policies that **strengthen** rural schools, like those that encourage new teachers to return to rural communities to work in their schools by providing them with **increased training and certifications** (Collins, 1999) that can impact labor markets in those places, as well as other structures that influence community solidarity."

(Schafft & Biddle, 2014)
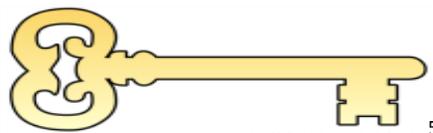
WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL STRATEGIES AND EVIDENCE-SUPPORTED APPROACHES FOR IDENTIFYING AND SERVING RURAL GIFTED STUDENTS?

Place-Based Education

- Rural educators understand the necessity of preparing their students to succeed in the urban context (given that many students eventually migrate to a city).

- And yet, their students also must be equipped to be successful in the local rural context. There is an expectation that rural schools prepare their students to function well biculturally: as people who may move back and forth between city and country many times.

- By contrast, there is no expectation placed upon urban schools to prepare their students for anything beyond city life.

(Sher & Sher, 1994, p.39)

Reflections on Place-Based Education

- *Among my science courses I took two full years of biology, but I never learned that the beautiful meadow at the bottom of my family's pasture was a remnant virgin prairie. We did not spend, so far as I can remember, a single hour on the prairies – the landscape in which we were immersed – in two years of biological study. I took history courses for years, but I never learned that one of the founders of my town and for decades the leading banker...was also the author of the first comprehensive treatise on Minnesota's prairie botany.*

- ***I can only imagine now what it might have meant to me – a studious boy with a love of nature – to know that a great scholar of natural history had made a full and satisfying life in my town****. I did not know until long after I left the place that it afforded the possibility of an intellectual life. Nothing in my education prepared me to believe, or encouraged me to expect, that there was any reason to be interested in my own place. If I had hoped to amount to anything, I understood, I had better take the first road east out of town as fast as I could. And, like so many of my classmates, I did.*

  - (Gruchow, 1995, cited in Haas and Nachtigal, 1998, pp.1-2)

Identification

- Most studies focus on identifying rural students of poverty
  - Less likely to have strong writing and grammar skills
  - More creative
  - Great problem solvers
  - Is clever about making things out of ordinary materials
  - Understands the importance of culture and family
  - Understands the relationship of nature to farming
  - Knows how to interact to get along with a variety of people
- Contextual tools found to be helpful in increasing identification IF matched to service.
- **Use place-based and contextual tools and resources for identification – capitalize on the strengths of the area)**

- **Involve the family and community** in identifying gifted students.
- **Use local norms** or accept test profiles more indicative of the population, ex: subtest vs. full-scale scores.
- **Rural administrators and policy makers need to practice flexibility when implementing or crafting policies** related to identification so that these methods can be tailored to rural gifted students' specific needs.
- Provide ongoing, context based professional development to teachers.
  - Uneven profiles, great at problem solving, creative responses
- Use multiple measures and team approach.

Stambaugh, 2015

Rural School Characteristics and Subsequent Criterion for Gifted Programing Models

Rural school characteristics

- ✓ May not have critical mass of gifted students
- ✓ Diversity of different rural communities – even within the same district
- ✓ Lack of material and finances resources
- ✓ Competing priorities of leaders and teachers in rural schools
- ✓ Fewer qualified teachers
- ✓ Professional development costs
- ✓ Remote geographic area locales
- ✓ Need for research-based material and models

Criteria for programming models

- ✓ Can be implemented regardless of the number of gifted learns within a grade or district
- ✓ Flexibility of the model for different settings
- ✓ Doesn't require expensive materials or several individuals to implement with fidelity
- ✓ True commitment for teachers is not extensive
- ✓ Doesn't require a gifted specialist to be on site (vs. online)
- ✓ Isn't dependent upon specialized professional development beyond basic knowledge of gifted learners
- ✓ Isn't dependent upon the availability of high-speed internet for resources
- ✓ Has strong research base; preferably piloted with rural learners – even if not disaggregated.

Lewis, 2015; p. 183; Table 9.1

Criteria	ICM	Purdue	SEM	Talent Search
Can be implemented regardless of the number of gifted learners within a grade or district.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Model is flexible or adapted to different settings.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time commitment for teachers is extensive.	No	Yes	No	No
Can be implemented without specialized gifted specialist onsite (versus online)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Requires specialized professional development beyond basic GT knowledge	Yes	No	No	No
Can be implemented without the availability of high speed Internet	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes
Has strong research base – piloted in rural areas	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes
Can be implemented without expensive materials or additional purchases	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes

Programming and Curriculum

- **Supportive learning environments** with peers
- Access **to multicultural materials and resources**
- Curriculum that **emphasizes critical thinking and problem-solving skills**
- Project and problem-based learning
- Access to a range of educational opportunities
- Assessment of learning in a wider context
- **Place-based**

- Technology
- Summer, weekend, and after school programs
- Academic year specialized programs
- Collaborative services
- Mentorships internships and tutorials
- **Strategies:**
  - **Acceleration**
  - **Structure and scaffolding**
  - **Independent learning**
  - **Higher level questions**
  - **Role models**
  - **Graphic organizers**
  - **Biographies**
- **Teacher preparation**

VanTassel-Baska & Hubbard, 2015

Planning Curriculum & Instruction

- Total School Cluster Grouping
- Multiage Grouping
- Access to Advanced Curriculum Resources
- Opportunities to Use Higher Level Thinking Skills
- Problem-Based and Service-based Learning – Tied to Community Issues
- Acceleration

Reflections on Acceleration
Gifted student from a rural school who was accelerated

The institution resisted change; we were told that grade skipping was bad for me. As a 5 year old Kindergartener, you don't know all these things; I went to school every day, destroyed my schoolwork, and spend my time reading or playing teacher with the other students. The reasons why I was told I couldn't do things were numerous and varied. I couldn't skip a grade because my motor skills were too poor. I could get behind in art, and I would physically be miles away. Socially I would be a hermit, rejected by my classmates as the nerd. Rather than push me to be my absolute best, I was told to succeed via their rules, rules that would pull me back down to the crowd. They said I would never play sports. I wasn't great but I lettered in two varsity sports. They said I would be a hermit. As I write this, my best friend, the high school quarterback, is visiting me from his school, and we are as close as ever. I have a wonderful, loving girlfriend whom I love very much.

They said I would never improve my handwriting. Well… they were right about something.

Curriculum Opportunities in Rural Schools Can Be an Equalizer

Regardless of model, the level and quality of the curriculum are crucial for gifted and talented learners.

It is essential that curriculum planning and instruction for GT learners is based on high-quality **core curriculum** is supported by all relevant standards, and is differentiated through enrichment and acceleration appropriate to the readiness of each individual.

HOW DO WE IDENTIFY AND CREATE NECESSARY SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR GIFTED EDUCATION IN RURAL SCHOOLS AND THE COMMUNITY?

Supplemental and Out-of-School Programming

- **Build connections** with nearby schools to share resources and create a community
- **Create regional network** for extracurricular, weekend enrichment, and hybrid learning programs
- **Leverage "dual enrollment" programs** to provide access to college and university resources
- **Collaborate with colleges** and universities to create dedicated programs for gifted K-12 students
- **Find experts in the community** and involve them as mentors, resources, and advocates

Olszewski-Kubilius, Corwith, & Calvert, 2015

- **What is our fame** (festivals, awards, harvests, tourism, history?)
- **How can students be invited** (e.g. electives, special interest groups, after school/activity clubs)?
- **What do we have available** (e.g. public library, historical society music, artists. Etc.)?
- **What technology is already in place** that can extend and enhance both student learning and professional development?
- What have other rural schools done to **increase partnerships with community members**?

Montgomery 2004, p. 6

Partnerships (Parents and Communities)

- Relationship building
  - **Share information with parents** on school programs, academic standards, and assessments, nomination and identification processes via culturally diverse small group meetings
  - Follow up with individual meetings
  - Relationship characterized by mutual respect and understanding; incase parental self-efficacy counter the deficit approach that haunts students from diverse cultures'
- Open communication
  - **Listen, listen and listen some more**
  - "What do you see of your child at home?"
  - Discuss rationales for nominations and include/encourage parents nominations
- Community asset mapping
  - Encourages relationship building with **community partners and resources already available**

Griffin & Wood, 2015

Technology and Rural Connections

- Technology can
  - increase student awareness of their world without leaving home
  - allow for like ability peers with varying interests to interact
  - provide opportunities for advanced level learning not taught in schools
- Rural schools (59%) use distance education more often than suburban (47%) and urban (37%)
- Many rural schools focus on either obtaining or using technology instead of both
  - Need more formal teacher education regarding effective uses of technology

Housand & Housand, 2015 based on Puentedura (2014)

Coursera

Resources for Technology

Virtual Courses
- Center for Talented Youth   http://cty.juh.edu/ctyonline
- EPGY at Stanford   http://epgy.stanford.edu
- Center for Talent Development http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/gll
- HippoCampus – multimedia FREE online courses – no credit http://www.hippocampus.org
- Jason Learning   www.jason.org

Virtual Schools
- Florida Virtual School   http://www.flvs.net
- Laurel Springs School   http://laurelsprings.com/our-families/gifted-talented/
- Connections Academy   http://www.connectionsacademy.com/curriculum/gifted-honors

Other Resources

MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses)
- edX: https://www.edx.org
- Coursera: https://www.coursera.org

iTunes U Resources
- STEM   http://bit.ly/itunessu-stem
- Virtual Field Trips   http://bit.ly/itunesu-classroom
- Primary Sources   http://bit.ly/itunesu-primarysource

Khan Academy Partners
- MIT-K12   https://khanacademy.org/partner-content/mit-K12
- Crash Course
- https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/crashcourse1
- NASA
- https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/nasa

Considerations for Online Learning

- Will this course be accepted for credit?
- Does the student have the necessary skills to be successful in an online learning environment?
  - Study skills and computer skills are found to be the most critical for success.
- Are there facilitators to support or oversee the online learning process?
  - Rural students are generally more conversational, intimate, and used to relational types of learning
- Costs?

Housand & Housand, 2015 based on Puentedura (2014)

Professional Development
Croft, 2015

Challenges

- Demanding expectations
- Filling multiple roles
- Limited preservice education working with GT
- May not be a member of the local community
- Loss of instructional time if service multiple schools
- Different or conflicting values and beliefs (ex: creativity, educational aspirations)
- High takes accountability and testing

Guidelines and Ideas

- CEC-TAG Standards for Learning (7)
- NAGC Pre-K 12 Gifted Programming standards (6)
- Independent Teacher learning
- Professional learning communities
- Personal Action research
- Use of resources

Teachers of the gifted are often "sole advocates for gifted students in their districts without cadre of peers or supervisors providing professional support' (Azano et al., 2014, p. 96)

Policy

Assumptions

- GT students are part of the overall Prek-12 educational landscape and therefore are impacted by local and state policies. **Policies are designed to be broadly applied. They are, by nature, more inclusive than exclusive.**
- Policies are part of the infrastructure providing the foundation for educational practices. For gifted students, leveraging this tool is critical.
- **Gifted education stands to benefit from ensuring that general education policies imply gifted students. "Will, must" and "all, every."**
- Gifted students are diverse. Supplemental educational polices may serve some populations of gifted that gifted policies leave out.

Suggested Strategies

- Opportunity to learn
- Recruit and retain educational leaders who appreciate the positive aspects of rural life
- Tailor policies and implementation to community needs
- Adopt flexible leadership and school models – breadth and depth
- Advocate for flexible funding models
- Embrace positive rural attributes
- Community and parent aspirations and expectations
- Partner with other consortiums

Brown, 2015

Concluding Thoughts

- Build **relationships** with the community and families

- Use community **assets** to support innovation

- Recognize and support the rural **identity** but provide "windows" in addition to "mirrors"

- **Share** the load; partner with other educational consortiums

- *The paths to a fulfilling life, however, are many; and extraordinary accomplishment comes in many varieties. Arguably, in fact, the most gifted individuals in any group point the way to new paths rather than simply demonstrating high achievement in the already well-defined domains of accomplishment.*
   —*Howley, Rhodes, & Beall, 2009*

Questions?