Young Scholars
A Talent Development Model for Finding and Nurturing Potential in Underserved Populations
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Abstract: The Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) Young Scholars model offers new language and ideas for thinking about giftedness that embrace expanded beliefs about the nature of intelligence and highlight the importance of nurturing intelligent behavior in children from diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds as early as possible. These expanded beliefs move beyond an exclusionary vocabulary that is based on a child’s proficiency in skills that are taught in school or a single score on a standard ability test and instead focus on a child’s ability to think, reason, and problem-solve through evidence and assessments that cross cultural, ethnic, and linguistic boundaries. The Young Scholars model is embedded in a continuum of gifted services offered to a broad range of learners, and it has the capacity to be an important vehicle for change. Young Scholars are students who historically have been underrepresented in gifted programs. This includes students from poverty, students whose primary language is not English, and twice exceptional learners. Staff at Young Scholars schools work together to find and nurture gifted potential as early as kindergarten to ensure that no student is overlooked. The model has two goals: (a) to identify students who may not be considered for gifted programs using traditional methods of identification, and who, without that opportunity, are less likely to pursue advanced levels of learning on their own; and (b) to nurture gifted potential at an early age so that Young Scholars will be prepared to engage in challenging subject matter and rigorous courses in elementary school, middle school, high school, and beyond.

Keywords: talent development, gifted education, young gifted, at-risk students, advocacy, diversity, underserved populations, special school programs, identification, best practices

Background
In 2001, a growing concern with the continual underrepresentation of Black, Hispanic, and English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students in gifted programs led the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) central office to form a committee of principals and teachers from Title 1 Schools. The purpose of the committee was to study the issue of underrepresentation and form recommendations to address this issue. Previous program changes focused on identification criteria with a heavy emphasis on test scores and did little to increase the participation of underrepresented populations in the FCPS Gifted and Talented (GT) Programs. The committee, which was made up of principals and teachers from schools with high numbers of students from diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, worked...
with central office staff to study and rethink current practice and to design a model with a focus on increasing gifted services for students who had historically been underserved. The new model developed by this team of stakeholders was called “Young Scholars”, and it embraced current thinking and research on best practices for identifying and nurturing gifted potential in all populations through a focus on talent development (Bernal, 2002; Elliott, 2003; Frasier & Passow, 1994; Van Tassel-Baska, Johnson, & Avery, 2002).

The Young Scholars model is guided by key principles of systemic change: Change comes from within, there are no quick fixes, and there is no one best way. The four components of the model: principal/teacher leadership, non-traditional assessments, powerful interventions, and professional development for teachers with strong outreach to parents necessitate a school-wide commitment. The elements are interdependent and integral to finding and nurturing talent potential in diverse populations. Each school incorporates the four components into their school plan in ways that work for their students, families, staff, and community (see Figure 1).

Beginning in kindergarten, school professionals (including principals, teachers, and educational specialists) work together to find and nurture potential talent using a wide variety of observations and assessments. Evidence of academic strengths and interests are recorded and collected in student portfolios. Because the GT resource teacher has a limited amount of time at each school, classroom teachers play a significant role in the identification of Young Scholars. Through systematic observations of all students, anecdotal records, and a careful review of portfolios of student work, classroom teachers in kindergarten through Grade 6 search for, identify, and nurture academic strengths in students who have potential talent in one or more subject areas. Historically, these students have lacked access to gifted services, advocates for their high potential, and affirmation of their advanced abilities.

**Principal/Teacher Leadership**

The Young Scholars model was initially piloted in Title I schools because they have large numbers of economically disadvantaged students and many students with limited English proficiency who have historically been underserved in gifted programs. Principals were invited to participate and from the very beginning, principal leadership has been a key component. In the first year, 12 principals accepted the invitation, adopted the model, and began incorporating the essential elements into their school community. Over time, additional schools were added as principals saw the value of the model and were willing to make a commitment to find and nurture gifted potential in their own school communities. There are now 82 elementary schools and 3 middle schools implementing the model, and each year the number continues to grow.

The principals are committed to increasing the number of low-economic, minority learners participating in gifted programs at their schools. As instructional leaders, they meet several times a year with other principals of Young Scholars schools to collaborate, share ideas, and tackle the challenges and concerns that must be addressed as they implement the model. Central office staff members coordinate the meetings and provide research information, data on Young Scholars, and guest speakers on topics that relate to the work they are doing in their schools. In addition, schools are invited to highlight one or more aspects of the model as it is implemented in their schools. For example, one school shared how they started a GEMS (Girls in Engineering, Mathematics, and Science) club, an after-school club designed to encourage girls to enter the fields of engineering, mathematics, and science. As part of the after-school program, the girls watched a video and learned about...
President Obama’s Women in STEM Initiative. In the video, they saw girls from middle and high school that had made exciting innovations in response to areas of interest. The girls brainstormed ideas and then worked together to design a “piezoelectric insole,” a device that fits into the sole of your shoe. As they walk, it collects electronic energy that can be used to recharge the battery of their cell phone or other small electronic device. This example ignited an interest in forming GEMS clubs in other schools and GEMS clubs have now become an important element of a district-wide STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) initiative.

The principals are strong advocates for the students. They provide ongoing support to the teachers and they ensure that year after year the Young Scholars are clustered in classrooms with teachers who know how to nurture and develop their gifted potential. Their leadership acknowledges and builds on the contributions of the numerous professionals that work in their schools and is responsive to the complex demands of a diverse school population. They foster a climate of respect and commitment in which every individual believes that he or she has an important role to play. When school leaders are able to empower and energize all staff members, then the possibilities for what they are able to accomplish become endless (Fullan, 2003). A principal from one of the Young Scholars schools sums up the impact that participation in the program has had on her school staff:

Anytime that you do something to look at a child’s behavior or performance in a different way, then you’re going to extend your perception of what’s going on. So, the more we look at children, the more we’re going to find out about them. I think the more we work with Young Scholars, the more potential we’re going to see.

The GT resource teachers assigned to each school, other educational specialists, and the classroom teachers have critical roles to play. Gifted services in each Young Scholars school are provided through a collaborative model in which the GT resource teacher works with collaborative teams of classroom teachers and other educational specialists to provide a continuum of gifted services that begins in kindergarten. When educators work together in collaborative teams that continually assess and design instruction in response to the needs of their students, they are able to overcome barriers and improve achievement for all students. The GT resource teacher meets with grade-level teams to design and implement differentiated lessons that challenge Young Scholars to think on a higher level and study advanced content through projects, research, and extensions of the general education program. The teachers and specialists understand that the success of the model is dependent on their combined efforts. They learn to think and apply strategies and practices in new and innovative ways that are relevant to them and their work. Change becomes the norm and they are continually reflecting on and revising their practice to identify new and better ways of finding and nurturing the potential of each student. It is exciting to see this in action at the Young Scholars schools as school teams create engaging and dynamic learning experiences that transform the educational lives of the Young Scholars. As one teacher recently wrote:

Since I’ve worked with Young Scholars, my expectations have been broader; I have higher expectations for children who are able to perform better. Everyone has an idea of what giftedness is, but Young Scholars has broadened my perspective about who is brought into that category.

Levels of Service

Concurrently with the development of the Young Scholars model, the school-based gifted program transitioned from a pull-out model for a small group of identified students to a collaborative model in which the GT resource teacher works with classroom teachers to provide a continuum of gifted services in kindergarten through Grade 6 along four levels. The model is an adaptation of the work of Donald Treffinger on Levels of Service (Treffinger, Young, Nassab, & Wittig, 2004) and The School Wide Enrichment Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1997). The FCPS continuum of advanced services is designed to build on academic strengths and interests over time with a focus on labeling services, not children (see Figure 2).

Level I is provided to all students in kindergarten through Grade 6. Nine critical and creative thinking strategies are embedded in model lessons that connect to the state standards and are designed to teach critical and creative thinking skills at each grade level. The lessons are modeled in all classrooms by GT resource teachers, and the thinking strategies are then used throughout the year by classroom teachers and other teachers who work with students. The problem-solving skills, thinking processes, and student products that result from these lessons provide observable evidence of a student’s ability to think and reason on advanced levels. Students who exhibit characteristics of emerging talent or who have specific academic strengths are considered for differentiated services or Level II. These services are specifically planned to provide more challenging content, assignments, resources, and/or instructional groupings within the classroom. Level II services are provided in kindergarten through Grade 6 by classroom teachers in collaboration with the GT resource teacher. The resource teacher shares ideas, lessons, and materials that allow the classroom teacher to extend and enrich the curriculum for students in one or more areas of strength. Once identified, Young Scholars receive Level II services. Over time, many move on to Level III or Level IV services.

Level III services consist of direct services to students who have been identified by a local school screening committee. Level III services are part-time and are provided by the GT resource teacher. The GT resource teachers collaborate with classroom teachers to design or select differentiated curricula...
that challenge students to think on a higher level and study sophisticated and complex content in one or more of the four core subject areas. In addition to lessons as well as units developed by FCPS teachers using the Parallel Curriculum Model, other published curricular resources are used such as Project M3 Mentoring Mathematical Minds, curriculum written and published by the Center for Gifted Education at the College of William and Mary; the National Geographic JASON curriculum in science; and Engineering Is Elementary developed by the Museum of Science in Boston.

Level IV services offer full-time placement to identified students in a highly challenging instructional program. Differentiation in the depth, breadth, and pace of instruction is designed to meet the needs of highly gifted learners with a strong emphasis on critical and creative thinking, problem solving, and decision making. Students participate with the entire student body in school-based activities such as student government, physical education, band and strings, chorus, and other electives. The Level IV environment allows students to explore and express their ideas with intellectual peers. Teachers implement units of study from a curriculum framework that lead to an understanding of the concepts, themes, and issues that are fundamental to the disciplines and an appreciation for relationships within and among disciplines. Students pursue independent investigations and ongoing research appropriate to the disciplines. They have ongoing opportunities for reflection and self-assessment that develop an understanding of the characteristics, demands, and responsibilities of advanced intellectual development. Students are selected for Level IV services through a central selection process and may be referred by parents, teachers, peers, or self. Many GT resource teachers in Young Scholars schools are now referring Young Scholars for Level IV, and the work samples and records that they collect through school-based gifted services provide powerful evidence of a student's ability to succeed in a highly challenging academic environment.

The change in the delivery of school-based gifted services from a once a week pull-out model to a collaborative model with a continuum of services allows each GT resource teacher to become integrated into the total school community. It also supports their work with classroom teachers at Young Scholars schools as they work together to find and nurture gifted potential as early as kindergarten. Efforts to identify and build on students' strengths highlight the need to nurture the potential of all children so that potential talent has the opportunity to emerge.

Non-Traditional Assessments

To identify Young Scholars at an early age, school administrators and the GT resource teacher create a committee that...
that includes a school administrator, classroom teachers, the GT resource teacher, specialists, reading teachers, guidance counselors, and/or the media specialist. The committee meets throughout the school year to assess students’ strengths and to collaborate on ways to appropriately challenge Young Scholars.

Early identification is essential. This allows schools to provide Young Scholars with an educational setting that will nurture their potential and prepare them for challenging course work in upper elementary, middle school, high school, and beyond. Young Scholars are students who are not likely to be considered for gifted programs using current methods of identification and who, without that opportunity, are less likely to pursue advanced levels of learning on their own. Curriculum plays an important role as an identifier of talent, and beginning in kindergarten, school professionals work together to find talent potential in Young Scholars. It takes the combined efforts of principals, classroom teachers, special education teachers, teachers who work with students who have limited English proficiency, art teachers, music teachers, GT resource teachers, and other educational specialists who observe the students in a variety of settings. Conversations, an examination of student portfolios, performance-based assessments, and non-verbal ability tests are used to find and nurture Young Scholars.

Identification is informal and focuses on teacher observations, anecdotal records, and student work samples. The process begins in kindergarten and ends on the side of inclusion. As the Young Scholars model was developed, changes in the delivery of school-based gifted services district-wide promoted and supported increased involvement of classroom teachers in the screening and identification process as well as the delivery of services. Classroom teachers now play an important role in the screening and identification process through the infusion of critical and creative thinking strategies into lessons designed to elicit higher level thinking responses. The problem-solving skills, thinking processes, and student products that result from the lessons provide observable evidence of a student’s ability to think and reason on advanced levels. The GT resource teacher collaborates with the classroom teacher to model and plan lessons that can be integrated into all content areas throughout the school year. The nine thinking strategies, adapted from the work of Edward de Bono and Richard Paul (de Bono, 2008; Paul & Elder, 2008), make up the first level of service that is provided to all students. Each thinking strategy can be used at any grade level and in any curriculum area. Students are taught the name of the strategy, how it can help them become better thinkers, and are then given opportunities to practice the thinking strategies in different content areas. Each icon provides a visual representation that helps students identify and remember the strategy (see Figure 3).

Model lessons, designed to teach students to think on a higher level, and multi-dimensional assessments increase the prospects of identifying a broader range of gifted learners. As lessons are taught, a tool called the Gifted Behavior Ratings Scale is used to help teachers identify and record behaviors that may...
indicate gifted potential in children. The Gifted Behavior Rating Scale was created by FCPS in collaboration with Dr. Beverly Shaklee (1992), professor at George Mason University. The scale has four categories: exceptional ability to learn, exceptional application of knowledge, exceptional creative/productive thinking, and exceptional motivation to succeed. Each category includes a list of indicators that provide examples of what this behavior might look like in a classroom. For example, under \textit{exceptional ability to learn}, one of the indicators states "is acquiring language at a rapid pace." This would apply to a student whose primary language is not English and who is demonstrating an exceptional ability to learn a new language. In another category, \textit{exceptional application of knowledge}, one of the indicators states, "communicates learned concepts through role playing and/or detailed artwork." This allows teachers to note gifted behaviors that may be demonstrated through alternative modes of expression such as drama and the visual arts. The inclusion of these observable behaviors supports the notion that gifted potential may be demonstrated in ways that traditionally have not been considered. It also helps teachers find children who may lack the skills that are needed to perform well on traditional school tasks and yet have the capacity to think, reason, and problem-solve on advanced levels. The school district has created videos to show teachers how these behaviors look in classrooms with students from diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. The videos are used as part of the training that all teachers receive on how to use the Gifted Behavior Rating Scale.

The observations and conversations between the GT resource teacher and classroom teachers at the Young Scholars schools help build the capacity of classroom teachers to instruct at an advanced level and assist in the identification of Young Scholars. In the words of one teacher:

I have a little girl in kindergarten who is quiet and yet is a very intense thinker. She made a comment one time when we were talking about letters and sounds. She asked if things had to be in order. She asked if things in math had to be in order, as letters have to be in order to make a word.

Evidence of advanced ability is collected in student portfolios, which are reviewed by local screening committees to identify talent potential. Early identification coupled with early intervention fosters a growth mindset in students and teachers (Dweck, 2008). Teachers soon realize that it is not possible to know what students are capable of learning and achieving until they are given an opportunity to experience high-powered curriculum and instruction. The learning experiences that are provided to Young Scholars help to increase their self-efficacy and prepare them for more challenging work as they progress in grade level. Early identification also plays an important role in counteracting the effects of negative peer pressure. When identified early, intellectual peers from a similar background can support and sustain each other over time, and peer pressure becomes a positive force that keeps students from underrepresented populations in gifted programs and promotes their advanced academic achievement (Cooley, Cornell, & Lee, 1991).

The teachers also receive extensive training in culturally responsive teaching so that they will understand how important it is to take into consideration the diversity of background experiences that the Young Scholars bring to school. They learn and practice instructional strategies designed to elicit high-level responses and use various methods to record evidence of gifted potential to include observations, anecdotal records, and portfolios of student work. For example, the GT resource teacher may model a lesson on creating analogies while the classroom teacher observes and records student responses and behaviors. Next, the classroom teacher conducts another lesson while the GT resource teacher creates anecdotal records of student responses. Ensuing conversations between the GT resource teacher and the classroom teacher help them find and identify students who are at risk of not being identified through traditional methods.

As the Young Scholars model evolved, the Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test (NNAT; Pearson Education, Inc.) was incorporated into the screening and identification process for all students throughout the district to help reduce cultural bias and to provide an additional opportunity for students to demonstrate cognitive strengths. The use of the NNAT helped increase the number of ethnic minorities and the number of students whose primary language is not English for gifted services. It also highlighted the need to design curriculum and instruction that would strengthen basic skills while nurturing gifted potential. Teachers continuously review and consider multiple forms of data as they search for and build on student strengths to find and nurture talent potential in Young Scholars.

At its inception, Young Scholars started with dialogue, and the program continues to grow through powerful conversations. Conversations among administrators, teachers, and specialists ignite questions and generate discussions that lead to new ways of finding and nurturing advanced academic potential in low-economic, minority learners. As one teacher recently commented:

I have discovered that there are many methods one can utilize to identify giftedness other than merely relying on standardized test results. I am now a strong supporter of portfolio presentations and anecdotal records to illustrate a child's abilities and talents.

At each Young Scholars school, ongoing assessments by educators who have been trained to provide curriculum and instruction designed to elicit gifted behaviors may be the most powerful means of identifying gifted learners in underserved populations.

**Expanded Opportunities**

As evidence is collected through Level I services, interventions are provided to nurture talent development and academic growth. Multi-age classrooms, looping, flexible
grouping, and/or vertical teaming of teachers are examples of service delivery options that are used to support the students. Clustering Young Scholars provides important opportunities for students to be challenged and motivated by intellectual peers. It also facilitates better use of the GT resource teachers’ time and allows them work directly with the students and to develop a close partnership with teachers in Young Scholars classrooms.

Once identified, Young Scholars receive challenging curriculum and instruction in a supportive and stimulating educational setting that is responsive to cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences. The teachers in the Young Scholars schools collaborate, plan, and design learning experiences that connect to the students’ diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. Basic skills are strengthened through lessons that require students to think and apply knowledge on a higher, more complex level. Young Scholars are held to the same high standards and performance expectations as other gifted students; the main difference is in the amount of support that is provided to promote and nurture their advanced academic ability. The long-range goal is to find students with high academic potential from historically underrepresented populations at an early age, to raise their personal expectations, to support family involvement, and to prepare them for more challenging and rigorous course work as they move up in grade level.

At Young Scholars schools, opportunities for risk-taking are provided in a safe and nurturing learning environment through high-powered curriculum. This develops self-efficacy as the Young Scholars successfully take on new challenges. When the school and classroom community employ a total collaborative effort, students understand rules and limits, identify issues and problems they want to pursue, and work together on projects that accept and encourage diverse ideas and multiple modes of learning. Empathy and self-regulation, two important characteristics for future success, are nurtured and cultivated in such an environment. Teachers and specialists implement research-based best practices that capitalize on and develop student strengths. Teaching practices are differentiated based on students’ interests, readiness, and learning profiles. When students are encouraged to think critically and creatively, they build on their strengths, constructing products and presentations that incorporate their unique talents. Young Scholars are provided opportunities to develop and strengthen their knowledge, understanding, and skills in work that is challenging to their minds and meaningful to their lives.

As Young Scholars develop confidence in themselves, they also develop a desire to rise to new challenges and raise the bar for their achievement. Teachers, specialists, counselors, and other professionals work together to support and nurture the social and emotional growth of these young learners. Not only must teachers believe that such students can achieve at higher levels, but the students must also believe they can do the work. These beliefs emerge when the curriculum is organized around meaningful learning experiences that challenge students to use their strengths in ways that will support and nurture continuous academic achievement and growth.

Young Scholars gain important skills and confidence as they create questions, search for answers, and share what they learn through products and presentations that they design. As their confidence increases, their motivation and willingness to take risks increase as well. For example, a group of first-grade Young Scholars recently created a slide show presentation to teach kindergarten students all that they had learned about insects. As they designed and created their presentation, the first-grade students became experts on their topic and were excited to share their knowledge with their younger peers. Another group of Young Scholars in fifth and sixth grades explored the concept of a watershed as they learned their watershed address and discovered their connection to a nearby bay through their local streams. After an in-depth study of the watershed and problems that ensue when it is not protected, the students decided to take action and share with other students ways that they could help improve the health of the watershed, and thereby save the Chesapeake Bay. The Young Scholars worked together and designed a school television show on the importance of protecting the local watershed. This experience allowed them to make a real-world connection and to see themselves as problem solvers of an issue that impacted their lives and their community. Strategies and practices that are incorporated into their learning experiences are shown in Figure 4.

A summer school program for Young Scholars from each Young Scholars school provides the students with additional learning opportunities that are extended and enriched. The summer school teachers work with the GT resource teachers to design an engaging curriculum that includes concept-based instruction, enrichment opportunities, field trips, and guest speakers. The summer school classes are multi-age and basic skills are strengthened through learning opportunities that challenge the students to think and apply knowledge on a higher, more complex level. For example, one class of Young Scholars studied the concept of conservation and what it means to conserve nature, culture, resources, and ideas. The students simulated the role of earth scientists as they explored the effects of deforestation on soil erosion. Through experimentation and data collection, they learned how trees and plants hold the soil in place and “conserve” it for the future. A visit to a local...
are developed, guided, and supported. In one student's words: 

climate in which advanced knowledge, understandings, and skills students gain proficiency in reading and mathematics. The cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds while they help the learn how to create lessons that connect to the students' diverse independent study. The teachers in the Young Scholars schools nurture their strengths and talents. These may take the form of Scholars receive specific interventions designed to develop and the school (Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997). The Young likely to engage in such experiences unless they are created by research suggests that students from low-economic backgrounds are less students from low-economic backgrounds are less to succeed in a complex and competitive world, research 

Although all children need learning experiences that prepare them to succeed in a complex and competitive world, research suggests that students from low-economic backgrounds are less likely to engage in such experiences unless they are created by the school (Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997). The Young Scholars receive specific interventions designed to develop and nurture their strengths and talents. These may take the form of project investigations, problem-based learning, research, and independent study. The teachers in the Young Scholars schools learn how to create lessons that connect to the students' diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds while they help the students gain proficiency in reading and mathematics. The learning experiences that they provide Young Scholars promote a climate in which advanced knowledge, understandings, and skills are developed, guided, and supported. In one student's words: 

Being a Young Scholar has brought a lot of opportunities for me. It let me look at things in a whole new way. I had a chance to discuss things that I have always been wondering about. In Young Scholars you can explore further and have additional fun with your friends. After Young Scholars I got accepted into Level II of the Advanced Academic program, and then into Level III, and after that into Level IV (full-time Advanced Academics). You can achieve this too; Young Scholars gives you many additional opportunities to reach your goals.

Additional learning opportunities and support systems include the following:

- GEMS after-school clubs to encourage girls to enter the fields of engineering, mathematics, and science
- Parent liaisons from local communities to support family connections
- Parent outreach meetings at various times of the day provided by GT Resource Teachers
- After-school middle school programs available at all middle schools to provide a number of enrichment opportunities to include math clubs, Science Olympiad, and so on
- Student Learning Plan, a district-wide process that begins in Grade 7 and allows students to identify interests and strengths; set academic, career, and personal goals; and reflect on their learning. Every student works with counselors, teachers, and family to create an individual plan using the Family Connection website. Student Learning Plans are updated and reviewed periodically through Grade 12
- Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program at the secondary level
- Summer Residential Governor's Schools offered by the Virginia Department of Education with a competitive application process

Professional Development and Parent Involvement

Teachers in Young Scholars schools receive professional development opportunities that help them meet the needs of advanced learners from a variety of backgrounds. They incorporate research-based practices and consider the influences of home, prior knowledge, language, learning preferences, and culture as they plan learning experiences that build on strengths to compensate for weaknesses (Bernal, 2002; Castellano & Diaz, 2001; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Ford, Harris, Howard, & Tyson, 2000; Ford & Trotman, 2001; Gay, 2000). Many of the Young Scholars teachers are either National Board Certified Teachers or are working toward achieving this certification. This demonstrates their commitment to the teaching profession and their high level of expertise (Bond, Hattie, Jaeger, & Smith, 2000). The report of the Committee on Minority Representation in Special Education (Donovan & Cross, 2002) underscores the important role that teachers play by emphasizing how the expectations that teachers have for children from diverse backgrounds can greatly impact the expectations that these children have for themselves. Currently, very few colleges and universities offer courses in gifted education and most teachers do not even receive introductory courses in this area (Parker, 2003). Through the work of the principals and teachers at Young Scholars schools, notions of teacher quality have been expanded to include knowledge and expertise on how teachers can help students move beyond
minimal competencies to develop and nurture academic potential that has no ceiling. When teachers receive professional development on culturally responsive teaching and learn strategies that nurture gifted potential in all populations, they gain a deeper understanding of the need to identify and build on academic strengths as they are manifested within the context of each student's current life experiences (Borland, Schunur, & Wright, 2000; Gay, 2000).

Recognizing the importance of providing ongoing professional development and in an effort to reach more teachers, FCPS collaborated with an online learning company, CaseNEX, and created a three-credit Young Scholars course. All GT resource teachers must enroll in the course as part of their initial training. The course provides a semester-long study of research-based best practice in finding and nurturing advanced academic potential in students from historically underrepresented populations. Through a process of reading, reflection, research, and online discussion, they learn about the Young Scholars model and how to use its elements to ensure that all students have access to the appropriate level of advanced academic services in the schools that they serve. Once they have taken the course, the GT resource teachers use the course materials to do turnaround training at their assigned schools. Teams of classroom teachers from the Young Scholars schools are encouraged to take the course together, and it has become an important venue for keeping the model energized and effective across a large district. Through CaseNEX this important online learning opportunity is also available to other school districts and many have used it to replicate the model in their own schools.

In addition to the CaseNEX course, the teachers in Young Scholars schools participate in numerous professional development opportunities with a focus on research-based best practices that improve academic achievement and challenge young learners to think and reason on advanced levels. They participate in in-service days during the school year as well as institutes on teacher workdays and in the summer. Each time the Advanced Academic Programs office offers training, institutes, or in-services, teachers from Young Scholars schools are invited to attend. For example, Dr. Catherine Little from the University of Connecticut recently presented an in-service for GT teachers on the models and strategies embedded in the William and Mary Language Arts units that are designed for gifted learners. Classroom teachers from the Young Scholars schools were invited to attend and they were then able to use the models, lessons, and strategies from the William and Mary units in their work with the Young Scholars. The GT resource teachers at the Young Scholars schools also provide important staff development and support to teachers through their work with collaborative teams at the local schools.

Summer school is an important element of Young Scholars, not only for the students but for the teachers as well. It gives them an opportunity to learn and implement high-powered curriculum and instruction without the additional responsibilities that they have during the school year. Many teachers are amazed at what the students are capable of doing when stretched and challenged during summer school. They also feel more confident in using the strategies and practices during the school year after they have had the opportunity to practice them successfully during the summer.

In addition to their work with students and teachers, each Young Scholar School actively works to strengthen the family connection. Letters, brochures, and flyers with information about the activities and opportunities offered to Young Scholars and their parents are translated into multiple languages and sent home in student backpacks. The counseling office and the GT resource teachers provide workshops for the parents with a focus on what the school system has to offer and how parents/guardians can be advocates for their children. Parents are invited to participate in many of the learning activities to include field trips and special programs. This active involvement provides the parents with ideas on how they can work with their Young Scholars at home. Parent liaisons at each school also communicate with the families and provide additional information and support.

**Evidence of Success**

Longitudinal studies of Young Scholars allow the school district to assess the two major goals of the model: early identification and participation in advanced courses in high school. Once they are identified, each Young Scholar is assigned a special YS code in the district's student information system. This code allows the district to assess the participation and performance of Young Scholars over time to determine whether they are identified for gifted services, the level of service, the courses that they take in middle and high school, and their grades. As Young Scholars may be identified as early as kindergarten, the code has provided important research on the success and impact of the model over time.

Of the 5,266 Young Scholars currently in Grades K-8, 50% receive Level II services or differentiation in the classroom, 25% receive Level III services which are direct services provided by the GT Resource Teacher, and 25% are in a GT Center program which is full-time placement with highly challenging curriculum and instruction all day every day.

The tables below show a significant increase in the number of Black and Hispanic students receiving Level IV services (Table 1) and Levels II and III services (Table 2) from before the Young Scholars model was implemented in 2000 until current enrollment in 2014.

At the secondary level, of the 4,432 Young Scholars currently enrolled in Grades 7 to 12, 78% are in advanced academic courses to include GT Center, Honors, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate classes and 75% of their grades are As and Bs.

A comparison of data from the Annual Report to the State of Virginia on Gifted Education in 2003 (just after the model was implemented) with data from 2014 (11 years later) shows a 505% increase in the number of Black and Hispanic students receiving gifted services in high school.
Many Young Scholars return or write and thank former teachers for the difference that Young Scholars had on their learning and their lives. One student recently wrote to a former teacher:

I hope you know how much Young Scholars shaped my life. It helped lead me on a path to succeed . . . and you were the biggest part of that. I was deemed the hardest worker in my graduating class and that drive that I have is rooted from my YS experience. I am now at UVA and am going into Computer Science engineering . . . My love for science and math comes from my Young Scholars roots . . . Young Scholars was such a great part of my life and I am so grateful for the time and compassion you gave and showed me through my elementary school years. And I can honestly say that I will be a Young Scholar for life.

Professional development for teachers has increased significantly as a result of heightened teacher involvement in providing advocacy and interventions for Young Scholars. In 2012, 1,260 elementary teachers participated in professional development courses offered by the Advanced Academic Programs Office. In 2013, this number increased to 3,302, a 160% increase. At the secondary level, the number of secondary teachers completing the Advanced Academic endorsement increased from 331 in FY12 to 391 in FY13, an 18% increase.

In partnership with CaseNEX, a professional development corporation that provides online education courses, FCPS developed an online course to support implementation and replication of the Young Scholars model in other districts as well as to support expansion in their own district. Each year the number of teachers taking the Young Scholars course has increased. For example In school year 2012, 47 teachers completed the Young Scholars course and in school year 2013, 65 teachers completed the course—an increase of 38%.

The Young Scholars model has also been successfully replicated in other districts both in Virginia and across the United States. One example is the Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan school district in Minnesota that now has a website with information about their model: http://www.district196.org/District/Departments/giftedtalented/YoungScholars.cfm.

Final Note

Finding and nurturing Young Scholars to ensure their academic success is an enormous undertaking that requires the dedication and commitment of numerous educators. Schools can be powerful agents of change when they provide a context in which students are able to develop potential that might not be realized without the opportunities that a school setting can provide (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012). When giftedness in children is viewed as multi-faceted and multi-dimensional potential that is ever evolving in response to internal and external catalysts, educators take a more active role in searching for potential among students of varying cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds. Because advanced academic programs are an important gateway for participation in challenging and advanced classes in middle school, high school, and higher education, access to these advanced learning opportunities must be provided to all students who have the potential to succeed. The Young Scholars model builds capacity in schools to embrace a new way of thinking about academic strengths in students that moves beyond the notion of potential as a static trait and supports the notion of potential that can and should be developed in all populations.

Schools that implement the model take a comprehensive approach to the issue of underrepresentation that changes the culture of the school and their perception of who is gifted. Through professional development experiences, summer school

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**Table 1. Change in Level IV (GT Center) Advanced Academic Services Grades 3-8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Multiracial</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,566</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>9,554</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>1,419</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5,990</td>
<td>1,222</td>
<td>19,157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. GT = gifted and talented.*

**Table 2. Change in School-Based (Levels II and III) Advanced Academic Services Grades K-8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Multiracial</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>6,760</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1,158</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>8,924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>10,489</td>
<td>2,064</td>
<td>4,079</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>4,678</td>
<td>1,225</td>
<td>22,621</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
opportunities, and the work of collaborative teams, the teachers in Young Scholars schools gradually move beyond a reliance on test scores and begin to take a multi-dimensional look at evidence of potential talent through a review of daily learning activities, performance assessments, and interactions with their students. The teachers and principals of the Young Scholars schools develop an invested interest in finding and nurturing talent potential in students who have historically been overlooked. They also involve parents in the process and enlist parental support in nurturing the potential of these young children. The changes in school culture and the multi-layered structures that support change from within lead to systemic change within these schools that is more likely to endure.

Because the problem of underrepresentation is complex, a multi-faceted approach with multiple layers of support is needed to implement changes and practices that allow every student, regardless of cultural, ethnic, or linguistic background, to have access to gifted programs and learning opportunities that promote continuous academic growth. Young Scholars schools make a concerted effort to value the differences that children bring to school and provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their academic strengths, talents, and interests. Their understanding of the issues and their implementation of research-based best practices allow them to create a school culture in which the talent development of Young Scholars is a natural extension of the belief that every child needs to be continuously assessed and nurtured to reach his or her full potential.
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References

Bio
Carol V. Horn, EdD, is coordinator of Advanced Academic Programs for Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) in Northern Virginia and has worked in gifted education for more than 25 years. She has a master of education in educational psychology with an emphasis on gifted from the University of Virginia and a doctorate in teacher preparation and special education from The George Washington University. She has worked extensively to develop and implement the Young Scholars model, a comprehensive approach to finding and nurturing advanced academic potential in young learners from underrepresented populations. Young Scholars was featured as one of eight successful programs that support low-income high-ability students in the 2012 NAGC Unlocking Emergent Talent report.