

Family and Community Session 5

Removing Barriers to Success

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Foreword

The topics for these community forums were chosen with input from a variety of stakeholders in Project North Star. We understand that these topics are significant in parenting and educating gifted children in rural areas, but that they are just a handful of important topics families, educators, and communities need to discuss when nurturing the gifts and talents of young people. **These are a tiny lens on very large topics, and are intended to be a starting point for discussion and further exploration.** Please use these forum guides in whatever way makes sense in your community, and feel welcome to use them as a template for addressing other important topics.

The contents of these guides have been chosen using a number of criteria. We asked:

- Are they relevant to people who live in rural areas?
- Are they current and/or timeless?
- Are they respectful?
- Are they universal? (Some resources reference specific cultures, regions, or traditions. We know the readings cannot be specific to every group, but do the selected resources spark important questions that are relevant to our target audience—communities, educators, and families in rural areas who are actively engaged in creating opportunities for growth for gifted and talented children?)
- Are they thought provoking?
- Can we show alternate points of view with multiple readings, in order to help start a positive dialogue?
- Are they readily available in complete form? (Most sources are available online. We felt the need to include excerpts from several books whose authors' wisdom we felt necessary to include in our work. All sources are cited.)

We understand that not all readings will ring true to all people. Please read with an open mind, and the understanding that multiple points of view are helpful, even if the specific information offered does not apply to your situation. Analyze the readings with an eye for finding similarities, differences, and commonalities of purpose to your own experience. Feel welcome to disagree respectfully, or to champion another point of view with equal respect.

The content of these sessions are not intended to reflect the opinions or beliefs of the Project North Star staff, contractors, consultants, or participants. In fact, resources were chosen with an eye to presenting multiple points of view, with the intent of providing a lot of scope for conversation.

Above all, the Project North Star Team applauds you for engaging in discussions that bridge the divide often found between education, family, and community. We know that this collaborative spirit is very often a strength of rural communities, and is something we seek to share with others. We sincerely thank you for your contributions to this work.

Suggested Reading #1

Promoting Resilience (excerpt)

By Maureen Neihart

Excerpt from [Gifted Today](#), a Duke TIP blog for parents and teachers

As parents, we naturally want to prevent our children from experiencing extreme adversity, but, try as we might, there is only so much we can do to keep them safe. The world sometimes is an unsafe place, and for many children it is increasingly dangerous. Yet many children beat the odds. At least one in four is resilient, or able to achieve social competence and emotional health in spite of a history of acute or chronic stress.

Gifted children are often in educational situations that heighten their risk for adjustment problems because they have limited access to others with similar interests, ability, and drive or because they are not sufficiently challenged. The differences in their abilities and their heightened sensitivities can contribute to these problems.

A positive outlook on life is a hallmark of resilient individuals.

Resilience in children has been researched for decades, so we know a lot about its characteristics and the factors that promote it. A powerful way to increase children's ability to bounce back from difficult times is to strengthen these characteristics, model resilience ourselves, and help children build a strong social support network.

Characteristics of Resilient People

Resilient children have similar characteristics. Note how many items on the following list are common among gifted children, and pay particular attention to those that are true of the members of your family:

- compassion for others
- a sense of humor
- persistence in the face of failure
- moral conviction or a strong code of ethics
- an interest in spirituality or religion
- a respectful manner
- the capacity to get attention in positive ways
- the ability to plan ahead
- skill at problem solving
- a feeling of autonomy
- a positive outlook on life
- the belief that one's effort can change things
- an interest in developing a special talent or hobby

- flexibility in gender roles

We know that circumstances do not always determine outcomes in life. If they did, people who have suffered a great deal would inevitably be less well adjusted than those who have not. Yet we all know people who have been through a lot but remain emotionally strong, physically healthy, happy, able to achieve, and capable of making a difference in the world. Similarly, we know individuals who appear to have every advantage but crumble at the first sign of trouble. The difference is resilience.

A positive outlook on life is a hallmark of resilient individuals. It is not what happens to us but our response to it that predicts our emotional health. Children can learn to be more resilient by becoming more optimistic in response to difficulty.

Although a positive outlook on life is important, studies suggest that the most important predictor of positive outcomes among children who face trying circumstances is a long-term relationship with a caring adult. To begin building resilience in your child, demonstrate the conviction that life is worthwhile and recognize and reinforce the qualities that enhance resilience. For example, praise effort rather than performance. Read hopeful, optimistic stories with resilient characters, and discuss the challenges they face and the choices they make. When something happens that is upsetting to your child, brainstorm many possible reasons for the situation to prevent your child from developing black-or-white thinking. Most important, do anything and everything to enhance your child's relationships with caring adults.

Maureen Neihart, PsyD, a clinical child psychologist in private practice, has worked with gifted children and their families for more than 20 years

<https://blogs.tip.duke.edu/giftedtoday/2006/08/06/promoting-resilience/>

Suggested Reading #2

Forum: Does Mentoring Work in Rural Areas? (excerpt)

by Mike Garringer

In my time as a technical assistance provider in the youth mentoring field, some of the most difficult and persistent challenges I've seen are those faced by rural mentoring programs. While running a high-quality program is difficult in any town or urban environment, the challenges faced by rural programs are considerable: geographic distance between program participants, a dearth of easy-to-do activities, a small fundraising and volunteer base. And in the smallest of small towns, such as those in the area of Iowa where I'm from, you also get a healthy dose of "everyone knows everyone's business" issues that can make building trusting, confidential mentoring relationships difficult.

So can youth mentoring really work in rural environments? What challenges do these programs face and how do they overcome them? And is it possible that rural programs actually have some advantages over their urban counterparts?

To answer these questions, I've asked a panel of leading experts on running programs in rural areas to weigh in on the promise and hurdles of offering mentoring in rural areas.

Kathryn Eustis – Director, Youth Development and Prevention Programs, Calaveras (CA) County Office of Education

Not only does mentoring work in rural areas, I believe that mentoring has the potential to be even more influential for youth in rural areas than in urban areas. There may be greater challenges in building and sustaining a mentoring program, but mentoring itself can be extremely powerful in a small community.

In the first place, isolation for vulnerable rural youth is literal, not figurative. Our kids often live miles away from their neighbors and are literally stuck at home, often with nothing to do but watch TV and play video games. The opportunity to hang out with a safe, fun adult has also meant the first time ever going to a restaurant or movie theater; the first time hiking, fishing, or exploring in their own community; or the first time visiting a home that is quiet, clean and safe. For youth who haven't been exposed to extreme violence or drugs, simply reducing their physical isolation and letting them know they are valued can have an enormous impact. They are like thirsty plants, because their self-esteem and social skills increase incredibly quickly. Another powerful way in which mentoring works in rural areas is the potential of each mentor-mentee relationship to affect the entire community. In a rural environment, socio-economic differences manifest in cultural—and geographic—gulfs in the community. It is very easy for more comfortable, affluent community members to avoid acknowledging the challenges faced by other community members and to judge the kids from the "bad" families. Mentors act as bridges across those gulfs, allaying fears of the Other on both sides while they build relationships that weave the entire community closer together. The fact that many people know each other in a small community is an asset once the process gains momentum; adults begin role modeling compassion among their peers just as much as they do for their mentees, and opportunities open up for youth who would never have had them.

Dr. Susan Weinberger – Founder and President of the Mentor Consulting Group

Unquestionably, in rural communities, recruiting mentors for youth is a challenge. Distance is a factor. How do you spend an hour a week with your mentee when you might have to travel an equal amount of time just to get to the session? Let's look at the positives. It takes a whole village to mentor a child. In my experience, I think it is actually an advantage to mentor in rural areas because often the community wants to help their own within a five mile radius of where they live. There is a built in community bond there that is often missing in urban programs. A few years ago, I designed a program in Port Aransas, TX. Most get to this fishing village by boat. Soon after I arrived, the folks wanting to begin the program said, "Who will we get as the mentors? We have no other industry here. Not even a bank..." Well, we used the village as our base. We recruited the local fishermen — who became mentors for the youth — and many of the mentees became interested in becoming fishermen and wanted to learn the trade. A career-based mentoring program developed before our eyes. We also recruited the only doctor, postman, fireman, and policeman, all of whom became mentors.

However, there are many rural areas where there is a challenge to match mentors and mentees. In my work in Indian country, many of the reservations have youth that live a long distance from the interested and prospective mentors. The solution for them has become e-mentoring – three weeks a month with supervised, software-based computer generated discussions, and in-person meetings once a month.

Another way to approach this in rural America is seen in the work of organizations like the local Boys & Girls Clubs where youth thrive in a safe haven after school. The schedule for meetings is much more flexible. The mentors meet the mentees after work, often between 3 – 7 p.m., before the Club closes. This flexibility of meeting times can alleviate some of the scheduling issues that challenge rural programs.

Rural America needs to become creative in terms of finding mentors. These programs may not always look like their more traditional urban counterparts, but the outcome can be incredible for mentors and mentees.

Michael Garringer serves as the Director of Knowledge Management for MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, overseeing projects related to the translation of mentoring research into program practice.

<https://chronicle.umbmentoring.org/forum-does-mentoring-work-in-rural-areas/>

Suggested Reading #3

Extrinsic versus Intrinsic Motivation

by Natalie Boyd

Study.com

Types of Motivation

Sammy and Dani are running buddies. Sammy loves to run and will often go running just to clear his head or blow off steam. Dani, meanwhile, hates to run, but she does it because her doctor told her that she needs to lose weight or she might end up with diabetes.

Sammy is intrinsically motivated to run. Intrinsic motivation is when you do something because you enjoy it or find it interesting. Compare that to Dani, whose reason for running involves extrinsic motivation, or doing something for external rewards or to avoid negative consequences. Now, you may think that intrinsic motivation is better than extrinsic motivation, and you'd be right up to a point. Studies have shown that people are more likely to stick to a task, invest more time in a task, and be more successful at it if they are intrinsically motivated.

However, extrinsic motivation has its place, too. After all, without extrinsic motivation, many of us would never exercise, never go to work, and never clean our houses. Many day-to-day tasks that are required to live a healthy life are extrinsically motivated. Besides, who doesn't like to be rewarded for what they do?

The Overjustification Effect

Still, there are some issues with rewards. Giving someone a reward for doing a task can actually decrease their intrinsic motivation for that task because they begin to feel like they should only do the task for external rewards. This is called the overjustification effect.

One famous example of the overjustification effect occurred when researchers rewarded nine- and ten-year-olds for playing with math games. Before they were given the rewards, many of the kids played with the games just because they thought they were fun. But, after being rewarded for playing with the games, the children spent far less time playing with the games than they did before being rewarded.

Why do people who are intrinsically motivated to do a task suddenly change their motivation? No one is exactly sure why the overjustification effect occurs, but there are a couple of things that scientists do know about when it is most likely to occur. For one thing, the overjustification effect really only happens with tasks that have a high intrinsic motivation to begin with. If someone isn't interested in doing the task before a reward, their interest won't decrease after being given a reward.

For another thing, rewards for performance are less likely to cause the overjustification effect than rewards that are given just for doing a task. In other words, being given candy to play a game is more likely to decrease your intrinsic motivation for the game than being given candy to win the game.

Though psychologists aren't completely sure why the overjustification effect occurs, there are some theories. One theory is that when people engage in a behavior, they justify their actions to themselves. If they don't get rewards, they decide that they must like doing it, but if they get rewards, they might decide that they only do it for the rewards. Thus, they convince themselves that they don't really like to do it. This is called self-perception theory.

Natalie is a teacher and holds an MA in English Education and is in progress on her PhD in psychology.

<http://study.com/academy/lesson/intrinsic-and-extrinsic-motivation-in-education-definition-examples.html>

Discussion Rules

1. You cannot change other people. We can share ideas, resources, and opinions, but we can't make other people think the way we do. This community forum is all about finding common ground.
2. Compromise. Talk about the goals underlying your ideas and plans. When you see why people want to do things, you often find you are working toward the same goals in different ways. Meet somewhere in the middle.
3. Practice acceptance. When we accept others' differences, we give them a gift. This is great role modeling for our children.
4. Realize your contribution. Just by being here and participating in this discussion, you are making a difference in the lives of your children and the future of your community. Well done!

Project North Star ~ Discussion Notes ~ Removing Barriers

<i>Discussion</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<p>Geographical barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance from resources • Weather related travel challenges • Access to high speed internet 	
<p>Cultural barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are appropriate role models? • What achievements are valued and nurtured? • What other cultural barriers do you see? 	
<p>Financial barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing resources via scholarship or grant is time consuming • Access to available resources may be limited to certain hours or days, making it difficult for young people who work or care for siblings to use those resources 	
<p>Family challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families may rely on young people for child care, elder care, additional income, etc. 	
<p>What are the desired outcomes of success?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does success look like in your community? • How does your community encourage and support success? 	

Discussion Questions

These questions are included for your convenience, and should be considered a suggestion, not a requirement. You can choose to use some, none, or all of these questions as you facilitate your discussion. Keep in mind that there are no right answers—all opinions are valid, and the purpose here is to open lines of communication.

Questions for Suggested Reading #1

1. In the first suggested reading, Dr. Neihart mentions that approximately one in four children are resilient, or can bounce back after suffering a setback. Does this number apply to your community? Do you think more of your kids are resilient, or fewer?
2. Looking at the list of characteristics of resilient people, think about the traits you see in the young people of your community. Which do you see, and which do you want to see? How can your community work to nurture those traits?
3. Optimism can be difficult to cultivate in the face of hardship. Given the challenges and difficulties you face, how do you stay positive?
4. An optimist sees the glass as half full, the pessimist sees the glass as half empty, the scientist sees the glass as entirely full, half liquid, half air. Where do you fall on the continuum of optimism? Where do your children or students rank? How does that help or hurt their success?

Questions for Suggested Reading #2

5. The second suggested reading explores mentoring programs. Does your community have a mentoring program? Do you work with an established organization, or have you grown your own? Can you use any of the ideas in the reading to improve your mentoring program?
6. If your community does not have a formal mentoring program in place, what is a starting point in creating one? What skills, talents, and wisdom exist in your community, and how can you remove the barriers to sharing them with young people?
7. Technology creates a much larger pool of potential mentors with specialized knowledge for the young people in your community, but kids still need the grounding influence of a present and trusted adult. Can you see yourself as an advisor for creating and nurturing the connection between a long-distance mentor and a young person in your community?

Questions for Suggested Reading #3

8. Suggested Reading #3 describes motivation, both the kind that comes from within, and the effort that is made to receive rewards. Think about the things that you love to do, and also of the things you only do because you either get something positive, or avoid something negative. These will be different for everyone. Share if you wish.
9. Everyone experiences both kinds of motivation, but sometimes tasks that are extrinsically motivated (at job that pays the bills, or, for kids, school because it's the law that they go) leave very little time for the fun stuff. If you could combine the two, what would it look like? What would it look like for a young person in your life?

General Questions

10. In what way do cultural differences impact motivation in your community?
11. Neihart states that the most important predictor of a young person's success in life is a positive relationship with a caring adult. Thinking about the resilient adults in your community, how might they be positive role models or mentors for young people? In

what ways can you and your fellow community members be those important people in a child's life?

Practical Strategies

We have no easy answers for removing barriers to success in rural education settings. We talk about transportation, distance, poverty, lack of funding in schools, outdated technology, cultural biases, the need for good family support services, substance counseling, college and career counseling, and the culture shock of life at a college or university that has more students than your town does people. We want big, quick fixes, but the barriers aren't straightforward. Every time we think we've solved one of the challenges faced by people in rural areas, two more come up.

The key common factor in the writings of or about folks who grew up in rural areas, attended college, and found success in a job or career is one person. This is the person who believes in your ability to do well. This is the person who finds the resources and pushes you in to taking the next step, and the next. This is also the person who is sad to see you go, even while rejoicing that you've found a way to get out there and use that amazing brain. This is also the person that you carry with you, who reminds you to respect your origins, and possibly to be that person for someone else.

Can you be that person for one extraordinary child?

Can you also be the reason that child comes back, bringing with her all of her newfound skills and resources? The solution for helping children with great potential who live in rural areas is not to take them forever from their homes so they can find success elsewhere. It's to get them to come back, and make a difference for the next child, and the next. This is the long game, since there is no short game. The pathway out needs to come full circle home, again and again, until the community that grew and nurtured these talented kids is growing and thriving because of them. Because of you. How can you be this person?

- Identify and nurture the child's strengths and passions, even when they are not necessarily academic strengths. Getting good at anything builds a strong work ethic, persistence, and focus.
- Praise the effort, not the child. "I admire how hard you worked on painting that sunflower" means more than "What a beautiful sunflower!" Praising the effort is a kind of expectant praise. It tells kids, I admire your hard work, I will admire your hard work next time, whether I like the product of your hard work or not.
- Help find resources, pathways, loopholes, scholarships, foundations, internships, competitions, mentors, and anything else that might help a child realize that the barriers between them and their dreams can be overcome. It's okay to ask for help, in fact, it's admirable. The people who work for these organizations and outreach programs feel bad when kids don't take them up on the hard work they've put into making resources available. Scholarships are not available because people feel sorry for you—they're there because people want to see what you can do, given half a chance. It's not a free ride—you'll work hard.
- Avoid pointing out all the reasons a dream is unreasonable and impractical. They know. Believe with them, instead.

- Create ways for students to share their talents and dreams with the community. The more these skills are nurtured by your community, the more likely kids will be to come back to pay it forward for another generation of kids.
- Honor the decision to stay. Not every person needs or wants to leave home to find their path in life. Gifts, talents, and expert-level skills can be homegrown, too. Help kids who want to stay find a way to achieve their goals and dreams.

Follow-up and Extension on Readings and Discussion

The following excerpts, links, and research questions are included to begin to broaden and deepen your exploration of the topic. These, again, are suggestions, not required reading and research. This section is included for those whose interest was sparked, and who seek more information. This is not a comprehensive list of resources by any means. As you explore these suggestions, you will find many, many more. Follow your interest, build on previous knowledge, and share with your community!

Shared Wisdom

Serving Gifted Kids in Rural Settings (excerpt)

by Tamra Stambaugh

...common threads can be found across approaches that are consistent with the values and strengths of rural America. First, resource sharing and collaboration are key. Connecting and collaborating with neighboring and regional schools and institutions can reduce the limitations of attending a small school while maintaining the benefits of membership in a close-knit community. Second, a culture of resourcefulness is essential in utilizing supplemental and out-of-school options effectively. Schools, organizations, and families serving rural students must be especially entrepreneurial with respect to recognizing and capitalizing on the affordances of their regions for learning while overcoming geographic and economic barriers. Third, leaders and participants in supplemental and out-of-school educational programs must actively foster communities from which they come. Particularly through programs that allows students from urban, suburban, and rural communities to collaborate and interact, students can learn to appreciate and balance global connected, and local ways of knowing. When these principals are embraced, supplemental programs can reduce the rural opportunity gap and help rural students (and others) benefit from the unique cultural and knowledge resources of rural communities in an ever more diverse and interconnected nation of learners. (p. 251)

Tamra Stambaugh, Ph.D. is an assistant research professor in special education and executive director of Programs for Talented Youth at Vanderbilt University.

From *Serving Gifted Students in Rural Settings* (p. 251) by T. Stambaugh and S. M. Wood, 2015, Waco, TX: Prufrock Press. Copyright 2015 by Prufrock Press. Reprinted with permission.

Afterschool Programs: Helping Kids Succeed in Rural America (excerpt)

Afterschool Programs Successfully Address Rural Community Needs.

Notwithstanding the obstacles and challenges, rural communities possess strengths that enable them, if given adequate financial resources, to overcome the obstacles and challenges presented to children. A strong work ethic, a spirit of teamwork, and broad-based community support coupled with existing public facilities and the ease of partnering with local community organizations are assets found in many rural communities. With these 3 assets, implementing afterschool programs that tailor to the needs of children and build on community strengths is likely to result in marked success.

Rural Afterschool – Helping Kids Catch Up, Keep Up and Stay on Track for Success

Children in rural communities often face social isolation, a lack of positive role models and scarce opportunities, but in many communities afterschool programs are helping change that and more. Working on the strengths of the communities, afterschool programs can give children in rural areas access to safe, inspiring activities that allow them to flourish.

Afterschool programs can offer children supplemental help in order to meet basic grade-level expectations, and help children develop the necessary skills to compete in an increasingly specialized and global workforce. By collaborating with local partners and businesses, and motivating families and residents to participate in establishing new afterschool programs or improving the quality of existing ones, improving the quality of life for children living in rural communities is both possible and affordable.

http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue_briefs/issue_rural_4.pdf

Further Investigation

Questions to Consider

Gender

1. Are male students at risk?
2. What methods best address the needs of gifted boys? Gifted girls?
3. What implication does gender identity have on educational services and their delivery?
4. How does gender or gender identity affect student motivation?

Technology

1. What is the role of technology in this generation of learners?
2. How does technology help learning in the community?
3. How does technology inform the culture of today's generation of students? How does this differ from the culture of the larger community?

Important Areas for Research (Diné) (adapted excerpt)

<http://gerinari.weebly.com/research.html>

Websites

- Davidson Young Scholars – supports profoundly gifted children with scholarships, mentors, community-- <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Young-Scholars>
- Jack Kent Cooke Foundation – need-based scholarships, counseling, and other services -- <http://www.jkcf.org/scholarship-programs/young-scholars>
- 4H – community engagement, mentors, service learning -- National: www.4-h.org
Minnesota: <https://www.extension.umn.edu/youth/mn4-h/about4-H.html>
- Girl Scouts – can be troop or individual (Juliette) -- <http://www.girlscouts.org>
- Boy Scouts -- <http://www.scouting.org>
- University of Minnesota Extension Family Programs -- <http://www.extension.umn.edu/family>

- FastWeb Scholarship Search Engine and Database --
<https://www.fastweb.com/educators/registration>

Books

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- Tough, P. (2012). *How Children Succeed*. Boston, MA: Mariner Books.
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Articles

- Building Resilience, by Rosina Gallagher-- <http://sengifted.org/building-resilience/>
- Afterschool Programs: Helping Kids Succeed in Rural America --
http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue_briefs/issue_rural_4.pdf
- Forum: Does Mentoring Work in Rural Areas? by Mike Garringer --
<https://chronicle.umbmentoring.org/forum-does-mentoring-work-in-rural-areas>
Bio: <http://www.mentoring.org/our-work/about-mentor/leadership/senior-leadership-and-staff/#1443444023739-aa2c518f-5443>
- Promoting Resilience, by Mareen Neihart --
<https://blogs.tip.duke.edu/giftedtoday/2006/08/06/promoting-resilience/>
Website and bio: <http://maureenneihart.blogspot.com/p/about-me.html>
- Extrinsic versus Intrinsic Motivation, by Natalie Boyd --
<http://study.com/academy/lesson/intrinsic-and-extrinsic-motivation-in-education-definition-examples.html>