Expanding Excellence: Mitigating Advanced Achievement Disparities through

A Response to Intervention System

ABSTRACT

Project Need: During the past ten years significant attention has been given to improving and reforming K-12 education for struggling students in the United States. At least since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, much of the emphasis in public schools has been to bring students up to minimal proficiency – to close the achievement gap. This, of course, is a laudable and important goal, but no less important is the excellence gap. The excellence gap, as defined by Plucker, Burroughs, and Song (2010), is the difference between proportions of subgroups of students performing at the highest levels of achievement (as opposed to performing at proficient levels). For example, in Wisconsin in the 2013 – 2014 school year, 4.7% of students who were eligible for free or reduced price meals (FARM) scored "advanced" on the 8th grade math section of the WKCE, the state standardized test. Comparing this to 16.8% of students who were not eligible for FARM and who scored at advanced levels reveals an excellence gap of 12 percentage points or nearly 400%. Similar numbers can be seen at almost every grade level, in nearly every subject area, and for English language learners.

This project seeks to mitigate the excellence gap that exists for low-income students and English language learners in three large urban school districts. Specifically, this project seeks to expand the expertise of demonstration site staff regarding best practices in gifted education with a targeted emphasis on how to best meet the advanced learning needs of two groups of disadvantaged students: those who qualify for free or reduced price meals and English language

learners. A larger goal is to increase identification rates and rates of high achievement among these populations to close the excellence gap.

Project Goals: The goals of the project are:

- **Goal 1: Collaboration:** Build collaborative systems that include school and district staff, students, and student families, to support the achievement of high ability/high potential students from economically diverse backgrounds or who are English Language learners**.**

- **Goal 2: Assessment:** Increase the number of high ability/high potential economically disadvantaged students and English language learners identified for advanced services through more appropriate assessments.

- **Goal 3: Instruction:** Increase the percentages of high ability/high potential economically disadvantaged students and English language learners that achieve at advanced levels.

To accomplish these goals, District Leadership Cadres and classroom teachers from twenty demonstration schools in three large urban school districts will be provided training in: analyzing data for disproportionality; implementing a Response to Intervention framework that includes services for high ability/high potential students; culturally responsive practices; USTARS~PLUS, a research-based program previously funded by Javits; content from a state-approved educator licensure program in gifted education; the Dual Capacity-Building framework; and Academic Parent Teacher Teams. The project will also train a State Leadership Cadre to scale up the models used in the demonstration sites statewide using a strategic plan created by multiple stakeholders.