
BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR A CONTINUUM OF SERVICES FOR GIFTED STUDENTS: FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT REPORT

ERIC CALVERT, ED.D.

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR TALENT DEVELOPMENT

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- Inviting external critical review requires institutional courage
- High rates of survey participation and focus group turnout
- Willingness to participate in above-grade-level assessment
- Candor across stakeholder groups
- Access to people, places, and background

PROJECT PURPOSE

- Develop initial snapshot of status of learning opportunities for gifted and advanced students in Lake Bluff:
 - How are these students performing academically?
 - How do stakeholders perceive current educational opportunities available to these students?
 - What are priorities and opportunities for improvement?

PROCESS

- Formative vs. summative
- Mixed Methods Approach
 - Assessment of current student achievement levels using above-grade-level tests
 - Online surveys of Lake Bluff parents and educators based on National Association for Gifted Children Program Standards
 - Focus group interviews with parents, faculty, and staff
 - Classroom observations
 - Document reviews



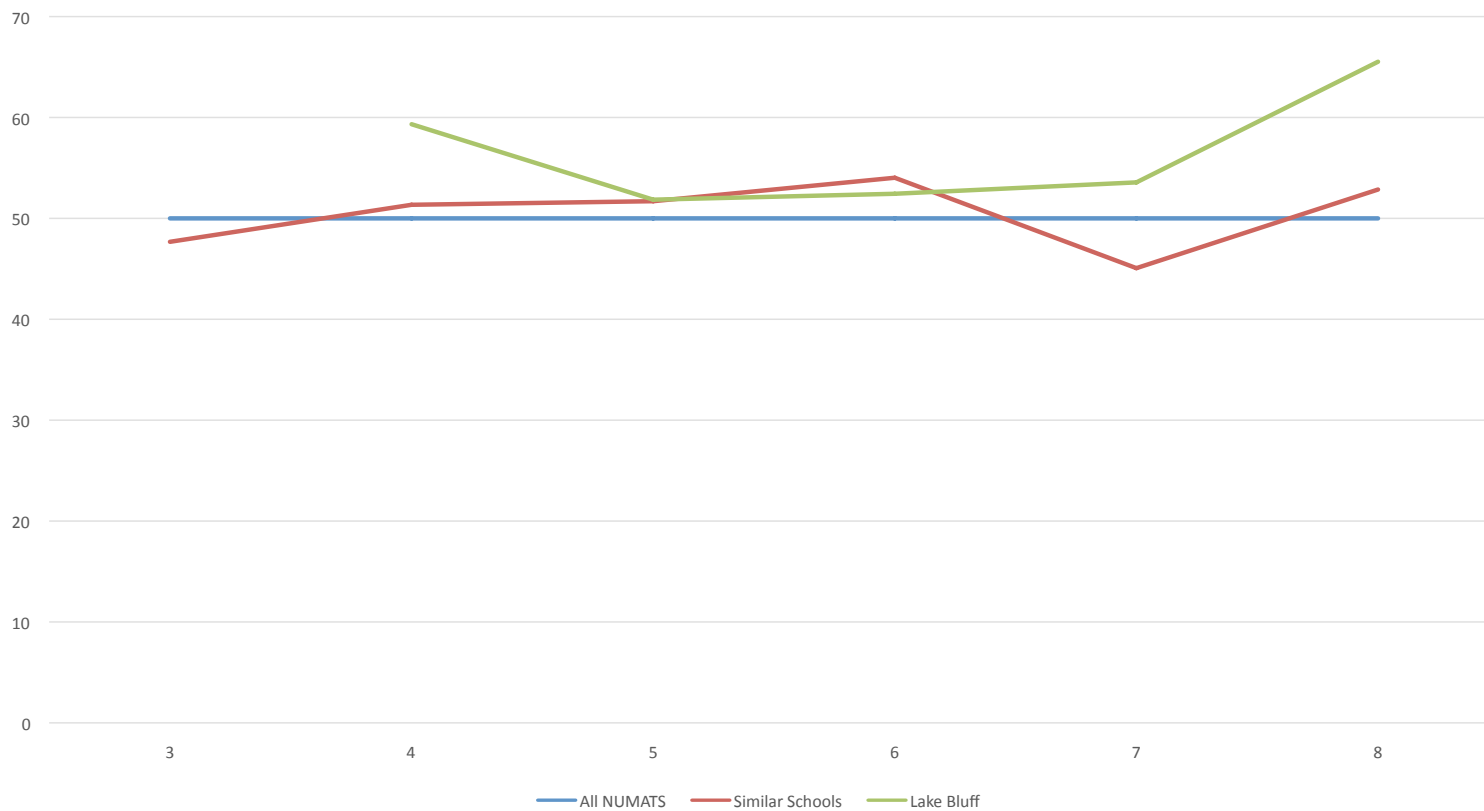
NUMATS ASSESSMENT RESULTS



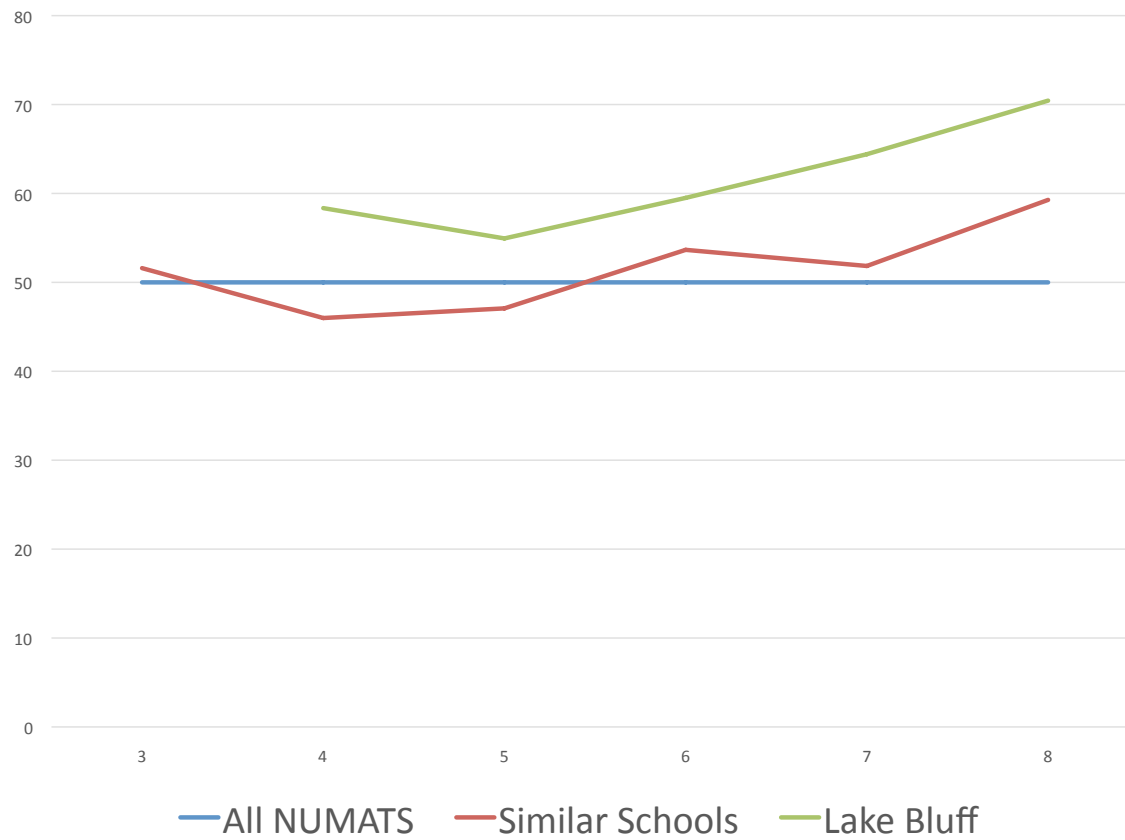
ASSESSMENT RESULTS - NUMATS

- Northwestern University Midwest Academic Talent Search (NUMATS)
- NUMATS uses college readiness-focused assessments “above-grade-level”
 - Removes “ceiling” effects of grade-level assessment
 - Removes “restriction of range” effects
 - Apples to apples: NUMATS provides a large, multi-state comparison sample to allow Lake Bluff to see how local gifted students are performing in comparison to other *gifted* students across the Midwest

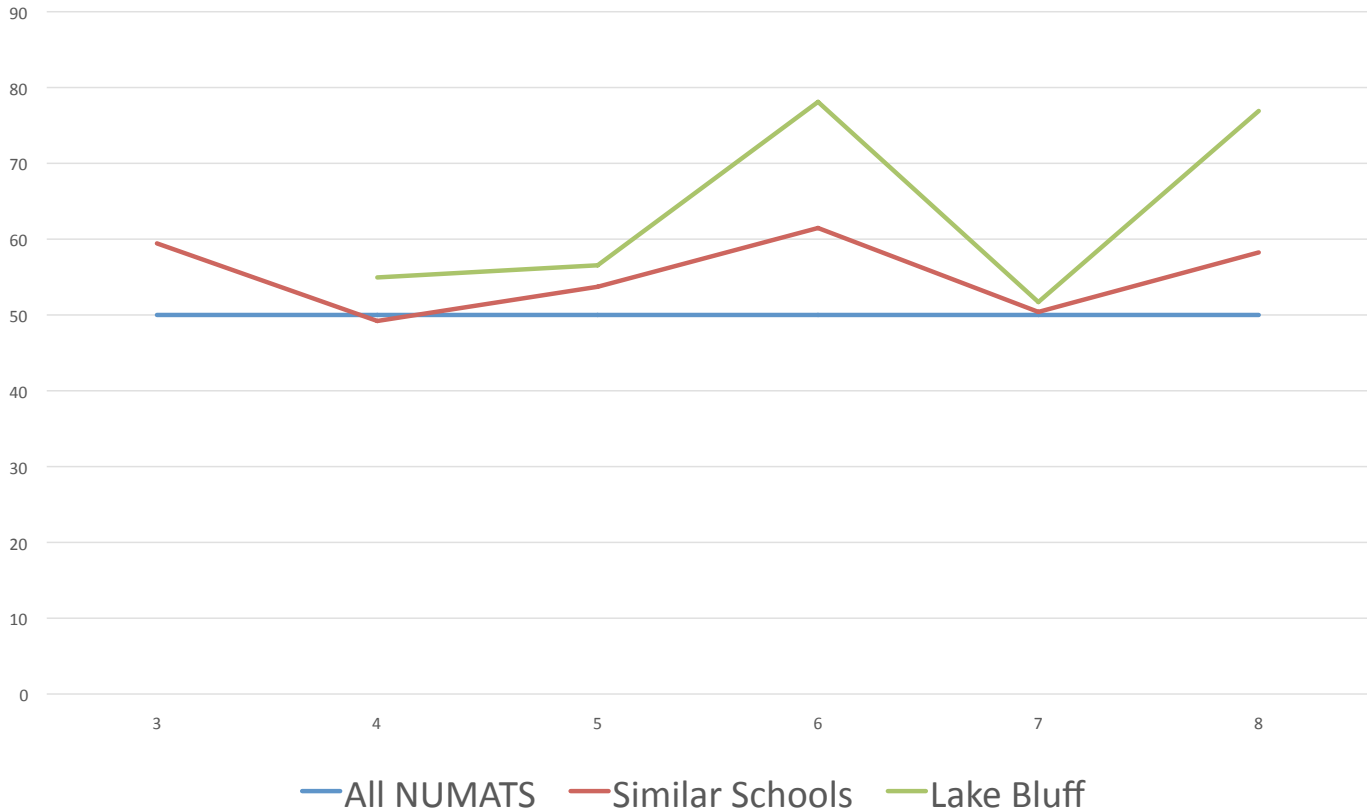
English - Average Percentile by Grade



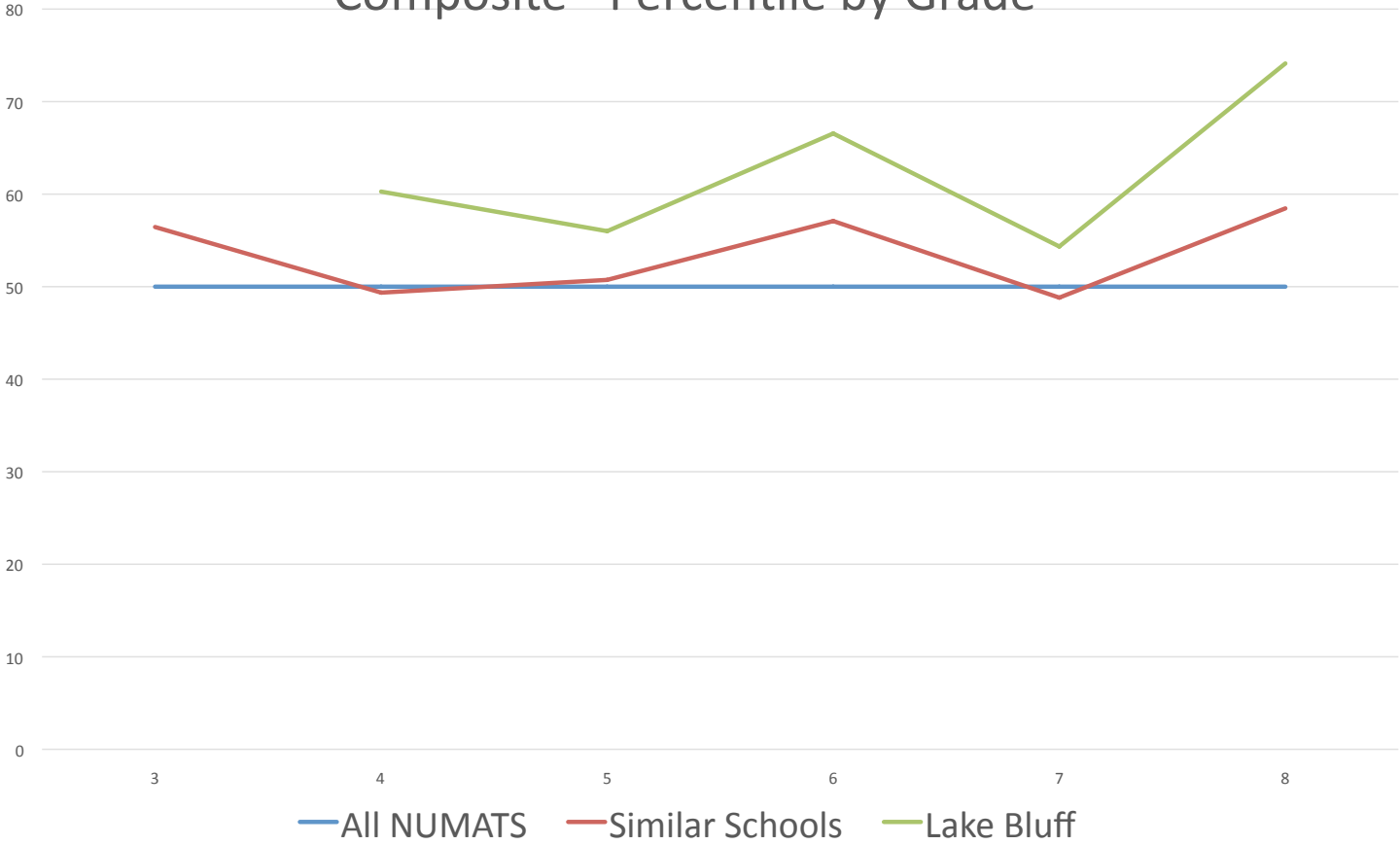
Reading - Average Percentile by Grade



Math - Average Percentile by Grade



Composite - Percentile by Grade



DATA IN CONTEXT

- *As a group* NUMATS participants from Lake Bluff outscored total NUMATS population and students from other schools with similar poverty levels
- Differences *between* Lake Bluff NUMATS students were large. Average difference from the Lake Bluff mean score equivalent to 25 percentile places.
 - 6 Lake Bluff Middle School students earned composite scores on the ACT equal to or better than the average ACT score for incoming Freshman at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
 - 2 of those students were 7th graders

NUMATS DATA IMPLICATIONS

- Test data and classroom observations suggest that core curriculum in Lake Bluff District 65 is relatively rigorous and well aligned with “college ready” standards even in comparison to other districts with low rates of poverty.
 - Realignment of general curriculum to Common Core State Standards appears to be on track.
- Range of difference in readiness for above-grade-level curriculum, even among select students participating in NUMATS, is large at all grade levels.
 - Enrichment focus within grade level standards is appropriate for some Lake Bluff gifted students, but scores suggest others would likely benefit from access to significantly above-grade-level curriculum.



SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUP DATA

SUMMARY AND SYNTHESIS



SURVEY OVERVIEW

- Parallel online surveys administered to parents and educators by Center for Talent Development
 - 103 parents and 43 staff members completed the surveys
- Survey sections reflected foci of NAGC program standards
- All participants guaranteed anonymity

CONSENSUS RESPONSES

- Educators and parents agreed that purpose/goals of current program should be made explicit.
- Only 7% of parents and 23% of educators agreed that “goals for gifted and advanced students are clearly articulated.”
- Most parents (74%) and many educators (52%) did not understand how students were identified for enrichment opportunities and additional support
- Most stakeholders valued current enrichment efforts, but felt support was spread too thin to ensure consistency, quality, and equity
- Stakeholder agreement that improvement efforts should focus first on core academic aspects of program development (vs. extracurriculars, social/emotional aspects of giftedness, etc.)

WHAT WOULD MOST IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION FOR GIFTED AND ADVANCED STUDENTS?

Top Responses - Educators:

1. Professional development on meeting these students' needs
2. Improving policies and procedures for selecting students for participation in accelerated/enriched learning opportunities
3. Improving ELA curriculum for gifted/advanced students

WHAT WOULD MOST IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION FOR GIFTED AND ADVANCED STUDENTS?

Top Responses - Parents:

1. Professional development on meeting these students' needs
2. Improving math curriculum and instruction for gifted/advanced students
3. Improving ELA curriculum and instruction for gifted/advanced students
4. Improving policies and procedures for selecting students for participation in accelerated/enriched learning opportunities

SHOULD EMPHASIS BE ON EXPLORING GRADE-LEVEL CURRICULUM IN GREATER DEPTH OR MOVE ON TO ABOVE-GRADE-LEVEL MATERIAL?

- $\frac{2}{3}$ of educators chose exploring grade-level curriculum at greater depth
- $\frac{2}{3}$ of parents chose above-grade-level material
 - Parents stated support for interest-based enrichment for all, but some should also be afforded more advanced curriculum, opportunities to progress at a faster pace
 - Comments about desire for more advanced opportunities in math were most common
 - Parent interest in additional science and technology enrichment was high
- Educators indicated that some students (e.g. “moderately advanced” students) were well served now, but the most highly advanced students (“outliers”) were the least well served



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



FINDINGS

- Articulated policies and program goals, transparency about how students are selected for services and additional supports are needed as a first step toward improvement and stakeholder collaboration
- Transition to new standards is progressing and appears to contribute to rigor in the general curriculum that may provide a sound foundation for future improvement for gifted students
- However, a need for better differentiated curriculum is widely and freely acknowledged across stakeholder groups, but more focused support is needed for development and implementation
- Current approach to differentiation and enrichment benefits many students, but is not adequate to fully meet needs of the most advanced students

RECOMMENDATIONS - STRUCTURES

- Adopt a modern “continuum of services” approach to gifted education
 - Rich curriculum and schoolwide enrichment opportunities for all
 - Opportunities to go beyond grade-level standards for students who are academically ready
 - Recognize that multiple special needs may exist within an individual student
 - Ensure that procedures for identifying students for advanced learning opportunities and services provided are culturally fair and inclusive
- Make use of readiness grouping transparent to teachers and parents
- Due to economy-of-scale challenges in a small district, explore use of non-traditional structures to meet needs of most advanced students (e.g. multi-age groupings, online learning)

RECOMMENDATIONS – SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- Manage schoolwide enrichment at the school or district level to allow specialists to focus on supporting teachers and students in clustered classes
- Use technology to make school learning and activities more transparent to parents and expand learning options
- Charter a gifted education leadership team with parent, teacher, administrator, and specialist representation
- Use above-grade-level assessment to identify learning needs and monitor gifted student growth over time
- Explore adding a dedicated, trained gifted coordinator to district leadership team or teaming with Lake Forest to hire a shared coordinator to save costs and ensure program articulation into high school grades

RECOMMENDATIONS - POLICIES

- Develop formal policies and procedures for selecting students for advanced learning opportunities and informing parents about their rights and responsibilities relative to these opportunities
- Adopt formal policies and procedures on academic acceleration following NAGC guidelines, including provisions for:
 - Early entrance to kindergarten
 - Whole-grade acceleration
 - Acceleration in individual subject areas
 - Mastery-based progress

RECOMMENDATIONS – PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Provide professional development on addressing the needs of gifted students with a specific focus on curriculum development and implementation
 - Short-term, general professional development on differentiation has been shown to be ineffective at changing classroom practice
 - Provide intensive training and support for cluster teachers in each content area for two years. Focus on one content area at a time and recognize that sustainable change requires a multi-year commitment
- Plan to incorporate instructional differentiation as a focus area in classroom observation protocols and recommended curriculum models