# RETHINKING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPING STUDENT TALENT

ALITE INTERNATIONAL WEBINAR SERIES

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# CONTACT INFORMATION AND A LIST OF RELEVANT REFERENCES ARE INCLUDED AT THE END OF THE PRESENTATION

Please contact me if you would like a copy of these slides or any of the publications.

# THE WORLD IS CHANGING A LOT

- Consider how we consume music:
  - Live performances→albums→cassette tapes→CDs→streaming

- Each evolution had large, unsettling impacts on music companies, artists, consumers, merchants

- Some impacts were negative, some positive

  **+** Musicians can subvert gatekeepers to record their music and reach an audience

  **-** Lower royalty rates, splintering of audiences
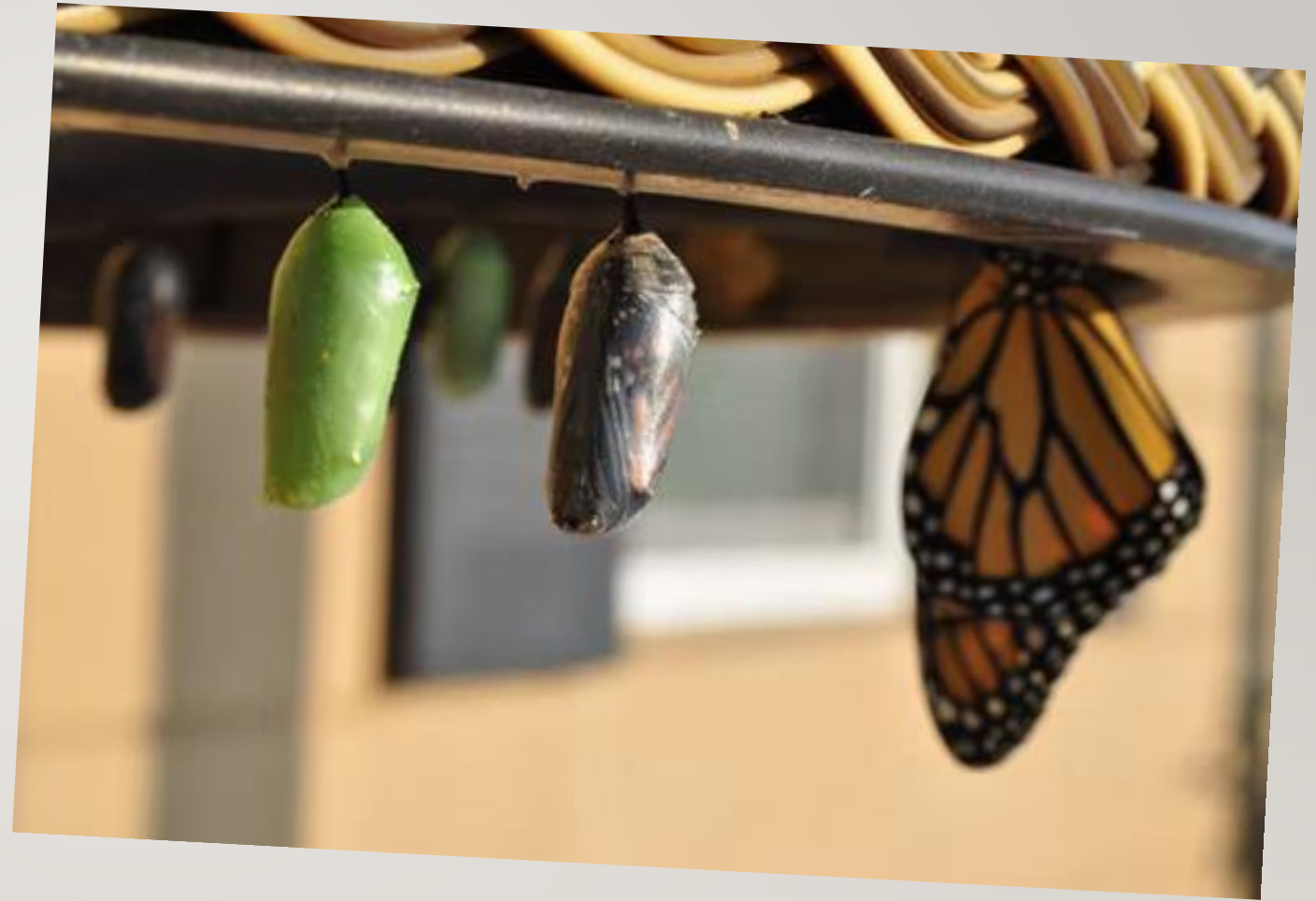
**Think**

United States employment, by type of work, m
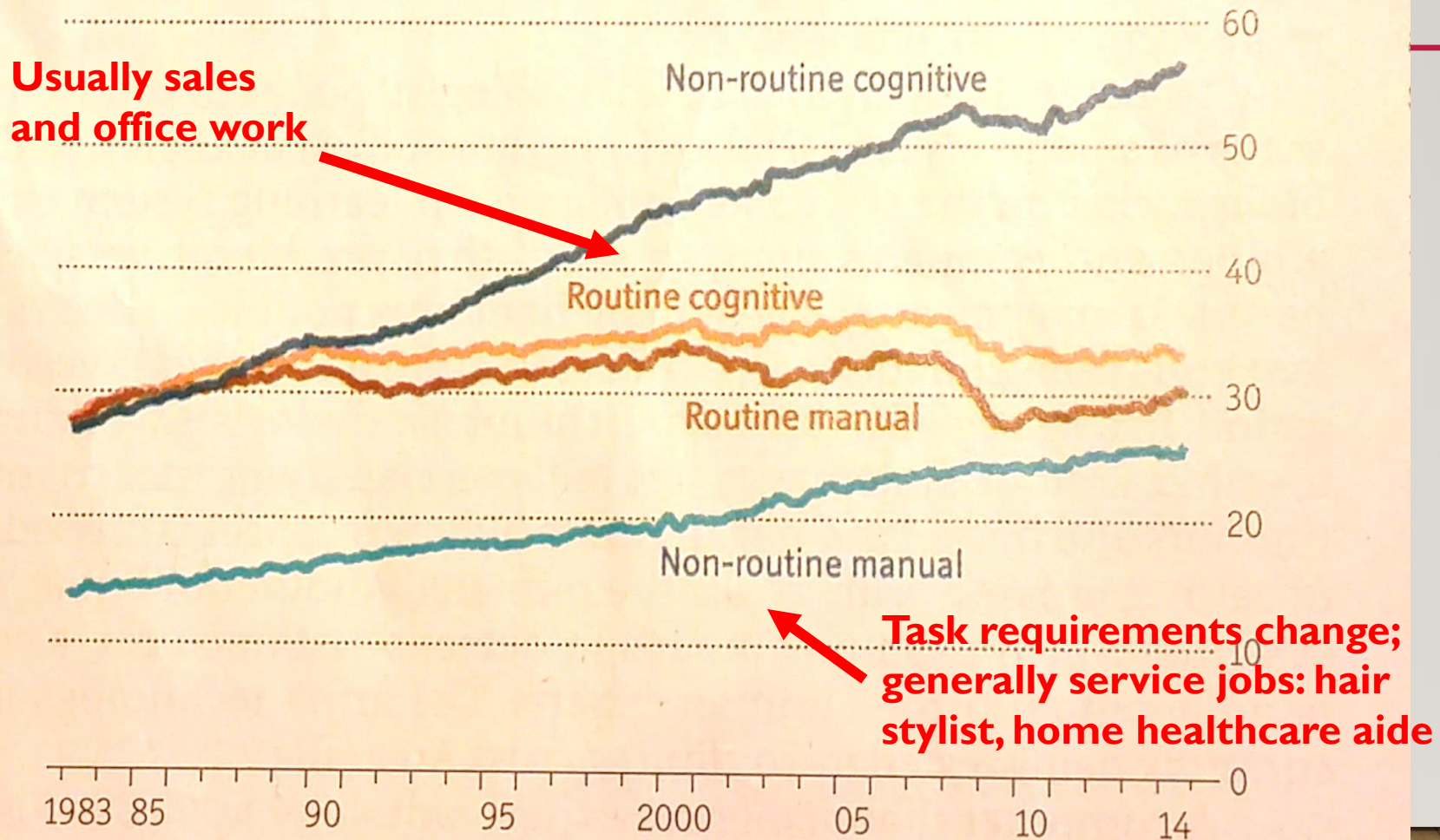
Usually sales and office work

Non-routine cognitive

Routine cognitive

Routine manual

Non-routine manual

Task requirements change; generally service jobs: hair stylist, home healthcare aide

1983 85    90    95    2000    05    10    14

Sources: US Population Survey; Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

# QUICK QUIZ!

- **How many people worked as smartphone designers in 2007?**
  - Practically none, and they were all locked in Steve Jobs' basement.

change coming, whether you like it or not!

FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE

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# ALL ASPECTS OF OUR LIVES HAVE SEEN THESE CHANGES

- It is difficult to think of an area of our lives that is not undergoing massive change.

- As a result, the skills and achievements that enable individuals to stand out as "gifted" or "talented" in any given field have shifted, as well.

- Yet our approach to gifted education and talent development has not changed at the same pace as other societal & cultural developments.

# TRADITIONAL APPROACHES IN MOST COUNTRIES

- "Find the gifted child"
  - Very test-focused, few false positives/many false negatives
- Maybe some enrichment options (going deeper)
- Maybe some acceleration options (going faster)
- Special schools and other pull-out programs
- Often nothing at all
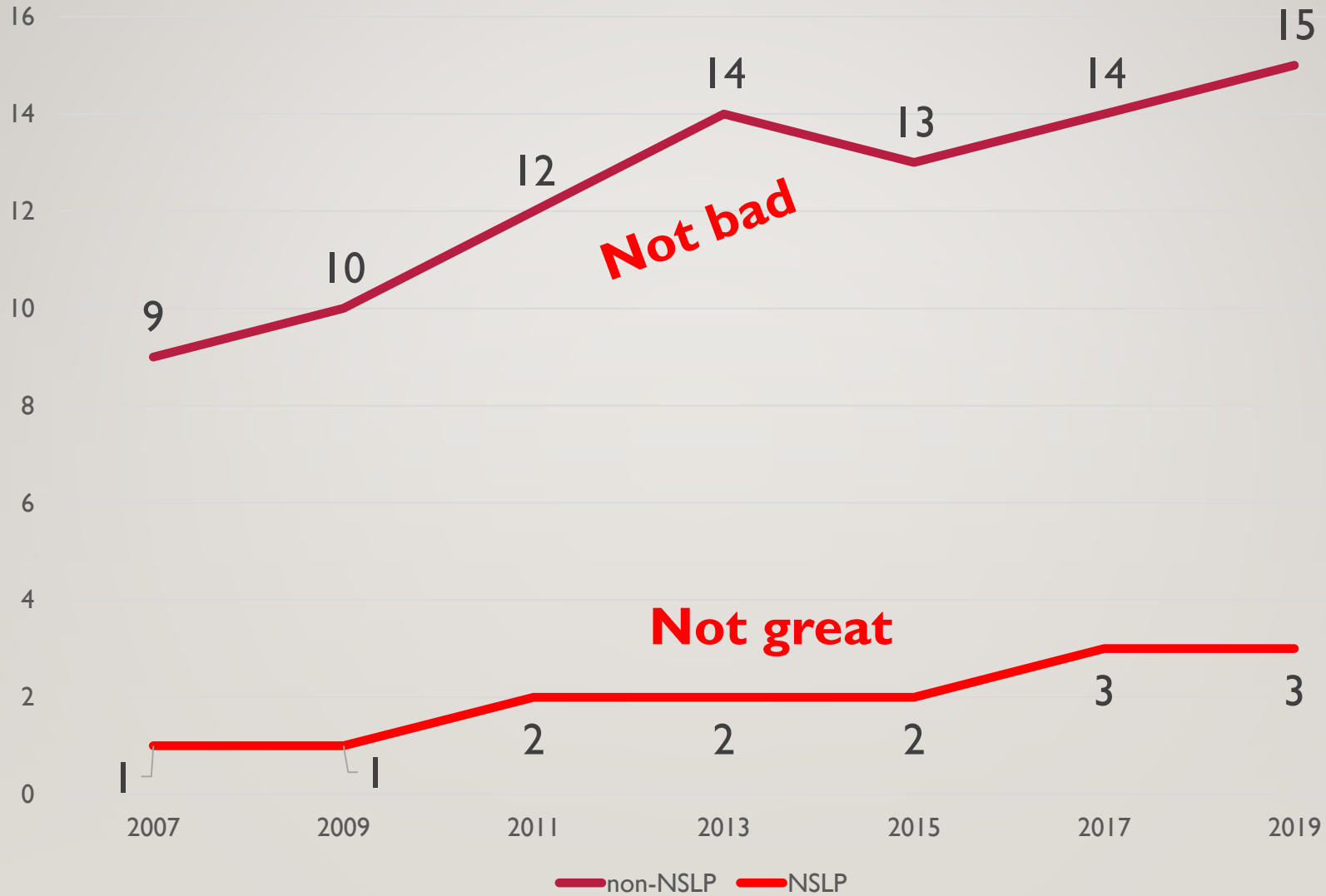  - "These students can take care of themselves"
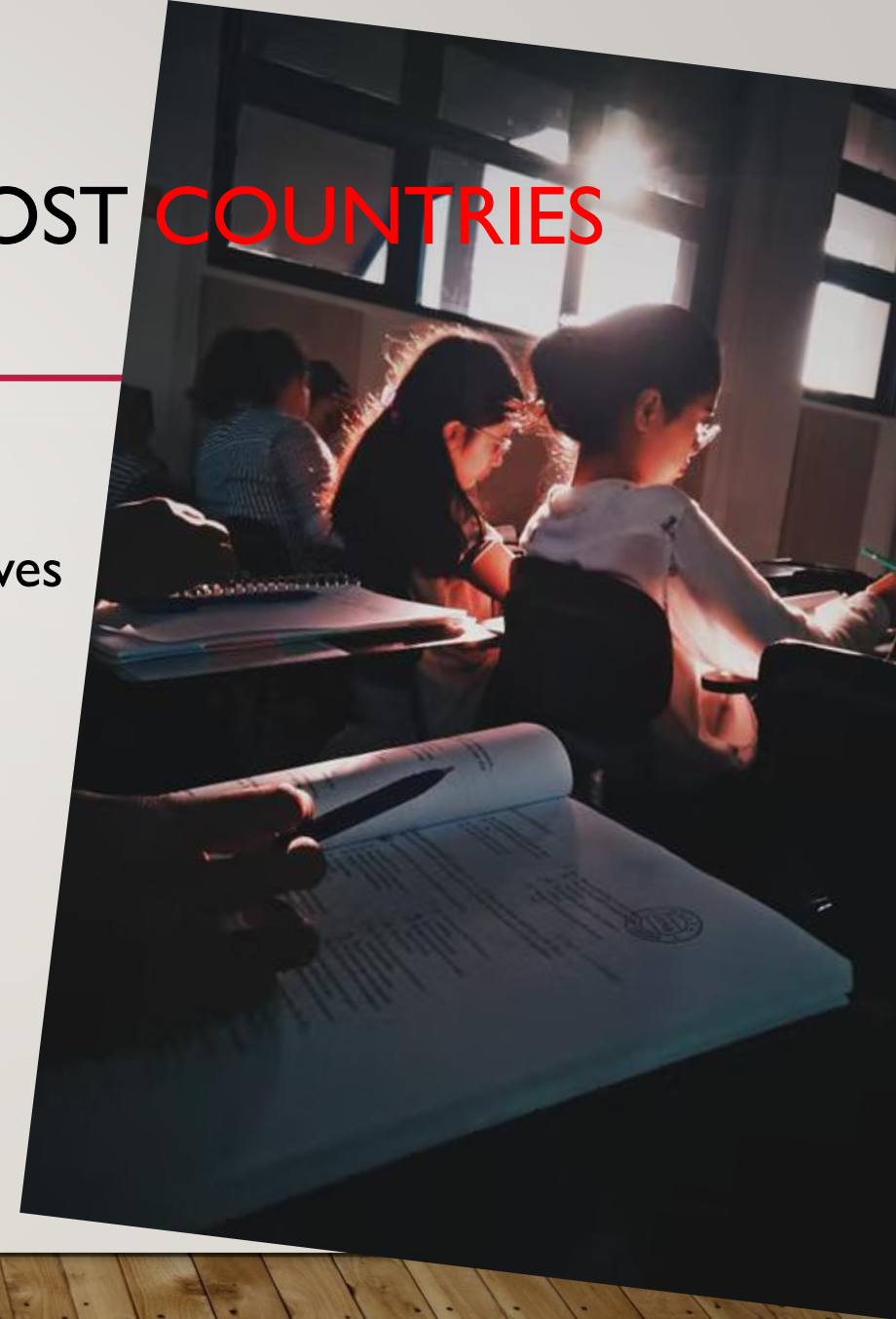
# RESULTS OF TRADITIONAL APPROACHES

- Very mixed research results
- Services often a mix of strategies without coherence or rigor
- Limited evidence students in pull-out programs gain much from those experiences
- Huge equity gaps in participation and outcomes (excellence gaps)

# NAEP % ADVANCED MATH GRADE 4

# CONTEXT …

- … is a crucial unit of analysis for understanding how talent emerges, becomes valued, and garners resources and support

- *giftedness*, *talent*, *intelligence*, *creativity*, etc., need to be defined solely within context

- For example, Plucker Beghetto & Dow (2004) define creativity as:

  - the interaction among aptitude, process, and environment by which an individual or group produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a *social context*" (p. 90, emphasis in original)

- From this perspective, looking for *universal* examples of creative potential in K–12 students is not particularly useful

# AN EXAMPLE (FROM BARAB & PLUCKER, 2002)

- Student attending intensive summer program for talented students

- Poor performance and poor peer interactions made instructors question why she was in the course

- During the course, they learned she had no experience with problem-based learning in her urban high school; she was also uncomfortable being in a group with so many suburban students

- The instructors were asking, "Why is this student doing poorly?" But from a sociocultural perspective, a better question is, "How could the context be modified to allow the student to succeed?"

- We tend to ask the first question when potentially talented, low-income students fail to achieve at high levels. We should instead be asking the second question.

# BASIC TENETS OF A SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON TALENT AND GIFTEDNESS

1. Knowledge = socially valued forms of thinking, valuing, and acting

2. Learning is distributed across people, tools, and contexts

3. Learning and development occur in the Zone of Proximal Development

Worry less about finding talented students and more about creating talented contexts that help more students achieve excellence

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# APPLICATIONS TO ADVANCED EDUCATION

- Identification systems should focus on a wide range of variables that may contribute to success within your programs
  - E.g., universal screening, fewer/smarter nominations, self-nominations, automatic enrollment

- Services should focus on problem-based learning, preferably within a curriculum that emphasizes connections to the community

- Assessment should be realistic; less *telling* and more *showing*

- Context should be the driving force: Use local norms in identification, use curricula that is linked to the communities in which students live, use assessments that require students to apply their knowledge to solve real-world problems

# EXAMPLE:
## WHAT'S YOUR SCHOOL'S TALENT DEVELOPMENT PLAN?

# THINK OF IT AS A "CONTEXT AUDIT"

YOU PROBABLY ALREADY HAVE A NUMBER OF ADVANCED EDUCATION SERVICES, BUT THEY LIKELY AREN'T COORDINATED

# KEY QUESTIONS

- How does a talented young child move through your schools from K-12?

- How would you describe the process/services to a parent of a talented child?

# KEY QUESTIONS

- Do you include ALL of your excellence programs in your TD plan?
  - Gifted, honors, AP, acceleration, grouping, academic counseling, dual credit, aid for economically vulnerable families, etc.

- Does your TD plan address transitions among grade levels? (Biggest parent concern)

# Talent Development Plan

# A More Advanced Example …

| Grade | Pre K | K | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Identification Tools** | FIS selects students (Primary Talent Pool) based on characteristics and behaviors of high potential learners and who have been further diagnosed using a series of informal and formal measures to determine the disirability of differentiated services during the primary program. | | | | Same as K-2. Additionally, upon exit, all take Cognitive Ability Test. | Formal identification made based on 3 pieces of evidence including "jot down" screeners, Sociograms, available test data, work samples, Scales for Identifying Gifted Student (completed by parents and teachers), normed referenced tests, etc. CogAT is given again at the end of 6th grade. | | | | | | | | |
| **Services** | Weekly pull out with GT resource teacher, collaboration/consultation and in-class differentiation. | | | | | Weekly pull out with GT resource teacher, collaboration/consultation and in-class differentiation and similar options as 5-8 | Extension offerings to match interest, in-class differentiation, consultation/collaborative teaching, extracurricular offerings 7/8 accelerated ELA | | | | Summit move at your own pace allows acceleration, honors options, dual enrollment, Early College. GT Specialist consults with teachers, provides direct, one-on-one services to students via Google Classroom | | | |
| **Existing Programs, Strategies, and Opportunties for Recognition** | **Teaching Strategies Gold** Teachers use Teaching Strategies Gold for progress monitoring of student skills. Due to this being individualized, it gives the teachers the opportunity to identify skill strengths in their students. | | | | | | | **KYA** The Kentucky Youth Assembly (KYA) is a 3-day experiential learning program in which students serve as part of a model state government. KYA offers students the opportunity to learn about a wide variety of issues, develop critical thinking skills, and articulate their beliefs while engaging constructively with their peers from around the Commonwealth. | | | | | | | |
| | **Creative Curriculum** For those students who are well above their peers, they use different parts of Creative Curriculum to make sure they are meeting individual needs. They do this for all students, not just ones above their expected range. | | | | | **Genius Hour Passion Projects** Genius hour is a movement that allows students to explore their own passions and encourages creativity in the classroom. It provides students a choice in what they learn during a set period of time during school. | | | **KUNA** The Kentucky United Nations Assembly (KUNA) is a 3-day experiential learning conference in which students participate directly in simulated international diplomacy. KUNA offers students the opportunity to experience the richness of cultures from around the world, develop empathy, and hone their critical thinking skills while engaging with a wide variety of perspectives and global issues. Partnering with the YMCA. | | | | | |
| | | | | | | **The Frankfort Tribune**- A student written weekly newspaper | | | | | **Summit Learning** Summit Learning uses personalized teaching and learning to empower students to harness their inner drive for success. (https://www.summitlearning.org/) | | | |
| | | | | | | **STLP (Student Technology Leadership Program)** | | | | **TOMODACHI Shimamoto-Frankfort Educational Exchange Program** It is to get young American and Japanese leaders engaged in strengthening relationships between the two countries and give those leaders global skills and mindsets that will allow them to contribute and thrive in the world. | | | | **Professional Mentorship Program** All seniors at Frankfort High School will participate in two 14-week professional learning placements within local businesses and organizations. |
| | | | | | | **Leadership Development** Students will investigate key characteristics of powerful leaders, learn problem-solving skills, and plan a school/community service project. | | | **ATLAS** Advanced Topics in Language Arts Studies Based on past KPREP, Exact Path, and classroom performance, students were nominated to take an advanced English Language Arts class. Thisis a combined class of 7th and 8th grade students who are all reading and writing above grade level and who would benefit from a challenging course of study. Some students in the class are identified as gifted, and some are not, but all receive instruction at a minimum 9th/10 grade level. | | | | **Early College** 1) Established Early College access for all students starting with Juniors and Seniors – 80+ students enrolled in at least one dual credit class during the 2018 fall semester at a college/university; 2) Immediate access to Dual Credit classes held at Frankfort High School, taught by KSU professors; 3) Established P-16 partnership MOA with Kentucky State University that provides Frankfort students with immediate access to college/university "life" supports; 4) Collaborated (w/ KSU) in the design of teaching learning and leading pathway – Educator Prep coursework – targeting under-represented student |

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# SUMMARY

- Of course, sociocultural contexts can be largely ignored when working with gifted students
  - Focusing on individual gifted students is a time-tested approach about which many advocates and educators feel passionate
  - This approach may lead to impressive educational accomplishments
- However, many low-income students are not broadly successful within this approach, nor are women in certain STEM disciplines
  - In most countries, that's well over half the students, calling into question how well the traditional approach works
- In addition, many of the students who appear to thrive in the "context-neutral" approach likely benefit from a range of unnoticed or invisible contextual advantages that are not available to other students
- Advanced programs that emphasize problem-based learning with real problems, require social interaction among talented students, are aware of the cultural context in which student work is situated, and emphasize the importance of noncognitive skills in achievement have the potential to better prepare students for successful use of their talents in real-world settings.

# THANK YOU!

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