Shrinking Excellence Gaps:
Research–Supported Interventions
Discussion Guide

The purpose of this video (Part 3 of a 3-part series) is to not only raise awareness of excellence gaps in our schools (Part 1 focuses on that) but also to discuss ways to reduce the gap. Schools and districts need to be proactive by intentionally implementing research-supported interventions. The video highlights four major interventions through a series of interviews with Dr. Jonathan Plucker of Johns Hopkins University, Purdue's Dr. Marcia Gentry, and Jefferson County Public Schools teacher Mrs. Jenny Stith, and Mario Hernandez, a sophomore in high school.

This guide is designed to facilitate discussion prompted by the video. Its use is up to the facilitator and should differ based on the audience. Whether answered in writing during the viewing, prompting oral discussion after viewing, or a mixture of the two, the questions should not only aid in understanding, but they should also encourage continued thinking and action concerning the Excellence Gap. Suggested ideas follow each question.

1. **What is the Excellence Gap?**

The Excellence Gap is essentially the achievement gap at the advanced level of student achievement. Jonathan Plucker and his colleagues at several different universities have analyzed the state-by-state results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. This research revealed that lower socio-economic demographic groups, as well as English language learners, Hispanic and African American students were underrepresented at the highest levels of academic achievement. Their results were far below their counterparts.

2. **List and define the four research-based interventions that can reduce the excellence gap.**

-Cluster Grouping*: an organizational framework that places students into classrooms on the basis of achievement, flexibly groups and regroups students as needed for instruction, and provides appropriately challenging learning experiences for all students*

-Frontloading: *"preparing students for advanced programs before they have a chance to be identified or enroll. Such programs are almost like advanced education boot camps. They take students who are not on the typical trajectory to need, benefit from,*

or be identified for advanced programs and help them explicitly prepare" (Plucker & Peters, 2016, p. 130),

-Enhancing Opportunities: *not only offering more opportunities that challenge and engage, but also increasing participation in the programs via transportation, communication with families, and understanding cultural issues that may prevent attendance*

-Professional Learning: *all educators need professional learning on the excellence gap, characteristics and needs of advanced learners including those from underserved populations, how to identify those learners, and how to address their social, emotional, and cognitive needs*

3. **Describe a possible plan for using cluster grouping in your school or district. What type of support would educators need?**

4. **What would frontloading look like in your school or district? What type of support would educators need?**

5. **What opportunities for advanced learning do you offer in your school or district? What could you offer? How could you ensure the opportunities are feasible for all of your students, including those from underrepresented populations?**

6. **What professional learning opportunities in advanced learning or gifted education are offered in your school or district? What type of learning experiences should be provided? How can you help make that happen?**

Plucker, J. A., & Peters, S. J. (2016) *Excellence gaps in education: Expanding opportunities for talented students.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.