Testimony for the Record

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Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to participate in today's hearing and thank you for your attention to a topic that has been the focus of my professional career for over 30 years, developing children's talents and advanced skills. Today I am specifically speaking to the need to increase the funding available to the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program, administered by the Department of Education.

My name is Jonathan Plucker. I am a professor at Johns Hopkins School of Education, where I teach in the gifted education and education policy programs. I am also immediate past-president of the National Association for Gifted Children. I would like to state for the record that the opinions expressed herein are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Johns Hopkins University and NAGC.

Lower Rates of Academic Excellence in the U.S.

Academic excellence and talent development have strong relationships to economic and cultural growth. Yet ample evidence suggests that U.S. students achieve at advanced levels at significantly lower rates than students in other countries.

Regardless of the content area or international assessment, the percent of U.S. students who score in the advanced range tends to be below that of students in economically competitive countries. For example, the most recent round of the Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) provides evidence that our highest performing fourth-grade students underperform those in South Korea, Japan, England, Taiwan, Australia, and Turkey in math and at the same level as students in Russia. Results are similar for eighth grade math. Science performance tends to be better but is middle-of-the-pack among major economic powers.

One reason for this relatively poor performance at advanced levels is the presence of large and growing excellence gaps. These gaps are differences in advanced performance associated with student race, gender, and class. For example, in Grade 4 Math during the last administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 2% of low-income students scored advanced compared to 13% of higher-income students. In Grade 4 Reading, the corresponding results were 3% versus 14%. These excellence gaps were large before the pandemic and now appear to be even bigger.

Studies strongly suggest that much of the excellence gap is caused by students' lack of opportunity for advanced learning. Ironically, at a time when research points us to dozens of strategies to help students achieve academic excellence, many students simply do not have access to these services.

Of special concern are bright students in both cities and small towns, and also talented students with learning challenges, whom are often described as being "twice exceptional." A study

reported just last week that students in small towns have among the lowest participation rates for advanced learning opportunities. When students are provided with advanced learning opportunities, they thrive; but far too many do not get these opportunities.

There is bipartisan concern about these problems, and educators are tackling them across the country. I work with districts each year to implement strategies that allow all students to develop their talents. The issue is not a lack of desire to improve advanced outcomes for students. Rather, the issue is lack of resources and inadequate dissemination of research-based strategies for achieving those outcomes.

Solving America's Academic Excellence Problem

Javits Has Greatly Advanced Our Knowledge of Advanced Education

The Javits Act remains the federal government's primary program to promote educational excellence and close excellence gaps, and the program has made a clear, demonstrable difference. Javits projects have changed the way we train teachers to identify talent, created and tested new models for high-quality curriculum, improved strategies that help teachers meet the wide range of readiness levels in their classrooms, and designed and evaluated new techniques for helping twice-exceptional students develop their academic strengths, among many other innovations.

In particular, the Javits Act funded projects that helped us design effective interventions for identifying talented students in low-income and rural communities, and high-quality, pre-differentiated curriculum that raises the advanced achievement of students in both the inner-city and small towns. A number of current projects are exploring the degree to which after school programs can promote advanced academic achievement across a range of school and community types.

Many of the funded projects have taken models created in one district and carefully applied them to other districts, such as a project to apply the Young Scholars Model from Fairfax County, Virginia, to low-income students in Connecticut, or a project to apply advances in STEM teaching

and learning to rural schools in Indiana. These application projects are invaluable, in that they help us learn how promising models generalize to other communities and populations of students.

Javits Impact Has Been Felt Across the Country

Furthermore, Javits projects have been implemented from coast-to-coast and border-to-border, helping improve our understanding of how to promote talent development among our country's very diverse communities and stakeholders.

The past few award cycles have resulted in large-scale funded projects from Connecticut to Hawaii, North Carolina and Tennessee to Texas and Arkansas, among several others, including statewide projects in Oklahoma, Maryland, and Minnesota. Many of these projects are STEM-focused or directly address the talents of twice-exceptional students.

The geographic diversity of these projects has been invaluable, allowing us to learn how projects developed, for example, in Washington State or South Carolina can benefit students and families in New York or South Dakota, and vice-versa.

The available evidence overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that the Javits Program is fulfilling its original goals, driving innovation in an area critical to the nation's future well-being. The Javits Act has had an exceptional return on investment for the country's economy, culture, and taxpayers.

Expand Javits to Give Schools and Educators Better Tools and Resources

I am grateful for the Committee's ongoing support of the program and last year's increase in funding. Yet Javits remains underfunded given its importance to the country's economic growth and security. Even with the Committee's generous increase of funding last year, the Act only provides less than 30 cents per each of the country's 56 million K-12 students.

These limited resources prevent the program from holding competitions for cutting-edge demonstration projects on an annual basis or funding a national dissemination/resource center. In

addition, experts have identified a need for much more robust leadership training programs, given that a major roadblock to talent development can be administrative indifference to advanced outcomes. At current funding levels, new initiatives to tackle leadership issues are simply not on the table.

Perhaps most importantly, the size of the program prevents consistent funding opportunities for state dissemination projects. My colleagues doing cutting-edge work in several states could use additional resources to accelerate their activities. For example, in a recent study of state-level policies that promote excellence and shrink excellence gaps, Alabama, Colorado, and Texas, among others, showed evidence of considerable innovation. Additional Javits support would allow those state departments of education to significantly increase services for students and educators.

Increasing the funding to $1 per student, or $56 million, would provide ample resources for all of these activities to occur, greatly increasing our knowledge of how to promote equitable advanced learning and our ability to implement these strategies in every community in the country. This investment in our children will pay significant dividends for the United States for years to come by increasing innovation, economic competitiveness, and cultural resources for a generation.

Thank you and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.