



# Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning

College of Education  
Southern University and A & M College

ISSN 2158-592X

Volume 4

Number 2

Summer 2014



Michelle Trotman Scott  
*Guest Editor*

## Strategies, Interventions, and Services for Culturally Responsive Special Education: Putting Theory Into Practice



Ralph Gardner III  
*Guest Editor*

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## **Working with Twice-Exceptional African American Students: Information for School Counselors**

**Renae D. Mayes**

*Ball State University*

**Erik M. Hines**

*University of Connecticut*

**Paul C. Harris**

*University of Virginia*

This qualitative study examined the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of eight twice-exceptional African American gifted students who attended the same K-12 urban school district in the Midwest. Four major themes emerged—academic supports, personal and social challenges, career worries, and experience with school counselors. Findings revealed that students’ special education status negatively impacted their relationship with peers, educators, and school counselors. Further, students struggled in developing a positive sense of self. Recommendations for school counselors are included.

*Keywords:* African American, twice-exceptional, school counselors, gifted

The topic of “twice-exceptional”, meaning gifted while having a disability, has received increased attention in recent years (Assouline, Foley Nicpon, & Whiteman, 2010; Trail, 2011). With the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), children with disabilities who are gifted and talented were recognized as a special population in need of additional supports. Despite federal recognition of twice-exceptional students, schools have faced challenges in properly identifying and serving these students. Currently, it is estimated that between 2% and 7% of the special education population are twice-exceptional (Trail, 2011). However, understanding the definitive prevalence of twice-exceptionality becomes increasingly difficult, as there are many challenges with identification. For example, twice-exceptional students may only be identified for one exceptionality or for no exceptionality, thus leaving twice-exceptional students underidentified and underserved (Foley Nicpon, Allmon, Sieck, & Stinson, 2011).

Additionally, the identification of twice-exceptional students greatly depends upon the expertise and competence of educators. Several studies suggest that when faced with identifying twice-exceptional students, educators were more likely to recognize students’ disabilities despite the student demonstrating exceptional talent (Bianco, 2005; Hartnett, Nelson, & Rinn, 2003; Rinn & Nelson, 2009). This could likely be due to their perceptions about giftedness and disability. Some may believe that gifted students do not require special interventions, are equally talented in other subjects, and/or do not have disabilities (Assouline, Foley Nicpon, & Huber, 2006). When

Foley-Nicpon and colleagues (2013) investigated educators' understanding of twice-exceptionality, gifted education, and special education; they found that while all educators reported a high level of familiarity with twice-exceptionality and how it can manifest, most were less familiar with state guidelines for special education, gifted education, and Response to Intervention (RtI) as a model for gifted education services (Foley-Nicpon, Assouline, Colangelo, 2013). Moreover, 40.3% of the educators believed that the gifted education specialist would be the best choice for providing support to students, followed by the classroom teacher (17.8%), special education teacher (14.1%), parent (7.0%), psychologist (3.4%), school counselor (3.4%), and school administrator (0.3%).

Once identified as twice-exceptional, students may face a myriad of challenges in their efforts to be successful. First, twice-exceptional students experience both strengths and vulnerabilities as a result of the intersection of their disability and giftedness. This intersection may cause them to struggle as they try to understand their unique identities (Assouline Nicpon, & Huber, 2006; Williams King, 2005). It may also create challenges in the classroom in finding instructional strategies to help them reach their potential. More specifically, Willard-Holt and colleagues (2013) found that twice-exceptional students felt that their schools failed to help them reach their academic potential. These students believe they had to learn how to use their own strengths to overcome their weaknesses. Moreover, students may experience feelings of low self-esteem, self-doubt, and frustration, and thus they may exhibit more disruptive or problem behaviors making it more challenging to maintain social relationships and succeed in school (Assouline, Foley-Nicpon, & Doobay, 2009; Williams King, 2005).

While current literature provides insight on twice-exceptionality, gaps still exist in understanding within group diversity. For example, a comprehensive review of the literature on twice-exceptionality yielded few studies that incorporated the experiences and perspectives of twice-exceptional students of color. Additionally, most twice-exceptionality studies focus on students with intellectual giftedness or giftedness in specific content areas like math, science, or reading. While these studies present valuable information, they may lack generalizability to the greater twice-exceptional student population, including students of color and those who are gifted in non-academic areas such as art, music, and dance.

In addition to the lack of literature on diversity within the twice-exceptional population, there is less literature regarding the role of school counselors in supporting twice-exceptional students. Given the challenges in identifying and supporting twice-exceptional students, it is important that educators, including school counselors, recognize their role in promoting the success of twice-exceptional students. School counselors, in particular, play a critical role in the development of students' academic, social, and career/college outcomes (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; Chen-Hayes, Ockerman, & Mason, 2013). Specifically, school counselors are responsible for assisting students in the personal/social domain and they have an obligation to collaborate with other educational stakeholders in developing educational plans, as well as consulting and advocating for student success. In other words, school counselors are the leaders for bringing teachers, administrators, and parents together for one common goal—academic achievement for “all” students. Further, social justice permeates the role of a school counselor. They have a responsibility to seek community resources to assist students, use data to determine barriers to student learning, and advocate for educational equity in school curricula (The Education Trust, 2009). Given the mandate by the U.S. Federal Government for education reform and accountability, school counselors must lead by using their

skill sets to empower students to succeed as well as close achievement, attainment, and opportunity gaps (The Education Trust, 2009).

Moreover, school counselors are responsible for developing a comprehensive counseling program within their schools to meet the needs of every student. The most well known school counseling program is the ASCA National Model. The ASCA National Model is an excellent tool for systematically accessing and addressing the needs of African American students who are considered twice-exceptional. This program consists of the following components: (a) foundation, (b) delivery, (c) management, and (d) accountability. The foundation component guides the school counselor's beliefs and vision for student success in addition to using ASCA competencies to facilitate student development. Also, school counselors create a mission statement that aligns with the school and district's mission statement for goal setting and later measuring whether those same goals are met (ASCA, 2012). The delivery component, requires school counselors to provide services such as academic individual planning with students, individual and group counseling (i.e., counseling, psychoeducational, and psychotherapy), developing and implementing a core curriculum, meeting student needs, and collaborating with stakeholders to ensure academic success and positive post-secondary outcomes. The management component requires school counselors to use assessments and data tools to not only measure the success of the counseling program but also to evaluate the effectiveness of school counselors and the services provided. Lastly, the accountability component determines the impact of the school counseling program on academic achievement and other success indicators that produce positive outcomes for students.

Additionally, school counselors are charged with providing services for all students (ASCA, 2012), including African American twice-exceptional students. However, research on how school counselors can assist African American twice-exceptional students is lacking. From our review of the literature, we found only one article (i.e., Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006) that emphasized the need for school counselors to understand how to work with African American twice-exceptional students, particularly in regards to advocacy and support. The paucity of studies on this population highlights the gap that exists and the need for information about how to effectively provide counseling services to African American students labeled as twice-exceptional. The purpose of this article is to share our understanding of the perceptions and experiences of twice-exceptional African American students and their interactions with school counselors; and, to provide recommendations for more effectively identifying strategies that can be used by school counselors to better serve this population. The specific research questions were:

1. How do students experience their intersecting identities (gifted, special needs, race) in K-12 schools?
2. How have students interacted with school counselors throughout their K-12 schooling?

## **Methodology**

### *Participants and Recruitment*

The participants in this study were selected from a pool of 118 African American twice-exceptional high school students located in a large urban district in the midwestern region of the

United States. While the students were gifted in academic and non-academic areas, the majority (86%) was gifted in non-academic areas. Because of the lack of literature on twice-exceptional students in non-academic areas and the prevalence of these students in this particular school district, we recruited twice-exceptional African American students with non-academic gifts.

Each of the students was previously identified by the school district using standards and procedures for both special and gifted education. Students identified for special education were evaluated by the district using procedures in alignment with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Students identified as being gifted in non-academic areas (e.g., art, music, dance) were first nominated for gifted education by a visual or performing arts specialist at the school. Once nominated, behavioral checklists and performance assessments were completed via student performance or portfolio work. Families of students who were tested were notified of gifted status via U.S. mail.

The school district provided the researchers with a list of all identified twice-exceptional African American high school students. One of the researchers then worked with principals and school counselors to contact students and invite them to a recruitment session at their respective high schools. Potential participants were provided information about the study as well as consent documents to be completed by parents and submitted to the researcher during a second session at their respective high school. Once consent forms were collected, semi-structured individual interviews were arranged to gather in-depth understanding of their experiences.

A total of eight students (5 females, 3 males) participated in the study with disabilities ranging from specific learning disabilities (5, 62.5%) and emotional disorders (2, 25%) to traumatic brain injury (1, 12.5%). The students were also identified for gifted education in non-academic subject areas, including instrumental music (2, 25%), vocal music (2, 25%), dance (3, 37.5%), and visual-spatial (1, 12.5%). See Table 1 for student demographics.

### *Data Collection*

Two forms of data collection were used—a demographic questionnaire and a 30 to 90 minute individual semi-structured interview (Patton, 2002). The demographic questionnaire included information about family background (e.g., parent education level, siblings, community make-up) as well as educational information (e.g., extracurricular activities, college and career goals, grade point average). A general interview guide for the semi-structured interviews was created based on the researchers' experiences in education and the review of the literature. Questions were added, subtracted, or modified based on the responses of the participants before and during the interview to allow for systematic, comprehensive interviewing (Patton, 2002). The interview questions focused on students' understanding of their giftedness and special needs (e.g., When did you learn that you are gifted/had special needs? How were you included in that process? What does it mean to you to have that label?) as well as questions regarding race (e.g., What is it like to be African American in your school? Best part? Worst part?). Additionally, questions addressed experiences in school, including their interactions with teachers and school counselors (e.g., In what ways have teachers/school counselors been a source of support? How have they been unsupportive?) as well as questions regarding how school staff and programs could be more supportive or helpful (e.g., How can school be more helpful to you? What do you need the most from your teachers/school counselors? How can they be more helpful?)

**TABLE 1**  
**Student Demographics**

<b>Student Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Special Education ID</b>	<b>Gifted Education ID</b>	<b>GPA</b>	<b>School Size</b>	<b>Free and/or Reduced Meals</b>
Amber	F	15	9	SLD	Instrumental Music	77-82	699	84.7%
Chelby	F	14	9	ED	Dance	77-82	607	87.5%
Darnell	M	16	10	TBI	Instrumental Music	< 77	1000	76.8%
Karin	F	17	12	SLD	Dance	87-92	728	86.9%
Luisa	F	16	10	ED	Vocal Music	< 77	728	86.9%
Riley	F	17	12	SLD	Vocal Music	83-86	554	88.3%
Trey	M	19	12	SLD	Visual-Spatial	83-86	681	81.3%
Zero	M	17	12	SLD	Dance	83-86	728	86.9%

## *Data Analysis*

A grounded theory approach was used to understand data from the participants' individual interviews. The data was analyzed using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This strategy involves collecting and analyzing data simultaneous to develop conceptual categories that illustrate the relationship between data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Thorne, 2000). Responses to each interview item were sorted and compared across participants. Emergent themes and categories were then tested to build and clarify categories as well as identify the variations within categories (Charmaz, 2001). To ensure trustworthiness of data, the researchers used member checking to solicit feedback from the participants on the categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This feedback was used to further refine the categories and to report an account of the feedback that "closely approximates the reality it represents" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57).

## **Data Presentation**

In keeping with the nature of grounded theory, in-depth descriptions are presented to illustrate the school experiences of students (Patton, 2002). These experiences were divided into four general categories—academic supports, personal and social challenges, career worries, and experiences with school counselors.

### **Category 1: Academic Supports**

All of the students discussed the tremendous amount of academic challenges that they faced in the school setting, which primarily related to their disability as identified in their individualized education plan (IEP). Each student reported that despite having their needs documented in the IEP, teachers and other school staff often overlooked the accommodations they needed. For example, Riley felt like her IEP tutor would "take advantage" of her because the tutor thought she was slow. This caused many disagreements between the two and ultimately led Riley to avoid the support that she needed. Similarly, Darnell shared that his IEP tutor was less than understanding of his needs related to his traumatic brain injury (TBI). His tutor would often chastise him by saying "you make me look bad. You need to come to school more" despite Darnell's physical challenges related to his disability, which made it difficult for him to come to school some days. Other students talked about their perception that classroom teachers in that they felt that teachers "assumed every student was the same there, and they all did the same work," which often meant students' unique needs were not being met.

In addition to lack of accommodations, each student expressed the general rudeness and lack of connection they experienced from teachers, which created an even greater disconnect for students who yearned for a personal connection with their teachers. Louisa felt like there was an overall communication breakdown: "[they were] not trying to get to know me, not trying to get to know what I like to do, not even trying to contact my parents whatsoever telling them how well I'm doing or if I'm doing bad or anything good."

Despite these challenges, the students talked about a desire to be successful as well as individuals in the school that could support their efforts. The students were also aware that they played a part in their own success. They knew they needed to "go to class everyday," do their best, and be

intentional with whom they associate. Additionally, the students knew that they needed to have confidence in their own abilities to do the work. All of the students identified at least one individual in the school that they perceived as supportive of their academics. For example, Zero felt that his teachers were “very motivated” in helping him get to the next step in his education and eventually be successful in securing a job. Like many of the other participants, Chelby described her relationship with a teacher, as feeling like she’s one of the teacher’s kids. Chelby believed that this teacher looked after her at school and did everything in her power to help her pass the ninth grade, including advocating for her needs in and outside of the classroom.

## **Category 2: Personal and Social Challenges**

Interestingly, many of the students’ social and personal experiences have been related to their special needs. In fact, five of the participants did not know they were identified as gifted prior to their participation in this study. When the researchers discussed their gifted identities, all five participants expressed conflicting views of their gifted label as designated by the district and how they believed they were gifted. For example, Karin was identified as being gifted in dance; however, she thought that was “a complete lie...[she didn’t] know who said that.” Darnell, Chelby, and Trey were the only students who knew that they were gifted prior to the start of this study. Despite most of the participants’ lack of knowledge of the district’s identification of their giftedness, all 8 students liked being called gifted. They all felt “happy” and “unique” because of the label. They believed that being gifted was something to be shared with everyone.

While being gifted was new to the students, each were aware of their special education status. Many of the students received special education services in special education classes, pull out supports in the resource room, or extra tutoring. They expressed feeling “low,” “dumb,” and “stupid” when they learned that they had special needs. Moreover, the students expressed their frustration with keeping their special needs a secret while at the same time feeling isolated at school. For example Riley, who was placed in special education classes, felt “segregated” in her classes but made a great effort to keep her needs a secret by “stay[ing] in the back” of class as to limit the attention drawn to her. Although all students had concerns about their peers knowing about their disability, they also wanted genuine connections with their classmates.

In addition to negative perceptions of their special education status, seven of the eight students shared that they were often bullied or teased by their peers, which in turn impacted their behavior at school. Chelby said she would often skip or be tardy when going to the resource room to avoid her peers because they “think it’s the slow class...and ask ‘did ya’ll eat your cheerios today?’ ” Amber expressed that doing something wrong at her school meant that “everybody will talk about you,” which contributed to her isolating herself from her peers and maintaining a very small circle of friends.

While their special education label seemed to create a number of personal and social challenges, students found strength in their cultural identities. For example, several students expressed solidarity with other students because of the majority of African American students in attendance. Three students spoke specifically of their pride in their cultural background and how it has shaped them. Karin believed that being Jamaican American provided her with morals and standards and felt like she would have “turned out differently” had her grandmother not raised



her. Although students felt pride, they also realized that they faced stereotypes both within the school and in the larger society. For example, Darnell believed that his intersecting identities of being black and having TBI led teachers to stereotype him as “another black, lazy kid” when he had difficulties related to his TBI. Similarly, Zero’s lack of athleticism generated a lot of stereotypical conversations about his blackness. Both Karin and Trey saw that being African American or Jamaican American had larger implications in society in how they might be treated. For instance, Trey realized that the media portrays African Americans in a negative light, which causes him to get upset. However, he is able to reframe these portrayals as the media’s lack of understanding about African Americans.

### **Category 3: Career Worries**

All eight of the students expressed great interest in their postsecondary futures. Each student wanted to pursue more education either in trade school or college. For example, Trey was encouraged by his teachers to go to trade school where he could link his visual giftedness to a career in carpentry. Chelby wanted to let her gift shine in her career goal of becoming a professional dancer after studying dance and choreography at a university. With all of their postsecondary aspirations, six of the students expressed concerns about their ability to be successful in school and in college. Prior to enrolling in high school, both Luisa and Amber shared that they were worried about the transition and what it would entail to have an IEP. They were worried that high school would be too difficult and that teachers would not be as helpful. The three male participants worried about their ability to be successful in their courses due to their respective disability. For example, Zero often felt like he fell behind in school and that he had “constant headaches, mainly [due to] confusion on what [he] was doing.” Similarly, Trey felt worried because he “really can’t read,” despite his best efforts to overcome his disability. After Darnell’s traumatic brain injury, he worried about his ability to still be smart, but he “knew things would be different because of the plans [IEP] that were being made.” On the other hand, Karin, a senior, was gravely concerned about her ability to be successful in community college. She was concerned that her professors would think she was “dumb” and that they wouldn’t accommodate her needs.

### **Category 5: Experience with School Counselors**

All of the participants had limited interactions with their school counselors, and only three had some positive experiences. Zero was the only student who had consistent experiences with school counselors throughout his K-12 education. For him, school counselors were “really motivated and set goals for you. Sometimes you think like they’re way too high goals and once you actually get there you’re like that was really easy.” Although Amber and Karin did not have interactions with a school counselor until high school, both felt like their high school counselor supported them, and “helped [them] through a lot of things.”

Being a senior also played a role in the students’ interaction with the counselor. For example, Karin, Riley, and Trey worked with the school counselor to monitor their grades to make sure they were making adequate progress for graduation. However, Riley thought her school counselor hindered her progress towards graduation due to lack of communication. She

explained that her school counselor “tells [her] stuff late” and one miscommunication led to her cumulative GPA dropping.

## Discussion

As previously stated, research on twice-exceptionality and how school counselors can support twice-exceptional students is limited. Within the limited literature on twice-exceptionality, no study was identified that focused specifically on the experiences of twice-exceptional African American students in schools and their interactions with school counselors. The lack of information about these students may negatively impact the ability of professionals to service the educational needs of twice exceptional African American students.

Provided the district identified all students in the sample, the students did not experience the challenges related to masking (Foley Nicpon et al., 2011). However, because of district policy, 7 out of the 8 students were not involved in the gifted program at their school, thus seeing their school experiences through the lens of having a disability. Most challenges experienced were those related to securing supports and services from educators related to their IEPs (Petersen, 2009). Students felt that they were constantly faced with educators who did not follow their IEPs and communicated low expectations, rudeness, and hostility towards them. Interestingly, Darnell did have experience in the gifted program but after the onset of his TBI, he struggled with securing the appropriate supports for his special needs. These findings suggest that while educators may be more likely to see the student’s disability (Bianco, 2005; Hartnett, Nelson, & Rinn, 2004; Rinn & Nelson, 2009), they may need additional training to adequately meet students special needs to ensure their academic success.

Although students did not have to negotiate their special needs with their gifted status (Assouline Nicpon, & Huber, 2006; Williams King, 2005), they did struggle to develop a positive sense of self, often feeling dumb or stupid (Willard-Holt et al., 2013) as a result of their disability. Moreover, students’ cultural background was important. While students drew strength from their cultural background they also felt that they had to combat stereotypes and negative messages in their school and society as a whole. This finding, in particular, extends the current twice-exceptionality literature, which has not addressed the intersection of culture with disability and giftedness. Given the limited exposure and experience of giftedness, these students experienced school much like African American students in special education (DeValenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006). Students often experienced a mismatch between their learning environments and found themselves in hostile and negative social situations with peers, ultimately affecting their self-esteem (Waitoller, Artilles, & Cheney, 2010). If students are able to build positive identities (i.e., cultural, academic, ability), they are more likely to be resilient in the face of negativity and be successful (Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003; Petersen, 2009).

It is encouraging that students were able to find at least one individual in their school experience that could support them. Most described teachers whom they were able to build a relationship with and who supported them in and outside of the classroom. Only one student, Amber, described the school counselor as a support. Other students had limited experiences with school counselors despite the numerous challenges they faced in their academic, personal and social, and career development. The lack of interaction with school counselors is particularly interesting

as school counselors are advocates in schools, working both with students, parents, and educators to create an environment where all students can be successful (ASCA, 2012; Assouline et al., 2009). This lack of interaction with school counselors suggests that students may not understand the role of schools counselors. Likewise, the lack of interaction may indicate that school counselors may have limited opportunity and skills to adequately address the needs of this population.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of this study have the potential to assist educators, especially school counselors, better support the success of twice-exceptional African American students K-12 schools. Given the schooling experiences of twice-exceptional African American students, we provided a list or recommendation to assist school counselors in preparing this population for academic, social/emotional, and career success.

1. School counselors must examine their attitudes, beliefs, and biases toward African American students to appropriately understand their needs in the context of special education and advocate for appropriate services (Assouline et al., 2006; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005; Robinson-Wood, 2013).
2. School counselors should work with the district to properly notify students of their gifted status and include information concerning their gifted identification in their individualized education plan. School counselors should also meet with individually with twice-exceptional African American students to discuss strengths, gifts, goals, and strategies to capitalize on these gifts in an effort to make progress toward their goals. With the intersection of race, giftedness, and a special education identity, school counselors need to understand how self-perception impacts students' educational experience. School counselors must implement programs and activities to help students cope with and even embrace these identities.
3. School counselors need to encourage positive racial identity development among gifted African American students, as it improves academic success by reducing social and psychological stress (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005).
4. Collaboration between school counselors, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel is needed to determine how to best support twice-exceptional African American students in attaining academic success. In regards to legal protections for special education, school counselors must assist school personnel in navigating this process to ensure students are receiving adequate services (Assouline, et al., 2006).
5. In addition to individual education plans, school counselors should work with twice-exceptional students in developing a career and academic plans that will prepare them for post-secondary opportunities. Career and academic planning is essential to ensuring students as many opportunities as possible to attain a post-secondary education (Harris, Hines, & Ham, 2013; Reid & Moore, 2008; Trusty, 2004).

6. School counselors should partner with local post-secondary institutions to understand the special education services offered and inform twice-exceptional students of the support available to assist with success at this level.
7. School counselors should increase their visibility with students who receive special education services by visiting frequently and providing classroom guidance lessons (Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008).
8. School counselors should foster positive relationships with students by seeking alternative ways to build rapport and use this time as an opportunity to share their role in fostering academic success by emphasizing students' unique strengths and minimizing their deficits (Assouline et al., 2006).
9. School counselors should be instrumental in helping to establish a school-family-community partnership (Bryan, 2005; Epstein, 1995). This would assist school counselors in helping parents and students attain resources that schools have limited access to and it would provide more support for twice-exceptional African American students.
10. School counselors should develop a parent-training workshop to promote parents' awareness and knowledge of the types of special education and gifted services offered in the schools.

### **Implications for Future Research**

School counselors are in a unique position to collaborate with other school personnel concerning twice-exceptional students. They can share information on students by holding weekly meetings with special education teachers. Information sharing sessions can help school counselors monitor student progress and plan for additional activities or supports to aid with student success. Additionally, school counselors can facilitate career groups for twice-exceptional students to discuss their plans after high school and to highlight their disability as a strength, rather than a deficit, to increase their academic performance and career aspirations.

While this study offered noteworthy information from the interviews and other documents about the lives of twice-exceptional African American students, the findings could have been strengthened if observations included student interactions with peers, parents, teachers, administrators, and school counselors. This would have provided a more in-depth understanding of the student experiences within the context of the home and school environment.

Also, because the students in this study were identified as being gifted in non-academic areas (e.g. instrumental music, vocal music, dance, etc.), future research should incorporate the experiences of twice-exceptional African American students who are identified as academically gifted (or superior cognitive) and receiving services. In so doing, it would shed light on the impact of gifted services on students' overall experiences in education as well as how they conceptualize their race, disability, and giftedness.

Future studies should also explore how differences in identification impact students' experience. More specifically, students who experience their giftedness first may have a very different experience than students who experience disability first. Likewise, experiences may differ greatly based on disability. For example, a study might explore the differences in experience of twice-exceptional African American students who have physical disabilities in comparison to those with disabilities related to their cognitive or social/emotional abilities.

Follow-up studies with twice-exceptional African American students are also needed that explore the issues they face in transitioning from high school to post-secondary education. A study of this nature could highlight how and if students' understanding of their unique needs and gifts change over time, as well as their experience in finding supports in a new system.

### **Conclusion**

The status of twice-exceptional African American students in education is perilous. The findings in this study have the potential to assist high school counselors as they work with twice-exceptional African American students preparing for post-secondary opportunities. It also may provide insight into the partnerships and resources needed to ease students' transition to post-secondary education or the world of work.

Despite being identified as gifted, these students did not have their talents recognized or developed during their schooling as the majority of students did not receive gifted services. Moreover, their general and special education teachers did not recognize and incorporate their gifts into their classes, and they often did not accommodate their special needs. Instead, students were the recipients of negative messages about their abilities in academic, personal/social, and career contexts. If these messages continue, twice-exceptional African American students may face challenges in reaching their full potential and being successful both in and outside of school.

It is evident that considerable advocacy and support are needed to help twice-exceptional African American students develop the skills and attitudes necessary to navigate negative experiences. Given the aforesaid, school counselors can serve as advocates for these students by attending to their unique needs through systemic programs and activities, and building networks of support among teachers, families, and the community to ensure their academic, personal/social, and career success. Moreover, school counselors can serve as advocates to ensure that twice-exceptional African American students obtain the skills necessary to become self-advocates. By acquiring skills in self-advocacy, these students will not only be prepared to enter and navigate postsecondary opportunities, they will also be prepared to assimilate into their local communities and the society at-large.

### **AUTHOR NOTES**

**Renaë D. Mayes, PhD, NCC**, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Counseling Psychology and Guidance Services at Ball State University, where she also serves as the Director of the School Counseling Program. Her research interests include: academic achievement and college readiness of gifted African American students, intersectionality in gifted education (race,

gender, and disability status), and school counselors' role in school, family community partnerships. Dr. Mayes research interests also include STEM exploration for historically underserved K-12 students. **Erik M. Hines, PhD, NCC**, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Connecticut. His research agenda include: African American male academic achievement and college readiness, parental involvement and its impact on academic achievement for students of color, and improving and increasing postsecondary opportunities for first generation, low-income, and students of color (particularly African American males). His research interests also include career exploration in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) for students of color in K-12. **Paul C. Harris, PhD, NCC, NCSC**, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Counselor Education at the University of Virginia. His research interests include the college and career readiness process of underrepresented students, particularly Black male student-athletes. Dr. Harris is also interested ingroup counseling prevention and interventions activities for historically underserved students.

Correspondence about this article should be directed to: Dr. Renae D. Mayes, Department of Counseling Psychology and Guidance Services, a Ball State University, Muncie, MN 47306. Telephone number (765) 285-8056; e-mail: [rdmayes@bsu.edu](mailto:rdmayes@bsu.edu)

### Acknowledgments

This study was funded by a research grant from the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision. The information reported in this article are those of the authors and do not represent the funding organization.

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