

OUR TAKE

Clarke County School District schools do not provide Gifted Education Services to a representative sample of the student body.

2,171. That's the number of students who are gifted-identified in the Clarke County School District according to the April 19 CCSD Demographics Analysis Dashboard. That's the number of students who receive differentiated, more rigorous instruction in Gifted Education models like Advanced Placement or advanced classes.

Unfortunately, that same number of gifted-identified students is wildly unrepresentative of the district's holistic population.

According to April 19 data on the dashboard, of the 2,171 gifted-identified students in the CCSD, 1,171 are white. Of the 10,402 non-gifted-identified students in the CCSD, just 1,507 are white. That means, in the CCSD, more than two in every five (43.7%) white students are gifted-identified.

For Hispanic students: 385 gifted-identified students to 3,478 non-gifted-identified students – just over one in 10 students (11.1%).

For Black students: 438 gifted-identified students to 5,356 non-gifted-identified students. Not even one in 10 students (7.6%).

In a majority-minority school district, where Black and Hispanic students outnumber white students by a ratio of far more than 3:1, it is appalling that Black and Hispanic students are so dramatically underrepresented in the gifted-identified population.

The numbers tell the story, but individual students live it.

"Socially, (being gifted-identified), definitely affected (me) when (I was) separated from that group, especially as a minority individual," junior Kevin Capcha, who is Hispanic, said. "I feel like (the disparity is) still persistent even at the high school level (in) AP courses."

Minority students in the CCSD must be represented more equitably in the

district's Gifted Education Services.

To make that a reality, CCSD leaders need to prioritize the identification of minority students by whatever means necessary – even drastic measures.

One such measure is to change the criteria that students are required to meet to become gifted-identified. Currently, the Georgia Department of Education requires students to obtain a qualifying score in three out of four areas – mental ability, achievement, motivation, and creativity – or exceptionally high in mental ability and achievement to be identified.

Nationally normed-assessments to measure students in most areas – however, Dr. Tarek Grantham, an Associate Professor of Educational Psychology with the University of Georgia's Gifted and Creative Program, advocates for

waiving these requirements in favor of local norms, which are created by individual districts to identify gifted students. These could exist as district-created assessments or different qualifying scores on present exams.

"The (gifted education) field has not only embraced but encouraged local norms. (They) give educators, especially

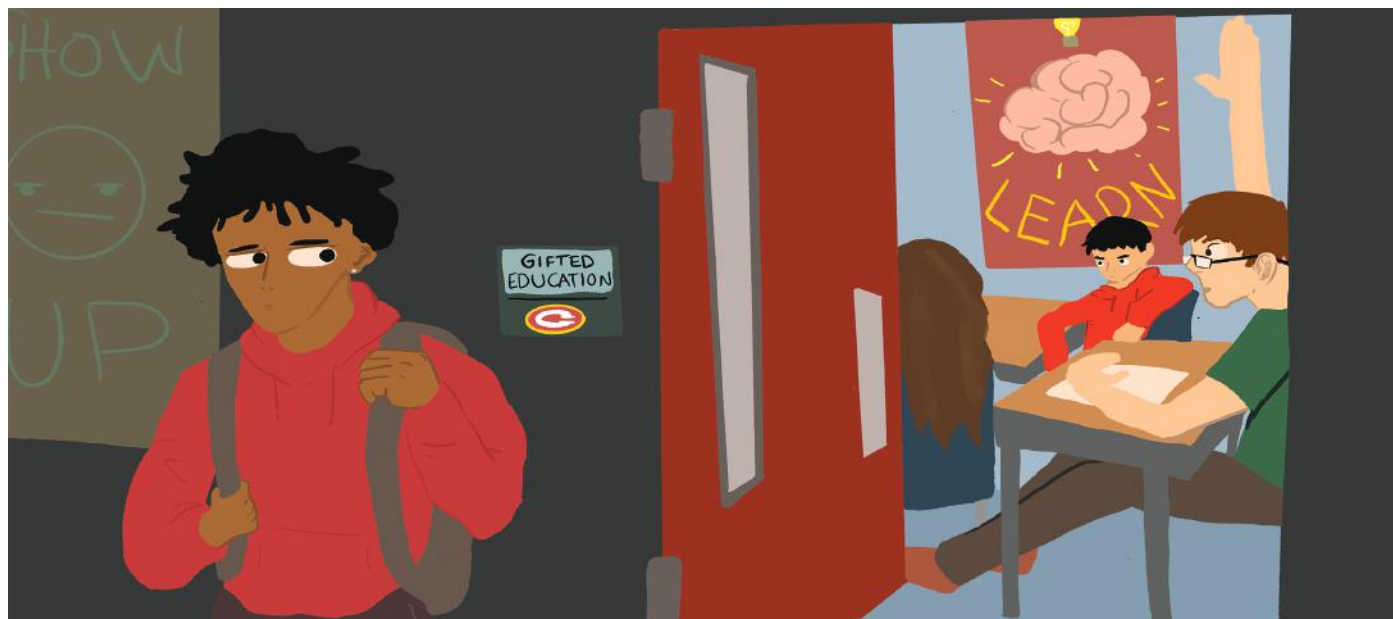
those who are equity-minded, (who are) proactive and not bystanders, options and ways in which to look at how they can set goals," Grantham said.

The CCSD certainly isn't solely responsible for the demographics of its gifted program – historical inequities in education and resources are barriers stretching far beyond Athens.

While these circumstances should certainly be acknowledged, they shouldn't be an excuse not to change. As former U.S. President Barack Obama said, "It's not enough to just change the players. We've gotta change the game."

The CCSD has a major problem with its gifted-identified players. To change those players, district leaders might just have to change the whole game. **O**

CCSD leaders need to prioritize the identification of minority students by whatever means necessary.



Above: GIFTED DISPARITIES: An illustration shows a student disappointedly looking at a class composed of gifted-identified students. White students comprise only 20.7% of all students in the Clarke County School District, but comprise 52.7% of gifted-identified students, revealing problematic inequities within the CCSD. "Minority students must be represented more equitably in the district's Gifted Education Services." Illustration by Sam Harwell