

High Ability, Rural, and Poor:

Lessons From Project Aspire and Implications for School Counselors

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This article describes a grant-funded effort to improve the lives of academically able middle and high school students living in rural poverty. The program, Project Aspire, attempts to increase the number of these children in the most rigorous math and science coursework available in their schools. To that end, Project Aspire assists 14 school corporations by helping faculty in those settings increase the level of rigor of their courses and by offering Advanced Placement (AP) courses through multiple platforms of distance education technologies.

A primary component of the project is the attempt to assist the school counselors' work with their students, in hopes that the students' lives will be improved. To prepare the counselors, ongoing training has been provided. This paper reports an analysis of the ideas and experiences shared during the lengthy training sessions with 21 school counselors. From the analysis and a literature review, the authors offer in three tables concise information for effectively working with high-ability middle and high school students living in rural poverty.

Description of Project Aspire

This article provides an overview of Project Aspire, a federally funded initiative that attempts to improve the lives of impoverished, academically able students in rural middle and high schools. Project Aspire is predicated on the findings of Adelman (1999), who wrote persuasively about the importance of rigorous coursework in predicting college success. To that end, the project has two components: the first emphasizes academics and the second, counseling. For the first component, the project provides Advanced Placement (AP) courses to high schools through distance education platforms and prepares future students for these advanced courses through the development and implementation of a sustainable pre-AP curriculum. The project has five interacting components: (1) delivering AP courses through distance learning; (2) using vertical teams of middle and high school teachers to prepare students for AP courses; (3) increasing the number of low-income students enrolled in AP courses; (4) implementing effective strategies to facilitate student mastery

of pre-AP curricula; and (5) providing the tutoring and counseling services necessary to help students succeed in selected math and science courses.

The counseling component of Project Aspire has three major purposes: (1) to enhance the knowledge of school counselors concerning the value of Advanced Placement courses for low-income enrollees while seeking to raise student and parent expectations as to what the child can accomplish and achieve in the future; (2) to work with students participating in the programs to help them deal with the stress of high academic expectations and to develop study skills and organization needed to succeed; and (3) to provide college and career counseling. The project enhances the training of the counselors already working in schools in the characteristics of low-income students and ways to help these students adjust to an environment of high academic and career expectations. In addition, counselors learn how to help students think about future careers and the preparation necessary for them. Counselors are provided with regionally located staff development sessions, print resources related to giftedness and poverty, on-

campus college counseling workshops, information about opportunities for their students to participate in university-based summer programs, offers for on-site college counseling assistance, and e-mail support.

This article reports on an analysis of a series of ongoing discussions during training sessions with 21 school counselors working in 14 rural school corporations across a Midwestern state with significant incidence of poverty. The dialogue focused on ideas about and experiences with high ability, rural, poor students and the counselors' ability to serve them. The authors' analysis of transcripts of the discussions, along with their observations of the counselors in practice, were added to information learned during the literature review to create a concise set of tables that offer ideas on serving high-ability students living in poverty. The lessons learned provide greater understanding of the overwhelming obstacles for advanced achievement for poor students of high ability in rural settings. The lessons also provide school counselors with tools to help these students transcend the limitations that many of them face.

Rural, Poor, and Gifted

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Young, 2003), in the 2001–2002 school year, 42% of all public schools in the United States and 30% of all public school students were in small towns or rural areas. There are several issues involved for students with special needs in small schools and/or rural settings. The gifted student population may be spread out among a large number of schools that may also be geographically isolated. Serving gifted students in these environments may require models, approaches, and options different from those employed in serving gifted students in larger or more urban environments (Colangelo, Assouline, & New, 1999). Because of the small number of professional staff in these districts and the small number of students with these special learning needs, teachers and administrators may not have the special training required to adequately plan for needed services. In a review of the literature, Cross and Dixon (1998) pointed out that providing services to gifted students in rural areas may be complicated by a lack of proximity to resources, limited access to academic materials, fewer choices of advanced courses, extended travel time to attend after-school opportunities, and the different types of grade configurations for school buildings.

Small school size is not in itself a disadvantage; there are many benefits to small school settings. Cotton's (1996) synthesis of 103 research studies and reviews related

to school size found advantages for students, as well as teachers. She described a small school as 300–400 students for elementary and 400–800 students for secondary schools. Among her findings were that students from small schools, when compared with students in larger schools, were more positive about school, had higher academic self-concepts, had at least equal academic achievement, had fewer disciplinary incidents and better attendance, participated in extracurricular activities at a higher rate, had lower drop-out rates and a greater sense of belonging. She also noted that students who stood to benefit most from small schools were economically disadvantaged and minority students.

Gifted students may benefit from attending small schools and from being in rural areas. Compared to students in larger and more urban settings, important differences may exist in the social and psychological well-being of gifted students in small, rural school environments. Students from rural areas viewed the competition for valedictorian as positive, while gifted students from larger school settings described feelings of greater anxiety and stress (Cross & Stewart, 1995). A family-like atmosphere of school has been described by gifted students in small rural schools (Cross, Coleman, & Stewart, 1993). Rural schools also have tremendous connection to their communities, and the opportunity to participate in more activities presents additional venues for student leadership development and meaningful contribution. The needs of a gifted student may well be met, in part, through these rural resources (Montgomery, 2004). Studies suggest that having fewer students can allow the smaller rural school to tailor academic opportunities at the individual level. Gifted students in rural settings viewed teachers as more important. In addition, students in rural high schools did not experience the "stigma" of giftedness (Coleman, 1985), as others often identified them with their extracurricular activities instead of just their academic talent. Cross and Dixon (1998) found gifted students in these environments were less likely to be seen in the one dimension of giftedness, but rather as composites of their activities and talents. These positive experiences allowed gifted students in small or rural high schools greater social latitude than gifted students from larger schools.

Although there are some advantages to the small environment, it is important to consider that some smaller schools' lack of educational opportunities appropriate to a gifted child's ability may be a factor influencing psychological well-being. Citing more than 134 studies and related writings in her quest to determine whether the gifted were

more or less at risk for their psychological well-being than their nongifted peers, Neihart (1999) concluded:

Giftedness does influence psychological outcomes for people, but whether those outcomes are positive or negative seems to depend on several factors that interact synergistically. These factors are the type and degree of giftedness, the educational fit or lack thereof, and one's personal characteristics. (p. 16)

Low income and its attendant lack of opportunity and resources may be additional risk factors. So, while giftedness itself is not a risk factor for psychological well-being, lack of educational fit may be an additional factor in the psychological equation of a poor student of high ability living in a rural area.

A significant proportion of the U.S. population lives in poverty, but we do not know much about gifted students of low income in rural areas. The National Center for Education Statistics (Young, 2003) reported that 37% of students in the United States qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch program. The research on students of poverty has been conducted in areas with a significant minority population. Because of the low incidence of minorities in some rural populations, research relating to students of poverty may have limited applicability in the rural Midwest.

Characteristics of Poverty and the Relation to Gifted Education

Knowing that the literature is sparse in relation to the specific conditions found in rural areas of poverty, the authors focused on helping counselors understand poverty in conjunction with gifted education. In working with school counselors, the authors discussed the observations and work of Ruby Payne (1998) in her book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. She noted that focus on the present, lack of familiarity with opportunities outside the immediate area, lack of resources for meeting basic needs or supporting learning in the home, and the seeming lack of relevance of education to present reality are all part of the experiences of the student of generational poverty. Payne's observations repeatedly note that many students from poverty do not come with middle-class values, behaviors, or expectations; therefore, it is crucial that changes are made to the ways that these students are viewed and opportunities are structured and supported for them. The authors encouraged counselors to read Slocumb and Payne's (2000) *Removing the Mask:*

Giftedness in Poverty. Further elaboration on what Payne and Slocumb described as particular characteristics of students from poverty can be found in Table 1, along with implications for counselors.

Meeting With Counselors

Over a period of 3 years, the authors met an average of four times each with 21 school counselors who were working in small, rural schools. The ongoing meetings ranged in length from 2 to 3 hours per session to several full-day sessions. A total of 53 hours were spent in these meetings. Most meetings were held in small groups of four to seven people representing schools that were in somewhat close proximity to each other geographically. Two daylong meetings were held on the campus of Ball State University. One session was held in the centrally-located state capitol at the Department of Education. The sessions included the sharing of information about research and literature on rural students, high-ability students, and students of poverty, and about providing service as guidance counselors. State experts also presented information relating to college guidance, specific college opportunities, and state college access trends. The goals of Project Aspire were also reviewed in the early sessions. Time was provided for the counselors to share their worries, concerns, and successful practices relative to the goals of the project. The discussions were analyzed by organizing comments into themes. To ensure accuracy of interpretation of the ideas conveyed, counselors were given an opportunity to review the information and provide any corrections or further clarification.

Themes

Three themes emerged that add to the understanding of the difficulties facing high-ability students of poverty living in rural settings. Suggestions from the counselors regarding their view of what is helpful to this population are included.

Theme 1: Rigorous courses are too much work or take too much time. Counselors in many schools brought up the difficulty in convincing students of potential, some of whom were from poor backgrounds, to enroll in more advanced courses. The students' objections were frequently to the additional work required or to their lack of time for additional work. Many saw no reason to take advanced subjects such as calculus or AP biology, whether or not additional support was provided. Sometimes aca-

Table 1

School–Related Issues, Poverty, Students of High Ability, and Implications for Counselors

Implications of Poverty for High-Ability Students	Implications for Counselors
Standardized tests may not measure full potential. Identification protocols for advanced classes need flexibility (Slocumb & Payne, 2000).	Find ways to highlight performance assessments. Counselors, in writing letters for students seeking admission to selective programs or colleges, may need to outline the demonstrated skills that have been seen and the obstacles the student has had to overcome in order to achieve.
The family may not allow siblings to attend a magnet program in another building. Friends may not be in the gifted program or AP courses (Slocumb & Payne, 2000). For older students, leaving the family to go away to college may not be encouraged.	Find ways for the student to participate in special offerings that do not involve separating the student from family. Point out college opportunities nearby, as well as those farther away. Help the student understand the long-term benefits to education.
Programs and class assignments for high-ability students usually involve more projects that require more supplies, more research, more group work outside of class time, and more trips to other locations for field trips or contests. Library and Internet access, computers, printers, photocopying, transportation, and pocket money for admissions and meals while at these locations enhance a student's ability to produce a professional product.	Work with teachers to assess what really is required in order to meet the advanced, in-depth assignments that are appropriate for students of high ability. If additional materials and access to technology and other resources would enhance a particular project, the counselor might be able to help arrange access to these for students. Avoid restricting students from participating in valuable experiences because of their inability to pay or lack of transportation.
Students may not have an environment conducive to concentration and completing academic work (Payne, 1996).	Try to find a place where students can complete work before going home or before school in the morning (Slocumb & Payne, 2000, p. 167). Transportation or responsibility for younger siblings may be barriers for these students.
Students may have more tardiness and may be absent to provide support for other family members who are sick or unsupervised. This may be problematic for high academic expectations that rely on rigid compliance with deadlines.	Expect to "run interference" with teachers occasionally to ask for flexibility, reminding them that the student may not have a choice in absences; arrange for extended deadlines.
The student may not have anyone modeling organizational or time management skills.	Teach the use of an assignment notebook, organizing binders, planning long-range assignments, etc.
Student will realize that a dislike for authority or laughing when corrected (Payne, 1996) are not the usual responses of other high-ability students from middle class environments, leading to greater feelings of being different and alienation.	Use an adult voice with the student and do not argue. Teach respectful behavior; discuss choices of action when responding to correction (Payne, 1996, pp 106–110). Students should stay with the same counselor over several years. When the opportunity for staying with the same teacher presents itself, try to arrange that. Relationship building is key (Payne, 1996, p. 142).
High-ability students may be eligible for opportunities beyond what is offered in the regular classroom or within the school day. Students are not likely to stop in, respond to an announcement, or follow-up on a letter that was sent in the mail.	Seek out these students to present opportunities, solicit the required information, and encourage participation.
A self-contained classroom for high-ability students is the preferred delivery mode for advanced curriculum. This fosters the development of relationships among students and with the teacher. Pullout programs and departmentalized elementary schools provide less continuity in terms of student-teacher relationship building (Slocumb & Payne, 2000, p. 163).	Serve as an advocate for students of poverty on committees where services for high-ability students are planned.
Gifted students are intellectually different from their average peers. High-ability students from poverty are also different from their intellectual peers economically (Slocumb & Payne, 2000, p. 223). Their parents may not understand the need for them to be placed in a program for high-ability students.	It is tremendously difficult for high-ability students from poverty, as they have few others with whom to identify and may have little support for intellectual achievement from the home environment. A strong and ongoing relationship with a counselor could make a huge difference.

demically capable students were already heavily involved in multiple extracurricular activities that limited their free time, or they had to work during their hours outside of school. Students from poverty often had family responsibilities or family members who seemed to resent the extra work required of their children. Counselors reported some families objecting to their children taking the SAT, ACT, or test preparation sessions because those occurred outside of the school day. This was sometimes seen as an intrusion in both the family and the child's lives. One counselor reported being told, "The school has no right to make her do this." When a counselor sought parental support for homework completion for a middle school student, she was told the parent had too much to do to have to check on the work of the child. Schoolwork was viewed as the responsibility of the school, not the parent, and parents thought it should be completed during school hours.

Interestingly, a tangential finding was that AP courses may be too much work for some teachers, as well. Because of the small size of the school, a teacher may have as many as six different preparations during the day and may also coach or sponsor several extracurricular activities. A small school may have only one teacher in a particular subject. The additional training and daily preparation required made the AP teaching assignment unappealing and/or impossible for many overcommitted teachers. Although counselors did not complain about their caseloads per se, they echoed teachers' sentiments by noting that there was never enough time in the day. Their small schools had limited numbers of nonteaching professional personnel, and school counselors were involved in many responsibilities beyond attending to individual students' needs. Thus, additional time required of teachers and counselors for AP courses may limit the number of opportunities available for students with high abilities.

Theme 2: School climate, issues, and rules discourage participation in advanced options. The school attitude toward achievement appeared to be very influential in who achieved at a high level. Some counselors felt there was a gender-related issue in regard to achievement in their schools: girls outperformed boys on nearly all measures. They felt this was related to school culture and what was deemed to be "acceptable" behavior in their schools. The implication was that it was not as acceptable for boys to work hard at school or outside of school on school-related tasks. Generally, because of the schools' smallness and family-like atmosphere, a few students could be very influential in setting the attitude, either positive or negative, toward achievement.

In a related issue, academically able students were very aware of their grade point average (GPA), and viewed

this as the most important measure of their academic preparation. Concern for GPA affected course selection, as competition for valedictorian was keen in small, rural schools. The expected grade was more important than course content. As an example of this, in a discussion of a current state policy issue of whether diploma credit should be given for algebra in grade 7 or 8, it was pointed out that high-ability students may elect to wait to take algebra if credit were not granted at the earlier grade levels. If students were required to take math each year in high school, starting the math sequence prior to grade 9 would then force them into calculus by grade 11 or 12. Some students worried that taking calculus might prove to be difficult and jeopardize their GPA. Thus, the way school policies are written can negatively impact enrollment in the more challenging courses. Counselors also urged caution in structuring the weighting of grades to avoid unintended consequences for students trying to "play" the system.

It was not common for the schools involved in Project Aspire to have had a National Merit Semifinalist or a student who had applied to a highly competitive, top-tier college. Having no students with exceptional academic achievement at a state or national level provided no role models for current students nor any familiarity with the processes of highly competitive college admissions on the part of the counselors. Counselors were also unfamiliar with the results of the Adelman (1999) study that found the quality of the high school curriculum had more impact on bachelor's degree completion than either test scores or GPA. In addition, the study found that finishing a course beyond the level of Algebra II more than doubles the odds that a student who goes to college will graduate. Counselors wanted to get their students into college but were generally unaware of the predictive implications of specific high school preparation.

Another small-school issue that affected student performance related to teachers. Teachers in these schools frequently teach more than one course and more than one grade level, sometimes in more than one department. This results in teachers' having the same students in more than one class and/or for more than one year. When a student had the same teacher more than once, the student-teacher relationship had an effect on the student's academic development positively or negatively, depending on whether the student found the teacher to be effective. If the teacher was ineffective, the student could refuse to take the subject the teacher taught in a later grade, refuse to perform, or passively resist the course, gaining very little from the class. One counselor reported that a school valedictorian had to take remedial English in college because of the ineffectiveness of the only English teacher in the school. The detri-

mental effect to academic preparation and/or aspiration of a single teacher in a small school can be devastating.

Theme 3: There are issues relating to generational poverty (Payne, 1998). When working with students of poverty, Payne noted that it is important to accept that some individuals will use incorrect grammar, inappropriate language, and “casual register,” but that they must be taught when these behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable. Project Aspire counselors confirmed they had witnessed that some students from poverty had this behavior in their settings and reported occasionally providing individual guidance on appropriate language and behavior.

Recognizing the need to provide additional academic support for poor students with high ability, one school used Project Aspire funds to make tutoring available for students before and after school. As Payne would likely have predicted, the students who most needed tutoring were dependent on transportation that did not allow them to take advantage of the opportunity, or they had responsibilities for younger siblings during those times. Counselors reported another problem for students from poverty who needed college financing was that some parents did not want to invite government scrutiny and would not submit required forms for determining financial need. Even when finances were secured and the student was accepted to college, some students would find reasons not to leave home as the time drew near. If students did not want to take a particularly rigorous course, attend a special program, or leave for college, their parents would not encourage it.

Counselors reported that some higher education programs had very helpful components for first-generation college students. These involved campus visits to help students get acquainted and become comfortable with campus life. However, some parents of students of poverty did not want their children leaving home or did not want them to be on a college campus for a week. At times, these students needed summer job income or had responsibilities for younger siblings that did not allow them to be away. For similar reasons, some students were unwilling or unable to take advantage of the Project Aspire summer camps. Parents frequently asked, “Who else is going?” and if there were no friends or someone else their children knew from school going, students often declined to go. Parents with limited income seemed less able to see long-range benefits of student participation in special programs.

Counselor Suggestions

Counselors were positive and able to use their skills to find ways to assist the students in Project Aspire.

Overwhelmingly, they felt that building personal relationships was very effective; setting aside 15 minutes for a weekly check on individual students of poverty resulted in some long-term positive relationships and regular encouragement for pursuit of higher education. Phone call reminders were necessary and helpful in getting forms returned. Counselors pointed out the need to go out of their way for students from poverty—to be willing to track them down, remind them, call home, and so forth. Posting information about college visits, scholarships, or summer opportunities on bulletin boards or including the information in morning announcements was inadequate for these students. The students from poverty may not have had family experiences with higher education. Many lacked the resources to visit colleges for informative sessions or produce professional application packages. Others had limited interviewing and letter-writing skills and had little knowledge of career opportunities available in the world outside their own immediate geographic area. The needs of these students were different from the typical college-bound, middle-class student, and the counselor needed to reach these students in different ways. It was agreed that the most effective strategy included providing individual attention, pointing out specific opportunities, assuring the student that financial aid can be obtained, encouraging goal setting, and assuring the student of the counselor’s own high expectations.

Counselors acknowledged the limited number of AP course offerings the school was able to provide on-site, but felt there were resources for their students with highest abilities. For example, the counselors knew that the state’s Academy for Science, Mathematics & Humanities (a public residential high school for high-ability students in grades 11 and 12) was an opportunity for students who could benefit from more rigorous opportunities and contact with other exceptional learners. They thought it might be difficult for some students to leave their families at age 15 or 16 to attend, but acknowledged it could be a life-changing opportunity for high-ability students from isolated areas, limited circumstances, or both.

For students of poverty who had no family experience with higher education or did not want to be too far from home, there were some 2-year programs, university extensions, or small private colleges closer to home that were good options. Building institutional relationships was very productive. Small, rural schools sometimes partnered with area junior colleges in order to provide dual credit opportunities or outreach programs of other types. Organizing a program such as “College for a Day” for eighth graders, through which the students were taken to visit nearby colleges, could provide positive outcomes in the long run for

Table 2

Personal Characteristics, Poverty, Students of High Ability, and Implications for Counselors

Implications of Poverty for High-Ability Students	Implications for Counselors
Introversion occurs more frequently in the high-ability population. Introverts prefer not to be the center of attention and may not be as valued in their home environment.	Value the students for thoughtful responses; give them time to think before responding. Find ways to encourage participation in out-of-the-limelight roles or activities.
High-ability students have likelihood of greater emotional intensity than students of average ability. They may be unusually sensitive and less able to deal with criticism. They may also be very perceptive and articulate; stinging verbal responses made in anger may be difficult to resolve.	Be sensitive to emotional intensity in gifted students. If this appears to be a problem, discuss implications of this in advance with the student and arrange with teachers to allow the student to seek asylum in counselor's office when feeling overwhelmed.
Student success and willingness to work in a class may be based upon whether or not the student likes the teacher or has promised someone else to do well. Students are less willing to take a class if they do not like the teacher.	Build a relationship with the student. The student may achieve in order to please the counselor or teacher, not for his or her own future. Enlist the support of the family as much as possible.

the colleges, as well as the students. Career talks during the eighth-grade year were also productive. There were many programs and funding options available for schools or counties with certain criteria (e.g., rural, poverty, county unemployment rate). Counselors thought districts should aggressively pursue such opportunities, but also plan for transition when funding runs out.

Having a career fair was another beneficial activity for students to learn about opportunities outside their own community. It was suggested this be done with local volunteers from different career clusters, perhaps with some local high school alumni among the volunteers. The event could be alternated from one year to the next with another high school in the area. Once the organization was in place, repeating it every 2 years for one high school would not be too overwhelming.

Using insight gained from the counselor training sessions and a literature review, the authors created three tables that provide information on dealing effectively with high-ability students who live in rural poverty. Tables 2 and 3 focus on personal characteristics of students and college career issues.

Discussion

This article represents the authors' understanding of the interrelatedness of the characteristics of rural, high-

ability students of poverty and discussions with the school counselors conducted over a period of 3 years. High-ability students from rural schools, many who live in poverty, have unique needs. Payne's (1998) observations provide valuable insight into those needs. Discussions with school counselors about characteristics of the gifted and of people living in poverty assisted the counselors in understanding why they need to do things differently for high-ability students from poverty.

The counselors confirmed the report in the literature of the existence of additional barriers for high-ability students of poverty in small schools. Family responsibilities and participation in extracurricular activities, including sports, clubs, and community organizations, curtail the time available for academic work outside the classroom. While these other experiences can be positive and meaningful, advanced academic preparation is a key to success in college. For students without longer-range perspectives of the value of the higher level of preparation, the time commitment required for advanced academics may not seem worthwhile. In addition, parents may not support the extra time commitment. In the situations reported by counselors in this study, there was usually no one at home with any experience with either the process of higher education or the level of preparation necessary to be successful in that arena. Opportunities for college may be farther away geographically for rural populations, and students of poverty may be less willing to separate from the family;

Table 3

College/Career Counseling Issues, Poverty, Students of High Ability, and Implications for Counselors

Implications of Poverty to High-Ability Students	Implications for Counselors
Family may not be aware of types of jobs, careers, or opportunities outside the realm of their personal, local experience.	Arrange for students to have a local mentor, workplace visits, community college visits, and career shadowing of persons with work that requires advanced training and/or uses advanced technologies. Seek out outreach programs of local colleges, large and small.
With television as a focal point of the home, information that can be viewed on the screen may be a good way to communicate.	Obtain a video of a program or college that has an opportunity for the student. Send this home with the student to view with the parents. Videos can impart information that might not be heard otherwise (Payne, DeVol, & Smith, 2001, p. 92).
Opportunities will be evaluated according to their day-to-day impact on current life. If an appointment is too far away or requires too much training, it may not be an option. If it does not yield as much income now as another opportunity, the opportunity with greater immediate income is likely to be chosen.	Investigate co-op opportunities for college experiences that combine earning with learning. Look up information on starting salaries, job opportunities, and long-range earnings for possible career paths.
Student may not have had the opportunity to see formally written letters of recommendation, business letters, or resumes, or have had a formal interview.	Offer to help edit formal responses required for applications and resumes. Role-play a job or college interview.
Conferences for school or college planning may be misunderstood by both sides. These meetings are usually brief and to the point. Parents from poverty may be more accustomed to a less formal structure and view the discourse as rude (Payne, 1996).	Build relationships for effective communication.
High-ability females may not see educational advancement as an option for them; they may feel the burden of responsibility for others.	Be especially encouraging to high-ability girls. Encourage them to think “outside the box.” At a minimum, help them consider advanced education in fields that are compatible with family responsibilities. Enlist the support of the mother.
Planning for things that are a long way off may be difficult. It may be hard to get support for appropriate course selections for college preparation.	Carefully review the course selections of students. They may not elect courses that are more challenging or are prerequisites for other more rigorous courses.

Note. Characteristics of poverty are based on Payne (1996, pp. 59, 68–70, 103–104).

the family may also be unsupportive of their leaving. The presence of motivating teachers, dedicated counselors, and other school personnel is crucial to providing the extra attention that is required to assist the high-ability student of poverty over these hurdles.

According to Payne (1996), “Four reasons one leaves poverty are: It’s too painful to stay, a vision or goal, a key relationship, or a special talent or skill” (p. 11). Schools

may be the only place “where students can learn the choices and rules of the middle class” (p. 80). The school counselor will have to advocate for the students with other faculty members who are intolerant of the behavioral aspects of the culture of poverty. They may have to educate and convince the family of the potential of, and opportunities for, the student. The school counselor could provide the key to encouraging the vision that it is possible for high-

ability students to break free of the overwhelming restrictions of rural poverty.

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