



Promising Practices for Equity & Inclusion: A Portrait of Six Illinois Schools

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October 2022

Case Study Summary.

Children with advanced learning needs are found in every socio-economic stratum and racial and ethnic group.¹ They are present in every school; yet their academic experiences are not the same due to inequities that persist in the identification of needs and the learning opportunities available to them in their schools and communities in Illinois and throughout the nation.

Several studies have analyzed inequities in representation in gifted and advanced programs and gaps in performance at high academic levels among racial and socio-economic groups.² Research also supports several promising practices that schools and districts can take to support equity and access to gifted programs in their schools.

This case study examines six Illinois schools or districts that have successfully implemented one or more research-based steps intended to support equal access to advanced programs. The districts profiled in this case study are of different sizes, and they serve a broad range of urban, suburban, and rural communities. Yet, they share a common commitment to developing advanced potential in all children from the diverse families and communities whom they serve.

The following portraits highlight success, provide practical guidance, and support networks for educators seeking to increase access to advanced programming in their own schools and districts. Although the schools featured in this report are at various stages along the journey, their steps toward achieving equity and access are commendable as they guide and inspire a vision for others who engage in this critical work.

¹ In this report, "children with advanced learning needs" encompasses populations referenced in Illinois statutes and cited reports as "gifted," "children with gifts and talents," "advanced learners," and/or other similar terminology.

² Thomas B. Fordham Institute Study (2018); Jack Kent Cooke Report, 2nd Edition (2018); System Failure: Access Denied -Gifted Education in the United States: Law, Access, Equity, and Missingness Across the Country by Locale, Title I School Status, and Race (2019); Education Trust, Inequities in Advanced Coursework: What's Driving Them and What Leaders Can Do (2020).

Theoretical Rationale

This study advances the theoretical rationale of achieving equity in advanced, gifted, and exceptional education. Research must consider the disproportionality in the socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic demographics of such students (Worrell & Dixson, 2022). Given the heightened awareness of social justice and cultural awareness, the issue of equity becomes a paramount problem that requires an exploration of solutions.

Peters (2022) further describes the varied challenges in achieving equity through identifying inequality, systemic racism, and lack of access as the most important requirements in addressing the equity gap. However, Peters channels the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here*, who suggests that a final victory is simply an “accumulation of many short-term encounters,” and the process of achieving a final and full victory requires valuing short-term and small successes. Thus, Peters concludes, “gifted education has a number of small-scale successes...[h]opefully, these successful practices are pitstops on the road to a final victory” (p. 91).

Thus, study is based upon conducting research about successes in gifted education addressing not only equity, but also diversity and inclusion throughout the State of Illinois. The Rinn, Mun, and Hodges (2020) State of Gifted Education national report identifies the State of Illinois (along with Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Nevada, New Jersey, and North Carolina) as those with “efforts to address the equity gap” (p. 20). Such efforts include collaborative work with other relevant departments or institutions. One of the leading organizations addressing the equity gap is the Illinois Association for Gifted Children (IAGC), which continues to partner with other organizations, institutions, colleges, and universities for pursuing research involving equity, diversity, and inclusion practices.

The following realities in Illinois underscore the need to recognize successes in implementing promising practices to support equity, access and inclusion and in providing a vision to guide other schools and districts:

- Illinois is one of twenty-three states that has no dedicated state funding for gifted education, and schools are not required to use funds received through the Evidence-based Funding Model (“EBF”) to

meet advanced learning needs (Rinn, Mun, & Hodges, 2020, p. 14).

- Since Illinois eliminated grant funding for gifted education, low-income districts are most likely to have eliminated their gifted programs, affecting the most vulnerable students (Dwyer & Welch, 2016).
- Students in low-poverty schools in Illinois are more than twice as likely to participate in gifted programs as students in high-poverty schools (Yaluma & Tyner, 2018, p. 5).
- Experts in the field of gifted education assert that gaps in advanced learning opportunities for low-income and historically marginalized populations is the main cause of Illinois’ large excellence gaps (Plucker & Peters, 2016).

In Illinois, a March 2021 legislative effort to address inequities added new language to the Illinois School Code under the Education and Workforce Equity Act. The School Code now asserts “...that inequitable access to advanced coursework and enrollment in accelerated placement programs exists...and more must be done to eliminate the barriers to access to advanced coursework and enrollment in accelerated placement programs for all children” (105 ILCS 5/14A-10(4)). This Act, among several other provisions, requires Illinois districts to develop plans to expand access to accelerated placement programs for all children.³

For district and school leaders seeking guidance with respect to supporting equity and inclusion in advanced programs, the six districts profiled in this report offer a wealth of experience in connection with several evidence-based practices. Moreover, these six entities represent a wide variety of educational settings and communities, providing a lens through which readers can gain insights from a school or district that is similar to their own.

³ Acceleration is an intervention for advanced learners in which children move through the curriculum at a faster rate or younger age than typical. Under Illinois law, all districts need to have policies in place for early entrance to Kindergarten and First Grade, whole grade, and subject acceleration (Illinois School Code, 105 ILCS 5/14A). There are many other forms of acceleration including Accelerated Placement classes, curriculum compacting, self-paced learning and others (Assouline, S.G., et. al., 2015).

Data and Research Methods

This study applies a mixed-method case study design that explores successful schools surrounding the central question about “How Illinois elementary schools with gifted/advanced programs implement equity, access, and inclusion practices?” This method also adapted and incorporated elements of data for school improvement. (Bernhardt, 2018).

Using both quantitative and qualitative data within a mixed-method case-study design is quite unique to the area of gifted education.

This research employs a two-phase exploratory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Phase I (quantitative phase) collected data about school/district implementation of evidence-based practices through a brief poll (see Appendix A).

Selection of districts to answer the poll was based upon their connection to IAGC through

membership, staff attendance at IAGC events, and/or volunteerism. This selection intentionally included schools of different sizes and grade levels which represented different regions and communities throughout Illinois. For each district/school that answered the poll, researchers completed a demographic profile based upon Illinois State Report Card data and available information published on district websites.

Phase I results informed a targeted follow-up of identified schools. In Phase II (qualitative phase), further data was collected in terms of narrative, artifacts, and selective interviews. The data analysis interprets findings that explain how such successful schools and programs practice and implement equity, access, and inclusion. The findings may guide the development of more successful gifted/advanced practices in the State of Illinois.

Case Study Focus: Evidence-Based Practices

Researchers have identified several promising practices that support positive results with respect to increasing equity and access to advanced programming. This case study focuses on implementation of the following six evidence-based practices:

- Using multiple tools to assess exceptional potential and provide several pathways into advanced programs when assessing student need for advanced or accelerated programming (Pendarvis, E. & Wood, E.W., 2009; VanTassel-Baska, Johnson & Avery, 2002; Gallagher & Gallagher, 2013). Examples of such tools may include a combination of standardized measures such as ability, achievement and aptitude tests as well as rating scales, teacher observations, student portfolios, and performance tasks.
- Providing enrichment opportunities starting in the early grades to address achievement gaps that occur at school entry and provide students opportunities to demonstrate their advanced potential (Horn, 2015).
- Universally screening students for advanced potential combined with using local, school-based norms for placement in accelerated and advanced learning programs (Peters, Rambo-Hernandez, Makel, Matthews & Plucker, 2019; Card & Giuliano, 2016).
- Ensuring a continuum of services to identify and develop talent in all learners ranging from enriched learning experiences (e.g., problem-based learning, performance tasks, critical thinking, career exploration) to accelerated and advanced programming (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018).
- Providing professional learning in gifted education for educators (e.g., classroom teachers, specialists) to appropriately

challenge and identify individuals from diverse cultures and backgrounds who may benefit from advanced and/or gifted programming (NAGC & CEC, 2013).

- Reaching out to diverse stakeholders to share information and invite input with respect to gifted and advanced programming (NAGC, 2011).

Six School/District Profiles

Our study focuses on six schools and districts and their use of research-based practices to support equity and inclusion in advanced programs. As the following profiles suggest, the schools differ in the size, community setting (urban, rural, and suburban), and the demographics of students served. Yet, they all have reported success with respect to implementing one or more of these practices.

Elgin District U-46

Elgin District U-46 is a large, suburban, K-12 district located in Elgin, Illinois serving 11 communities in the northwest suburbs of Chicago.⁴ According to data on the state report card, the district includes 53 schools (5 high schools, 8 middle schools, and 40 elementary schools, 8 of which include preschools). The district serves approximately 36,000 students and employs 2,267 teachers and 198 administrators. Several schools receive Title I funds, and the average class size is 22.2.⁵

As one of the largest districts in Illinois, Elgin U-46 serves a socioeconomically, racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse student population. 57% of its students are low-income.⁶ Students represent families from more than 100 language backgrounds,⁷ and 36.8% are English language learners. The student racial demographics are 25% White, 6% Black, 55.9% Hispanic, 8.5% Asian, 1.1% American Indian, .2% Pacific Islander, and 3.3% two or more races.

The district offers a continuum of services for advanced programming. Services for gifted learners include Access to Inquiry and Meaning (AIM), a talent development program for 2nd and 3rd grade students in which gifted specialists provide enriched classes and critical thinking activities for students in Title I settings. Consultant

services are offered to non-Title I schools. In grades 4-6, the district offers its Inquiry and Gifted Network for Ingenuity Talent and Exploration program (IGNITE), including a dual-language counterpart, for high achieving/high aptitude students in mathematics and language arts.

Gifted services continue through 8th grade with Gifted Sites at all U-46 Middle Schools, 5 of which also offer Dual Language Gifted Programs. In addition, the district offers content and grade level acceleration.

At the high school level, U-46 offers Early College Coursework, such as Dual Credit and Accelerated Placement courses.

Over the last several years, Elgin U-46 has redesigned its programs to support equity and access to advanced learners. According to the IAGC poll, U-46 supports this goal, in whole or part, by implementing several evidence-based practices with demonstrated results. These practices include using multiple assessments for identifying students for advanced programming, providing early-grade enrichment, and using a combination of universal screening and local norms for placement. Teachers consistently receive professional learning in gifted education to support talent development.

La Grange District 102

La Grange District 102 is a K-8 suburban school district in the Western Suburban region of Chicago. District 102 consists of six schools, a middle school, 4 elementary schools, and one preschool/kindergarten.

⁴ School District U-46. (2002-2022). *About School District U-46*. u-46.org/domain/76.

⁵2020-2021 Illinois State Report Card.

⁶2020-2021 Illinois State Report Card.

⁷School District U-46. (2002-2022). *General Information*. u-46.org/Page/7942

The district serves approximately 2,989 students and employs 229 teachers and 12 administrators. The district average class size is 18.3 students.⁸

In District 102, 14.8% of the students are low income and .4% are homeless. The student demographics are 68% white, 5.1% Black, 20.6% Hispanic, 1.7% Asian, and 4.6% Two or More races. 5.4% of the students in the district are English Language Learners,⁹ and the district offers a Spanish dual language program that is housed in one of its elementary schools.¹⁰

District 102 offers a Talent Development Program with a continuum of services to develop and meet the needs of advanced learners. This program includes classroom-based differentiation service, acceleration, and individual planning services. Classroom-based services are not accelerated, but provide instruction based on student needs and profiles. Subject-based acceleration is offered in language arts in grades 5-8 and mathematics in Grades 3-8. Students who take two years of French or Spanish in Middle School can be placed in French II or Spanish II in high school.

The La Grange District 102 equity policy states, "By outlining our commitment to inclusivity and equity, we hope to foster our rich and diverse district community and ensure each and every student has access to the best educational opportunities to reach their full potential."¹¹

According to the IAGC Poll responses, District 102 uses multiple measures to identify students for their talent development programming, and the use of universal screening in combination with local norms to identify students for advanced programming has yielded demonstrable results.

West Chicago D33

West Chicago D33 is a diverse, suburban, K-8 district located in West Chicago, a city with a population of 25,370 located

between Geneva and Wheaton, Illinois in the far West Suburbs of Chicago¹² The district consists of 10 schools including three preschools, six elementary schools, and one middle school. The district serves 3,635 students and employs 331 teachers and 30 administrators. The average class size is 19.6.¹³

West Chicago D33 serves a socioeconomically, racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse student population. Over half (56.7%) of its students are low income and 5.9% of students are homeless. 61.6% of students are English language learners.¹⁴ To support language instruction, West Chicago D33 offers both dual language classes in Spanish and monolingual English classes taught by ESL certified teachers who offer language support through ESL best practice strategies. Because the district is home to many immigrant and refugee families, it welcomes many students from around the world with a wide range of language backgrounds. Students in this district represent families who speak at least forty-three different languages.¹⁵

West Chicago D33 offers a continuum of services to develop potential and meet student learning needs, including enrichment and acceleration in both English and Dual Language programs. Gifted and Talented Education ("GATE") teachers serve students in grades K-8. In grades K-2, an enrichment specialist supports classroom teachers to provide access to high level learning for all students. Students in grades 3-8 are eligible to be identified for the gifted and talented program, and the district offers math and reading enrichment as well as accelerated programming in mathematics. At the middle school level, accelerated Language Arts and push-in enrichment services in Science and Social Studies. The district offers accelerated mathematics and is adding a compacted

⁸ 2020-2021 State Report Card.

⁹ 2020-2021 State Report Card.

¹⁰ District 102 Website, [Dual Language Program](#).

¹¹ [District 102 Equity Policy](#). Adopted October 8, 2020.

Retrieved from District 102 website.

<https://www.dist102.k12.il.us/page/equity>

¹² Illinois Demographics by Cubit. © 2022 Cubit Planning, Inc.

¹³ 2021 State Report Card.

¹⁴ 2020-2021 State Report Card.

¹⁵W. Del Toro, Coordinator for Teaching and Learning, L. Deluca, Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation, and G. Trejo, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, West Chicago D33, Interview May 13, 2022.

curriculum to allow students to take Geometry in grade 8.¹⁶

As with the other districts in this study, West Chicago D33 reports success on the IAGC Poll with using multiple measures and universal screening combined with local, school-based norms for identifying students for a continuum of services to support advanced learning. They also use progress monitoring to measure student growth and match programs to academic needs.

Du Quoin District 300

Du Quoin District 300 is a small, rural unit district in Du Quoin, Illinois, a city of 6,000 residents in Perry County located in southern Illinois.¹⁷ The district is comprised of 1 elementary school, 1 middle school, and one high school that serve 1,374 students, and employ 101 teachers and 6 administrators. The average class size is 19.4.

The students served are 83.5% White, 4.8% Black, 2.3% Hispanic, 0.9% Asian, and 8.4% Two or More races. 59.5% of the students are low-income and 1.5% are homeless.¹⁸

Du Quoin recognizes that, in addition to struggling students, students with the potential to achieve at high levels are present in every school. In District 300, students are identified as gifted beginning in second grade. Advanced reading and math classes begin in 3rd grade and continue through middle school. In grades 3-8, identified students are cluster-grouped within the grade level classroom for advanced levels of instruction. The high school offers honors English all four years as well as AP US History, AP Calculus, and several dual enrollment classes as part of the honors program.¹⁹

According to the IAGC Poll responses, Du Quoin uses universal screening, local norms, and multiple measures to identify

students for their talent development programming. Early grade enrichment and professional development in gifted/advanced education are consistently implemented. Providing a continuum of services and reaching out to diverse stakeholders has yielded demonstrable results.

Ted Lenart Regional Gifted Center, Chicago Public Schools

Lenart Regional Gifted Center is a selective enrollment Chicago Public School serving approximately 277 gifted students, Kindergarten through Eighth grade, with an accelerated and enriched program.²⁰ The school employs 2 administrators and approximately 16 teachers.²¹ The average class size is 28.

The school demographics are as follows: 15.2% White, 63.5% Black, 14.4% Asian, and 3.6% Two or More Races. 35.7% of students are low-income.²²

Students who are admitted and enroll at Lenart are participants in the gifted programming that the school offers. The core instruction in grades Kindergarten through Second Grade is compacted so that students are accelerated up to 2 years beyond the typical grade level in the first 3 years of instruction. By middle school, 7th and 8th grade students may remain at Lenart or attend a Chicago Public Schools academic center housed within a high school where they can take high school courses.

Because some students need scaffolding and others need additional challenges to meet the demands of an enriched and accelerated curriculum, teachers differentiate lessons using a flexible grouping model as well as available classroom, partnerships with other schools, and online resources. Educators continually use progress monitoring to assess student needs and measure growth. Also, teachers consistently receive professional development in gifted education to support their work.²³

¹⁶W. Del Toro, Coordinator for Teaching and Learning, L. Deluca, Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation, and G. Trejo, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, West Chicago D33, Interview May 13, 2022.

¹⁷ Du Quoin District #300. (2022). *Our Community*.

<https://www.DuQuoinschools.org/page/our-community>

¹⁸ 2020-2021 State Report Card.

¹⁹D. Rea, Director of Instructional Services, Du Quoin District 300, Interview, May 3, 2022.

²⁰2020-2021 State Report Card.

²¹ Ted Lenart Regional Gifted Center Website. <http://lenart.cps.edu/>

²² 2020-2021 State Report Card.

²³Sims. Principal, Lenart Regional Gifted Center, May 20, 2022.

In the IAGC Poll, Lenart's responses indicated that the school consistently implements the use of multiple measures, provides early grade enrichment, progress monitoring, and professional development in gifted education.

Illinois Math and Science Academy ("IMSA")

The Illinois Math and Science Academy ("IMSA") is a public, tuition-free, selective enrollment, residential high school that serves students in grades 10-12, enrolling academically talented students from 55 Illinois Counties. IMSA serves approximately 652 students and employs about 54 teachers and 4 administrators.²⁴ The impact of IMSA is significant across the state of Illinois, as 62% of Alumni live in Illinois, 70% of Alumni work in a STEM field, more than 644 patents are held by Alumni, 1 in 10 Alumni are entrepreneurs, 42% of Alumni are published authors in their field.²⁵

In 2020-2021, the IMSA student population demographics included 0.2% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 35.5% Asian, 10.1 % Black or African American, 17.1% Hispanic or Latino, 5.7% Two or More Races, Non-Hispanic or Latino, 29% White, and 2.3% Not reported. In 2020-21, 16.6% of the students were reported as economically disadvantaged.²⁶

IMSA is a high-performing school, with an average composite ACT score of 31.9, and average SAT English/Reading/Writing and Mathematics scores of 685 and 718, respectively. The school boasts 29 National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists and 55 Commended students.²⁷

IMSA offers a wide variety of AP classes in multiple STEM and Humanities subject areas, including several post-AP level classes such as Multivariable Calculus, Number Theory, and Numerical Analysis.²⁸

In addition, there are a wide variety of extracurricular offerings.²⁹

In the IAGC Poll, IMSA reports demonstrated success in the use of universal screening and local norms, as well as outreach to diverse families and stakeholders.

²⁴ IMSA Website. [Discover IMSA](#); [Faculty](#)

²⁵E. Glazer. FY23 Budget Requests, Illinois House Appropriations Committee Presentation, February 10, 2022, Slide 4.

[https://go.boarddocs.com/il/imsa/Board.nsf/files/CCBK4R4FF63E/\\$file/FY23_IMSA%20Budget%20Requests%20House%20Appropriations.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/il/imsa/Board.nsf/files/CCBK4R4FF63E/$file/FY23_IMSA%20Budget%20Requests%20House%20Appropriations.pdf)

²⁶ [Illinois Math and Science Academy Profile](#), 2022, p. 3.

²⁷ [Illinois Math and Science Academy Profile](#), 2021-2022, p. 2.

²⁸ [Illinois Math and Science Academy Profile](#), 2022, p. 2.

²⁹IMSA by the Numbers, (n.d.).

Promising Practices In Action

The six profiled schools and/or districts that are the subjects for this study vary widely in their sizes, grade levels, and communities, but collectively provide a portrait of practical applications of research-based practices to support equity, access, and inclusion. Although these schools and districts may not have yet achieved their ultimate goals or objectives, their work suggests action steps for diverse communities and schools throughout Illinois who share this journey.

The following snapshots depict ways in which the six schools/districts profiled in this report exemplify promising practices in action. The resulting collection of experience and wisdom sheds light on several key insights connected with each practice.

I. Using multiple tools to assess exceptional potential and provide several pathways into advanced programs.

"Students from all backgrounds are capable of amazing things. And I think it's our responsibility to create and provide a program that allows them to showcase all of the amazing things that they're capable of..."

-Whitnie Del Toro, *Coordinator for Teaching and Learning, West Chicago D33*

All six subjects in our study use multiple measures in their identification protocol. According to representatives from Elgin U-46, IMSA, and West Chicago D33, this practice yields demonstrable results.

Key Insights:

Multiple Pathways Expand Access. Using a single measure to identify students for advanced programs creates potential barriers because it limits the lens through which to identify talent. Accordingly, experts in the field agree that using more than one measure is a more equitable approach for identification. Multiple assessments and tools generally include a combination of

subjective and objective measures.³⁰

Elgin U-46 exemplifies success with this practice. In U-46, a combination of ability, and achievement measures, as well as input from community members and/or teachers is used to identify students for placement. CogAT scores are added to a comprehensive student profile including MAP scores, data from schools and the community, and teacher input. Families are also provided with an opportunity to appeal placement decisions that they do not feel meet their child's learning needs.³¹

Multiple Entry Points Take Into Account Student Development and Growth. In addition to using multiple measures, all the K-8 districts interviewed emphasized the importance of providing multiple entry points for identification. District 102 aligns the use of multiple measures with the following objectives: (1) inclusivity; (2) use of multiple entry points; and (3) expansion of program. As students develop, additional data points become available throughout their school experience. District 102, in addition to using more than one assessment, assesses students for placement each year, allowing multiple pathways and entry points into

³⁰For example, as a subjective measure, teacher surveys are used in Du Quoin to help students get into the program. These subjective measures are not intended to keep students out of programs. Rather, teacher observations help students who may not meet objective measures but show potential through classroom performance and/or behaviors such as questioning, curiosity, and creative problem-solving that indicate a need/readiness for advanced learning. D. Rea, Director of Instructional Services, Du Quoin District 300, Interview, May 3, 2022.

³¹School District U-46. (2002-2022). Gifted Identification. <https://www.u-46.org/Page/9001>.

advanced and accelerated programs.³²

Similarly, in Du Quoin District 300, beginning in elementary school, there are multiple opportunities for students to enter the gifted program as they develop. In second grade, approximately 10-12 students out of a class of about 100 students are identified at the beginning of the year, which typically grows to around 18 students by the end of second grade. In third grade, the number of identified students increases through the same process. By the time students get to fourth grade, 15%-20% of students are identified.³³

Existing Assessments Can Be Leveraged.

Two districts in this study emphasized that assessments used for identification, such as NWEA MAP achievement tests and/or Cognitive Ability tests, were already used in the districts for measuring growth and assessing student learning needs. Dr. Randy Lange, the Talent Development Coordinator in District 102, noted that when he began developing the identification protocol for advanced programming, the district was already using multiple assessments to guide instruction such as NWEA MAP, IAR, and CogAT. Data from existing assessments were used for identification, as they could be analyzed with an eye to advanced placement needs. Diana Rea, Director of Instructional Services in Du Quoin also noted that existing resources can be tapped, reducing the need to purchase and/or incorporate additional assessments.³⁴

Additional measures, such as curriculum assessments, student portfolios, parent/teacher surveys, and classroom observations can be included with existing standardized data to provide a multi-dimensional portrait of student abilities and readiness for advanced programming.

Multiple Measures Inform Progress Monitoring. Multiple measures are useful not only to identify students for programming, but to continually monitor growth and assess

³² District 102. (March 2022). *Discover, Nurture, and Celebrate Talent: La Grange School District Talent Development Services Program Representation Report*, Appendix A.

³³ D. Rea, Director of Instructional Services, Du Quoin District 300, Interview, May 3, 2022.

³⁴ K. Boxell, Director of Instructional Equity & Accountability, C. Finch, Director of Curriculum, R. Lange, Talent Development Coordinator, and L. McShane, Director of Assessments, La Grange District 102, Interview, May 6, 2022; D. Rea, Director of Instructional Services, Du Quoin District 300, Interview, May 3, 2022.

student needs. For example, at Lenart Regional Gifted Center, progress monitoring is used to assess the needs of children who are already identified for gifted programming through the Chicago Public School protocol. At Lenart, enrolled students have a variety of learning needs, and multiple measures serve to provide educators with a clear understanding of student interests and readiness for additional challenges. Lenart Principal, Angela Sims, notes that state assessments have limitations because they are limited to student ages and grades. At Lenart, adaptive assessments such as NWEA MAP, Star 360 as well as curriculum-based assessments (such as ALEKS that assesses mastery of advanced skills in mathematics), pre-assessments before units, and interest-based surveys inform progress-monitoring to guide instruction.³⁵

Multiple Measures Help to Identify Potential and Advanced Needs for Children from Diverse Language and Socioeconomic Backgrounds. The use of multiple measures can help identify English Language Learners who need advanced instruction. For example, in West Chicago D33, U-46, and District 102, language skills are considered when assessing students for advanced programming.³⁶

In West Chicago D33, multiple pieces of evidence including standardized tests, student reflections, teacher reflections, and performance in both languages (if students are bilingual) are considered for placement. As additional data points, educators use curriculum assessments that measure student growth and progress in both English and Spanish as well as data from the NWEA MAP that is given in both English and Spanish.³⁷

Dr. Randy Lange of District 102 suggested that assessment data should be reviewed thoughtfully when considering the needs of students who are English Language learners. Also, he notes that scores can be considered through the lens of factors that impact opportunity to learn, such as considering the

³⁵A. Sims, Principal, Lenart Regional Gifted Center, Interview, May 20, 2022.

³⁶ M. Gomez De LaTorre and E. Aldana, Gifted Specialists, and B. Davis, Gifted Office Secretary, U-46 Interview, May 4, 2022.

³⁷W. Del Toro, Coordinator for Teaching and Learning, L. Deluca, Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation, and G. Trejo, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, West Chicago D33, Interview May 13, 2022.

relative performance of low-income students compared to other students who are on free or reduced lunch.³⁸

II. Combining universal screening with use of local, school-based norms for placement in accelerated and advanced learning programs.

"Unless people are purposeful in realizing systemically that there are biases preventing people who are not privileged or are under-resourced, we are not going to advance as a society."

-Dr. Evan M. Glazer, *Principal, Illinois Math and Science Academy*

Where applicable, all subjects of this study implement universal screening with the use of local, school-based norms for potential placement in accelerated and/or advanced learning programs.³⁹ These schools or districts report demonstrated results with respect to this practice.

Key Insights:

Universal Screening Supports Equal Access.

A consensus exists among all our interviewees that all children should have equal access to screening for gifted services. Four of the subjects of our study implement universal screening in the identification process to provide equitable access to gifted and advanced programs. (For Lenart and IMSA, the practice is not applicable to identify students for placement). In some districts, such as Du Quoin, West Chicago D33, and La Grange 102, universal screening occurs on an annual basis. In other schools, such as Elgin U-46, this occurs at the third grade and sixth grade levels.

³⁸K. Boxell, Director of Instructional Equity & Accountability, C. Finch, Director of Curriculum, R. Lange, Talent Development Coordinator, and L. McShane, Director of Assessments, La Grange District 102, Interview, May 6, 2022.

³⁹This practice is reported as "not applicable" at Lenart, as the school does not identify students for placement.

Universal Screening Can Guide Talent

Development and Outreach. Because IMSA is a selective high school that accepts applications from students throughout the state, universal screening is implemented differently than the other subjects. At IMSA, universal screening is used indirectly to support equity and inclusion in the admission process by helping to identify students with academic strengths/potential who may benefit from IMSA enrichment programs and with whom the school can develop relationships that may encourage future enrollment. By collaborating with the Illinois State Board of Education, IMSA uses data from state testing to identify students who perform well, and to build connections with families and students from culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse populations. Starting in grade 3, IMSA uses this data as a basis to invite students to participate in virtual and enrichment programs that align with IMSA's mission to support STEM education throughout the state. (Note that these invitations are inclusive and not exclusive; IMSA programs are open to all students.)⁴⁰

Local Norms Support Tailoring of Advanced Programs to Student Need.

Within our interviews, district representatives generally agreed that within schools, students tend to have more similar backgrounds and experiences. Accordingly, there was a consensus that local norms more equitably take into consideration students' learning needs as well as cultures reflected in each unique school community.⁴¹

For example, District 102 found that using local, school-based norms enabled them to identify students whose learning needs significantly differed in that they were more advanced than students working at grade level at each school.⁴² Accordingly, local norms resulted in more students being identified for services. In addition, the district

⁴⁰ E. Glazer, Principal, IMSA, Interview, May 12, 2022.

⁴¹ In Elgin U-46, all 3rd & 6th grade students take the CogAT as part of the Universal Screening process. (A screening is administered at the middle school level to develop local norms, but students are not re-assessed for identification.) In Du Quoin District 300, all students are screened for the gifted program based upon the MAP test. Then, a matrix that reflects performance on several different assessments based upon local norms is used for placement, identifying the top 15%-20% of students. West Chicago D33 and La Grange 102 also identify for advanced using local, school-based norms.

⁴² C. Finch, Director of Curriculum, La Grange District 102, Interview, May 6, 2022.

found that identified students were successful and retained in talent development programs.

According to Diana Rea, in Du Quoin, teachers embraced the use of local norms, as they could see that students at higher learning levels than the grade level curriculum needed different instruction and resources to support student growth.⁴³

Local Norms Take Opportunities to Learn into Account: As with the other schools/districts in this study who use local, school-based norms, IMSA's admissions approach takes into consideration differences among students with respect to resources and opportunities to learn.⁴⁴ At the Illinois Math and Science Academy, using local norms is a key component of a state-wide admissions process in which students come from diverse districts that offer a wide range of opportunities. For admissions, IMSA considers a broad range of factors, including local performance, to identify students who have taken advantage of all available learning opportunities and who show readiness for IMSA's advanced programs. At IMSA, students matriculate from diverse districts offering a wide variety of educational opportunities, reflecting the talent and potential of students throughout the state.⁴⁵

Outreach Is Important to Gain Community and Parent Support for Local Norms. When implementing local norms, schools and districts may need to address questions and/or concerns from stakeholders. For example, parents may ask why a child with the same scores may potentially be identified at one school for advanced programming and not in another.

To gain stakeholder support, interviewees agreed that parent and teacher education is a key ingredient. For example, in U-46, district leadership places a priority on communicating why practices, such as the use of local norms, are implemented to support equity and inclusion. April Wells, the Enrichment Coordinator in U-46, explains, "We want to communicate clearly and consistently across the community." With

⁴³ D. Rea, Director of Instructional Services, Du Quoin District 300, Interview, May 3, 2022.

⁴⁴E. Glazer. *IMSA Equity Practices*. Overview provided to IAGC.

⁴⁵E. Glazer, Principal, IMSA, Interview, May 12, 2022.

respect to universal screening and local norms, Elgin U-46 codifies their procedures within Board Policy. Also, part of their work with respect to implementing local norms, universal screening, and other measures is educating parents and engaging in crucial conversations regarding equity and access. Such conversations are a key to opening minds and creating understanding for the use of measures to support equity.⁴⁶

Presume Success in Middle School. A potential question that arises with the use of local norms is how students who are identified based upon local school norms will perform once they matriculate to the same middle school. To explore this concern, District 102 looked to the local high school, where their students enroll from many different school districts. Director of Curriculum, Christopher Finch, Ed. D., observed that students can matriculate from different backgrounds and be successful in high school. Accordingly, students who enter middle school from different elementary school communities should be presumed to be capable of success. To support growth, teachers provide scaffolding to students who need additional support in advanced classes.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ A. Wells, Gifted Coordinator, District U-46, Interview, May 20, 2022.

⁴⁷K. Boxell, Director of Instructional Equity & Accountability, C. Finch, Director of Curriculum, R. Lange, Talent Development Coordinator, and L. McShane, Director of Assessments, La Grange District 102, Interview, May 6, 2022.

III. Providing enrichment opportunities starting in the early grades to address achievement gaps that occur at school entry and provide students opportunities to demonstrate their advanced potential.



"We can start with kids in Kindergarten and First Grade on free and reduced lunch and get to know them really well so that we get the kids in the places they need to be."

-Dr. Randy Lange, Talent Development Coordinator, District 102

Four districts in our study report that the practice of providing enrichment opportunities starting in the early grades ("frontloading") is consistently implemented. Two districts, U-46 and West Chicago D33, indicate that providing enrichment experiences in the early grades has been implemented with demonstrated results.

The value of frontloading instruction to provide equal access to learning opportunities, as demonstrated by perspectives shared in this study and by research, underscores potential gains from additional support, staffing, and professional development in gifted education to support educators who serve students in the primary grade levels.

Key Insights:

Frontloading Reduces Opportunity Gaps. April Wells, Gifted Coordinator in U-46, explains that opportunity gaps present substantial obstacles to advanced learning. Accordingly, U-46 supports talent development with early grade enrichment, especially for children from under-resourced communities.⁴⁸ In Title I schools, through the AIM program, Talent Development teachers in second grade teach in both English and Spanish, incorporating critical thinking skills and other academic and social-emotional curriculum to

⁴⁸A. Wells, Gifted Coordinator, District U-46, Interview, May 20, 2022.

support advanced learning. This talent development program is provided to whole classes, rather than as a pull-out class devoted to a designated group of identified students. During weekly "push-in" lessons, using multicultural literature and materials, enrichment specialists provide enriched instruction in the grade level classrooms, supporting vocabulary, questioning, and critical thinking strategies. The classroom teachers observe their students and note different skills and strengths of students. Social-emotional resources are used as well as visuals and vocabulary to meet the needs of English Language Learners. Lessons are modified for non-readers and writers, and all students gain access to requisite skills for advanced learning and have opportunities to demonstrate their strengths through a wide range of products and modalities.⁴⁹

Early Enrichment Provides Identification

Data. In addition to supporting academic and social-emotional development, offering early enrichment supports identification for additional gifted services. For example, in Elgin U-46, the AIM talent development program provides a pathway to gifted services by providing exposure to requisite skills before the identification process for IGNITE (self-contained programming) in grades 4-6 and corresponding Middle School program begins. April Wells explains that talent development has to be for whole groups and cast a wide net to "grow the pie" and identify more students for enriched and advanced programming.⁵⁰

Similarly, in West Chicago D33, a Gifted and Talented Education position has been added in Kindergarten - Second Grade to provide additional enrichment in the early grade levels. This provides not only an opportunity for learning, but an additional avenue through which to identify students for gifted and advanced services.⁵¹

⁴⁹M. Gomez De LaTorre and E. Aldana, Gifted Specialists, and B. Davis, Gifted Office Secretary, U-46, Interview, May 4, 2022.

⁵⁰A. Wells, Gifted Coordinator, District U-46, Interview, May 20, 2022.

⁵¹W. Del Toro, Coordinator for Teaching and Learning, L. Deluca, Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation, and G. Trejo, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, West Chicago D33, Interview May 13, 2022.

IV. Ensuring a continuum of services to identify talent in all learners.

“If your program is centered in being child focused and a clear vision for who you serve and what your desired outcome will be, then everything else falls into place.”

-Angela Sims, Principal, Lenart Regional Gifted Center

As described in each of their profiles, all subjects of this study indicated that they provide a continuum of services to develop potential and meet student needs. Two districts, Du Quoin 300 and West Chicago D33, report that their development of a continuum of services to support advanced learners has yielded demonstrated results for increasing equity and access to gifted services.

Key Insights:

A Continuum of Services Includes a Wide Range of Educational Interventions and Contexts. Collectively, the districts in this study provide a continuum of services for advanced learners through a multitude of delivery contexts including Classroom Differentiation, Dedicated Intervention Time, Cluster Grouping, Advanced and Accelerated Classes, and Accelerated Placements. Examples of the range of services offered include the following:

- **Classroom Differentiation.** The Talent Development Program in District 102 includes three services - Classroom-based Differentiation Service, Acceleration Service, and Individual Student Planning Service. Part of District 102’s Talent Development services includes enrichment that happens in the grade level classroom under the

direction of the classroom teacher.⁵²

- **Dedicated Intervention Time.** In both Du Quoin and West Chicago D33, dedicated instructional intervention time (“WIN” = “What I Need” time) is provided at the elementary level to support a range of learning needs, including those of advanced learners.
- **Cluster Grouping.** To facilitate differentiated instruction for advanced learners, students identified as gifted or advanced may also be clustered together in a grade level classroom with a teacher with expertise in gifted education. For example, in Du Quoin, advanced students are placed into cluster groups with a teacher who has a gifted endorsement, allowing advanced instruction starting in 3rd and 4th grade, such as an advanced reading program.⁵³
- **Advanced and Accelerated Classes.** All the subjects of our study offered advanced and accelerated classes. For example, in District 102, accelerated Mathematics and/or Language Arts classes are offered in grades 3-8. Similarly, in Elgin U-46 the IGNITE program and its dual language counterpart consists of core advanced classes for 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students who demonstrate achievement or specific academic aptitude in the areas of Mathematics and English Language Arts and perform beyond the norm for their age group.⁵⁴
- **Accelerated Placements (Whole Grade, Early Entrance to Kindergarten and First Grade, Subject Acceleration).** All the schools and/or districts in this study offer acceleration as part of a continuum of services. As defined in

⁵²K. Boxell, Director of Instructional Equity & Accountability, C. Finch, Director of Curriculum, R. Lange, Talent Development Coordinator, and L. McShane, Director of Assessments, La Grange District 102, Interview, May 6, 2022.

⁵³ D. Rea, Director of Instructional Services, Du Quoin District 300, Interview, May 3, 2022.

⁵⁴ La Grange District 102 Website. (2022). *Talent Development Services Program*, [tps://www.dist102.k12.il.us/page/talent-development-services-program](https://www.dist102.k12.il.us/page/talent-development-services-program); U-46 Website. (2020-2022). *Core Academic Gifted Classes - IGNITE*, <https://www.u-46.org/Page/8998>

the influential report, *A Nation Deceived* (2004), acceleration is an educational intervention that moves students through an educational program at a faster than usual rate or younger than typical age.⁵⁵ Under Illinois law, all districts need to have policies in place for early entrance to Kindergarten and First Grade, Whole Grade, and Subject acceleration.⁵⁶

Progress Monitoring informs Service Delivery and Instruction. Both Lenart Elementary Regional Gifted Center and West Chicago D33 noted that progress monitoring informs instruction delivered through a continuum of services. For example, West Chicago D33 uses a Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework (“MTSS”), to monitor progress not only for struggling learners, but for advanced students as well. Focusing on grade level classroom instruction (Tier 1), the teams can work to add appropriate enrichment and support on both ends of the learning continuum. The MTSS process holds teachers accountable to monitor progress and determine what support might be needed for students who have been placed in advanced programming.⁵⁷

Collaboration and “Team Time” Strengthens Instruction. Teacher collaboration is also important for supporting instruction. In West Chicago D33, collaboration time for grade level teachers is provided by the district for teachers to review student data. Also, gifted and talented education (“GATE”) teachers from all 6 schools meet monthly to collaborate and analyze data to guide instruction to meet the needs of their students. GATE teachers also meet with grade level teams at their weekly meetings to serve students at the Tier I level and support the identification of students for advanced instruction in grades 3-5.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Colangelo, A., Assouline, S.G., Gross, M., (2004). *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students*. The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, Vol. 1, p.5.

⁵⁶ Illinois School Code. 105 ILCS 5/14A

⁵⁷ W. Del Toro, Coordinator of Teaching and Learning, L. Deluca, Director of Teaching and Learning, and G. Trejo, West Chicago D33, Interview, May 13, 2022; A. Sims, Principal, Lenart Regional Gifted Center, Interview, May 20, 2022.

⁵⁸ W. Del Toro, Coordinator of Teaching and Learning, L. Deluca, Director of Teaching and Learning, and G. Trejo, West Chicago D33, Interview, May 13, 2022

Quality Curriculum Supports Talent Development. At least three districts expressed another key ingredient for supporting a continuum of services – the importance of using a curriculum that supports scaffolding for advanced thinking skills and that is culturally responsive.

Dr. Randy Lange from La Grange District 102 suggested that using critical thinking materials such as *Jacob's Ladder* for all students can help expose all students to high level instruction and help to provide data that can help teachers to recognize potential for success in an advanced learning context.⁵⁹ When such resources are used, he suggests that Talent Development teachers can serve in a coaching and observation role so that students can receive support and enrichment experiences, and teachers can identify behaviors and performance that inform placement.⁶⁰

With respect to programming, Dr. Angela Sims at Lenart Elementary Regional Gifted Center asserted that inquiry-based and interest-based learning are also key components for engaging gifted and advanced learners.⁶¹

Gifted Coordinator April Wells (Elgin U-46) stresses the importance of using curriculum resources for scope and sequence that include equity pedagogy. She asserts that honoring cultural experiences by providing responsive curriculum such as books, author talks, and “windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors” is designed to increase equitable impact and a sense of belonging within the program and because of an advanced learning intervention.⁶²

A Continuum of Services Includes Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular Enrichment. In all the districts interviewed, a “continuum of services” involves not only classroom instruction but extends to summer and after school enrichment. For example, Elgin U-46 offers summer programming for third-sixth grade and middle

⁵⁹ William and Mary School of Education Website. [Jacob's Ladder Reading Comprehension Program](#).

⁶⁰ K. Boxell, Director of Instructional Equity & Accountability, C. Finch, Director of Curriculum, R. Lange, Talent Development Coordinator, and L. McShane, Director of Assessments, La Grange District 102, Interview, May 6, 2022.

⁶¹ A. Sims, Principal, Lenart Regional Gifted Center, Interview, May 20, 2022.

⁶² A. Wells, Gifted Coordinator, District U-46, Interview, May 20, 2022.

school and is partnering with Northwestern Center for Talent Development (“CTD”) to offer enrichment for young students. This summer enrichment combines interest-based and STEM-focused programs such as engineering classes, cancer research, high-pursuit, STEM-based activities that provide students with inquiry and problem-solving experiences, and access to experts in the field. Both early grade and summer enrichment allow students to start seeing themselves as scholars, and teachers to see the potential that students have when exposed to enriching content and additional challenges.⁶³

At Lenart Regional Gifted Center, interest-based learning is emphasized and exposure to various domain areas is provided through music, arts, critical thinking, competitions, STEM, computer science, coding, and other enrichment activities.⁶⁴

Tap Creativity and Community Partnerships for Enrichment Resources All interviewees in this study suggest that curricular opportunities inspire, motivate, develop talent in gifted learners, and help to address opportunity gaps. However, providing co-curricular and extra-curricular activities requires personnel and financial resources.

The schools in this study suggest creative ways to support enrichment for all students, such as connecting with community partners. This is illustrated in West Chicago D33, a Community School that follows the National Community School model. This community support model, through partnerships, provides a range of services to families beyond the work of the school district such as financial assistance, food, after school programming, mental health, and other resources. Enrichment provided through this community support model includes STEM programs, Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE), the *Becoming a Man* program, language classes, and several other opportunities. Partnerships with IMSA and Fermilab are also available to help identify and meet the needs of advanced students.⁶⁵

Similarly, In Du Quoin, enrichment programs include a grant-funded, after school “21st Century” program that takes place after school and during the summer. Students have access to challenging, STEM-related enrichment with LEGO, Minecraft,

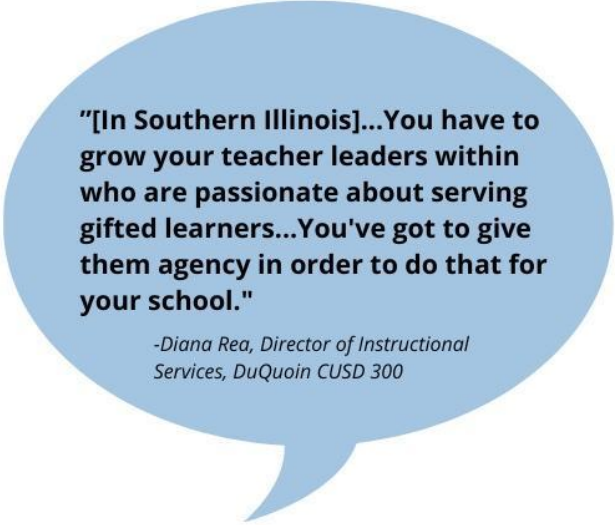
⁶³ A. Wells, Gifted Coordinator, District U-46, Interview, May 20, 2022.

⁶⁴ A. Sims, Principal, Lenart Regional Gifted Center, Interview, May 20, 2022.

⁶⁵ W. Del Toro, Coordinator for Teaching and Learning, L. Deluca, Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation, and G. Trejo, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, West Chicago D33, Interview May 13, 2022.

coding, science club, and other types of enrichment. Community partners, such as the University of Illinois Extension provide enrichment opportunities as well.⁶⁶

V. Providing professional learning in gifted education for educators.



“[In Southern Illinois]...You have to grow your teacher leaders within who are passionate about serving gifted learners...You've got to give them agency in order to do that for your school.”

-Diana Rea, Director of Instructional Services, DuQuoin CUSD 300

From the small, rural district in this study to the urban, Chicago Public Schools gifted center, professional learning is reported as a key factor for supporting access to gifted and advanced programming. All six participants indicated that they implement professional learning in gifted education for educators, and five out of six answered that they do so consistently.

Key Insights:

Professional Learning Equips Teachers to Meet Advanced Learning Needs. Diane Rea, the Director of Instructional Services in Du Quoin, explains that because many education schools do not offer substantial instruction in gifted education, offering instruction in this area is important for teachers to identify and serve advanced learning needs. When implementing an intervention such as acceleration, professional learning was also important to teachers so that they would understand this

⁶⁶ D. Rea, Director of Instructional Services, Du Quoin District 300, Interview, May 3, 2022; [University of Illinois Extension](#).

intervention and its benefits.⁶⁷

At Lenart Elementary Regional Gifted Center, Principal Angela Sims identifies professional learning as a key component of student success. Using different kinds of assessments and providing support for students with diverse levels of needs are examples of important topics for teachers of advanced learners. Also, learning about strategies that work for educating students of color and applying this to meeting the needs of gifted learners is a key challenge and opportunity for educators.⁶⁸

IMSA also incorporates professional learning to help teachers use culturally responsive techniques. Teachers go through the Intercultural Development Inventory (“IDI”) and reflect on their own cultural competence. IMSA emphasizes culturally responsive teaching and continues to seek strategies that can be transformative as the influence to build momentum to support equity, inclusion, and excellence.

Another key component of professional learning is sharing among teachers to identify and implement practices that are most effective for supporting struggling and/or under-resourced students. For example, at IMSA, teachers are encouraged to look at gaps in performance between students of different backgrounds and to develop and apply strategies to address these gaps. Teachers with success in these areas are encouraged to share. For example, some teachers may need to shift to a mastery-based approach when it comes to assessment. Rather than gauge success at the beginning of a unit, they can provide an opportunity for students to show their learning at different times. Assessment continually guides instruction. Based upon information about student progress, educators can share resources in a variety of subject areas to provide additional scaffolding for students who may need it. Learning plans, such as work with tutors, peer tutors, the writing center, or lab skills may also be incorporated to support student success.⁶⁹

Professional Learning Supports Administrators. When implementing programs

⁶⁷ D. Rea, Director of Instructional Services, Du Quoin District 300, Interview, May 3, 2022.

⁶⁸ A. Sims, Principal, Lenart Regional Gifted Center, Interview, May 20, 2022.

⁶⁹ E. Glazer, Principal, IMSA, Interview, May 12, 2022.

to increase rigor at the grade level and in accelerated classes, professional development is needed not only for teachers but for administrators. For example, in West Chicago D33, increasing the readiness of students for advanced programs in high school requires administrators to examine their programming so that students are equipped to succeed.⁷⁰

Coaching and Modeling Enhance Professional Learning. Professional learning may also reach beyond formal training, workshops, conferences to classroom coaching and modeling. For example, in Elgin U-46, through the AIMS early enrichment program, professional learning occurs when enrichment specialists model critical thinking strategies in the classroom. Teachers observe weekly enrichment “push in” lessons and gain insights into student responses to challenging experiences. Similarly, in Elgin’s summer programs staffed by Center for Talent Development (“CTD”), teachers can observe or participate as teaching assistants and gain tools as they observe their students. They can also act as “talent scouts” to better understand student strengths.⁷¹

Talent Development Embraces a Critical “Mindshift.” A theme with respect to professional development that emerged during interviews is that developing talents of learners from diverse racial, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds requires a shared understanding of advanced learners and their needs. As April Wells, Gifted Coordinator in Elgin District U-46 notes, this involves a “mindshift” that enrichment is for all learners and that scaffolding can be used to develop the talents of students while meeting their individual needs.⁷²

VI. Reaching Out to Diverse Stakeholders

By reaching out to all members of the school community stakeholders about opportunities for gifted and advanced programs, districts break down information barriers that contribute to inequity. This may include outreach via the district website, publications, information

⁷⁰ W. Del Toro, Coordinator for Teaching and Learning, L. Deluca, Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation, and G. Trejo, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, West Chicago D33, Interview May 13, 2022.

⁷¹ A. Wells, Gifted Coordinator, District U-46, Interview, May 20, 2022.

⁷² A. Wells, Gifted Coordinator, District U-46, Interview, May 20, 2022.

nights, and family visits in connection with enriched and advanced programs.

"The more we can wrap around supports and engage in meaningful ways with families, we'll have a better chance of really improving outcomes for more students."

-April Wells, Gifted Coordinator, Elgin U-46

Several examples of this outreach emerged through this case study including, but not limited, to the following:

Key Insights:

A multitude of potential channels exist for community and family outreach. The following list includes several channels for outreach that emerged during interviews:

- **Website Communication.** All six schools or districts in our study communicated about their equity mission through their websites. For example, La Grange District 102 strives to create a common language and purpose around "equity" through its website.⁷³ This equity mission encompasses gifted and advanced programs, as conveyed in District 102's Talent Development Program description:

In line with the national conversation on diversity, equity, and inclusion within programs and services for high ability students, the Talent Development Program Services views this as a catalyst in discussions and decision-making. The Talent Development Program Services team engages in a variety of professional learning on this important conversation.⁷⁴

⁷³ K. Boxell, Director of Instructional Equity & Accountability, C. Finch, Director of Curriculum, R. Lange, Talent Development Coordinator, and L. McShane, Director of Assessments, La Grange District 102, Interview, May 6, 2022.

⁷⁴ District 102 Website. (2022). *Equity: Programs and Activities*. <https://www.dist102.k12.il.us/page/equity>

In furtherance of its effort to improve communication to stakeholders, District 102's equity committee includes a subgroup focusing on Talent Development. Through this subcommittee, communications are clarified to provide a shared understanding about the talent development program's offerings and identification protocol.

- **Handbook.** By including a handbook describing their Gifted and Advanced Education programs, Du Quoin makes information available to the community. Also, this information is presented to the school board, which is an "arm" to the community and a source of information and outreach for individual members of the community. West Chicago D33 also makes a handbook available on its website.⁷⁵
- **Information Sessions.** Holding periodic virtual and/or in person meetings to share information about advanced programs is another way to reach out to families. To make these sessions welcoming to families who speak languages other than English at home, having translators available during parent information sessions is helpful for reducing language barriers.⁷⁶
- **Family Outreach.** Elgin U-46 intentionally connects student experiences to support home/school and community partnerships. For example, the district hosts a summer enrichment program that includes families in learning the language of the discipline and provides higher level thinking tools. Addressing barriers can also happen on a personal level; in Elgin U-46, Gifted Coordinator April Wells has visited student homes to explain to families why enrichment programs may be of interest to their children. For in-school talent development programs, helping parents to understand what students are learning is a positive step.

⁷⁵D. Rea, Director of Instructional Services, Du Quoin District 300, Interview, May 3, 2022; W. Del Toro, Coordinator for Teaching and Learning, L. Deluca, Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation, and G. Trejo, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, West Chicago D33, Interview May 13, 2022.

⁷⁶ A. Wells, Gifted Coordinator, District U-46, Interview, May 20, 2022.

AIM teacher Elizabeth Aldana emphasizes that with respect to Covid-19 remote-learning, one advantage was having families observe classroom lessons, which led to increased understanding of learning and connections to the classroom.⁷⁷ Also, when U-46 brings in professional learning programs for teachers, a corresponding lane is provided to families, providing them with tools to support their learners.⁷⁸

- **Parent Advisory Council.** In addition to providing resources to families, home/school collaboration provides educators with insight from parents to support their children. For example, in West Chicago D33, a Gifted Parent Advisory Council, a committee including parents, teachers, administrators, and community members, provided channels for communicating about the program as well as for gathering input from stakeholders.⁷⁹
- **Informing School/District Staff.** Providing opportunities for all district staff to understand the benefits of gifted and advanced programming is another way that some districts in this study support equity and access.⁸⁰ By sharing the idea that all students are “thinkers” whose talents must be developed, districts can leverage staff relationships and knowledge of students to support identification and outreach for gifted and advanced programs.⁸¹
- **Targeted Enrichment Programs.** Pre-enrollment enrichment programs that intentionally welcome students from diverse backgrounds and introduce them to advanced learning

⁷⁷M. Gomez De LaTorre and E. Aldana, Gifted Specialists, and B. Davis, Gifted Office Secretary, U-46, Interview, May 4, 2022.

⁷⁸A. Wells, Gifted Coordinator, District U-46, Interview, May 20, 2022.

⁷⁹W. Del Toro, Coordinator for Teaching and Learning, L. Deluca, Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation, and G. Trejo, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, West Chicago D33, Interview, May 13, 2022.

⁸⁰W. Del Toro, Coordinator for Teaching and Learning, L. Deluca, Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation, and G. Trejo, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, West Chicago D33, Interview, May 13, 2022; D. Rea, Director of Instructional Services, Du Quoin District 300, Interview, May 3, 2022; A. Wells, Gifted Coordinator, District U-46, Interview, May 20, 2022.

⁸¹M. Gomez De LaTorre and E. Aldana, Gifted Specialists, and B. Davis, Gifted Office Secretary, U-46, Interview, May 4, 2022.

opportunities also support increased access. IMSA illustrates this through its pre-enrollment programs such as the “PROMISE” outreach program for Middle School students. The PROMISE program places a priority on recruiting students from diverse backgrounds, supporting IMSA’s efforts to reflect the population and talents of students throughout the state.⁸² Data reflects the success of the FY21 PROMISE Pre-Enrollment Program for recruiting 7th-9th Graders with CLED (“Culturally, Linguistically, and Economically Diverse”) backgrounds to IMSA; 1 in 5 students from IMSA’s Class of 2022 are former PROMISE participants. Moreover, over the past year, IMSA’s residential high school has served students who are gifted in mathematics and science from 54 counties across Illinois. 78% of PROMISE participants who applied to IMSA were accepted.⁸³ Although IMSA is unique in this study as a selective high school that enrolls students throughout the state, their success highlights the potential impact of reaching out to diverse families by welcoming students to engaging and interest-based activities that provide enrichment and develop relationships that encourage interest in advanced programming and information sharing.

Listen and Learn from Families School and district leaders support student success by developing ways to connect with families and engage them in meaningful partnerships.

As district leaders from West Chicago D33, Du Quoin, and District 102 suggested, organizing committees that include parents from the school community, and organizing parent groups is one potential way to gain feedback and gather perspectives. In Elgin U-46, building parent partnerships by providing tools and resources in connection with professional development and enrichment programs is another outreach channel for gaining insights from parents about the strengths and needs of their children.

⁸²E. Glazer, Principal, IMSA, Interview, May 12, 2022.

⁸³FY23 Budget Requests, Illinois House Appropriations Committee Presentation, February 10, 2022. Dr. Evan Glazer, IMSA President, Slide 3 & 9. [https://go.boarddocs.com/il/imsa/Board.nsf/files/CCBK4R4FF63E/\\$file/FY23_IMSA%20Budget%20Requests%20House%20Appropriations.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/il/imsa/Board.nsf/files/CCBK4R4FF63E/$file/FY23_IMSA%20Budget%20Requests%20House%20Appropriations.pdf)

Limitations of Study

This study highlights several ways in which districts are implementing research-based practices to support equity and inclusion. However, the results need to be understood in light of its limitations in three respects.

First, the selection of schools limited the small sample size (about 57 schools or districts) who were invited to answer the Phase I Poll based upon factors such as IAGC relationships with school/district personnel, inclusion in IAGC's database, size, region, and attendance at IAGC events. The schools who were interviewed are a subset of those who answered the Phase I Poll, and although they represent different sizes, and demographic communities throughout Illinois, they cannot fully represent the diversity and scope of schools throughout Illinois.

Second, districts were chosen for Phase II interviews in this study based on their perceptions and reports of successful practices in the Phase I poll. No standard "metric" was used by IAGC to measure "demonstrated success" with respect to any practice. Moreover, the "Key Insights" gained through interviews and artifacts in this study are not exhaustive with respect to each practice. However, these insights are informative, represent a broad variety of

educational settings, and provide valuable insights and guidance for diverse schools and districts throughout Illinois.

Third, this study does not address differences in funding and/or resources available to districts. The authors do note, as in the case of using multiple assessments, that districts have efficiently chosen to use resources available to them. However, we recognize that many of these practices do require allocation of available funding or an increase in funds. We acknowledge that budgets are necessary considerations when planning for professional development, enrichment programs, personnel, and curriculum and instructional resources to support equity and inclusion.

Although this study does not substantially take resources and finances into account, the highlighted practices are grounded in research and therefore demonstrate promise with respect to achieving and maintaining measurable results. Accordingly, to support school equity plans, this study may provide guidance to schools as they make decisions for allocating available Title I, Title II, local, and/or evidence-based state funds to support equity and access to advanced programs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As schools and districts move forward with plans to support equity and access to advanced programs, IAGC recommends the evidence-based practices discussed in this study.⁸⁴ Although the six schools and districts in this profile offer a small sample of Illinois schools that are at different stages of implementation, they provide a wealth of practical, key insights and opportunities with respect to the use of evidence-based practices. Through this report, IAGC encourages schools and districts to consider similarities and perspectives from entities to which they most closely relate.

The six districts or schools in this study differ in the size, community setting (urban, rural, and suburban), and the demographics of students served. Despite their differences, the six participants in this project are similar in that they share a commitment to support equity and inclusion, an eagerness to build and strengthen stakeholder relationships to further equity goals, and a willingness to embrace innovation. Also, and perhaps most importantly, these schools and districts share an ability to reflect on their own data and take collective action to provide equity, access, and excellence in advanced programming.

⁸⁴Section 14A-32(d) of the Education Workforce Equity Act requires that by November 1, 2022, each district shall review disaggregated data and develop a plan "to expand access to its accelerated placement program and to ensure the teaching capacity necessary to meet the increased demand." 105 ILCS 5/14A-32(d)

Compellingly, each subject acknowledges that their journey is unfinished. Yet, as with any challenging endeavor, we can celebrate and recognize incremental progress to keep momentum. Looking forward, we hope that these six portraits inspire a diverse and rich collection of examples that can serve to connect, guide, and inspire educators and stakeholders who seek action steps to create environments where all children can access learning to reach their dreams.

Acknowledgements

The authors and IAGC would like to thank the following individuals for their generous gifts of time, expertise, and support of this project through interviews and sharing of resources. We appreciate their commitment to equity and access to advanced learning, and their willingness to share their insights:

Kathy Boxell, Director of Instructional Equity & Accountability, La Grange District 102
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Special thanks to **Sneha Shah-Coltrane**, Director, Advanced Learning and Gifted Education North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, for her support and guidance on this project. We thank Ms. Shah-Coltrane and her colleagues, **Beth Cross**, North Carolina State Consultant for Advanced Learning and Gifted Education, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, **Matthew Makel, PhD**, Associate Research Professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Education, and **Stephanie R. Cyrus**, State Consultant, Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG) & Advanced Programs North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, research North Carolina Department of Public Education for their work on the Guidebook, *Critical Actions to Realize Equity and Excellence in Gifted Education: Changing Mindsets, Policies, and Practices* (February 2021) that was a source of inspiration for this case study.

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Appendix A

Phase I Poll⁸⁵

The following list includes 8 practices that can support equity and inclusion. *
 Please indicate your school or district's level of successful implementation with
 any of the following practices:

	This practice is implemented with demonstrated results	This practice is consistently implemented	This practice is implemented	N/A
Using multiple assessments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing early-grade enrichment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Universally screening students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using local school-based norms for placement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing a continuum of services (i.e., curriculum and instruction)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using progress monitoring to maintain growth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing professional learning in gifted/advanced education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reaching out to diverse stakeholders (i.e. families, communities, cultures)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

⁸⁵ In addition, Phase I Poll included the option to identify practices not listed. Also, names, titles, district/school, city/town, and county information for respondents was collected.

Appendix B

2019 School/District Achievement/Advanced Programming Demographic Data

School/ District	State Testing (IAR/SAT) 2019 School Report Card ⁸⁶ (approximate percentages)	Accelerated, Gifted Programs, & Early College Coursework - Illinois school Report Card ⁸⁷
Elgin U-46	<p>IAR (ELA), 27% of students met or exceeded standards</p> <p>IAR (Math), 27% met or exceeded standards</p> <p>SAT (ELA) approximately 27% of students met or exceeded standards</p> <p>SAT (Math) 25% met or exceeded standards in mathematics.</p>	<p>20.3% of students placed in accelerated classes (15.1% low income, 25.7% White, 10.1% Black, 16.7% Hispanic, 36.5% Asian, 14% American Indian 14%, 22.8% Two or More Races, 4.5% EL)</p> <p>8% students identified as gifted (5.1% Low Income, 9.5% White, 5.3% Black, 6.3% Hispanic, 16.8% Asian, 3.9% American Indian, 11.2% Two or More Races, .7% EL)</p> <p>30.5% of students take early college courses. AP, IB, and dual credit are offered.</p> <p>In U-46, 27.7% of students take AP classes (32.2% White, 10.1% Black, 24.6% Hispanic, 46.9% Asian, 19.4% American Indian, 26.3% two or more races, 22.3% low income, and 16.9% English Language Learners.)⁸⁸</p>
La Grange 102	<p>IAR (ELA) 66% of students met or exceeded standards</p> <p>IAR (Math) 55% met or exceeded standards.</p>	<p>16.8% of students in District 102 have been identified for gifted services. In District 102, this is the subject/content area accelerated classes in the Talent Development Program. (19.4% White students, 6.3% Black students, 9.9% of Hispanic students, 23.6% of Asian students, 19.1% Two or More races, 7.2% low income.)</p>
West Chicago D33	<p>IAR (ELA) 17% of students met or exceeded standards.</p> <p>IAR (Math) 18% met or exceeded standards.</p>	<p>12.8% of students in the district are enrolled in accelerated/gifted classes. (30.5% White, 9.7% Hispanic, 20% Asian, 32.7% Two or More races, 3.6% English Language Learners, 10% of low-income students).</p>
Du Quoin 300	<p>IAR (ELA) 41% of the students met or exceeded standards</p> <p>IAR (Math) 24% met or exceeded standards on the</p> <p>SAT (ELA) 30% of students met or exceeded standards</p> <p>SAT (Math) 28% met or exceeded standards</p>	<p>For 2021, in Du Quoin Elementary School, approximately 12% of the students were identified as gifted. 80% White, 20% Multiracial, 33% low income.</p> <p>20% of students enrolled in high school AP classes are low income.⁸⁹</p>
Lenart Regional Gifted Center	<p>IAR (ELA) 89.7% of students met or exceeded standards.</p> <p>IAR (Math) 85.5% met or exceeded standards.</p>	<p>N/A (Lenart is a Gifted Center, all children are identified for gifted and advanced programming. In addition, the school uses a variety of assessments to match enriched and accelerated programming to meet the individual needs of its students.)</p>
Illinois Math and Science Academy	<p>ACT 31.9 average composite score</p> <p>SAT (English/Reading/Writing) 685 average</p> <p>SAT (Mathematics) 718 Average⁹⁰</p>	<p>IMSA is a selective enrollment school. IMSA offers a wide variety of AP classes in multiple STEM and Humanities subject areas, including several post-AP level classes such as Multivariable Calculus, Number Theory, and Numerical Analysis.</p>

⁸⁶2019 data is used with respect to state testing, as the School Report card indicates that data in 2021 could be affected by Covid-19. pertaining to IEP/disabilities is not included, as it is beyond the scope of this report.

⁸⁷ 2021-2022 Report Card data used in this column unless otherwise indicated.

⁸⁸ 2020-2021 Illinois Report Card.

⁸⁹ Data provided by Diana Rea, June 1, 2022. 2021-2022 School Year Data.

⁹⁰ [Illinois Math and Science Academy Profile](#), 2021-2022, p. 2.