



A Call for Educational Equity and Access to Advanced Programming in Illinois Schools

Directed To:

- Education policy makers, Illinois legislators, school district leadership

Key Points:

- Lack of access to gifted and advanced programming in Illinois disproportionately impacts low-income students and students from culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse backgrounds.
- Several promising practices are recommended to support equity, access, and inclusion for all children to receive appropriate gifted/advanced programming in Illinois Schools.

Policy Recommendations:

- Establish school district accountability for providing equity, inclusion, and access to advanced programming.
- Provide dedicated funding for advanced programming and gifted education services and implementation of promising practices.
- Clarify and implement data reporting requirements related to advanced programming and gifted education.

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

The Illinois Association for Gifted Children (IAGC) is committed to enabling all children, regardless of background, to have their learning needs met with appropriately advanced and challenging courses and programs. IAGC empowers educators, families, and communities by advancing effective practices, programs, and policies to promote the development of gifted and talented children throughout Illinois.

*In this report, please note that “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.

Current Status of Gifted/Advanced Education in Illinois

- Although the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) acknowledges that children with gifts and talents have unique needs traditionally not met in regular school settings, there is no legal mandate for identifying or serving gifted students in Illinois. As a result, services are dependent on local decisions and are highly variable across the state.
- Illinois is one of twenty-three states that has no dedicated state funding for gifted education,¹ and schools are not accountable for using “gifted investments” allocated under the Evidence-based Funding Model (105 ILCS 5/18-8.15(b)(2)(M)) to meet the needs of children with advanced learning needs.
- The last funding for gifted programs was \$19 million in 2003. As a result, the percentage of Illinois districts offering gifted services declined from more than 80% in 2004 to 27% in 2016.² Low-income districts were most likely to eliminate their gifted programs, affecting the most vulnerable students.
- Students in low-poverty schools in Illinois are more than twice as likely to participate in gifted programs than students in high-poverty schools.³
- 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.⁴
- Illinois received a C in a 2018 report that graded states on services offered to high ability students.⁵ Schools in Illinois are much less likely to have gifted programs than the national average (35.2% vs. 68.3%).⁶

Promising Practices for Equity, Access, & Inclusion in Illinois Schools

The following practices support equity, access, and inclusion for children to receive appropriate gifted/advanced programming in Illinois Schools:

1. **Use multiple tools to assess exceptional potential and provide several pathways into advanced programs** when assessing student need for advanced or accelerated programming.⁷
2. **Provide 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.⁸
3. **Universally screen** students for advanced potential.⁹
4. **Use local, school-based norms** for placement in accelerated and advanced learning programs.¹⁰
5. **Ensure 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.¹¹
6. **Provide 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.¹²

Policy Recommendations

1. **Establish school district accountability for providing equity, inclusion, and access to advanced programming.** Accountability, incentives, and support are needed for school districts to comply with existing statutes and to implement practices for equity, inclusion, and access to advanced programming.
2. **Provide funding for advanced programming and gifted education services.** Funding is critical to ensure that all students have access to advanced programming that develops potential and meets learning needs. This funding should be used to support school districts with implementing promising practices outlined above.
3. **Clarify and implement data reporting requirements related to advanced programming and gifted education.** Several data reporting requirements related to gifted, advanced, and accelerated programming are provided under the School Code (105 ILCS 5/14A-32; 105 ILCS 5/10-17a). Guidance and clarification for school districts is needed to implement these requirements so that consistent, reliable data is available to inform families and support continual improvement in identification practices and advanced learning services.

Conclusion

For equity to become a reality in our education system, we must provide students from all cultural, socio-economic, and linguistic backgrounds with access to appropriate programming to support growth and success.

The Illinois Association for Gifted Children encourages your participation and support with this call to action. To learn more, please visit our website at iaqcgifted.org or contact Patricia Steinmeyer, Executive Director at director@iaqcgifted.org.

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