

## Gifted Education Feedback on ISBE ESSA Implementation Plan Draft II

### Challenging State Academic Standards and Assessments

Effective educational systems for gifted students are characterized by challenging and conceptually rich core curricula, support from educators with specialized training, intentional grouping with peers to facilitate differentiated instruction, and flexibility in the level and pace of instruction provided, including opportunities for accelerated learning.

Therefore, IAGC recommends ISBE:

- Take advantage of language in ESSA allowing states to use computer adaptive assessments as achievement measures for school accountability. Further, IAGC recommends ESSA include in computer adaptive test design requirements the ability to reliably assess student mastery of state academic standards at least two full years beyond students' current grade levels of instruction.
- Seek permission from the U.S. Department of Education to assess students at their current grade level of instruction for subjects and courses in which students are taught above the grade level typical for same-age students, at least until computer adaptive assessments can be implemented.
- Weight state assessment scores for students learning in accelerated (above grade-level) settings to ensure the accountability system does not unintentionally deter schools from making appropriate use of accelerated placements.
- Specify that individuals with specific expertise in the appropriate assessment of gifted and advanced students will be engaged in the peer review process for state assessments.
- Expand strategies on providing access to advanced mathematics coursework, including:
  - Developing policies on acceleration and credit flexibility to ensure advanced middle school students can earn high school credit for successfully completing high school-level coursework or demonstrating mastery of standards addressed in high school-level courses. And, specify that policies will be developed to ensure that high school credits earned by middle school students will be transferrable from district to district.
  - Expanding virtual learning opportunities for students with limited access to advanced coursework locally, while ensuring that virtual learning opportunities are *actively facilitated* by teachers with specific training in supporting younger academically advanced students.

Additionally, articulate a process for identifying additional approved providers to expand course offerings and opportunities to serve students with specialized needs.

- Articulating strategies for identifying and supporting students demonstrating advanced achievement or exceptional potential in mathematics prior to middle school, recognizing that developing math talent is a long term process and that high ability low income students in particular need support in primary grades (in addition to middle school) to develop readiness for advanced mathematics coursework in secondary grades and to fully develop their potential.

### **Accountability, Support and Improvement for Schools**

IAGC recommends ISBE:

- Include among “academic indicators” the percentage of students participating in advanced coursework by subject area and student subgroup.
- (Similar to the indicator for former EL students) Include longitudinal data on students who have previously scored in the top achievement level or top 10% on state assessments to help incentivize providing appropriate instruction and support to high ability low income students so that their achievement does not decline relative to similarly able students from more advantaged backgrounds.
- Include among indicators of “access to advanced coursework” access to elementary and middle school gifted education programming and access to above grade-level coursework in core subject areas at all grade levels.
- Elaborate on “equitable participation” in dual credit, AP, and IB coursework to ensure that equity is achieved by expanding access for students from underrepresented subgroups rather than by eliminating advanced courses for all students within a district.
- Articulate a process for maintaining definitions of “college and career readiness” that is research-based to avoid painting a false picture of readiness that would be misleading to families and harmful to students. Maintain the “and” language in Draft 2 regarding the combination of GPA, college entrance exam scores, and two or more additional indicators of college and career readiness.
- Adopt a linear regression or value table growth model focused on individual student growth rather than a growth to proficiency model or hybrid model. 1/3 of Illinois students are already achieving at or above the proficiency level. Schools should be rewarded for ensuring that all students, including students who are already proficient, maintain or accelerate their growth. A growth to proficiency model would ignore a large percentage of Illinois’

students and would not incentivize addressing inequities in access to gifted education services and advanced coursework for students from underrepresented subgroups.

- If a value table growth model is selected, assign weights to state assessments scores by achievement level such that schools have incentivizes to help students at the “proficient” level to move to the “exceeds” level and to ensure that students at the exceeds level do not regress toward the mean. Please note that ESSA regulations state “the achievement indicator must include a measure of student performance at the proficient level against a state’s academic achievement standards, and may also include measures of student performance below or above the proficient level, so long as (1) a school receives less credit for the performance of a student that is not yet proficient than for the performance of a student at or above the proficient level; and (2) the credit a school receives for the performance of more advanced students does not fully compensate for the performance of a student who is not yet proficient.” Based on this language, IAGC recommends that ISBE weight scores by achievement level using the following multipliers:
  - Level 1: X 0
  - Level 2: X 0.5
  - Level 3 (Proficient): X 1.0
  - Level 4 (Exceeds): X 1.4
- In the overall weighting of indicators, prioritize academic growth and college readiness over other indicators. And, include an “excellence indicator” that reflects access to gifted education services and advanced coursework and advanced achievement on state and college readiness assessments.

## **Supporting Excellent Educators**

IAGC Recommends:

- ISBE earmark a portion of Title II funds specifically for developing and delivering professional development on academic acceleration, differentiating curriculum and instruction for advanced learners, and supporting the psychosocial development of gifted students.
- ISBE articulate how individuals with substantial expertise in gifted education will be engaged in the work of IL-EMPOWER to ensure that training provided supports talent development and appropriate curriculum design and instruction for gifted and advanced students.
- ISBE develop a process for identifying professional development providers beyond IL-EMPOWER to ensure districts have access to necessary resources.

