Funding

Many states recognize the importance of providing additional funding for G/T students. A recent report from EdBuild found that 32 states currently provide additional funding for G/T programs in their state. States have chosen to provide this additional funding in several different ways:

- State Funding Formula (11 states): These states provide G/T funding through their state's primary school funding formula. In some cases, the funding is designated specifically for G/T programs while in other cases districts may but are not required to spend the funding on G/T programs.
- Non-Competitive Grants (18 states): These states provide grants to districts, often based on their total student enrollment, for qualifying G/T programs.
- Competitive Grants (Two states): Delaware and **Indiana** provide school districts with G/T funding through competitive grants.
- Other (One state): **North Dakota** provides G/T funding to districts by reimbursing them for a portion of their G/T expenses.[25]

Accountability

States vary widely in the level of accountability to which they hold gifted programs. As of a 2014 survey, only about half of states collected data on identified gifted learners, and the depth and detail of that data varies. While at least 18 states "required districts to submit gifted program plans" to the state, at least 19 states "did not monitor or audit [district] gifted programs as of 2014."[26]

AS OF A 2014 SURVEY, ONLY ABOUT HALF OF STATES COLLECTED DATA ON IDENTIFIED GIFTED LEARNERS, AND THE DEPTH AND DETAIL OF THAT DATA VARIES.

In the past decade, at least three states have passed policies relating to accountability. **Missouri** required school report cards to include gifted program and student data, **Ohio** mandated a new accountability indicator reflecting gifted student performance and services, and **Texas** established standards to evaluate gifted programs.[27]

In a recent report on the extent to which states' accountability systems support high-achieving students, the Fordham Institute recommends that states prioritize high-achievers in their accountability systems. Fordham argues that most state accountability systems currently prioritize bringing low achievers up to proficiency, which incentivizes schools to neglect high-achievers. Instead, the report suggests that state accountability systems could better serve high-achievers by giving greater weight to student growth and students attaining advanced achievement levels, as well as by identifying gifted students as a separate subgroup.[28]

Types of Gifted Programs

Most gifted student education state policies enacted over the past decade address gifted programs, rather than establishing or modifying identification processes or accountability systems. States offer gifted students a variety of that can be roughly classified into acceleration strategies and grouping strategies.

Acceleration Strategies

Generally, states have implemented two main types of acceleration strategies: content-based acceleration and grade-based acceleration. Content-based acceleration includes subject acceleration (for example, a third-grade student in fourth-grade math), curriculum compacting (teachers adjust instruction for advanced students in regular classrooms), dual enrollment or participation in Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate programs. Grade-based acceleration includes actions such as grade skipping, early admission to the next level of schooling or early graduation.

Many concerns with acceleration center on the ability of accelerated students to fit in with older students and the need for greater social and emotional support. However, research studies observe positive effects of acceleration on students' academic performance and no negative effect on social skills and development.[29] Additionally, many forms of acceleration may prove more cost-effective than other gifted programs and may even "save taxpayers money by advancing gifted learners through public schools more quickly."[30] In addition, teachers overwhelmingly favor grade- and content-based acceleration as strategies for supporting advanced students,[31] although teachers may find curriculum compacting particularly challenging.[32]

Content-based and grade-based acceleration tactics overlap with growing support to move beyond age- and grade-based advancement toward a competency- or performance-based system. This shift from an emphasis on seat time to an emphasis on mastery of content could benefit gifted students by allowing them to advance at their own pace.

ACCELERATION STRATEGIES

Some content acceleration strategies, such as dual enrollment or AP participation, can benefit not only gifted students but many other student groups. To find out more about these strategies, including strategies in your state, check out these resources from Education Commission of the States:

- 50-state comparisons on Dual Enrollment and Advanced Placement
- Advanced Placement: Model policy components
- Dual Enrollment: A strategy to improve college-going and college completion among rural students
- Dual Enrollment: 13 model policy components

Grouping Strategies

Grouping strategies can overlap with content-based acceleration, but in general, refer to clustering advanced students together within or outside of a classroom to receive separate instruction. These strategies are sometimes referred to as pull-out programs, clustering, ability grouping or performance-based grouping. Magnet schools or special state schools may also provide an avenue for grouping advanced students together.

Grouping strategies may face criticism if they lead to tracking students. Tracking can have negative effects on students by labeling low-income and minority students as low-performing early on in their educational careers. Because low-income and minority students are more likely to be taught by less-qualified teachers and to receive fewer supports at school,[33] ability grouping can have long-term effects on these students who may only need minimal additional support to reach their gifted potential. According to some research, tracking may exacerbate inequality with little effect on the overall achievement in the school or class.[34]

Key Issue: Equity

Low-income and minority students are less likely to be identified as gifted or to participate in gifted education programs.[35] A lack of school- and district-level data complicates efforts to identify the cause of these disparities, but some researchers have noted that "the decentralization of gifted education funding and policy could be one of the reasons for persisting and widely varying excellence gaps."[36] Black students, for example, are "less likely to attend schools with gifted programs,"[37] which may be because these students are more likely to attend schools in poorer districts that lack the resources to maintain gifted programs.

LOW-INCOME AND MINORITY STUDENTS ARE LESS LIKELY TO BE IDENTIFIED AS GIFTED OR TO PARTICIPATE IN GIFTED EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

- **Screening:** Universal screening has been shown to have a significant positive effect on the identification of black and Latino gifted students.[38] However, Education Commission of the States is not aware of any states that require statewide universal screening for gifted students. In addition, a survey of middle school gifted programs across the country found that states/schools most commonly use alternative assessments—such as bilingual verbal ability tests or student portfolios or interviews—and teacher recommendations to identify historically underrepresented gifted students, as opposed to universal screening.[39]
- **Achievement:** Underserved students are also less likely to be identified as gifted because most states emphasize academic achievement in identification. Minority students have been historically underserved by their schools; for example, they are more likely to be taught by less qualified, less effective teachers. Because these groups have performed worse academically than their white peers, they are less likely to be identified as gifted when emphasizing academic achievement.[40]
- **Racial Disparities:** Additionally, disparities in gifted education have been attributed to "lower social and financial capital," which may give minority families "less access to information about identification processes or to private psychologists or others who can test them for giftedness outside of school." Due to teacher perceptions of different races, racial disparities may also be linked to unequal identification.[41] For example, one recent study showed that black students with non-black teachers are less likely to receive gifted services.[42] This identification gap may be due to "differences in backgrounds or biases in [non-black teachers'] judgments or expectations" or to differences in the way students perform and behave with non-own-race teachers. Even parents' level of involvement may differ with own-race teachers.[43]

Racial disparities in gifted students may be caused by **unequal identification** and **unequal access** to gifted programs.

Policy Considerations

While states may leave many G/T program decisions to districts, state policymakers may want to consider how state-level policies can support improved identification and accountability practices, which may help alleviate existing inequities, increase the number and availability of high-quality programs, and ultimately better serve all gifted students.

Identification

- Consider fully funding existing mandates for gifted student identification.
- Consider how the state could support districts' ability to conduct universal screening.
- Explore alternative forms of identification, particularly those that are not dependent on academic achievement alone, and offer students multiple opportunities for identification.
- Consider developing uniform statewide criteria for gifted student identification.
- Consider providing professional development to teachers to improve their effectiveness at identifying gifted students.
- Consider bolstering state and district efforts to recruit and retain minority teachers.

Accountability

- Consider how the state can provide schools and districts with standards for high-quality gifted programs and guidance for their implementation.
- Collect data on gifted students and programs across the state to better identify how districts support gifted students and better identify inequities between districts.
- Emphasize high-achievers in state accountability systems by giving greater weight to student growth and students attaining advanced achievement levels and by identifying gifted students as a separate subgroup.

Additional Resources

- A wide variety of resources on gifted children and education can be found at the **National Association for Gifted Children**.
- For more on curriculum compacting, see **Curriculum Compacting: A Systematic Procedure for Modifying the Curriculum for Above Average Ability Students.**
- For examples of language from state acceleration policies and a Checklist for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy developed by the National Work Group on Acceleration, see **Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy**.
- For a state-by-state look at gifted education funding, see **EdBuild's report**.
- Gifted education centers housed in colleges of education include:
  - The University of Connecticut's **Renzulli Center for Creativity, Gifted Education, and Talent Development.**
  - The University of Denver's **Institute for the Development of Gifted Education.**
  - Purdue University's **Gifted Education Resource Institute**.

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