

## **Illinois K-2 Workgroup Indicator Discussion Guide Enrichment and Advanced Instruction**

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### **Indicator Summary**

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) defines gifted students as “students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities.” ESSA encourages states to look at performance and growth across the achievement spectrum, but has few requirements. It is mostly up to states to ensure that their growth metrics, as well as their other school quality measures, encourage student performance at advanced levels and equitable access to gifted education.<sup>1</sup>

Enrichment and advanced instruction encompass a wide range of programs, instructional methods, and supports for high-ability students.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately these opportunities are less often available to low-income students and students of color, because they are not screened or recommended for these programs, or because their schools do not offer them.<sup>3</sup> For K-2 students, gifted or enrichment opportunities are less likely to be formalized or to pull students out of a general education classroom, except in cases of children skipping ahead a grade or entering kindergarten early. Examples include pull-out instruction by a teacher specializing in gifted education, ability grouping in class activities to allow advanced students to pursue advanced work, specialized before or after school enrichment, assessing students above grade level to target areas of strength, and/or magnet programs. Because the early grades are such a critical period of child learning and development, they are an opportunity to build a larger and more equitable pipeline of high-performers, and set gifted students on a trajectory to excel at even higher levels as they advance in school.<sup>4</sup>

Research on gifted education in early grades generally suggests that appropriately targeted acceleration and strategies like ability grouping can improve young gifted students’ performance and increase their engagement in school without negatively impacting social and emotional development.<sup>5,6</sup> Generally, gifted students perform better in accelerated programs.<sup>7</sup> But, not every instance of gifted and talented instruction yields higher growth than students would find in a general education setting, which speaks to mixed quality of gifted instruction.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, because gifted programs are more likely to identify white and/or high-socioeconomic status students, ability grouping, pull-out gifted instruction, and magnet programs can deepen segregation in schools.<sup>9</sup>

One in three Illinois students score proficient or higher on state tests.<sup>10</sup> School districts in Illinois are not required to offer specific gifted programs, and most decisions around gifted programs are up to school districts.<sup>11</sup> For example, approximately 40 percent of Illinois districts allow students to enter kindergarten or first grade early, and grade-based acceleration past those years is rare.<sup>12</sup> Access to other classroom-based gifted or enrichment opportunities within early grades are not well understood. A survey of Illinois’ largest school districts found wide

disparities in gifted enrollment and access by students' race, income, and dual language learner (DLL) status.<sup>13</sup> That finding prompted the passage of the "Untapped Potential Act" in 2016, which aims to encourage and fund gifted education and require districts to report data on gifted students, but the Act has not yet been fully implemented.<sup>14</sup>

### **Measurement Options and ESSA Alignment**

In their comments on the Illinois ESSA plan, the Illinois Association for Gifted Children (IAGC) recommends an "excellence indicator" to measure access and equity in advanced instruction. Some parts of this indicator could be applicable and measurable in early grades, such as rates of screening for entrance into gifted education, access to extracurricular activities, access to a teacher with a gifted education endorsement, and student participation in one or more gifted or accelerated opportunities. (This indicator shares many structural qualities with the "DLL Access to High-Quality Learning Opportunities" measure featured in the workgroup memo on dual language learners, so they have similar ESSA alignment ratings.)

### **Gifted Education Screening and Access Measure**

- **Valid and Reliable:** Maybe.
  - Illinois would either ask schools to self-certify that they used or offered some combination of research-driven enrichment and acceleration strategies, or invest in deeper onsite quality reviews for some or all schools. The state would also need to demonstrate that gifted interventions or strategies were backed by research. The research base on specific gifted instructional strategies is still growing, and may not be strong enough to support firm conclusions in all cases. Gifted and accelerated education is not well-defined in the early grades, and much of it may be embedded into a general education classroom. Offering gifted opportunities is also only a first step – to be effective for student learning, programs should also be high quality and accessible to gifted students from a variety of cultural, linguistic, geographic, or economic backgrounds.
- **Meaningfully Differentiated:** Maybe.
  - Many schools in Illinois might not have enough gifted students in early grades to meet group size requirements, and many do not currently offer formalized gifted instruction. Among schools who do have substantial numbers of gifted students per grade, many may offer similar resources and programs, throwing differentiation into doubt.
- **Comparable:** Maybe.
  - Illinois would need to define access to resources and supports carefully to ensure comparability, especially if schools self-report their offerings. Schools may claim to offer a gifted program, but their program might not meet quality standards.
- **Reportable Annually and by Subgroup:** Yes
  - These metrics can be reported annually; disaggregation by subgroup and grade level would be difficult, but theoretically possible (e.g. percentage of black students with access to a teacher with a gifted education endorsement), and group sizes would likely be small.
- **Additional Considerations:** Developing, defining, and validating an indicator that would be developmentally appropriate for young children, and collecting new data from schools, would require considerable work and resources. This indicator is also likely to prompt equity

concerns for both students and schools, even if it emphasizes equitable access to programs and closing gaps, because not every school and district has resources to offer a well-developed gifted program. It could also unintentionally encourage schools to lower the quality or intensity of their gifted programs in order to enroll the maximum number of students, or alter their gifted approach to take more gifted students out of general education classrooms.

### Examples from Other States

Of the 17 states who submitted ESSA plans in the first round of reviews, 6 including Illinois use growth measures that emphasize performance across the ability spectrum and give them substantial weight in school ratings.<sup>15</sup> While several states encourage access to advanced coursework and college and career readiness in high school via their accountability systems, few states include similar emphasis in K-8 grades, or report on achievement for gifted students as a subgroup.<sup>16</sup> No state thus far has proposed a measure of access to gifted education that focuses on early grades in their ESSA accountability systems.<sup>17</sup>

Outside of ESSA, many states have more formalized reporting on gifted and talented education than Illinois currently does:<sup>18</sup>

- 24 states require LEAs to report on their gifted education services and require districts to offer services at certain grade levels, including early grades.
- 10 states approve LEA gifted education plans.
- 11 states include a gifted education indicator, usually the number of students identified as gifted and/or students enrolled in advanced courses, in their state report cards.

### Pros/Cons of Using This Indicator in K-2 Accountability Ratings

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages growth and excellence across the achievement spectrum.</li> <li>• Emphasizes equitable access and could draw attention to gifted students from historically underrepresented groups and encourage schools to develop screening and enrichment opportunities for young children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting, defining, and gathering data on gifted children in Illinois is only just beginning. Resource/opportunity measures require further research and definition, and overly prescriptive requirements could prevent schools from doing what works best for their unique populations.</li> <li>• Known gaps in access to gifted services could be exacerbated by accountability without careful safeguards.</li> <li>• Difficult to define/measure quality in gifted services, especially for young students.</li> <li>• Resource-driven measures could penalize districts with very small populations or fewer resources overall.</li> <li>• Could introduce new complexities to an already crowded accountability system.</li> </ul>

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- <sup>1</sup> National Association for Gifted Children, "Questions and Answers about the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)," Accessed September 12, 2017. <http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Advocacy/ESSA%20Q%20%2B%20A.pdf>.
- <sup>2</sup> National Work Group on Acceleration, "Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy," *Journal of Advanced Academics*, vol. 21. no. 2 (2010).
- <sup>3</sup> David Card and Laura Giuliano, "Can Universal Screening Increase the Representation of Low Income and Minority Students in Gifted Education?," NBER Working Paper No. 21519, September, 2015. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w21519>.
- <sup>4</sup> Chester E. Finn and Brandon L. Wright, "Diversifying our Selective Colleges Begins in Kindergarten," *The High Flyer, Thomas R. Fordham Institute and the National Association for Gifted Children*, August 30, 2017. <https://edexcellence.net/articles/diversifying-our-selective-colleges-begins-in-kindergarten>.
- <sup>5</sup> Saiying Steenbergen-Hu, Matthew C. Makel, and Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, "What One Hundred Years of Research Says about the Effects of Ability Grouping and Acceleration on K-12 Students' Academic Achievement: Findings of Two Second-Order Meta-Analyses," *Review of Educational Research*, vol 86. no.4 (2016).
- <sup>6</sup> The Acceleration Institute, "Annotated Bibliography on Gifted Preschoolers and Early Entrance to Kindergarten," <http://accelerationinstitute.org/Resources/Bibliography/Bibliography.aspx?ID=8>
- <sup>7</sup> Steenbergen-Hu, 2016.
- <sup>8</sup> Sa A. Bui, Steven G. Craig, and Scott A. Imberman, "Is Gifted Education a Bright Idea? Assessing the Impact of Gifted and Talented Programs on Achievement," NBER Working Paper No. 17089, May, 2011. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w17089>.
- <sup>9</sup> Allison Roda, "How to End Segregation in New York City's Gifted and Talented Program," *The Hechinger Report*, January 28, 2016. <http://hechingerreport.org/how-to-end-segregation-in-new-york-citys-gifted-and-talented-program/>.
- <sup>10</sup> Illinois State Board of Education, "Illinois Report Card 2015-2016: Assessments".
- <sup>11</sup> Illinois Associated for Gifted Children, "Accelerate Illinois: Matching Student Placement in Courses with Their Capacity to Learn," 2017. <http://powerupp.org/upp-wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ACCELERATE-ILLINOIS-1.pdf>.
- <sup>12</sup> Illinois Associated for Gifted Children, 2017.
- <sup>13</sup> One Chance Illinois, "Untapped Potential," 2016. [http://onechanceillinois.org/oci-wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/OCI\\_Report\\_UP\\_Mar2016.pdf](http://onechanceillinois.org/oci-wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/OCI_Report_UP_Mar2016.pdf).
- <sup>14</sup> Illinois SB2970, 2016. <http://ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=099-0706>.
- <sup>15</sup> Brandon Wright, "Early ESSA plans don't do enough to signal that all students are important," *The High Flyer, Thomas R. Fordham Institute and the National Association for Gifted Children*, April 26, 2017. <https://edexcellence.net/articles/early-essa-plans-dont-do-enough-to-signal-that-all-students-are-important>.
- <sup>16</sup> Wright, 2017.
- <sup>17</sup> Alyson Klein, "Which School Quality factors Are States Including in Their ESSA Plans," *Education Week*, April 6, 2017. [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2017/04/which\\_school\\_quality\\_factors\\_d.html?intc=main-mpsmvs](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2017/04/which_school_quality_factors_d.html?intc=main-mpsmvs).
- <sup>18</sup> National Association for Gifted Children, "2014-2015 State of the States in Gifted Education Policy and Practice Data," November 2015. <http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/key%20reports/2014-2015%20State%20of%20the%20States%20%28final%29.pdf>.