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# LOST EINSTEINS

*How Illinois fails to  
identify too many of its  
brightest minds*

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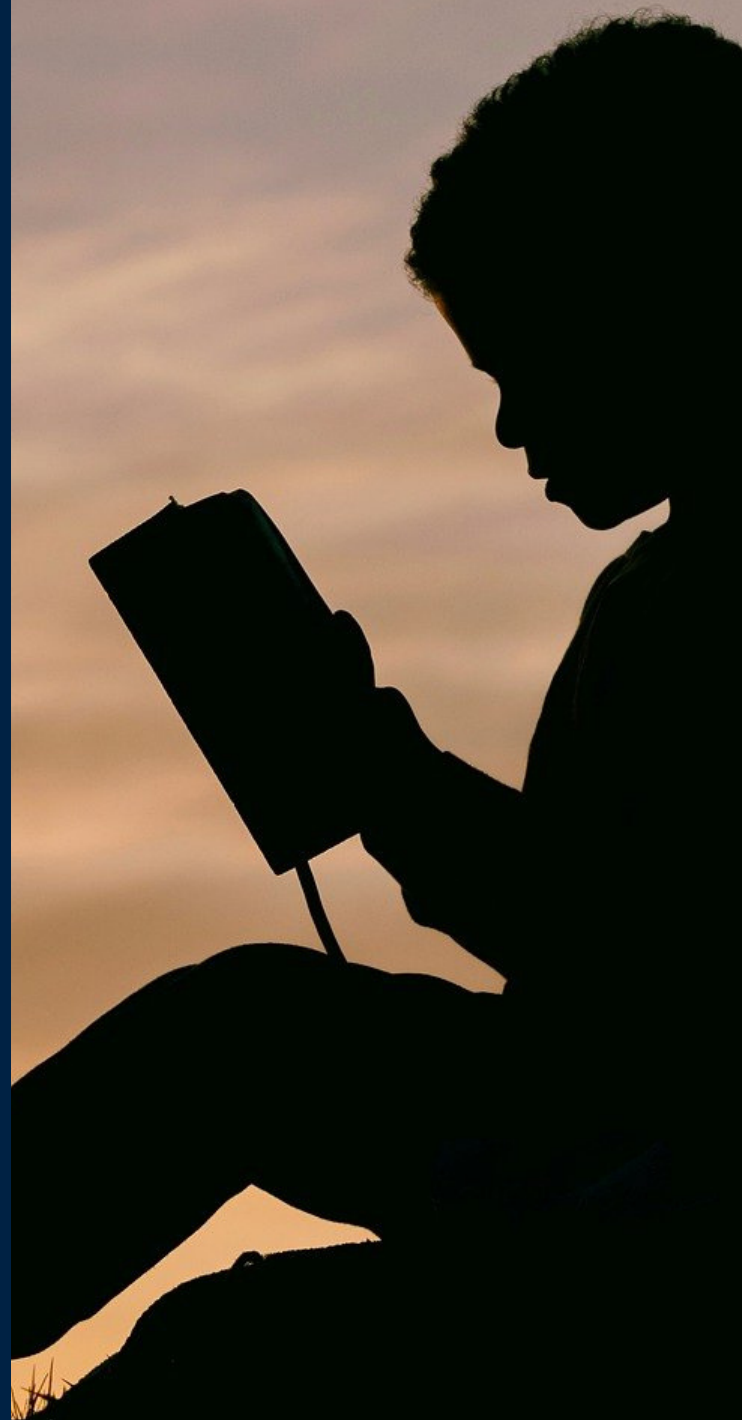
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# INTRODUCTION

**Is it really possible our schools are overlooking huge numbers of talented students?**

**According to the research: yes.**

Illinois fails to identify far too many of its brightest students – this is especially true for low-income students and students of color.

This is mostly because the thinking about gifted education is guided by three main assumptions.

The first is that most schools are meeting the needs of gifted students.

This isn't the case, primarily because most schools don't have gifted programs, and therefore, fail to identify any gifted students. In fact, a recent report from Purdue University's Department of Education found **only 56% of schools nationwide** offer gifted programs.

The second assumption is that even if schools don't have gifted programs, gifted students will do just fine.

This may be true for gifted students from high-income families – their parents will pay out-of-pocket for extracurricular and enrichment activities to ensure that their children are challenged, and their talents are developed. But, for low-income gifted students and students of color, this is rarely the case. Most depend on the public school system to meet their educational needs. Unfortunately, if they are one of the many students who do not have access to advanced learning opportunities, it is very unlikely that they will reach their potential.

Imagine if we treated elite athletes like we currently treat gifted students from disadvantaged backgrounds. What would have happened to U.S. Olympic gymnast Simon Biles if a gymnastics instructor observed her at a young age, said she had a talent for gymnastics, and then never followed up with any additional training?

Talent, like a muscle, atrophies over time without appropriate exercise. For gifted students, this means providing them with the equivalent of a full gym - an educational environment that challenges them and encourages them to develop their talents. Having them do the opposite – sitting in a classroom where they are not being challenged – is as productive as going for a daily walk and expecting to be able to win the Chicago Marathon.



The following data shows what happens when talent atrophies:

- A study of 482,418 gifted 7th graders who took the ACT in 7th grade and again in high school showed that the academic gains for students from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds were significantly smaller than for wealthier gifted students.
- Gifted students in reading from low-income families are 13 percentage points less likely than those from high-income families to remain gifted in reading during for the duration of their educational career.
- Gifted students in math from low-income families are 12 percentage points less likely than those from high-income families to remain gifted in math for the duration of their educational career.
- Gifted students from low-income families are 18 percentage points less likely than those from high-income families to complete a bachelor's degree.
- Gifted students from low-income families are 18 percentage points less likely than those from high-income families to earn a graduate degree.

This progressive atrophy of talent has real life consequences for the student, but also impacts society at large.

A 2017 study by Opportunity Insights – a think tank at Harvard University – shows what happens when the talents of low-income students and students of color are not developed.

The study examined the factors that influence who becomes an innovator later in life. To determine the answer, researchers gathered data from all patent holders from 1996 to 2014, including the patent holder's income, their parent's income when the patent holder was a child, and the patent holders' third-grade math test scores.

What the researchers wanted to test is whether ability (as represented by the third-grade math test scores), wealth (as represented by the patent holder's family's income when the patent holder was a child), or a combination of the two, is what spurs innovation.

The results of their study were astounding:

- Low-income students who were among the very best math students — those who scored in the top 5 percent — were no more likely to become innovators than affluent students with below-average math scores.
- Hispanic students who were among the very best math students were less likely to become inventors than below-average math students from white families.

This study shows that identifying and providing the right educational environment for talented students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, is incredibly impactful.



What would happen if low-income and students of color innovated at the same rate as their wealthier and whiter peers? According to Opportunity Insights, the innovation rate in the U.S. would nearly quadruple, leading to a massive increase in economic growth.

The third major assumption that guides most thinking about gifted education is that gifted programs are inherently inequitable – that no matter what actions schools take, white and Asian students will always be over-represented and low-income students and students of color will always be under-represented.

Many of the nation's largest school districts – New York, Seattle, and Boston - are eliminating their gifted programs for this very reason. In Illinois, districts like Evanston and Champaign, are considering phasing out their programs next year.

The decision to do so is misguided.

These inequities do not have to exist. When they do, it is because schools use subjective processes to identify gifted students.

It doesn't have to be this way. Instituting objective processes, like universal screening using local norms (which will be discussed later), have been proven to make programs far more equitable.

All the assumptions mentioned above have guided gifted education policy in Illinois. The state provides little funding because most policymakers believe that schools serve gifted students well, that gifted students from all economic and demographic backgrounds will succeed without any specialized support, and that gifted education is something that exists only for the children of white and wealthy parents.

Illinois is failing to identify far too many of its brightest minds. The trend of disinvestment and disinterest in gifted education has resulted in many students lacking access to advanced learning opportunities. This lack of access leads to talent being under identified and underdeveloped – a problem that is compounded by the disparities that exist in current gifted programs.

The solutions to these problems are known and effective. They do not require schools to eliminate programs, make massive new investments, or to overturn their approach to teaching. By changing specific policies, like how schools assess students for giftedness, and changing certain practices, like having these assessments be available in languages other than English, schools can ensure that more of the state's gifted students will be identified, that gifted programs will become more equitable, and that gifted students' talents will be developed.





# BACKGROUND

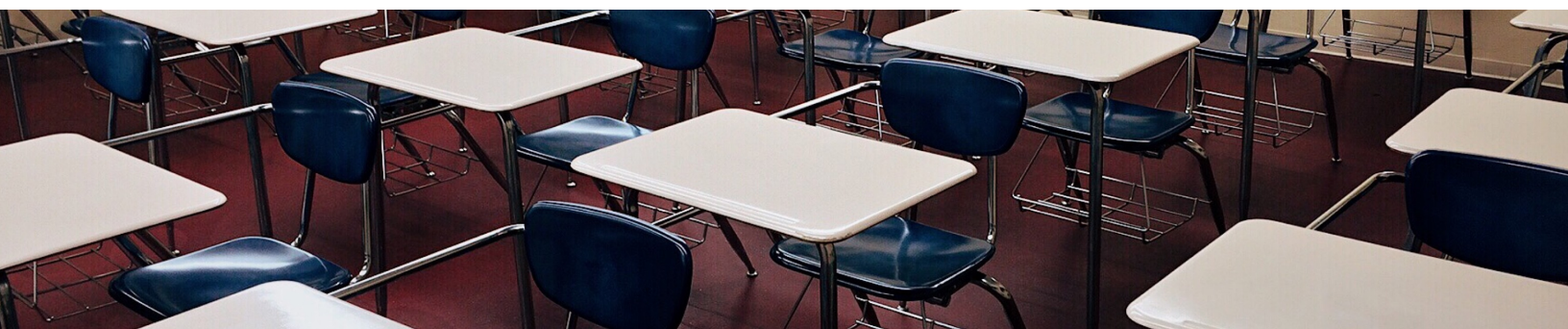
## Divestment and Disinterest

The most current data shows that 73,047, or 3.7% of all students in Illinois receive gifted services. Data about the percent of elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools that offer gifted programming doesn't exist because the state no longer collects it.

This stands in stark contrast to the way Illinois supported gifted education in the early 2000s. Back then, the state provided millions of dollars in funding, the percentage of the student population identified as gifted was more than double what it is now, at 7.9 percent, and 85.1% of elementary schools, 78.9% of middle schools, and 48.1% of high schools offered gifted programs.

What explains this change?

First, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001 included penalties for districts and schools if a certain percentage of their student population failed to meet state standards. This caused states and districts to refocus their resources on improving the education of students just above and below proficiency rather than students far below or far above. Part of this refocusing in Illinois included getting rid of the categorical funding of gifted education and instead folding it into the general funding formula, allowing districts to access money that used to be used for gifted education to fund general expenses instead.





Second, Illinois, like most states, takes a signal from the federal government about what is important in education – and, unfortunately, gifted education is not a priority at the federal level. In fact, the federal government only funds one program that supports gifted education – the Jacob J. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program. From 1988 to 1993, the program was funded at \$7.9 million per year. Between 1993 and 2010, funding varied, reaching a high of nearly \$12 million in 2002. In 2011 and 2012, in response to the Great Recession, funding was cut to zero.

Third, Illinois’ citizens, like most citizens in other states, have misconceptions about gifted education. A recent national survey conducted by the Institute for Educational Advancement, a national gifted education advocacy organization, found that most people believe that their schools are meeting the needs of gifted students, and, even if they aren’t, those students will be successful in the long run.

The survey also showed that when citizens are informed about the benefits of gifted education and what happens to gifted students from underserved populations without access to advanced learning opportunities, they support more funding for such programs, are more likely to consider them as an integral part of the educational experience and are more likely to advocate for them.

Federal government incentives, gifted education as a low-priority issue, and lack of public pressure have caused gifted education to be an issue that is largely off the radar in Illinois.

# METHODOLOGY

The data analyzed in this report is from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), collected and maintained by the federal Department of Education. It is the most recent data, from the 2017-2018 school year.

The data on gifted education is contained in a spreadsheet that also includes school names, school addresses, whether schools have gifted programs, and, if so, the demographics of those programs. The demographic groups included are American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black, Latino, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Two or More Races, White, Limited English Proficient Students, and Students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs).

Additionally, data on Title I status is contained in a spreadsheet that also includes school addresses, and a school's Title I status.

Lastly, the data on geographic location is contained in a spreadsheet that contains schools names, school addresses, and the locale the school is in (urban, suburban, town, rural).

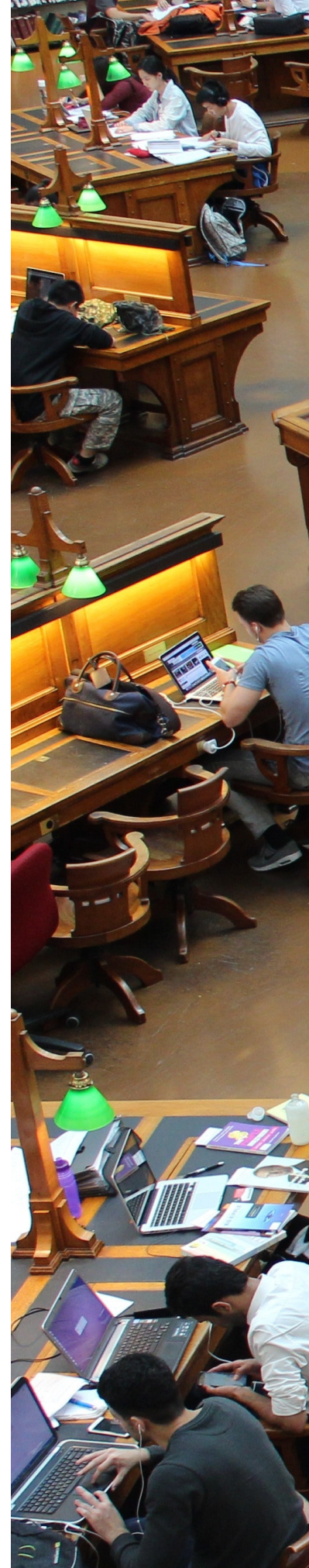
The first data analysis section will discuss access to gifted programming in Illinois. It will answer the question: "what percentage of Illinois students attend a school with a gifted program?" Gifted program availability data will be analyzed at the state level, across demographic groups, Title I status, and



geographic location. The availability of gifted programming will be described as the percentage of students who attend a school that has a gifted program, rather than the percentage of school districts or schools that have a gifted program.

The second data analysis section will discuss disparities in the identification of gifted students. It will answer the question: “how well represented are different demographic groups in gifted programs across Illinois?” Assuming that giftedness is evenly distributed across demographic groups, the idea is that the percentage of students from a demographic group enrolled in their school’s gifted program should be close to the percentage of students in that same demographic group enrolled in their school.

The final data analysis section will calculate the number of Lost Einsteins in Illinois – those students who are gifted, but are never identified as so, either because their school does not have a gifted program, or because their school uses identification processes that are not in line with best practices. This analysis will detail the total number of Lost Einsteins statewide and by demographic group.



# ACCESS TO IDENTIFICATION

## Gifted Program Availability

Only 24% of Illinois students attend a school with a gifted program. This is drastically lower than the percentage of students who attend a school with a gifted program nationally, at 67%.

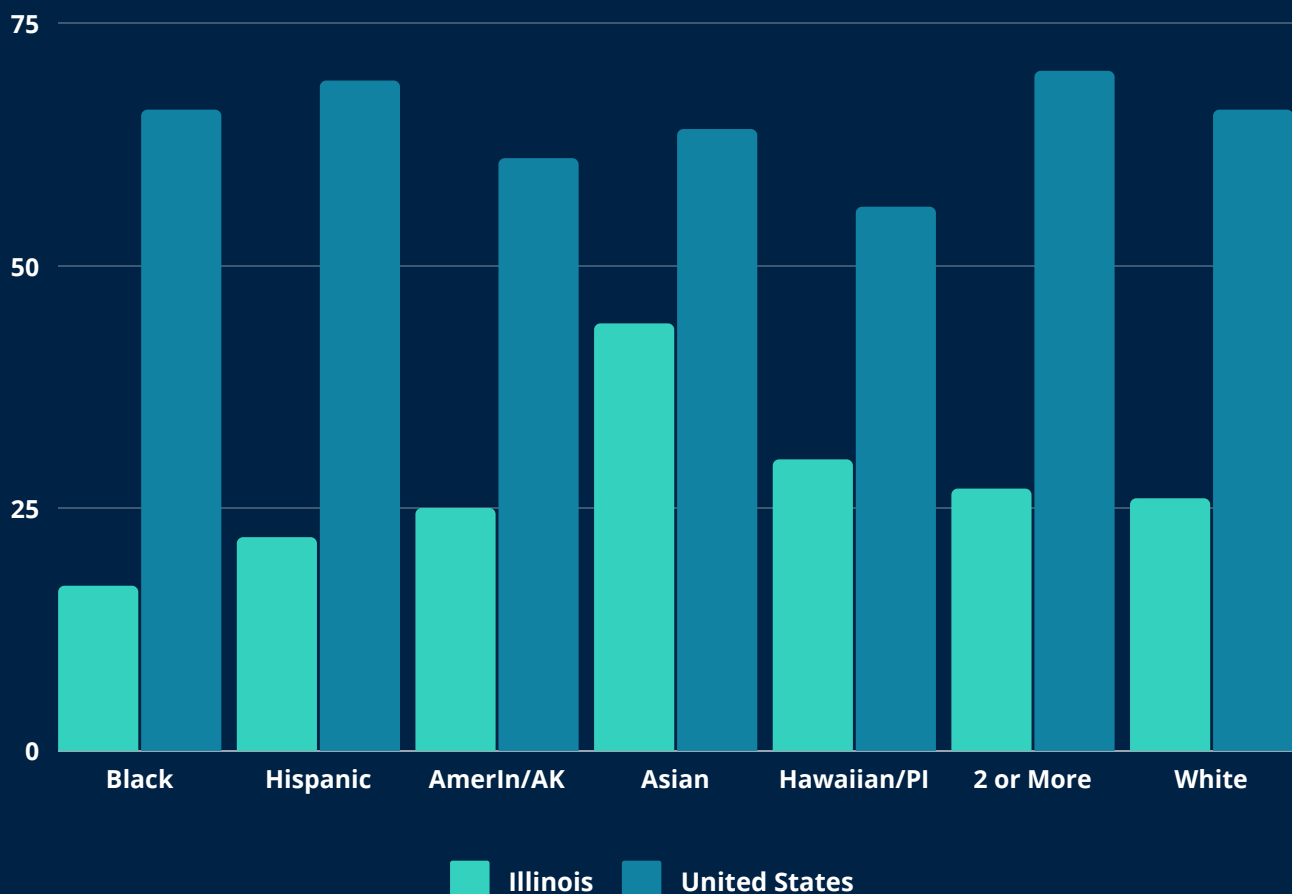
Breaking the data down by race and ethnicity paints an even grimmer picture:

- Only 17% of Black students in Illinois attend a school with a gifted program compared to 66% nationally.
- Only 22% of Hispanic students in Illinois attend a school with a gifted program compared to 69% nationally.
- Only 25% of American Indian/Alaska Native students in Illinois attend a school with a gifted program compared to 61% nationally.



- Only 44% of Asian students in Illinois attend a school with a gifted program compared to 64% nationally.
- Only 30% of Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students in Illinois attend a school with a gifted program compared to 56% nationally.
- Only 27% of two or more race students in Illinois attend a school with a gifted program compared to 70% nationally.
- Only 26% of white students in Illinois attend a school with a gifted program compared to 66% nationally.

## Percent of Students Attending a School with a Gifted Program, by Demographic Group - State vs. National





## Fewer than **3 in 10** Illinois Students attend a school with a gifted program

Students with specialized needs also lack access to gifted programs in Illinois:

- Only 26% of Limited English Proficient students in Illinois attend a school with a gifted program compared to 69% nationally.
- Only 21% of Illinois students with IEPs attend a school with a gifted program compared to 63% nationally.

Even more dramatic are the differences depending on where students live:

- Only 15% of students who reside in rural areas in Illinois attend a school with a gifted program compared to 70% nationally.
- Only 12% of students who reside in a town in Illinois attend a school with a gifted program compared to 66% nationally.
- Only 33% of students who reside in the suburbs in Illinois attend a school with a gifted program compared to 68% nationally.

- Only 23% of students who reside in urban areas in Illinois attend a school with a gifted program compared to 66% nationally.

Less dramatic is whether a school receives Title I funds from the federal government:

- 26% of students who attend Title I schools in Illinois have access to gifted programs compared to 67% nationally.
- 23% of students who attend non-Title I schools in Illinois have access to gifted programs compared to 67% nationally.

**85%** of rural students in Illinois attend a school without a gifted program

**83%** of Black students in Illinois attend a school without a gifted program

## **Why do so few Illinois students have access to gifted programs?**

First, as mentioned earlier, Illinois provides very little funding for gifted programming, and the funding that is provided is not required to be spent serving the needs of gifted children. Second, it does not require administrators or teachers to have any instruction in gifted education before they are certified. Lastly, Illinois lacks an identification or service mandate. The first requires schools to identify gifted students and the second requires schools to provide gifted students with specialized instruction.



# DISPARITIES IN IDENTIFICATION

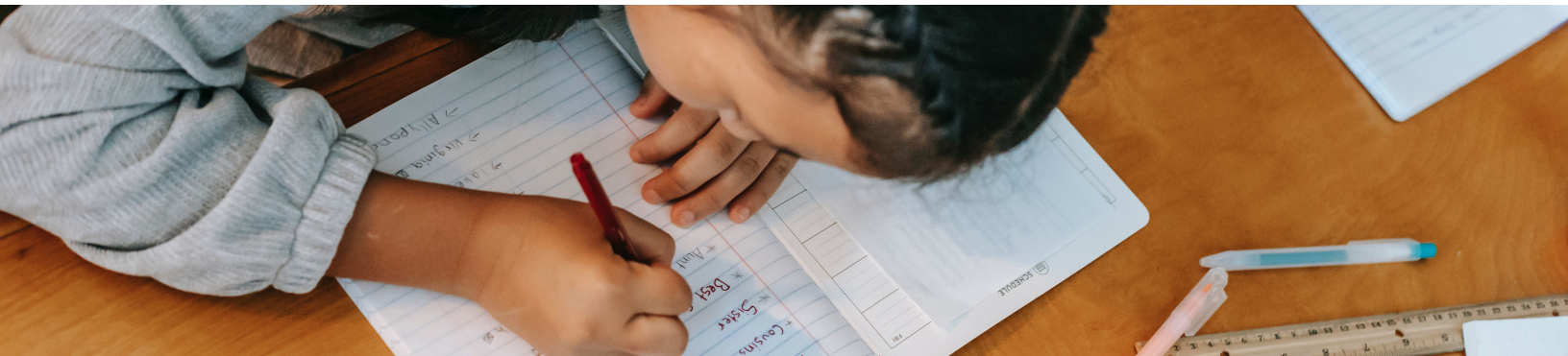
It's clear from the data above that the primary reason gifted students in Illinois are not identified is because their schools have no gifted programs, and therefore do not identify gifted students.

There is, however, another smaller subset of gifted students that go unidentified. These students attend schools with gifted programs but, for reasons out of their control, are not identified as gifted.

How wide are these disparities in Illinois? Here's the data:

- For every 100 gifted Hispanic students the state should identify in schools with gifted programs, it only identifies 67, meaning 23 go unidentified. This is slightly better than the national average of 65.
- For every 100 gifted Black students the state should identify in schools with gifted programs, it only identifies 66, meaning 34 go unidentified. This is above the national average of 55.
- For every 100 gifted students who are Limited English Proficient the state should identify in schools with gifted programs, it only identifies 15, meaning 85 go unidentified. This is below the national average of 22.

The main causes of these disparities are two-fold: parent advocacy and subjective identification processes. These both contribute to the identification disparities seen in many gifted programs.



# Parent Advocacy



All parents want the best for their children, but not all parents have the means to make that a reality. This is especially true for the parents of gifted students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In their study of the under-enrollment of low-income students in gifted programs - “Money over Merit? Socioeconomic Gaps in Receipt of Gifted Services” - Professors Jason Grissom, Christopher Redding, and Joshua Bleiberg discuss the many ways affluent parents can influence the gifted identification process to increase the chance that their child will be chosen to participate in a gifted program. They pinpoint three types of capital that affluent parents wield to influence the gifted identification process.

The first, economic capital, refers to how much money parents can spend on their child’s education. Having high economic capital can benefit the students of affluent parents in a variety of ways. First, it can allow parents to shop around for schools that have gifted programs, and/or for schools where their child is more likely to be chosen for the gifted program. Second, it allows parents to enroll their children in supplemental educational or extracurricular activities that boost the likelihood their child will be chosen for a gifted program. Research shows that teachers often mistakenly associate higher general or cultural knowledge with giftedness. Lastly, affluent parents can use their economic capital to have their child tested or retested by a psychologist outside of school - an act that is out-of-reach for most middle and low-income families.

The second type of capital that affluent parents use to increase the chances their child will be chosen for a gifted program is social capital. Social capital refers to the networks, including family, friends, and community, that allow people to work together to achieve similar ends. Social capital can influence the gifted identification process in several ways. First, it allows affluent parents to form relationships with administrators and teachers to learn “inside information” about the functioning of their child’s school. Becoming insiders allows affluent parents to understand the unwritten rules of the gifted identification process. This gives them an advantage over low-income families. Second, affluent parents can utilize their social capital to challenge a teacher’s decision to exclude their child from gifted programming. Because they have already established relationships with administrators and teachers in their child’s school, they are seen as less adversarial than their low-income counterparts when they file an appeal or request external evaluation by a child psychologist.

**"Parent advocacy is a bug in a system where the identification processes schools use rely on the subjective judgements of administrators and teachers."**

The third type of capital is cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to beliefs that are broadly accepted by society and signal high status. Affluent families with high levels of cultural capital often choose parenting styles that focus on the development of their child’s cognitive and social skills, including having them involved in more activities organized by adults and those that are associated with cultural pastimes than their peers. When children from high cultural capital families meet their teachers, their teachers may mistakenly attribute their high cultural capital as intellect, when it is, in fact, developed with a plan in mind. For example, a student’s ability to identify a painting as a Monet aids them in the gifted identification process.

Parent advocacy is a bug in a system where the identification processes schools use rely on the subjective judgements of administrators and teachers. It does not have to be a feature of gifted programs.

# Teacher Identification

Outside of parents, many people would argue that a child's teacher knows them best. But this not the case when it comes to the identification of gifted students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Unfortunately, researchers have found that teachers are not very good at determining who is a gifted student. In fact, a study by Matthew McBee of East Tennessee State University, Scott Peters of the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater, and Erin M. Miller of Bridgewater College, found that in nearly all identification systems that used teacher recommendations before testing, 60% of gifted students were missed.

## How is that possible?

First, most teachers receive little to no training about gifted identification. Few states require that teachers learn about gifted identification, let alone gifted education, before they can receive their certification.

Second, since teachers have little to no training, they must rely on their beliefs about what a gifted student looks and behaves like, gathered from their experiences in life, both as a student and as a teacher. Because of this, different teachers can hold directly opposing viewpoints. For example, some teachers believe gifted students are good students (meaning they are not disruptive, have excellent GPAs, and score well on tests) while others believe the exact opposite.



When examining race, research finds that teachers have higher academic expectations for white and Asian students than they do for Latino/a or Black students. Additionally, different types of students are seen to have different attributes. For white students, giftedness is seen as a natural; for Asian students, it is seen as the result of parent pressure. Latino and Black students are seen as lower-performing because they make up most of the under-performing students teachers see regularly.

A study conducted by Professor Rachel Fish of New York University shows implicit biases about race in action when it comes to who is referred to gifted programs. In her study, Fish used case studies of fictional male students in which the race/ethnicity, English Language Learner status, and exceptionality characteristics (gifted and special needs) were randomly distributed to determine whether teachers have an implicit bias about who they would refer for gifted services. She found that teachers were more willing to refer white boys for testing for giftedness even when their black and ELL peers exhibited the same academic and behavioral characteristics.

**"...high-income students were more than six times as likely to receive gifted services than low-income students, holding student achievement levels and backgrounds constant."**

The same trend of students not being referred for gifted programming due to implicit bias is echoed in Professor Jason Grissom of Vanderbilt University, Professor Christopher Redding of the University of Florida, and Joshua F. Bleiberg's study "Money over Merit: Socioeconomic Gaps in Receipt of Gifted Services." Analyzing nationally representative longitudinal data, they found that high-income students were more than six times as likely to receive gifted services than low-income students, holding student achievement levels and backgrounds constant. Similar discrepancies were found even among gifted students who attended the same school. There, students from high income families were twice as likely to receive gifted services than their lower-income peers, even though they both exhibited characteristics associated with giftedness.

Another study shows this same bias, but in a slightly different manner. In “Names, Expectations, and the Black-White Score Test Gap,” Professor David Figlio of Northwestern University studied whether a student’s name influences a teacher’s likelihood that he or she will be referred for gifted services. He found that students with names associated with low-income backgrounds are less likely to be referred. This was even true for students from the same families - the study found that a student named Damarcus is 1.9 percent less likely to be referred for a gifted program than his brother named Dwayne, even with identical test scores.

It may seem, from the studies discussed above, that teachers hold more implicit biases than the average person. But, according to a study by Jordan Starck, Travis Riddle, Stacey Sinclair, and Natasha Warikoo, entitled “Teachers are People Too: Examining the Racial Bias of Teachers Compared to Other American Adults”, that’s not the case. Using data from two national data sets, the researchers found that teachers and non-teachers hold pro-white explicit and implicit biases and that the differences between teachers and non-teachers was insignificant.

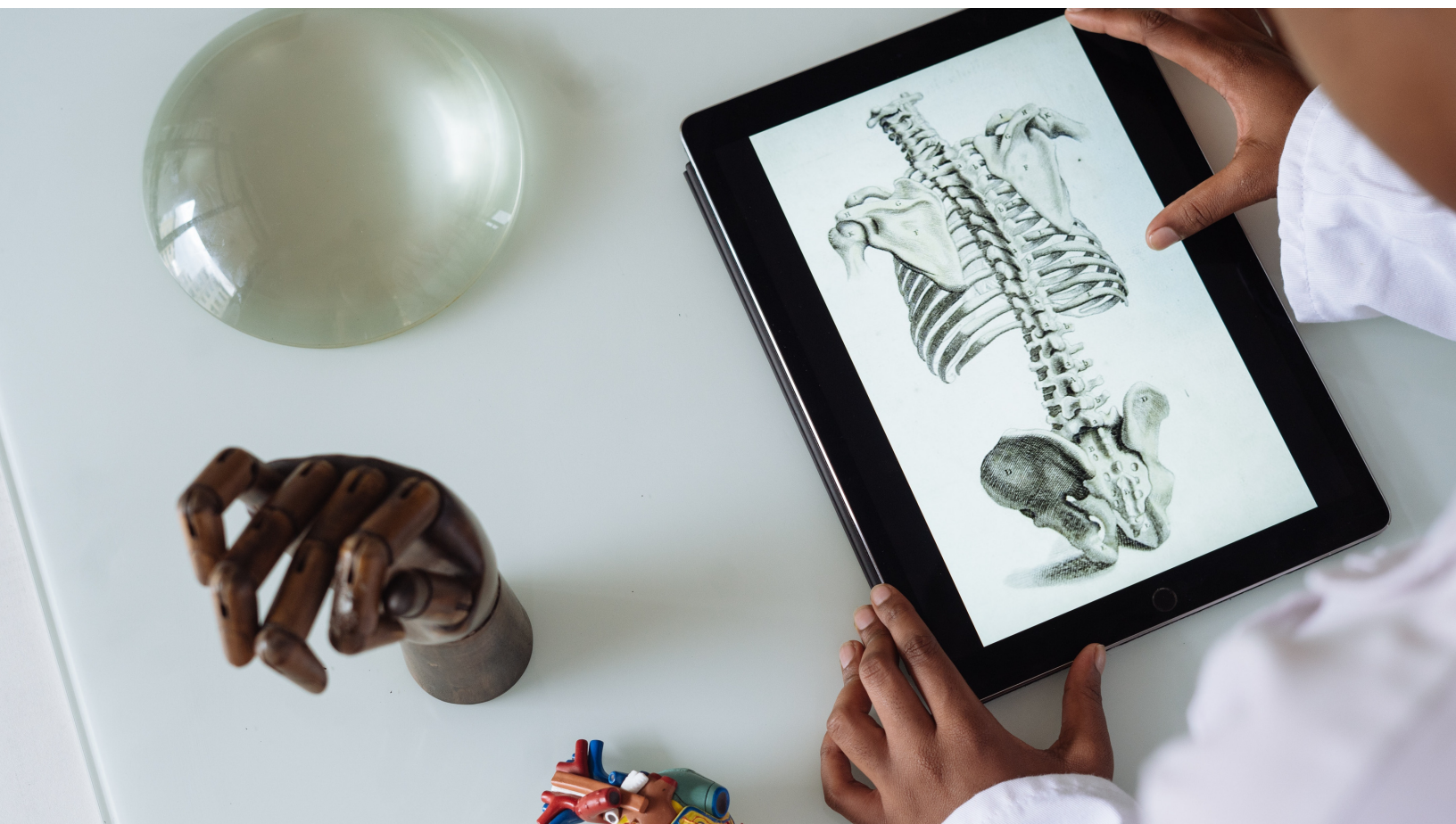


# ILLINOIS' LOST EINSTEINS

## Who are the "Lost Einsteins"?

The term "Lost Einstein" refers to a gifted student who is never identified as gifted, and, is therefore, never put into an educational environment that allows them to fully develop their talents.

Students become "Lost Einsteins" either because their school does not identify gifted students because it has no gifted program, or because they are overlooked during the identification process because the school relies on subjective identification processes to identify gifted students.



# The Results of the Access Problem in Illinois

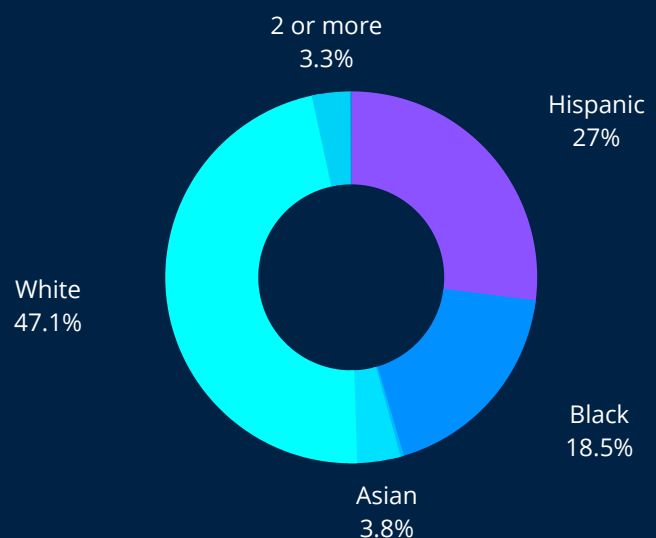
The numbers are startling.

Statewide, approximately 120,494 gifted students in Illinois are never identified because their school does not have a gifted program. This includes:

- 36,676 gifted Hispanic students
- 382 gifted American Indian/Alaska Native students
- 5,132 gifted Asian students
- 133 gifted Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students
- 25,081 gifted Black students
- 64,027 gifted White students
- 4,509 gifted two or more race students
- 15,445 gifted Limited English Proficient students

## The Results of a Lack of Access

Students who are not identified because they attend a school without a gifted program, by demographic group.





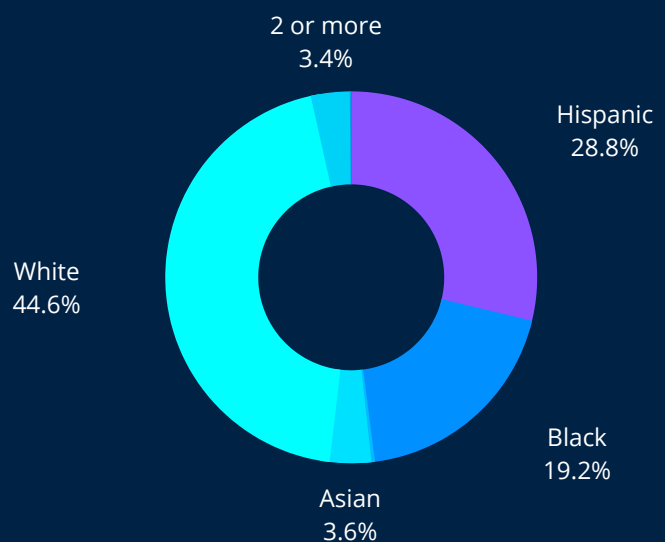
# The Results of the Subjective Identification Processes in Illinois

Moreover, 10,074 gifted students in Illinois are not identified as gifted because their school relies on subjective identification processes. This includes:

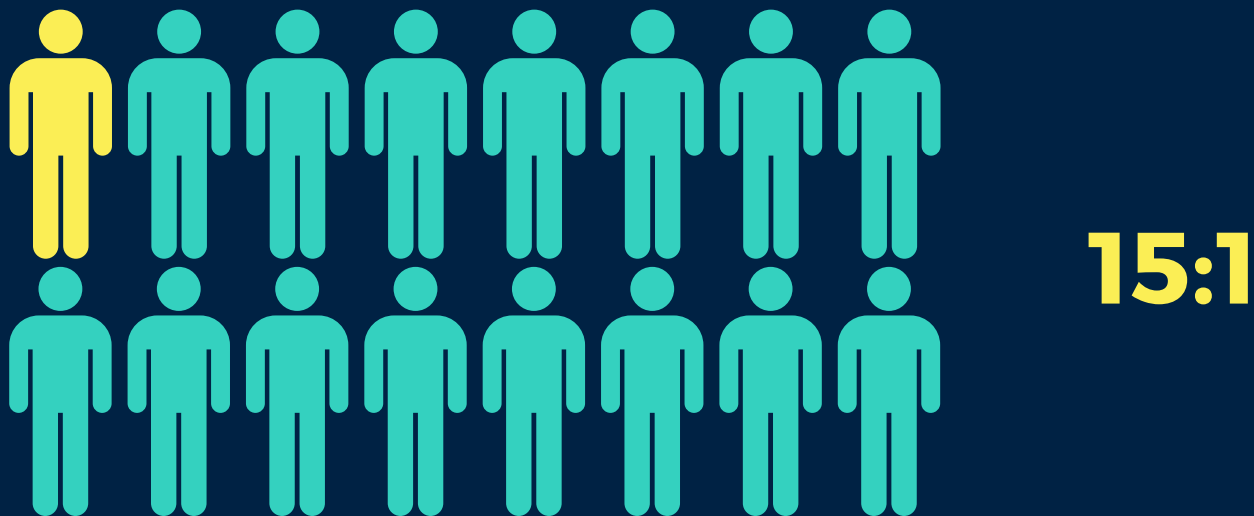
- 5,309 gifted Hispanic students
- 60 gifted American Indian/Alaska Native students
- 21 gifted Asian students
- 45 gifted Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students
- 2,954 gifted Black students
- 1,159 gifted White students
- 424 gifted two or more race students
- 5,421 gifted Limited English Proficient students

## The Results of Subjective Identification Processes

Students who are not identified because of subjective identification processes, by demographic group.



# Illinois' Startling Failure to Identify Gifted Students who are Limited English Proficient



For every 1 student Illinois currently identifies as gifted, it fails to identify 15 additional gifted students



For every 1 student identified in schools with gifted programs, Illinois fails to identify 6 more

# The Big Picture: Illinois' Missing Gifted

In total, the number of Lost Einsteins in Illinois is shocking - 130,568 gifted students are not identified as gifted either because their school does not have a gifted program, or because they are not identified for their school's gifted program because their school relies on subjective identification processes. This includes:

- 41,985 gifted Hispanic students, or 3.6 times the number of currently identified gifted Hispanic students
- 442 gifted American Indian/Alaska Native students, or 3.8 times the number of currently identified gifted American Indian/Alaska Native students
- 5,253 gifted Asian students, or .49 times the number of currently identified gifted Asian students
- 178 gifted Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students, or 1.3 times the number of currently identified gifted Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students

**ILLINOIS' LOST EINSTEINS**

**130,568**

gifted Illinois students are never identified

- 28,035 Black students, or 4.9 times the number of currently identified gifted Black students
- 65,186 gifted White students, or 1.6 times the number of currently identified gifted White students
- 4,933 gifted two or more race students, or 1.6 times the number of currently identified gifted two or more race students
- 20,866 Limited English Proficient students, or 15 times the number of currently identified gifted Limited English Proficient students

These students are our future innovators – the individuals who will discover more effective vaccines, invent longer lasting batteries, and build faster rockets. If they are not identified and placed in a learning environment that will allow them to thrive, they will fail to develop their talents to their full capacity, and, as a result, we – as a society – will lose out on the benefits their gifts could have created.

Thankfully, it doesn't have to be this way. There are public policies Illinois can adopt that will make it more likely that its gifted students are identified and their talents are cultivated.



# **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

## **Increase Avenues for Talent Development**

### **Gifted Program Funding**

Even though the state of Illinois has not funded its gifted grant program since 2003, it did include funding for school districts that identify gifted students in the overhaul of Illinois' education funding formula in 2017. According to that law, "each organizational unit (school district) shall receive \$40 per kindergarten through grade 12 average student enrollment (in gifted programs)."

What it does not require, however, is that the \$40 per student be spent on students in gifted programs, or that a school have a gifted program to receive this funding. Reforming the law to make these two changes, along with a substantial increase in the funding school districts receive for each identified gifted student, is a first step the state can take towards demonstrating that it truly values its gifted students.

### **Ensure All Districts have Properly Implemented the Accelerated Placement Act**

The Accelerated Placement Act was passed in 2017. It requires all school districts to have acceleration policies in line with best practices that allow students to enter school early, take above grade level courses, or skip courses.

Acceleration is a well-researched intervention to meet the needs of gifted students outside of gifted programs. For more information about how it works and its benefits, see the Illinois Association of Gifted Children's "[Accelerate Illinois](#)" report.

Though the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) did collect and release data on acceleration last year, the data was incomplete, and in many cases, inaccurate (for example, it said that upwards of 70% of all accelerations were grade-skips). Having more complete and accurate acceleration data would allow outside organizations like the Excellence Project to determine if the law is working as intended, and, if not, what reforms are needed to ensure its success.

## Pass Education Equity Scholarships

Illinois should pass an education equity scholarship program, which could be used by low and middle-income families to pay for their child to enroll in enrichment activities, including music lessons or summer camps, among other expenses.

A similar law has been introduced in Colorado earlier this year by the education advocacy organization Reschool Colorado. Their ballot initiative would raise more than \$100 million by increasing taxes on marijuana sales that would then be given to low-income and working class students in the form of \$1,500 scholarships for out-of-school expenses.

While research shows that access to enrichment activities benefits all students, it is especially important for gifted students, as such experiences serve as catalysts for later education and career choices.

## Pass a Universal Screening Grant

Universal screening means the screening of all students in a grade for giftedness the year prior to those students being able to enter a gifted program. It is the number one recommended intervention to decrease racial and economic disparities in identification.

A recent study conducted by Professor David Card of the University of California - Berkeley and Professor Laura Giuliano of the University of Miami found that universal screening substantially increased the

number of traditionally disadvantaged, gifted students identified for participation in their district's gifted program.

Their study examined a school district in Florida that instituted universal screening in the spring of 2005. Prior to 2005, the district's gifted program relied on parent and teacher referrals and consisted mostly of white and Asian students, despite having a student population that was 60 percent black and Hispanic.

Using a well-known non-verbal test that assesses cognitive-ability (the Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test, or the NNAT), the district allowed all students scoring two standard deviations above the mean (for English Language Learners and students receiving free-and-reduced lunch, one standard deviation above the mean) to take a full IQ test that would determine whether they would be enrolled in the gifted program.

The results were incredible.

First, the introduction of the non-verbal universal screen allowed a higher percentage of students to have their IQs tested, which resulted in a larger percentage of the district's student body being identified as gifted. Second, the newly identified gifted students were predominantly poor, Black and Hispanic, and less likely to have parents whose first language was English - students that the parent and teacher referral process previously missed. Lastly, the distribution of IQ scores for the new students was no different than under the old referral process, meaning that the new students were just as intelligent as the students previously referred by their teachers or parents.

These amazing results were short-lived, however, as the district felt it was too costly to continue universal screening. The next school year they went back to their old referral method. Guess what happened to



the previous disparities the district saw before they instituted universal screening? They came back, nearly matching the percentages as before.

If you ask districts why they don't universally screen, it's because of cost. Most states do not offer financial assistance for districts that choose to universally screen - they must bear the cost themselves. The only state that does is Colorado, through the Gifted Education Universal Screening and Qualified Personnel Grant, which districts can apply for to assist them in providing universal screening or teacher training in gifted education.

This may be a place where the federal government could step in. The U.S. Department of Education already oversees the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Education Program, which provides grants to organizations and individuals that do the following:

- Conduct evidence-based research on methods and techniques for identifying and teaching gifted and talented students and for using gifted and talented programs and methods to identify and provide the opportunity for all students to be served, particularly low-income and at-risk students.
- Establish and operate programs and projects for identifying and serving gifted and talented students, including innovative methods and strategies (such as summer programs, mentoring programs, peer tutoring programs, service-learning programs, and cooperative learning programs involving business, industry, and education) for identifying and educating students who may not be served by traditional gifted and talented programs.
- Providing technical assistance and disseminating information, which may include how gifted and talented programs and methods may be adapted for use by all students, particularly low-income and at-risk students.





There is no reason that the Department couldn't expand the program to allow school districts to request grants for universal screening. What would be more impressive is for the federal government to increase its investment in universal screening. A couple of extra million dollars could go a long way - providing school districts with the funding they need to universally screen would ensure that nearly every gifted student is identified.

**"Until the Advanced Coursework Equity Act, or a bill like it, becomes a reality, the state of Illinois should take immediate steps to provide grants to both public and private schools to use universal screening to select which students are invited to enroll in their gifted programs."**

A bill doing just that was introduced in the U.S. Senate by Corey Booker (D-NJ) and Joaquin Castro (D-TX) in 2020. The Advanced Coursework Equity Act would establish an \$800 million competitive grant program that would give grants of up to \$60 million to states that:

- Implement equitable enrollment mechanisms, such as universal screening, for advanced courses and programs
- Expand enrollment in advanced courses and programs, including by launching new courses
- Purchasing curriculum and materials for advanced courses, covering exam fees of low-income students, and training or hiring teachers to teach advanced courses

Though the bill was not voted on in the 2020 legislative session, it was reintroduced in April of this year.

Until the Advanced Coursework Equity Act, or a bill like it, becomes a reality, the state of Illinois should take immediate steps to provide grants to both public and private schools to use universal screening to select which students are invited to enroll in their gifted programs.

# CONCLUSION

## **Are meaningful changes really possible? The success of Illinois' second largest school district shows us solutions are within reach.**

For the superintendents, principals, teachers, and legislators who believe that an equitable and effective gifted program is too difficult to implement, look no further than the state's second largest school district, Elgin's U-46.

Here are specific actions that the district has taken to ensure that its gifted program is the best-in-the-state:

- It universally screens every third and sixth grader for gifted classes.
- It has students take the CogAT, a cognitive ability test, during the school day to ensure that students who could not otherwise take the test can take it.
- It evaluates students against their peers at their school (local norms) instead of a nationally representative sample (national norms) , which includes students from wealthier and more privileged districts.
- It requires all administrators and teachers to take a 45-hour course on giftedness and requires all gifted teachers to become certified in English as a second language.

These policies and procedures have caused the district's gifted programs to have a student population that is very close to the student population of the district. According to the latest federal data, Black students comprise 6.4 percent of the district's student population and 5.2 percent of the district's gifted student population, while Hispanic students comprise 54.3 percent of the district's student population and 47.7 percent of the district's gifted student population.

If every school district in Illinois followed Elgin's playbook, just imagine how many of the state's Lost Einsteins would be identified and given the opportunity to develop their talents.



“

**All that is valuable in human society depends upon the opportunity for development afforded the individual.**

”

-Albert Einstein





# Contact us



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