

Improve & Transform New York's Gifted Education

New York State's children need access to quality gifted programs in every district!

A united appeal for New York State to meet the needs of its diverse gifted student population

Why should we care about gifted programs? Don't gifted kids just do well on their own and "figure it out"? Don't they all do well in school?

Did you know that:

- **6.7% of students nationally** are enrolled in gifted programs, **but only 1.7% of New York State's students** are identified and enrolled in gifted programs¹.
- **This discrepancy disadvantages not only New York State's students, but the state's economy and future.** If we intend to have the best and most highly skilled workforce, our schools must be the wellspring of future leadership and the key to our global competitiveness.
- **Underachievement is a common issue among gifted learners.** Obstacles such as social and emotional difficulties, socio-economic challenges, discrimination, low expectations, coexistence of disability result in many high potential learners going unidentified or receiving inappropriate instruction².
- **Gifted youth experience additional factors associated with suicide**³. Psychological autopsies of students identified as gifted and having committed suicide uncovers that in addition to factors influencing youth suicide and prevention in the general population, **gifted individuals experience additional factors related to schools' lack of preparedness to meet gifted students' needs including:** Untrained teachers, inadequate curriculum, inadequate social and emotional support, anti-intellectualism, mixed messages, being/feeling misunderstood and neglected by school personnel, and feeling unsupported in academic setting transitions. **Conversely, protective factors for suicide prevention specific to gifted youth are:** appropriate academic challenge, opportunities to be with intellectual peers, school preparedness, adequately trained teachers, appropriate curriculum, effective social/emotional support, and interesting curriculum².
- Research supports that **graduate coursework in gifted education improves teachers' effectiveness.** They are more likely to individualize instruction and emphasize creativity and thinking skills in their teaching⁴, **potentially creating additional opportunities for exceptional learning experiences for all students.**

¹ National Center for Education Statistics. Table 204.90. Percentage of public school students enrolled in gifted and talented programs, by sex, race/ethnicity, and state: Selected years, 2004 through 2013-14. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_204.90.asp.

² The Association for the Education of Gifted Underachieving Students (AEGUS). Retrieved from <https://www.aegus1.com/our-work>.

³ Cross, T. & Riedl Cross, J. (2020): An ecological model of suicidal behavior among students with gifts and talents, High Ability Studies. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/13598139.2020.1733391>.

⁴ Starko, A. J. (2008). Teacher preparation. In J. A. Plucker & C. M. Callahan (Eds.), Critical issues and practices in gifted education: What the research says (pp. 681 – 694). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

For these reasons and our lived experiences, we believe that it is critical to **transform New York State’s approach to gifted education** to include:

- Universal, ongoing, and inclusive procedures for identification throughout the K-12 experience, using multiple methods for identification, and eliminating high-stakes single test methods.
- Strength-based programs and learning opportunities that go beyond enrichment and allow learners to excel to their ability, and not be limited to grade level standards.
- Professional development for all educators and administrators to help identify and advance understanding of gifted learners.
- Access to related services to support the social and emotional needs of this population, which may otherwise go unaddressed.
- Two-way accountability between the New York State Education Department and Local Education Agencies for quality identification and programming, including establishing an advisory council in collaboration with the Education Department.

The following statement is supported by these stakeholder groups consisting of parents, educators, providers, and other professionals from the following organizations representing diverse geographic areas of New York State:

- The Association for the Education of Gifted Underachieving Students (AEGUS)
- Twice Exceptional Children’s Advocacy (TECA)
- Gifted New York State (GiftedNYS)
- Central New York Gifted Youth (CNYGY)

New York State’s education budget cuts and New York City’s School Diversity Advisory Group’s recommendations are significant influencing factors on the future of gifted education in New York State. New York State already lags behind many U.S. states in its approach to gifted education. These issues place additional risk on the state’s ability to meet the needs of both its identified and unidentified gifted students.

New York State article §4452 defines gifted students as “those pupils who show evidence of high performance capability and exceptional potential in areas such as general intellectual ability, special academic aptitude and outstanding ability in visual and performing arts. Such definition shall include those pupils who require educational programs or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their potential.”

Further, the National Association of Gifted Children underscores that gifted children exist in every demographic group, personality type, and across disabilities⁵. Moreover, gifted students’ social emotional

⁵ National Association for Gifted Children. A Definition of Giftedness that Guides Best Practice. Retrieved from <https://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Position%20Statement/Definition%20of%20Giftedness%20%282019%29.pdf>

needs due to developmental differences can “lead to a set of issues unique to this group, making them vulnerable”⁶.

Marginalizing, eliminating, or calling for a moratorium on new gifted and talented programs for any reason is in direct conflict with the intent of the New York State state definition for gifted pupils (§4452). Such actions will negatively impact gifted learners throughout the state, including student populations currently underrepresented.

New York City’s School Diversity Advisory Group proposes actions intended to address the issue of equitable access to gifted education opportunities by providing equal access to enrichment opportunities for all⁷. We do not believe this is an “either or” decision. Schoolwide enrichment models done well can create robust opportunities for all students to creatively explore and nurture curious learning. However, we feel the recommendations specific to all high ability learners are soft, and therefore raise concerns regarding the details on range of curriculum options, how to identify which students may access different options based on educational need, and provision of professional development so as to not perpetuate the misunderstanding and underidentification of students with gifted education needs. Enrichment may be a component of gifted education, but it does not equate to gifted programming. We believe that enrichment alone is insufficient; it is not likely to achieve the desired outcome of inclusive gifted education nor access to quality, challenging, and engaging programming necessary to meet gifted learning needs.

We also believe the status quo in New York City is neither adequate nor acceptable. Best practices in gifted identification, programming, and accountability must be adopted to ensure that populations that are currently under-represented and/or under-served have access to quality gifted programs.

The issue of equal access to quality gifted education is not isolated to New York City. It is an issue throughout the entire state. **New York State is one of only eight states in the country that fails to mandate or fund gifted education** and to provide dedicated funding for gifted education services⁸. While the nationwide average for identified gifted students is almost 7%, only 1.7% of all New York students are identified. Within minority populations, only 0.9% Black, 0.6% Hispanic, and 1.1% Native American are identified as gifted⁹. The number of gifted students with disabilities, also known as twice-exceptional (2e), is not even tracked.

Numerous research studies have demonstrated that gifted students need the following:

- Support from school personnel who have had specialized training and on-going professional development which prepares them to address the unique needs of this population.
- An environment that is flexible, individualized, and cultivates expertise.

⁶ Gifted Development Center. Retrieved from <https://www.gifteddevelopment.com/about-our-center/what-is-giftedness>.

⁷ New York City Department of Education’s School Diversity Advisory Group. (August 2019). Making the Grade II: New Programs for Better Schools. Retrieved from https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/1c478c_f14e1d13df45444c883bbf6590129bd7.pdf.

⁸ Davidson Institute. Support for Gifted Programs Vary Greatly from State to State. Retrieved from <http://www.davidsongifted.org/search-database/entrytype/3>.

⁹ National Center for Education Statistics. Table 204.90. Percentage of public school students enrolled in gifted and talented programs, by sex, race/ethnicity, and state: Selected years, 2004 through 2013-14. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_204.90.asp

- On-going opportunities to interact with peers with similar interests and talents.
- An environment which promotes healthy social and emotional growth for asynchronous and intense, exceptional learners.
- Freedom to learn at their own pace, explore their interests, develop expertise, engage in strengths-based experiences and demonstrate their understanding in unique and novel ways.
- Access to content and materials which are commensurate with their abilities.

Therefore, we recommend that New York State take the following actions in order to comply with the state statute and decades of research on the benefits of specialized educational programs, schools, and services for gifted students:

- Establish district-wide, gifted and talented programs in every district that would include, but not be limited to, the development of gifted individualized education plans, certified learning specialists, differentiated instruction, social-emotional support, academic guidance and counseling, and opportunities for content-based or whole grade acceleration.
- Develop an ongoing process to identify gifted students starting in kindergarten and continuing to grade 12. This process would feature developmentally appropriate and multifaceted criteria that would also be inclusive of all students.
- Direct the New York State Department of Education to develop guidance to support local districts in the development and enhancement of local curricula for gifted students that is educationally challenging in all core subject areas.
- Prioritize and support professional development in the area of inclusive gifted education.
- Establish two-way accountability between the New York State Education Department and local education agencies to ensure consistent, quality programming and identification in every school district.
- Establish a statewide advisory council in collaboration with the New York State Education Department consisting of members from stakeholder groups (i.e. parents, students, educators, administrators, business sector, higher education, state education, legislators) and ensuring diverse and ample representation from across the state.

By identifying and providing gifted and talented students from all backgrounds and regions with an appropriate education, New York State makes itself a leader in best practices for education and better positions the state to attract technology and other industrial sectors looking for a highly educated and talented workforce.

As Chester Finn, former US Assistant Secretary of Education, and Amber Northern of The Thomas B. Fordham Institute noted, “The United States wastes an enormous amount of its human capital by failing to cultivate the innate talents of many of its young people, particularly high-ability girls and boys from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds. That failure exacts a great cost from the nation’s economy, widens painful gaps in income, frustrates efforts to spur upward mobility, contributes to civic decay and political division, and worsens the inequalities that plague so many elements of our society”¹⁰.

¹⁰ Finn, C. and Northern, A. (02/09/2018). Narrowing the Gifted Gap for Disadvantaged Students. Retrieved from <https://www.educationnext.org/narrowing-gifted-gap-disadvantaged-students/>.

It is our express responsibility to support and meet all students' needs, including gifted students, to transform their potential into success, ingenuity, discovery, and growth for society as a whole. Gifted students bring their innate curiosity, abilities and potential to become the leaders, innovators, and problem solvers that New York State needs for a secure future.

New York City is a bellwether of education trends and practices. Elimination of its gifted programs not only affects the pupils of the city of New York, but has the potential to negatively impact gifted students throughout the state of New York, and even throughout the nation. This is not the future that gifted students deserve.

Additionally, budget cuts often equate to reduction in spending on gifted programming. In light of New York State's financial challenges, we are concerned that districts will cut funding to or outright eliminate these important programs where they exist. We recognize the state's financial challenges are real and many important priorities exist. However, supporting our highest potential students can be accomplished cost effectively and is also an investment in our state's future.

We, representing multiple stakeholders throughout the state of New York, support addressing the specialized needs of gifted students by transforming and significantly expanding upon, not eliminating, gifted programming in New York State and call on the state to make a real and meaningful commitment to all its students.