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Illinois State Board of Education
100 West Randolph Street, Suite 14-300
Chicago, Illinois 60601

RE: IAGC Funding Request Fiscal Year 2022 - Reference # 22-113

To the Illinois State Board of Education:

The IAGC's mission is to empower educators, parents, and communities to support children with gifts and talents from all cultures, races and backgrounds throughout Illinois. We assert that equal access to advanced programming is fundamental to achieving true equity in education. Gifted learners are found in every socio-economic strata and racial group. Unfortunately, there remains no funding for gifted education in Illinois, where fewer than ⅓ of elementary and middle schools offer gifted services. With an absence of funding, the negative impact is disproportionately felt by Black, Latinx and low-income students who are most dependent upon schools to meet their educational needs and develop their talents.

We acknowledge that in light of Covid-19, challenges abound with providing educational funding. However, we cannot accept that many children with advanced learning needs and/or the potential to achieve at high levels lack access to an appropriate education. If we wish to make Illinois a place where families and businesses thrive, we need to make developing the talent in all of our children a top priority.

In order to address the excellence gap by providing equitable access to appropriate educational services, supporting the growth of students at all learning levels, and developing the talents of all students who are the future of our State, the Illinois Association for Gifted Children (IAGC) submits a funding request to the ISBE for fiscal year 2022 as follows:

1. **Restore district gifted education funding eliminated after fiscal year 2003 to assist schools in restoring and expanding services for students with gifts and talents and promoting equitable access to advanced learning opportunities across Illinois communities. In the alternative, we recommend that accountability for appropriate use of gifted investments provided through Evidence-Based Funding ("EBF") should be established.**

   We propose that for 2022 the funding amount be based upon the $19 million allocated in fiscal year 2003. IAGC recommends funding be restored at $27 million to adjust for inflation since 2003. Funds should be made available for assistance and professional development in schools who currently do not have services to meet the learning needs of diverse students with gifts and talents, including students from low-income families who depend upon public schools to give them access to an appropriate education.

   - The funding model should be designed to incentivize schools and districts that do not offer services for gifted and advanced students, or in which diverse students and families

are currently underserved for the purpose of training teachers to identify, provide appropriate curriculum and instruction, and develop the potential of students with gifts and talents.

- We note that currently schools are not accountable for using "gifted program investments" allocated under the EBF model through the adequacy target calculation to serve advanced learners under 105 ILCS 5/18-8.15. This should be changed so that acceptable uses of gifted education funding include one or more of the components of a local gifted education program outlined in Section 14A-30 and one or more of the components involved in implementing an accelerated placement plan in accordance with Section 14A-32.

2. **Allocate $130,000 for a salary to support a designated, full time Illinois Board of Education ("ISBE") professional to oversee gifted education in Illinois.**

   To provide accountability for compliance with recent legislation and to maintain and increase necessary professional development for teachers and administrators, IAGC is requesting a designated Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) professional staff member to cover the following responsibilities:

   - Oversee monitoring and compliance with current legislation.
   - Manage the data collection and reporting requirements of the Accelerated Placement Act and the Report Card Act.
   - Provide support to schools and families related to acceleration, gifted services, and teacher training.
   - Organize a review/revision of the Illinois Gifted Teacher and Specialist Endorsements.
   - Revise content and location of relevant gifted education information on the ISBE website and school/district report cards, making it more accessible for parents and school staff.
   - Monitor ESSA amendment factors related to giftedness including the growth indicator (measures student growth across the achievement spectrum, not diminishing weight for those advancing beyond proficiency) and P-2 and 3-8 school quality indicators (including collecting and reporting data on student participation in acceleration and enrichment).
   - Oversee and facilitate meetings of the Advisory Council on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children.
   - Collaborate with the State Advisory Council on the Education of Children with Disabilities and the Advisory Council on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children to support evidence-based practices to meet the needs of twice-exceptional children.

In conclusion, ISBE's equity statement declares that it is our "urgent and collective responsibility to achieve educational equity by ensuring that all policies, programs, and practices affirm the strengths that each and every child brings within their diverse backgrounds and life experiences, and by delivering the comprehensive supports, programs, and educational opportunities they need to succeed." Accordingly, we request that the ISBE grant the above funding requests and fulfill its commitment to all of the children in our Illinois classrooms -- including diverse gifted and advanced students.

Respectfully submitted,

The Illinois Association for Gifted Children
Submitted by:
Patricia Steinmeyer, IAGC Executive Director
Julie Luck-Jensen and Pamela Shaw, IAGC Advocacy Co-Chairs

2020 IAGC Letter Supplement - Metrics

ISBE Goal	IAGC Statement
GOAL 1 | STUDENT LEARNING: Every child will make significant academic gains each year, increasing their knowledge, skills, and opportunities so they graduate equipped to pursue a successful future, with the state paying special attention to addressing historic inequities.	Metrics in student performance at the "exceeds level" can be used to show impact on student learning at advanced levels. "Excellence gaps" between subgroups in Illinois are already significant and visible on the 2019 Illinois State Report Card. For example, in Grade 3 ELA outcomes, low income students are underrepresented among students scoring in the "exceeded" range (1.6 % in "exceed" range compared to 5.6% of non-low income students), and Black and Hispanic student subgroups are underrepresented compared to White and Asian students. Funds are needed to expand early enrichment opportunities and build district capacity to identify and develop exceptional potential in every school and community to help narrow these gaps. The large opportunity gap in elementary school gifted programming for high-ability students increases the significant excellence gaps existing in Illinois between subgroups of students at the advanced levels of achievement based on income and race. As the "State Snapshot" on the Illinois School Report Card indicates, the diversity of our students has increased over the last five years, underscoring the importance of ISBE's commitment to developing the talents of our diverse student population. Because achievement gaps between subgroups widen over time but are narrower in the early grades, providing resources, teacher training, and incentives for schools to assess students in preschool and Kindergarten would allow more low income and underrepresented minority students to be identified as gifted and to receive support to reach their full potential. By third or fourth grade, when many schools currently begin screening students for gifted identification, many disadvantaged students have already slipped through the cracks and regressed relative to their non-disadvantaged peers. Identifying gifted students earlier would reduce underrepresentation of low income students in gifted education programs and advanced coursework and help reduce Illinois' excellence gap.
GOAL 2 | LEARNING CONDITIONS: All districts and schools will receive the resources necessary to create safe, healthy, and welcoming learning environments, and will be equipped to meet the unique academic and social and emotional needs of each and every student.	Because fewer than 1/3 of Illinois elementary/middle schools offer gifted programming, children, especially low income children, lack opportunity and access to programs designed to meet their needs and develop their talents. All schools in Illinois need to offer gifted and advanced programming to provide equitable access to programming that meets learning needs. (see studies on IAGC Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion webpage.)
GOAL 3 | ELEVATING EDUCATORS: Illinois' diverse student population will have educators who are prepared through multiple pathways and are supported in and celebrated for their effectiveness in providing each and every child a high-quality education that meets their needs.	Currently, metrics on the number of teachers with gifted endorsements is available. However, there is sparse data on the amount of training that classroom teachers and gifted education teachers have completed. Accordingly, funding requested for gifted education and advanced learning would help support professional learning and allow all schools to provide training in this area for teachers. This data could be reported by schools to show teacher preparedness to teach and identify students with advanced learning needs.