

# **GIFTED EDUCATION in ALABAMA**

## **Information and Insights**

**Addressing the Urgent Need for  
State Funding of Gifted Education**



**2018**

## Introduction

This document was prepared by an ad hoc committee of experts in the field of gifted education in the State of Alabama. These individuals, members of the Alabama Association for Gifted Children, an organization whose mission is to advocate for the needs of gifted learners, encourage the reading and dissemination of the information contained in this document to all interested stakeholders, including educators, parents of gifted children, community and business leaders, and state .

## Overview of Gifted Education

The Marland Report to Congress in 1972 marked the first official recognition of gifted students as being at risk, stating that, "Gifted and Talented children are, in fact, deprived and can suffer psychological damage and permanent impairment of their abilities to function well which is equal to or greater than the similar deprivation suffered by any other population with special needs served by the Office of Education" (pp. xi-xii). Prior to that time, recognition of gifted children and their need for special education were addressed only sporadically through individual scholars and through research funded either by individuals or a handful of private institutions. The report also resulted in the first federal definition of gifted and talented, from which many states have modeled their definitions. The federal government allows each state to define gifted and to decide whether to serve gifted students. The state of Alabama passed legislation that mandates gifted services but has not historically funded gifted programs.

**Federal Definition:** "Gifted and talented children are those 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 or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. "  
*No Child Left Behind Act*, P.L. 107-110 (Title IX, Part A, Definitions (22) (2002); 20 U.S.C. Sec. 7802 (22) (2004))

**Alabama's Definition:** "Intellectually gifted children and youth are those who perform or who have demonstrated the potential to perform at high levels in academic or creative fields when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth require services not ordinarily provided by the regular school program. Children and youth possessing these abilities can be found in all populations, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor" (*Alabama Administrative Code (AAC)*, 29-8-9.12 (1)).

## Identification of Students for Gifted Eligibility in Alabama

There are two paths to identification:

- Automatic eligibility with a total score of 130 or above on an individual aptitude test administered by a licensed professional or a score of 97% or above on the *Torrance Test of Creative Thinking*.
- Matrix eligibility with a score of 17 of 20 possible points on the State Eligibility Determination Form. Points are assigned on the matrix in the areas of aptitude, gifted behavior characteristics, and performance.

Neighboring states (e.g., GA, MS, TN, FL) have similar methods for identification using matrices, with scores assigned for aptitude, achievement, gifted behaviors, and in some cases creativity.

## Quality Control of Gifted Education Programs in Alabama

University Programs	Alabama State Department of Education	Alabama Association for Gifted Children
Provide programs to certify gifted specialists at the Masters and Education Specialist levels	Assigns two gifted education specialists to oversee and maintain compliance with the AAC in gifted programs statewide	Maintains a professional organization for gifted specialists, administrators, and parents of gifted children.
Collaborate with ALSDE in determining the direction of gifted education in Alabama	Requires all LEAs to submit LEA Plans for Gifted Education which are aligned to AAC standards	Establishes regional networks of gifted specialists within the state
Work with school systems through consultation and collaboration to improve gifted education in gifted and general education programs	Establishes statewide standards for LEA Plans for Gifted Education and Acceleration Procedures	Provides statewide annual conference with opportunities for teacher training and exposure to national leaders in gifted education
Engage in research to benefit curriculum and instructional practices in gifted education	Monitors gifted programs to ensure compliance with the AAC and individual LEA Plans	Supports parent advocacy organizations
Provide professional development at national, state, regional and local conferences	Sets standards for certification of gifted specialists in Alabama	Partners with community and state leaders to improve gifted education
	Oversees quality of gifted specialists by requiring certification in gifted education within 3 years of employment	
	Provides professional development specifically for teachers of gifted children and Special Education / Gifted Coordinators yearly	
	Monitors curriculum development for gifted classrooms	
	Provides in person and on-line technical assistance to LEAs	

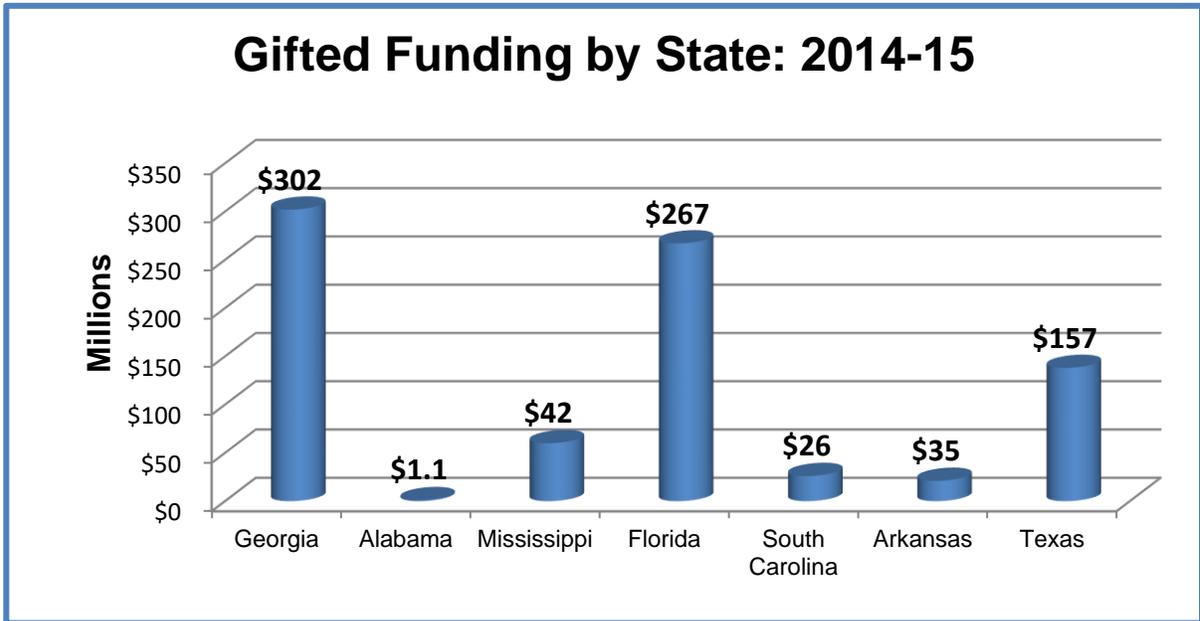
## **The State of Gifted Education in Alabama, the United States, and the World**

In the 1960s through the 1980s, the United States led the world in instructional strategies and special programs for educating America's most promising students, yielding an explosion of innovation in technology and economic growth. Ironically, emphasis on gifted education and the use of gifted instructional strategies has faded in the US, while interest in developing intellectual capital is growing in other countries around the world. Many of these countries are adopting practices developed by gifted educators and formerly used in the US to develop the potential of high-end learners. Consequently, students in countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand, are graduating and entering the global work force armed with increasing creative and critical thinking abilities, as well as skill in science, math, and technology. At the same time, US student performance in these areas continues to diminish.

How do some of our global competitors address gifted education?

- China focuses on individualized instruction for gifted students in strength areas.
- New Zealand fully funds gifted education at a national level. Their gifted programs are flexible and supportive of innovative and multifaceted thinking.
- Canada funds gifted services at the provincial level. Their gifted programs are designed to increase student intellectual horizons and differentiate curriculum and instruction to promote academic growth for gifted students.
- Japan purposefully instructs students to develop critical and creative thinking skills. Educators expect their brightest students to put forth the necessary effort to meet rigorous intellectual challenges.
- South Korean curriculum accommodates the needs of each student through independent learning and differentiated instructional strategies that address individual abilities, interests, aptitudes, and career directions.

In the United States, a lack of federal leadership in gifted education creates a disparity of policies and services among states and school districts. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) and the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted present the only national report on gifted education in the United States. This publication, entitled *State of the States in Gifted Education*, takes a biannual snapshot of how states support programs and services for gifted students. The following graph shows how Alabama compares to surrounding states in its funding of gifted education (NAGC, 2014).



\* Mississippi funds their gifted program through teacher units; therefore, the amount fluctuates based on the number of identified gifted students.

Most people would agree that educating all children is crucial to a successful future. However, our schools currently neglect the education of those who have the greatest potential to serve as community, state, and national leaders, stimulate economic growth, and provide innovative solutions to future problems. As the adage goes “one size does not fit all.” And, when our educational focus is on insuring that all children are educated to reach a set level of academic proficiency, our nation’s 3 million academically gifted and talented students become the children “left behind.” These future entrepreneurs, leaders, inventors, artists, writers, and problem solvers are among our state’s **most valuable natural resources** and are vital in maintaining Alabama’s ability to **compete in a global economy**. Their potential may never be realized unless their special learning needs are met. Gifted programs are essential in meeting these needs.

Alabama mandates gifted services but historically has not funded them. Providing equitable and high-quality services requires resources. During the 2013 fiscal year, the Alabama Legislature funded gifted education for the second time in its history through a line item of \$1 million. Since 2013, gifted education has been a line item in the Education Trust Fund Budget. In the FY 2018 and 2019 budgets, the amount for gifted education was \$2.5 million. In addition, \$750,000 was earmarked for grants to districts for innovative gifted education programming, with a limit of \$30,000 per grant award. Moving toward full funding will ensure the continued existence of gifted services and allow our state to develop better and stronger programs that will benefit our gifted children.

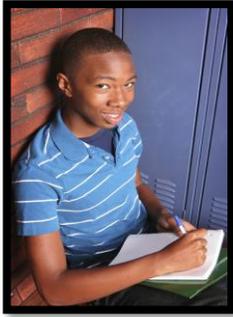
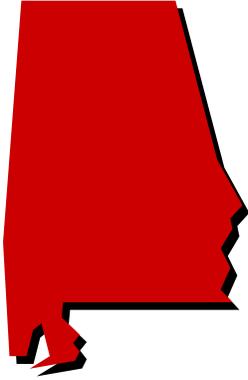
By fully funding gifted education, our students will be better prepared to compete with those from surrounding states for college admission, scholarships, and later for jobs that will keep them in Alabama. High quality gifted education programs can also serve to draw businesses in search of employees who can fill high-tech jobs requiring math and science expertise, creative thinking, and problem-solving skills. Funding appropriate education for gifted students is not only beneficial to their wellbeing, but it also pays high dividends for our state.

## Meeting the Challenge of Educating Gifted Learners in Alabama

School districts in Alabama are required to adhere to the Alabama Administrative Code (AAC) which requires that districts use the state-mandated process for identification of students for eligibility for gifted education services. Recommendations for service delivery and caseloads are also included in the code (Alabama Administrative Code: 290-8-9-.12 Gifted).

Based on the language and intent of identification and services for gifted outlined in the AAC, to meet the challenge of educating gifted learners in Alabama, the following evidence-based practices are recommended:

- We must implement **gifted educational strategies** to make a meaningful difference for our gifted and talented students as well as for high-ability students.
- Students who are advanced in their academic knowledge and skills may require **acceleration** either by grade or subject area.
- Implementing **curriculum compacting** to streamline grade-level curriculum and avoid re-teaching of already mastered content to the gifted student will enhance motivation for continued learning.
- **Cluster grouping** of gifted learners with similar-ability peers within the general education classroom, which provides gifted students opportunities for learning with their academic/intellectual peers allows for creating a sense of belonging and academic progress commiserate with knowledge, skills, and interests....and helps teachers better serve their gifted learners.
- **Pull-out programs** allow gifted students to share learning experiences with their intellectual peers. The social-emotional needs of the gifted can be best addressed within a pull-out resource classroom with the gifted specialist who is trained to recognize and meet their unique affective needs.
- **Differentiation** of instruction and curriculum allows gifted students who have already mastered certain areas of study to move forward gaining new knowledge and skills.
- **General education professionals** who have responsibilities for educating students identified with gifts and talents should be knowledgeable of gifted learners, trained in differentiation, and demonstrate a willingness to address the needs of these diverse learners.



### What is a Gifted Student Worth?

Alabama **NEEDS** to invest in our gifted and talented youth, not only because they deserve an appropriate education but because the state **NEEDS** their gifts and talents in order to remain competitive and prosperous.

- **The primary value of a gifted student is his/her brain power and creativity.** These are commodities we cannot manufacture. Investing in the education our most promising young people has a societal return on that investment. According to The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), \$1 invested in a college graduate in 1985 would yield an unadjusted \$15.06 in 2011 while \$1 invested in the S&P 500 in 1985 would only yield an unadjusted \$7.00. Education is the **best** investment! (OECD, 2011)
- **Higher levels of educational attainment lead to higher levels of income.** Gifted and high ability learners who complete college and post baccalaureate education have the capacity to earn significantly more than those with high school diplomas or less. This translates into more money funneled into the state and local economies.
- **Highly educated individuals are arrested less, are healthier, live in better equipped homes and provide better support for the education of their children.** (US Census Bureau, 2011 Annual Social and Economic Supplement)

## **Consequences of Failing to Meet the Needs of Gifted Students**

When gifted and high-ability students are not challenged, they begin to think that being smart means that they don't have to work hard. This may lead to poor learning skills and eventually underachievement and even failure in school. Some families concerned about the availability of challenging content and rigorous instruction seek alternate options, such as private schools or home schooling. Students from poverty, however, are dependent on Alabama's public schools to meet their educational needs, meaning they may not be able to reach their true potential without appropriate gifted services from their school (National Association for Gifted Children, 2012).

### **Factors to Consider:**

- The "Excellence Gap" (Plucker et al., 2010) is growing between groups of students achieving the advanced level on the NAEP exam. For example, in Grade 4 Math, the percentage of white students scoring at the advanced level increased by 5% between 1998 and 2007; the percentage of Black and Hispanic students increased by only 1%.
- Fewer than 1 in 4 teachers (23%) say that the needs of advanced students are a top priority at their school; 32% say that they are a low priority.
- Only 56% of children from low socio-economic backgrounds who are considered high achieving when they enter school remain high achieving by the end of 5<sup>th</sup> grade. (Plucker, Burroughs, & Song, 2010)

## **Gifted Students Need Trained Teachers**

Research yields an overwhelming amount of positive effects that come out of training teachers in gifted education. Davidson (1996) found that teachers with the proper training show more enthusiasm and support for gifted programs and work to provide a more differentiated curriculum rather than merely adding more content. She also found that they use more teaching techniques to ease boredom, give students time to pursue their personal interests, and encourage learning outside of the classroom. Along with the many positives that arise from gifted education training, it should be noted that giving teachers little to no gifted education training results in negative effects in the classroom. Untrained teachers commonly display more apathy and hostility toward gifted students and are prone to thinking giftedness only shows itself through high academic grades (Lichtenwalter, 2010).

## Alabama Gifted Program Needs

Funding for gifted education in Alabama is needed in order to provide appropriate program services. Currently, funding for gifted specialists is provided by local districts. According to ALSDE information (2016), there are 61,646 gifted students in Grades K-12 in Alabama schools. (This student count does not take into consideration districts which use an enrichment model/talent pool rather than following the state guidelines for gifted identification). Approximately 1044 gifted specialists are needed to meet the guidelines for teacher caseloads specified in the *Alabama Administrative Code*. Teacher caseloads as per *Alabama Administrative Code* (AAC) 290-8-9.12 (9):

- Elementary: 45 students per Gifted Specialist
- Elem/Middle: 45 students per Gifted Specialist
- Middle/High: 75 students per Gifted Specialist

Full funding of K-12 gifted services is the ultimate goal, with specific program needs as follows:

- gifted specialist teacher units: estimated number of units K-12 = 1044\*
- professional development for general education teachers and gifted specialists
- substitute teachers needed when professional development activities are scheduled
- scholarships for educators to obtain gifted certification at state universities
- classroom supplies and materials
- technology-related equipment and maintenance and software/licenses
- testing materials and services for Child Find

### Past Funding

For Fiscal Year 2013, the state legislature allocated **\$1 million** for gifted education. This was the first time in five years that gifted education was funded as a line item in the state education budget. The first ever funding occurred in FY 2007 when gifted education was funded **\$2.3 million**. Prior to 2007 **NO** state funds were provided to districts. All funding for gifted was provided at the local level.

### Present Funding Request

The current funding allocation (per the House budget) for FY 2019 is the same as it was for 2018: **\$2.5 million**.

### Future Funding Requests

To fully fund gifted education (i.e., teacher units and screening/assessment) for the Fiscal Year 2019, the budget request would for **\$60 million**. Beyond FY 2019, additional funding for gifted education is needed for program resources, professional development, etc.: **\$3 million**

(\*Formula for determining gifted program funding per ALSDE (2012): District enrollment plus identified gifted students divided by 2 = total student number to be multiplied by state gifted allotment.

**Total student enrollment is calculated in the formula to provide funding for:**

- Enrichment Model school systems which may not have any identified gifted students;
- Consultative services for Grades K-2 are indicated for any high-level student since mandated identification for gifted begins in Grade 2.
- Consultative services between classroom teachers, other school personnel, and gifted specialists in order to develop and provide differentiated curriculum and instruction for all high-ended learners;
- Second Grade Child Find and standard Child Find testing materials.

**Benefits of Gifted Education**

The Alabama Association for Gifted Children recognizes the need for educational excellence. The Association's members believe that every gifted student has the right to learn something new every day. By supporting gifted students, we increase the likelihood that Alabama will move to higher levels of productivity and economic growth.

**Benefits to students who participate in gifted programs:**

- enhanced leadership opportunities
- development of informed opinions
- exposure to various perspectives and points of view
- establishment of goals leading to career options
- exploration of post-secondary education opportunities
- demonstration of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills: creativity, imagination, collaboration, cooperation, service to others, and problem-solving strategies
- participation in field experiences and service learning
- growth in social-emotional domains
- development of autonomous life-long learners and responsible citizenship

**Benefits of gifted education to the State of Alabama:**

- advancements in new technologies
- leadership in business, community, schools, and state leadership
- attraction of businesses that require innovative individuals
- increased pool of inventors and entrepreneurs
- productive citizens who will contribute to the state's economy and a global society

## **Advocacy for Gifted Education**

Effective advocacy requires individuals to be knowledgeable, organized, have defined goals and objectives, be committed, and be persistent. As part of the Alabama Association for Gifted Children (AAGC) advocacy goal, we work with members of the Alabama State Legislature to increase support for gifted and talented learners. To be effective, AAGC depends on gifted education supporters across the state, including parents, educators, and other stakeholders who will contact their elected representatives on behalf of gifted students.

The Alabama Association for Gifted Children (AAGC) has increased advocacy efforts to heighten awareness and support for gifted programs, funding, and support groups through:

- Annual “Gifted Education Month” to highlight gifted learners and program services in Alabama (January)
- AAGC Advocacy Group Database
- AAGC Parent Advocacy Group Information Packet
- AAGC Annual Conference
- Email contacts
- Social media: Facebook, Twitter, and AAGC website
- Newsletters
- Letter writing campaigns to stakeholders, community leaders, state legislators
- Information presented at school faculty meetings
- Network with stakeholders, businesses, and community leaders
- Professional development training for educators
- Meetings with school officials and administrators
- Parent meetings
- Informational flyers to parents
- Meetings with state representatives and senators
- Meetings with university instructors

## **AAGC Partnering with State Leaders**

AAGC will continue to partner with state representatives, ALSDE administrators and Board of Education members, school administrators and staff, community leaders, parents, and gifted specialists to advocate for:

- implementation of Alabama’s Gifted Education Month activities
- state funding for gifted education to support student needs and programs
- dissemination of information about gifted education

## References

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## Resources

For additional information regarding gifted learners, visit these sites:

Alabama Association for Gifted Children	<a href="http://alabamagifted.org">alabamagifted.org</a>
National Association for Gifted Children	<a href="http://nagc.org">nagc.org</a>
Davidson Institute	<a href="http://davidsongifted.org">davidsongifted.org</a>
SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted)	<a href="http://sengifted.org">sengifted.org</a>
National Research Center on the Gifted/Talented (NRC/GT)	<a href="http://gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt">gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt</a>

Information on current research into the excellence gap with gifted/high ability learners:

Jack Kent Cooke Foundation	<a href="http://www.excellencegap.org/what-is-the-excellence-gap/">http://www.excellencegap.org/what-is-the-excellence-gap/</a>
Fordham Institute	<a href="https://edexcellence.net/publications/is-there-a-gifted-gap">https://edexcellence.net/publications/is-there-a-gifted-gap</a>

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