

JACK KENT COOKE
FOUNDATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
**EQUAL TALENTS,
UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

*A Report Card on State Support for
Academically Talented Low-Income Students*

2ND EDITION



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NO states receive a B or better for closing excellence gaps. There is tremendous room for states to increase their focus on income-based discrepancies in advanced learning. The full report unpacks these grades, examining separately state *policies*, student *participation*, and student *outcomes*, and finds that 38 states did well in at least one of these separate areas. We see small signs of progress since 2015, but there is much room for improvement. All states could implement stronger policies, and all states have observable gaps in the percentage of low-income students versus other students who reach advanced levels of learning.

States can and should take the lead in promoting educational excellence and eliminating excellence gaps. We offer the following recommendations to states:

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Attend to both excellence and excellence gaps.

Interventions that increase overall academic excellence may not address excellence gaps. While it appears that states are slowly increasing their focus on academic excellence, they are far less likely to have policies in place with potential to close excellence gaps. States should treat the goals of promoting educational excellence and eliminating excellence gaps as related, but distinct, objectives.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Maximize identification of students to receive advanced learning opportunities.

Students will never receive advanced instruction unless they are identified to do so. All states should require LEAs to identify advanced students through implementation of universal screening and use of local norms. Teacher preparation should include training on how to identify students who would benefit from increased rigor of instruction.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Ensure that all high-ability students have access to advanced educational services.

States should require services for gifted and talented students; require all educators to have exposure to the needs of advanced students in teacher, counselor, and administrator preparation coursework; and monitor and audit LEA gifted and talented programs for quality. In addition, states should provide for dual enrollment for high school students in college level coursework,

by: partnering with local higher education institutions, providing AP courses, or facilitating dual enrollment in bricks-and-mortar and online college courses.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Remove barriers that prevent high-ability students from moving through coursework at a pace that matches their achievement level.

Allowing high-ability students to move through the K–12 system at their own pace is one of the easiest and most straightforward interventions. State-level laws and policies should require LEAs to allow early entrance to kindergarten, acceleration between grades, dual enrollment in middle school and high school (with high school credit), and early graduation from high school.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Hold LEAs accountable for the performance of high-ability students from all economic backgrounds.

Our analysis of state K–12 accountability systems was based on plans as they existed in 2016–2017. As we completed this study, states were beginning to offer their revised plans under the Every Student Succeeds Act; some of which are qualitatively different from their NCLB-era plans. Although we did not evaluate the new plans due to their draft nature, initial analyses of these plans are not positive from the perspective of promoting high achievement and addressing excellence gaps. The new plans should: give credit for advanced achievement; include high-achievers in growth assessments; separately report growth for high-achievers; and include other indicators of excellence. Accountability systems should also report separately low-income and other students to identify excellence gaps.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Create a comprehensive talent development plan.

Because talent development has been a low priority for most states, relevant policies and programs almost universally have a patchwork feel: gifted education policies and interventions focus on mid-to-late elementary grades; middle school tends to be overlooked; AP policies are treated separately, as are dual enrollment policies. The lack of coordination among these moving parts leads to dysfunctional talent development systems that comprehensively address neither excellence nor excellence gaps. States should develop comprehensive P–16 plans for developing talent.

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