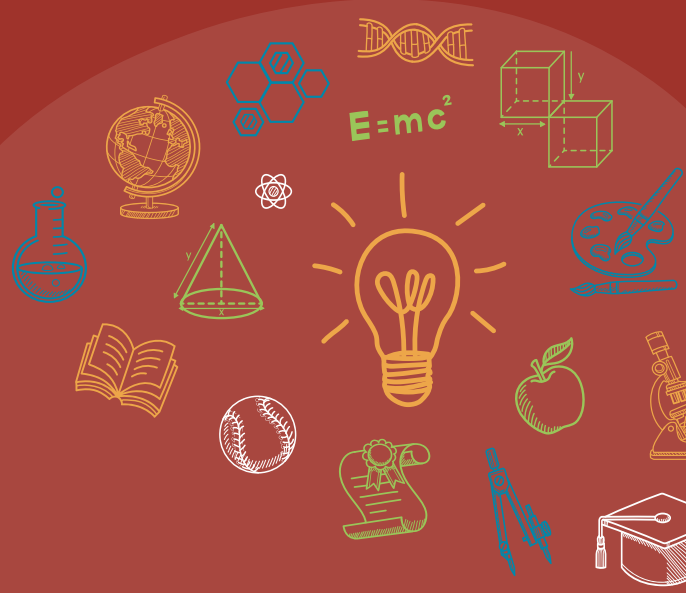




PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS GIFTED EDUCATION

Prepared by the Institute for Educational
Advancement with polling by Benenson
Strategy Group and The Winston Group





INTRODUCTION

In the United States, our goal is to provide a free and appropriate education for all children. Yet children with advanced cognitive ability are likely to enter their classrooms having mastered over half of the curriculum before the first day. Gifted young people have an intense intellectual curiosity and are eager to explore and learn, but they are often destined for days filled with repetition, lack of engagement and boredom. This is a tragic circumstance for those with such great potential to change our country and our world for the better. Advanced learners who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are especially at risk of being unidentified, underserved and thus unmotivated. Since the turn of the 20th century, educators and policy makers have grown increasingly aware of this issue, making small waves of progress at times in support of gifted students, yet nothing has taken hold.

The lack of services for these students is an issue that has been smoldering for decades and a crime for the individual and our community. According to the Davidson Institute for Talent Development, of the 37 states that mandate gifted youth are served, only four have programs that are fully funded, 24 are partially funded, and nine states mandate services but are not funded at all. Of the 13 states with no mandate, nine have no dollars going towards advanced learners, and five only have partially funded programs. These numbers are dismal. As Chester Finn, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education, once put it:

"If we cannot bring ourselves to push smart kids as far as they can go, we will watch and eventually weep as other countries surpass us in producing tomorrow's inventors, entrepreneurs, artists and scientists."

In 2014, the *Institute for Educational Advancement* (IEA) approached The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation with a proposal to fund a symposium as the first phase of a larger public policy initiative to advance programs and services for gifted youth. In November 2015, IEA invited a diverse group of 11 individuals with backgrounds in business, technology, education, politics and innovation to discuss why this part of our educational system continues to fall short and what can be done to make effective change. Through our dialogue, it was clear the first step to making progress was to conduct a study determining how the American public really feels about the issue. The hope was that this information would explain why gifted students are still not a priority.

In the fall of 2016, IEA commissioned Benson Strategy Group and the Winston Group to conduct the first national poll surveying American voters about their perceptions of gifted education in the United States. During the course of the survey, participants responded to questions about messaging, the meaning of the term "gifted," identification of gifted students, optimal services, professional development, and funding.

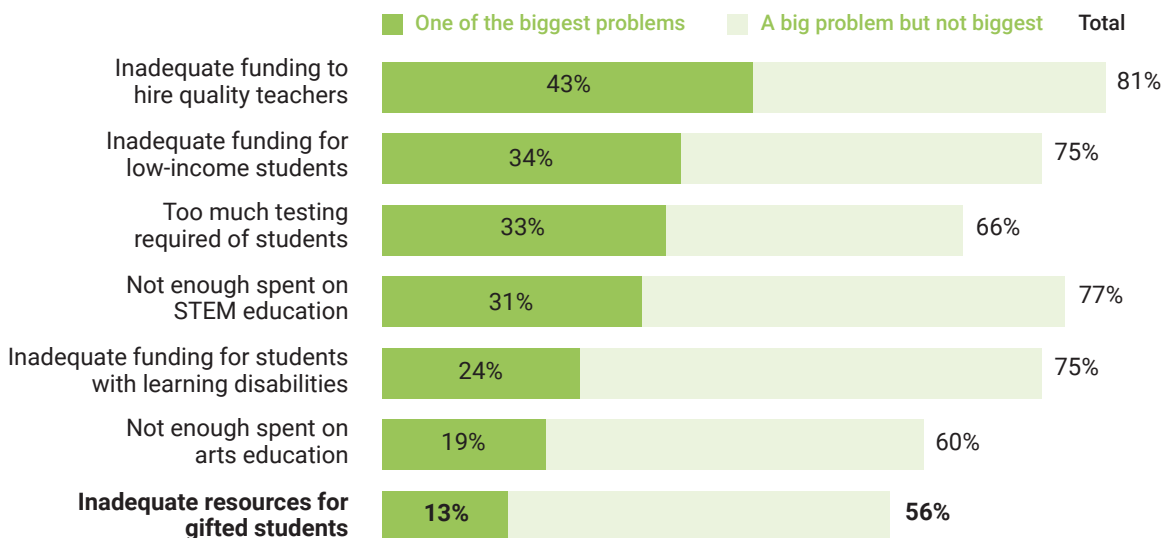
This document tells the story of how participants initially perceived gifted education in the United States and how particular messages increase a sense of urgency around the issue. The more voters hear, the stronger their support. Voters are concerned that gifted students are not getting the resources they need. Now, how do we encourage them to act?

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

QUESTION: WHAT ARE THE LARGEST ISSUES FACING OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM AND HOW WELL ARE PUBLIC SCHOOLS ADDRESSING THEM?

Initially, participants were asked . . .

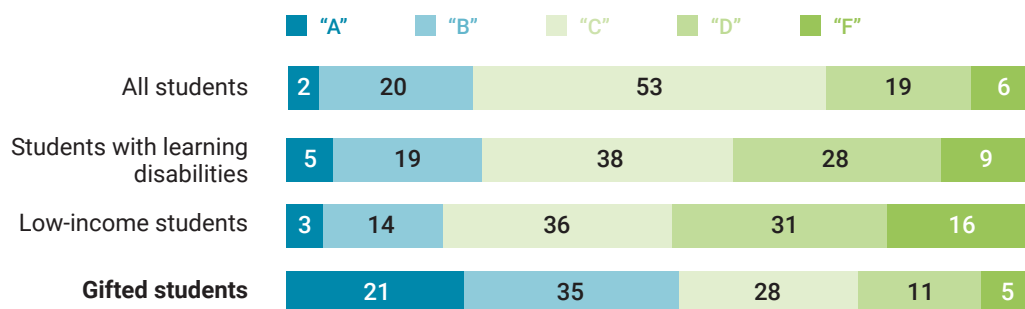
A) How big of a problem for our education system is each statement?



FINDING:

Resources for gifted students ranked in the bottom three for all major demographics.

B) Using a grading scale of A-F, how good of a job do you think K-12 public schools across the country are doing at addressing the needs each of the following types of students?



FINDING:

56%

of respondents gave public schools an A or B grade for addressing needs of gifted students.

IMPLICATION: WHAT DO THESE RESULTS MEAN?



The majority of people do not see gifted education as a priority when directly compared with other areas of education because they believe that the current system already meets the needs of gifted students better than others.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

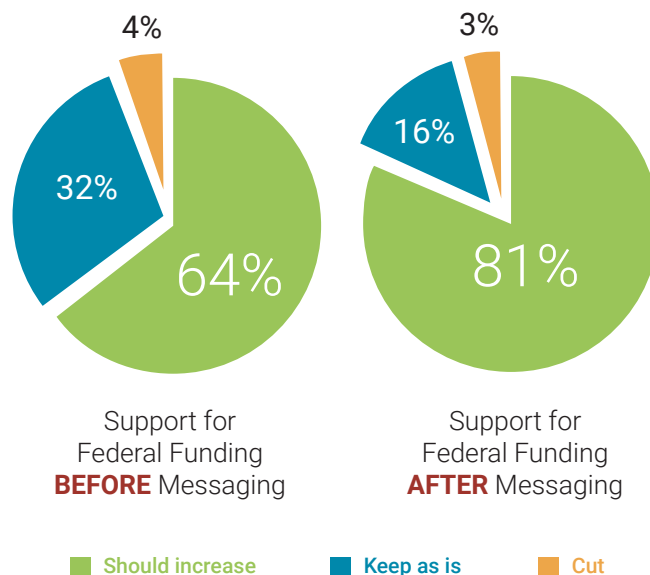
QUESTION: WHAT MESSAGING IS MOST EFFECTIVE IN BOOSTING SUPPORT FOR FUNDING GIFTED IDENTIFICATION & EDUCATION?

After messaging, there was strong support for increasing funds to support gifted identification, professional development and program/services. These findings were virtually equal across the political spectrum and socioeconomic groups!

81% of those surveyed supported increased state & federal funding after messaging



Participants associated “Advanced Learner,” “Gifted” and “Gifted and Talented” with above average ability over alternative terms.



IMPLICATION: WHAT DO THESE RESULTS MEAN?



There is more support than initially believed for increased funding towards gifted education. **This support increased substantially as participants learned more about the lack of resources for gifted and advanced students.**

ACTION: WHAT SHOULD WE DO?




The support for funding exists if messaging is structured correctly. Assert the problem, then follow up with potential consequences.

Example: In 2014, the federal government spent almost nothing on programs for gifted students in public schools. In fact, more than half of public schools have zero funds going to gifted learners. Other countries, like China and India, invest millions of dollars in their advanced students. If our country wants to remain globally competitive, we need to ensure these gifted young Americans receive the support and resources they need to succeed.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

QUESTION: WHAT ARE THE TOP PRIORITIES FOR GIFTED EDUCATION & TEACHER TRAINING?

 **42%** reported a great deal of concern that “Minority students and those from low-income households are often not identified as gifted when they should be”

 **43%** said inadequate funding to hire quality teachers is one of the biggest problems for our education system

PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS THAT SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING:

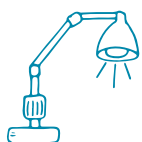
90% support improved funding to help train teachers who **identify and serve** gifted children

89% support improved funding to help train teachers who **are educating** gifted children

86% support requirements that any teacher who serves gifted children **receives special training**

86% support additional funding to schools in **underserved communities** specifically to support programs for gifted students

IMPLICATION: WHAT DO THESE RESULTS MEAN?



Across the board, the greatest concerns were for increased identification and access to gifted services among minority and low-income students, and increased professional development for all teachers of the gifted.

ACTION: WHAT SHOULD WE DO?



Advocate for pre-service training that prepares all teachers to equitably identify and serve gifted youth.

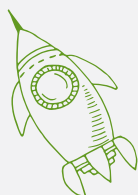
Additionally, local partnerships that provide supplemental services in schools as well as annual professional development sessions dedicated to serving advanced learners can help to ensure all advanced students are identified and served.

IMPLEMENTATION

SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

Based on these findings, here are some low-cost solutions we recommend pursuing:

- ✓ Cross-departmental conversations on how to meet the needs of advanced learners, especially underrepresented groups (minority, ELL, Title 1 students)
- ✓ Local partnerships that provide supplemental services in schools (after school courses, mentors, content area specials as visiting teachers, special interest clubs)
- ✓ Dual enrollment, subject acceleration and grade-level acceleration
- ✓ Annual professional development sessions dedicated to serving advanced learners
- ✓ Parent information sessions about early identification and gifted characteristics



87% of respondents support enabling students who have been identified as gifted to have their education accelerated (allowing them to skip a grade, grouping students by ability, or other means)

KYLE'S STORY:

Kyle started to read when he was two. He carried the first Harry Potter book with him to preschool and proceeded to finish the book in a week. His preschool teacher recognized Kyle's needs and advised his parents that Kyle should skip kindergarten. At first, the school district denied the request due to policy. As a result, Kyle's initial experience of kindergarten was fraught with boredom and frustration. He cried every morning and would try to negotiate ways to get out of going to school.

Knowing that something had to change, his parents went back to the district who then decided to take the risk and allow Kyle to accelerate to first grade. With the support of his teachers, administrators and parents, Kyle is once again motivated to learn, he is gaining confidence, making friends and maturing among his new peers. This has changed school policy, ensuring other children have similar opportunities.

CONCLUSION

As an organization, this information is a clear call to act. As educators and concerned citizens, we have work to do. **These students cannot be ignored.** We need to ensure that gifted youth have access to rigorous content thus inspiring exploration and engagement. We need to ensure that we are providing our teachers with the tools they need serve these students.

We need to educate the public and make it known that quality services for these students are rare, and largely unfunded.

"Every child deserves the opportunity to learn in an appropriate, challenging and engaging educational environment. We must support our advanced students to grow as individuals and global citizens who are able to contribute to the innovation, strength and growth of our nation."

– Elizabeth D. Jones, IEA President & Co-Founder

There is good news, people recognize the issue.

Now, **we must act.**

As we continue to work towards policy change, there is much that can be done now. Whether you're a parent, educator, administrator, academic or supplemental service provider, you have the ability to advocate for improvements and create change.



If you are interested in receiving a report, joining the conversation or learning more about next steps, please contact **Morgan Carrion** at mcarrion@educationaladvancement.org.

Or visit our website at:
www.educationaladvancement.org.

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The Benenson Strategy Group and The Winston Group conducted 1414 online interviews from December 19, 2016-January 6, 2017 with registered voters nationwide, including oversamples of: 150 Opinion Elites, 150 Parents, 150 Hispanics, and 150 African Americans.

-At the 95% confidence level, the margin of error for the entire sample is $\pm 2.51\%$. It is $\pm 6.21\%$ among Opinion Elites, $\pm 3.73\%$ among Parents, $\pm 6.03\%$ among African Americans, $\pm 5.81\%$ among Hispanics, and higher among subgroups.