



National Association for Gifted Children
1707 L Street, NW, Suite 550
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 785-4268
www.nagc.org

Narrowing the Prosperity Gap by Eliminating Achievement Gaps among High-Performing Students

Background

Closing the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children is the priority for Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA) as reauthorized by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). In particular, NCLB aims to address achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students and between economically disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers by setting the laudable goal of all students reaching proficiency by 2014. The focus of NCLB seems to have paid off for some students; the achievement gap between 4th grade White and African-American students reading at the proficient level is at an all-time low.

However, NCLB does not address the achievement gap between the highest performing disadvantaged¹ students and their more advantaged peers. According to recently published research, the achievement gap between cohorts of the highest-performing students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from more advantaged backgrounds grows at a faster rate as students progress through grades than that of like students at the opposite end of the achievement spectrum. A recent national study shows the achievement gaps in reading and math skills between Kindergarten and fifth grade grow roughly twice as fast for students who begin school with scores one standard deviation above the mean as for those who begin one standard deviation below the mean.² This trend is especially stark between high-achieving African-American and White students. Other recent research has found similar results.³ Additionally, half of lower-income students who were classified as high-achievers in math early in their schooling lost this status in elementary school.⁴

This widening achievement gap, particularly between those with highest ability, is especially problematic in light of the demand for a high-performing and highly skilled workforce to ensure economic competitiveness in the new global economy. The achievement gap also exemplifies the socio-economic divide as we struggle to address vexing poverty and unemployment issues. The Nation has an interest in providing leadership and resources to developing the talent of the best and brightest students from all population subgroups, particularly high-potential disadvantaged students who are underserved by the nation's public schools.

¹ Disadvantaged in this statement refers to students from racial/ethnic minority groups and those who are economically disadvantaged.

² Reardon, F. (2008, March). *Differential Growth in the Black-White Achievement Gap During Elementary School among Initially High- and Low-Scoring Students* (Working Paper # 2008-07). Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University.

³ Hanushek, E.A. & Rivkin, S.G. (2006, October). *School Quality and the Black-White Achievement Gap*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research; Gribben, M. A., Campbell, H. L., & Mathew, J. (2008). *Are Advanced Students Advancing? Examining Achievement Trends Beyond Proficiency*. Alexandria, VA: Human Resources Research Organization.

⁴ Wyner, J., Bridgeland, J.M., & Diulio, J.J. (2008). *The Achievement Trap: How America is Failing Millions of High-Achieving Students from Lower Income Families*. Lansdowne, VA: Jack Kent Cooke Foundation; Hanushek, E. A. & Rivkin, S. G. (2006). *School Quality and the Black-White Achievement Gap*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research



Equity in Excellence Grants

Program Summary

To fulfill the promise of Title I of NCLB, the *National Association for Gifted Children* (NAGC) proposes the creation of federal "Equity in Excellence Grants." The purpose of the grants is to support high-need districts in eliminating the achievement gap between high-achieving, disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers. The program will target interventions and academic services to disadvantaged students entering first grade who perform in the top decile on achievement assessments. The intervention will follow this cohort of students through fourth grade. The grants will support local educational agencies in developing a program of services and strategies to ensure that the rate of growth in academic achievement of high-achieving disadvantaged students is, at a minimum, comparable to that of their more advantaged peers. The Secretary of Education will administer a competitive grant process for these 5-year grants. In addition, the Secretary of Education will collect program data, including achievement data of students receiving interventions, and make it available for independent research and analysis. .

Program Description

The program provides 5-year competitive grants to high-need local educational agencies (LEAs), or eligible partnerships of high-need LEAs and other technical assistance providers to eliminate achievement gaps between the highest performing disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers.

Authorized activities include:

1. implementation of high quality assessments that provide diagnostic information that informs instruction;
2. implementation of evidence-based, challenging education programming designed to maximize learning of high-potential students, including enrichment programs, academic acceleration strategies, and the procurement of high quality support materials such as curricula;
3. training and hiring of effective teachers with the knowledge and skills in implementing evidence-based instructional strategies designed to meet the needs of high-achieving students; and
4. education and training of parents of high-potential disadvantaged students to support educational excellence for their children.

To receive an "Equity in Excellence Grant," a local educational agency or eligible partnership must submit an application to the Secretary describing how funds will be used to support the district in eliminating the achievement gap between high-achieving, disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers. The grants will support local educational agencies in developing a program of academic interventions and services to ensure that the rate of growth in academic achievement of disadvantaged students is, at a minimum, comparable to that of their more advantaged, high-achieving peers. The application must target interventions to cohorts of students entering first grade and progressing through the fourth grade and collect data on the effect of the program on the participating students.

The Secretary shall collect relevant program data, including achievement data of students receiving interventions under the program and those in comparable student cohorts on the *Early Childhood Longitudinal-Kindergarten Direct Child Assessment*.



DRAFT LEGISLATIVE LANGUAGE

Section 1002 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6302) is amended by adding at the end the following:

'(j) EQUITY IN EXCELLENCE GRANTS. –For the purpose of carrying out part J, there are authorized to be appropriated \$50,000,000 for fiscal year 2009 and each of the 5 succeeding fiscal years.'

Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6301 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

"PART J – EQUITY IN EXCELLENCE GRANTS

"SEC. 2001. PURPOSE.

"The purpose of this part is to support high-need school districts in developing a program that ensures that the rate of growth in academic achievement of high-achieving, disadvantaged students is comparable to that of their more advantaged, high-achieving peers.

"SEC. 2002. DEFINITIONS.

"(a) Eligible local educational agency.– The term 'eligible local educational agency' in this part means a high-need local education agency;

"(b) High-Achieving Student.– The term 'high-achieving student' in this part means any student who is performing in the top ten percent of the student's subgroup on a valid and reliable assessment;

"(c) Disadvantaged Student.– The term 'disadvantaged student' means any student belonging to a racial or ethnic minority group or student whose family is below the poverty level as defined by 20 U.S.C. 6313 (a)(5);

"(e) Secretary.– The term 'Secretary' in this part means Secretary of the Department of Education; and

"(f) Cohort.– The term 'cohort' means a group of high-achieving students entering the 1st grade and progressing through the 4th grade.

"(g) Eligible partnership.--The term 'eligible partnership' in this part means a partnership of one eligible local education agency and at least one technical assistance provider, such as institutions of higher education, with significant expertise educating students with gifts and talents

"SEC. 2003. PROGRAM AUTHORIZATION. In General.– The Secretary is authorized to make competitive demonstration grants for up to 5 years to eligible local educational agencies or eligible partnerships for the purposes of the local educational agency's development of targeted interventions and academic services to ensure that the rate of growth in academic achievement of a cohort of high-achieving disadvantaged students is comparable to that of a cohort of more advantaged, high-achieving peers within the local educational agency.



"SEC. 2004. AUTHORIZED USE OF FUNDS.

"Allowable uses of funds under this grant described in this section may include each the following:

- "(a) Implementing high-quality assessments that provide diagnostic information that informs instruction;
- "(b) Implementing innovative educational strategies, such as cooperative learning, evidence-based challenging educational programming designed to maximize learning of high-potential and high-achieving students, including enrichment programs, academic acceleration strategies, and the procurement of high quality support materials such as curricula;
- "(c) Carrying out training and professional development for educators, including principals, involved in the teaching of high-achieving disadvantaged students; and
- "(d) Conducting education and training for parents of high-achieving disadvantaged students to support educational excellence for their children.

"SEC. 2005. RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.- Nothing in this part shall be construed to prohibit a recipient of funds under this part from serving high-achieving disadvantaged students simultaneously with students with similar educational needs, in the same educational settings, where appropriate.

"SEC. 2006. DATA COLLECTION AND INDEPENDENT ANALYSIS.

- "(a) The Director of the Institute of Education Sciences shall collect data comparing longitudinal achievement levels of the targeted cohorts and their more advantaged peers under this grant using the *Early Childhood Longitudinal-Kindergarten Direct Child Assessment*. The Secretary of Education shall release the data for analysis by third-party research institutions;
- "(b) The Secretary of Education may reserve up to 1 percent of the total appropriation for this program for the Institute of Education Sciences to collect the data described in subsection (a).