

Instructional Quality: Gifted and Talented Identification, Services, Coursework and Assessment; Science Assessment (SSB3042, HSB554)

The Iowa Department of Education's pre-filed Instructional Quality bill (SSB3042, HSB554) consists of multiple system improvements to realize national best practices in serving advanced learners in Iowa. Our work has focused on ensuring all students are proficient in core subject areas, which must be matched with ensuring all students have access to opportunities aligned to their academic needs.

- Analysis of gifted and talented program plans, submitted annually to the Iowa Department of Education by school districts, shows some trends in gifted and talented programs in Iowa schools, including:
 - a general **lack of clear identification procedures** for lower elementary grade levels, and
 - **misalignment between identification procedures and services** provided by the gifted and talented program.
- Nationally, research shows students with low-income backgrounds have **less access** to and are **underrepresented** in advanced coursework.
- Additionally, since FY2019, Iowa school districts collectively have carried **at least \$23 million in Gifted and Talented program balances**. (Note: 219 school districts had a balance in FY2025 and 168 school districts have had a balance for the past seven years (FY2019-2025).)

1. Existing District Plans Support Consistently High-quality Gifted and Talented Student Identification and Services:

School districts are **already required** to create a plan for serving gifted and talented students ([Iowa Code Chapter 257.42-49](#)). This proposal strengthens the minimum requirements of these plans to ensure:

- **program consistency** between school districts,
- **uniform identification procedures** covering kindergarten through grade 12, and
- greater **uniformity of gifted and talented services** provided to students identified as gifted and talented.

This will align Iowa's requirements with national best practices for identifying gifted and talented students, and ensures all students are evaluated for, and no single criteria eliminates a student from, participation in a gifted and talented program.

2. Automatic Enrollment in Accelerated Coursework with Ability for Families to Opt Out:

This proposal provides that any student in grade 4 or higher who scores in the advanced performance level/exceeds grade-level expectations on the statewide summative assessment in English Language Arts (ELA) and/or mathematics will be **automatically enrolled in the next most rigorous course or program**, with the ability for families to opt-out of accelerated coursework. (For example, 13.9% of Iowa ninth graders were determined to be advanced/exceed grade-level expectations in mathematics.)

- In addition, each school district must establish and implement a **subject and whole-grade sharing acceleration process** to provide students access to accelerated coursework aligned with their skills, talents, and interests.

Note: Iowa will be one of the first states in the nation to support automatic enrollment in accelerated ELA coursework in addition to mathematics.

3. Advanced Mathematics Pathways Beginning in Middle School:

This proposal supports all school districts in developing **middle school advanced mathematics pathways** designed to enable students to be prepared for, enroll in, and master **Algebra I as early as the beginning of middle school and at least by the end of 9th grade**.

- The proposal also provides **transparent, consistent criteria for the identification of students** who are to be placed into the advanced mathematics pathway.

4. Assessments Aligned to Coursework, Not Age:

This proposal provides that a school district must *allow* any student enrolled in an accelerated course to take the **statewide student assessment that corresponds to the content and level of the course** in which the student is enrolled.

5. Statewide Science Assessment in Grade 11:

This proposal moves the summative state assessment for high school science (Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress or ISASP) from **grade 10 to grade 11** to ensure students receive instruction in all tested science concepts.

Note: Science is assessed three times, with the elementary assessment in grade 5 at the end of elementary school and the middle assessment in grade 8 at the end of middle school.

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