

# Illinois report examines under enrollment of minority, low-income students in gifted programs

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*One Chance Illinois highlights disparities statewide*

**CHICAGO, IL** – Gifted black and Hispanic students in Illinois are not getting the same academic opportunities as their white and Asian peers, according to a new report released today by One Chance Illinois.

The report, which examines gifted education in a sampling of districts throughout the state, shows that minority and low-income students are not being given equal opportunity to enroll in the state's gifted programs.

“We assumed our data would show issues identifying minority children as gifted, however, we were shocked by how much of a gap there really is and the reasons why,” said Myles Mendoza, executive director of One Chance Illinois.

One Chance Illinois solicited data from public districts statewide and assessed gifted programs run by the largest 10 percent of unit and elementary school districts. Across the sampled districts, black students comprised 24.6 percent of the student population, but only 16.3 percent of the gifted population; Hispanic students comprised 36.7 percent of the student population, but only 17.5 percent of the gifted population; and low-income students comprised nearly 56.9 percent of the student population, but only 32.8 percent of the gifted population.

There has been little to no change in the makeup of students receiving advanced academic support since 2003, the last year the Illinois funded gifted education. A report published that year by the State Board of Education showed that black and Hispanic students were greatly underrepresented in gifted programs, at nearly the same percentages that they are today.

The report shows significant disparities between students' likelihood of accessing advanced learning opportunities based on their skin color and income status and demonstrates that districts across the state are not following best-practices when it comes to gifted identification.

"While there are certainly bright children from minority and low-income families, they have been consistently overlooked in the current system," says Myles Mendoza. "Our report is a good first step in helping us determine why this gap exists; now we must figure out how we can give these students the same opportunities as their peers."

One reason for the disparity may be the use of teachers' referrals in the gifted identification process. A recent Vanderbilt University study of more than 14,000 elementary school students in districts with gifted programs showed that black students with the same high standardized test scores as their peers were less likely to be referred to gifted programs.

Ensuring that more minority and low-income students gain access to gifted programming not only benefits the student, but society at large.

"When given an enriching academic environment and emotional support, gifted students despite their background, go on to achieve incredible things," said Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, director of the Center for Talent Development and professor of Education and Social Policy at Northwestern University. "It's our responsibility to close the gap for these kids."

The report suggests revised identification policies in Illinois as an important first step. According to a study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, universal screening of students using a cognitive ability test helped boost low-income and minority student enrollment in gifted programs by more than 100 percent.

“In the long run, developing more innovative identification processes, increasing teacher training in gifted identification, and hiring more highly-qualified teachers of color will help ensure that more gifted low-income and minority students have access to the academic opportunities they deserve,” said Joshua Dwyer, policy director at One Chance Illinois and report co-author.

Beyond Illinois, the report highlighted low-income and minority student disparities nationwide. Data from the Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education shows that as of 2009, black children comprised 16.7 percent of the student population, but only 9.8 percent of the gifted population; and Hispanic children comprised 22.3 percent of the student population, but only 15.4 percent of the gifted population. Furthermore, in a ranking by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, Illinois received a grade of D- for failing to effectively support students with high potential from low-income families.

## **About One Chance Illinois**

One Chance Illinois (OCI) believes that children only get one chance at a high quality education, and that we must do everything we can to ensure that Illinois’s children get the education they need and deserve. Currently, the organization is working on a number of issues with a mission to advance public policy that expands quality educational options for Illinois’ low-income and working-class families. More information about One Chance Illinois and its efforts is available at [www.onechanceillinois.org](http://www.onechanceillinois.org).