



FOLLOW-UP REVIEW • REPORT NUMBER 22-11 • JULY 2025

Gifted Program

Action taken to identify best practices and reduce data discrepancies

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Why we did this review

This follow-up review was conducted to determine the extent to which the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) addressed recommendations from our August 2023 performance audit (Report #22-11).

The performance audit evaluated the extent to which the Gifted program's identification practices and services aligned with recognized best practices and the state's Quality Basic Education (QBE) funding formula.

About the Gifted Program

First incorporated into state law in the 1950s, Georgia's Gifted program provides services to intellectually gifted students. It is one of 18 instructional programs funded by the state's QBE funding formula, which was established in 1985. To be eligible for Gifted services, students must be identified as having intellectual needs requiring specialized instruction. The eligibility process requires testing to ensure the student meets state-specific criteria.

In fiscal year 2025, approximately 131,000 full-time equivalents were served through the Gifted program, generating \$1.04 billion in QBE funding. Since fiscal year 2022, Gifted QBE funding allotments have increased by nearly 43% (\$310 million).

Gifted Program

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What we found

Since our 2023 performance audit, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has made progress to address most of our findings and recommendations. GaDOE has provided additional guidance to local school systems on Gifted referral and eligibility practices and has taken steps to ensure differentiated instruction for Gifted students. It has also implemented data controls to prevent excess Gifted Quality Basic Education (QBE) funding.

Referral and Eligibility Practices

In the original report, we noted that GaDOE required school systems to follow some best practices for Gifted identification and incorporated relevant guidance into its Gifted Resource Manual. However, the guidance did not include other recommended strategies to help identify students who may be otherwise missed, such as universal screening. Universal screening is one of the most important tools to ensure all students are considered for Gifted services.

GaDOE has revised its Gifted Resource Manual to include additional practices related to Gifted identification. The manual now describes universal screening as a recognized best practice. The manual also provides guidance around retesting students who qualified in some assessment areas. In addition, GaDOE's Gifted Advisory Council developed three protocol documents intended to assist school system staff with Gifted referral and evaluation.

Universal screening and retesting are also discussed in GaDOE's training for new local Gifted coordinators, as well as training for school systems and Regional Educational Service Agencies. Additionally, training sessions cover how school systems can assess the extent to which their Gifted-eligible students reflect the broader student population and consider whether the system should take additional steps to address identified discrepancies.

Controls for QBE Funding

Our original report identified instances in which school systems earned QBE funding at the Gifted funding weight for classes that did not meet state requirements. (Gifted funding is approximately 30% to 70% higher than general education.) To receive funds at the Gifted weight, systems must ensure students in Gifted classes meet the state's eligibility criteria and are taught by a teacher with a Gifted endorsement. Because GaDOE's data system did not have adequate controls, school systems earned an additional \$13.1 million in fiscal year 2021 for Gifted segments that did not meet these requirements. We found 2% (3,800) of the approximately 195,000 students with Gifted segments were not shown as Gifted-eligible and 10% (7,500) of approximately 76,600 Gifted classes lacked a Gifted-endorsed teacher.

To address these issues, GaDOE has implemented additional controls on the full-time equivalent (FTE) data collected from local school systems; this data—specifically the number of segments (e.g., Gifted segments) each student received on the designated count day—is used to determine how much QBE funding each school system receives. In other data sets, GaDOE collects information such as Gifted eligibility, classes taken, and teacher qualifications. To prevent systems from receiving Gifted QBE funds for ineligible students, GaDOE implemented a data control to identify Gifted FTE segments reported for students without an eligible Gifted code in their Student Record data. To address teachers without the correct endorsement, GaDOE created Gifted job codes that must be used for Gifted classes, and teachers with those job codes must have a record of a Gifted endorsement.

We also identified discrepancies between FTE and Student Class data that could indicate additional excess funding related to the Gifted program. GaDOE indicated it has been working with school systems to identify common discrepancies and recommending systems review their reporting throughout the data collection window. GaDOE also plans to add a data control that will validate Gifted courses in the Student Class data against the FTE data.

Differentiation of Gifted Services

In our original audit, we found that some Gifted service delivery models were at higher risk of not providing differentiated instruction. In particular, the Cluster and Collaborative Models provided Gifted instruction within the regular classroom, and the Innovative Model allowed for broad flexibility but was not reviewed by GaDOE staff.

After our audit was released, an advisory committee was formed to review and revise the guidance for all Gifted service delivery models. GaDOE implemented the committee's proposed change to include additional guidance on the models in the Gifted Resource Manual. For systems using the three models we identified as higher risk, the superintendent must confirm to GaDOE that the models are being used appropriately, and systems using the Innovative Model must also submit plans to GaDOE regarding its use. Finally, after the 2025-2026 school year, GaDOE plans to end the use of the Collaborative model (under which a regular classroom teacher collaborates with a Gifted-endorsed teacher on lesson plans); the model was placed under additional restrictions and requirements beginning in the 2024-2025 school year. GaDOE has begun evaluating alternative models to potentially implement in future years.

Agency Response: *GaDOE agreed with the current status of the findings and recommendations as stated in the report.*

The following table summarizes the findings and recommendations in our 2023 report and actions taken to address them. A copy of the 2023 performance audit report 22-11 may be accessed here: [Gifted Program](#).

Gifted Program Follow-Up Review, July 2025

Status: 5 Findings

Substantially Addressed: 3

Partially Addressed: 1

Not Addressed: 0

No Recommendation: 1

Finding 1: GaDOE requires some best practices for referral and eligibility, but additional practices could be implemented to help ensure Gifted students are identified.

Substantially Addressed – GaDOE has incorporated universal screening and other recommended practices in its Gifted Resource Manual and trainings for local school systems.

Original Recommendations	Action Taken
1.1 The General Assembly should consider requiring school systems to implement universal screening.	Not Implemented – No legislation has been passed or considered that would require school systems to implement universal screening.
1.2 Even if universal screening is not made a requirement, GaDOE should incorporate guidance into its Gifted Resource Manual.	<p>Fully Implemented – While universal screening continues to be optional, GaDOE now references the practice in its Gifted Resource Manual and identifies it as a best practice for Gifted referral and eligibility procedures.</p> <p>In addition, GaDOE incorporated discussion of universal screening into its training for new Gifted coordinators, as well as Gifted education training for Regional Education Service Areas and school systems.</p>
1.3 GaDOE should assess whether other best practices for referral and eligibility should be incorporated into guidance or recommended for consideration as a requirement. If practices are included as guidance, GaDOE should describe the circumstances in which they may be relevant or could be implemented.	<p>Fully Implemented – GaDOE has incorporated additional referral and eligibility practices into its guidance for school systems. These additional practices can help ensure systems identify Gifted students for inclusion in the program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GaDOE recommends retesting students who qualify in two areas but need an additional qualifying score in a third area. The guidance has been incorporated into the Gifted Resource Manual and training to local school systems. GaDOE training sessions have discussed comparing systems' Gifted students to the broader student population to assess whether there are discrepancies within certain subgroups (e.g., socioeconomic status). GaDOE developed a course for new Gifted coordinators that includes Gifted testing and identification practices. <p>GaDOE's Gifted Advisory Council developed three protocol forms on Gifted referral and evaluation, which it recommends local staff use to guide their decision-making processes around student eligibility.</p>

Gifted Program Follow-Up Review, July 2025

Finding 2: GaDOE does not have adequate controls to ensure school systems meet requirements for QBE funding at the Gifted weight.

Substantially Addressed – GaDOE has implemented controls to ensure systems only receive Gifted QBE funds for eligible students and classes taught by Gifted-endorsed teachers.

Original Recommendations	Action Taken
<p>2.1 GaDOE should implement controls in its data system to ensure that school systems only receive Gifted FTE funds for students who have met eligibility requirements.</p>	<p>Fully Implemented – GaDOE has implemented data controls to better ensure systems only receive Gifted QBE funds for students who have been identified as eligible.</p> <p>GaDOE’s data system generates an error if the school system reports a Gifted FTE segment for a student who does not have an eligible Gifted code in their Student Record data. GaDOE also added an Initial Eligibility Date field in the Student Record that school systems must complete for newly eligible Gifted students.</p>
<p>2.2 GaDOE should implement controls in its data system to ensure that school systems only receive Gifted FTE funds for students taught by teachers with a Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) certified Gifted In-Field Endorsement.</p>	<p>Fully Implemented – GaDOE implemented data controls to identify teachers without a Gifted endorsement who are teaching a Gifted class. The new controls require Gifted classes to have teachers with Gifted-related job codes and those job codes to have an associated GaPSC-certified Gifted endorsement. GaDOE’s system also sends a list to each school system to manually verify their Gifted teachers’ endorsements.</p>
<p>2.3 In its guidance to school systems, GaDOE should clarify what items cannot be waived. For example, this language could be included in the Gifted Resource Manual.</p>	<p>Fully Implemented – GaDOE updated its Gifted Resource Manual to specify that systems can only earn Gifted FTE funds for students identified as Gifted-eligible in Gifted classes taught by a teacher with a Gifted endorsement.</p>
<p>2.4 GaDOE should explore options to address discrepancies between the FTE and Student Class datasets.</p>	<p>Partially Implemented – GaDOE plans to implement a data control to address identified discrepancies. GaDOE’s data system currently generates an error when a student has Gifted segment(s) in the FTE data but no Gifted classes in the Student Class data. GaDOE plans to modify this control to further validate Gifted courses in the Student Class data against the FTE data.</p> <p>In addition, GaDOE indicated it has been working with school systems to identify common discrepancies in the data collection process and recommending that systems review their FTE and Student Class datasets throughout the collection window for discrepancies.</p>

Gifted Program Follow-Up Review, July 2025

Finding 3: As currently implemented, Gifted services do not reflect the state's QBE funding formula.

Partially Addressed – GaDOE conducts reviews of systems' Gifted data, but these do not regularly include class sizes.

Original Recommendations	Action Taken
3.1 The General Assembly should consider the issues identified in the finding in future discussions regarding program funding formula changes. For example, the General Assembly could consider adjusting the QBE Gifted weight based on grade levels.	Not Implemented – The General Assembly has not passed or considered legislation related to Gifted education, including any that would adjust QBE Gifted weights based on grade levels.
3.2 GaDOE should periodically review Gifted class sizes and determine the extent to which they align with the intent of the state's funding formula. When very large classes are identified, GaDOE staff should reach out to the local Gifted coordinator to determine causes and provide guidance.	Partially Implemented – GaDOE indicated its Gifted Education and Advanced Academics team reviews data submitted by school systems after each data collection period, and the team reaches out to system Gifted coordinators if needed. However, this occurs on an ad-hoc basis and does not always include a review of class sizes.

Finding 4: Depending on the model selected, systems may not sufficiently differentiate services for Gifted students.

Substantially Addressed – To better ensure differentiation, GaDOE has implemented additional guidance and requirements for Gifted delivery models and is phasing out the Collaborative model.

Original Recommendations	Action Taken
4.1 GaDOE should periodically review its class data to identify anomalies that increase the risk of not ensuring differentiation (e.g., heavy reliance on a single model, high class loads for collaborating teachers). When outliers are identified, GaDOE should work with these systems to ensure differentiation is maximized.	<p>Fully Implemented – While GaDOE does not regularly review class data for issues mentioned in the recommendation, it has taken other steps to help ensure differentiation in Gifted service delivery. Specifically, GaDOE has incorporated additional guidance on each service delivery model into its Gifted Resource Manual and discussed the models in its training for local school systems.</p> <p>GaDOE also implemented new requirements for systems using models that we identified as higher risk. When Cluster, Collaborative, or Innovative Models are used, the superintendent must sign assurances that the model is being used appropriately. Starting with the 2024-2025 school year, each system using the Innovative Model must submit plans for its use to GaDOE for review and approval. In addition, GaDOE plans to discontinue use of the Collaborative model after the 2025-2026 school year.</p>

Finding 5: Most Gifted-eligible students are taking at least one Gifted class.

Original Recommendations	Action Taken
No recommendations	No recommendations

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