

New Law Starts Universal Screening for Highly Capable Students Next School Year

Starting in the 2023-24 school year, all Washington schools will begin screening elementary students for Highly Capable services.

TACOMA, WA, UNITED STATES, May 8, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Starting in the 2023-24 school year, all Washington schools will begin screening elementary students for Highly Capable services to ensure equitable identification and access. This will be the first time that Washington state schools will evaluate all students with the purpose to identify those who would benefit from advanced learning opportunities.

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Nancy Chamberlain

Senator Twina Nobles, D-28, was the primary bill sponsor of [SSB 5072](#), “Advancing Equity in Programs for Highly Capable Students.” She remarked, “This important new law removes systemic barriers that have prevented low-income

students, multilingual students, students with disabilities, and students of color from being fairly considered for these vital programs for our highest ability learners. When schools don’t serve the needs of high ability learners, students can disengage and develop behavior problems.”

Pioneering school districts such as Kent, Northshore, Pasco, Quincy, Rochester, and Sumner-Bonney Lake have demonstrated the success of this important equity policy.

In explaining his support for the new policy, State Rep. Alex Ybarra, R-13, said, “Quincy’s highly capable program was heavily skewed to Caucasian students, even though our district enrollment is 87% Hispanic and 13% Caucasian. With universal screening, our highly capable program now matches our district demographics.”

Under the new law, students will be universally screened at two grade levels, in or before second grade, and again in or before sixth grade. Districts may use a wide variety of data points in their screening process, including previously administered standardized, classroom-based, performance, cognitive, or achievement assessments, research-based behavior ratings scales, or districts may choose to administer a specific screening tool for the purpose of universal screening.

The law also includes new reporting requirements for OSPI to publish disaggregated data concerning Highly Capable program enrollment for each school district starting in November 2023.

SSB 5072 was broadly supported by many educational organizations, including Washington State PTA, Washington Education Association, Washington State School Directors Association, College Success Foundation, Washington Association of Educators of Talented and Gifted, Washington Coalition for Gifted Education, and others.

Nancy Chamberlain, Washington State PTA President, said passage of the bill capped off nearly two decades of work to reduce disproportionality of students not served by Highly Capable programs. "With this bill, barriers that have stood between highly capable students and the academic and social emotional services they need to thrive in our public schools will be removed."

Austina De Bonte, President of the Washington Coalition for Gifted Education, described why highly capable programs are so important. "If school is too easy, students miss the chance to learn how to tolerate frustration, handle mistakes, or ask for help. College may be the first real challenge for high ability students - but without prior experience, emotional coping strategies, or study skills, that doesn't always go well. We owe it to all of our students to prepare them to be resilient and resourceful citizens."

The bill passed the Legislature unanimously and was signed into law by Governor Inslee on May 4, 2023.

Additional quotes and information can be found at <https://wacoalition.com/press-room/>

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The WA Coalition for Gifted Education advocates for the educational needs of highly capable students through communication with and education of policy makers and influencers in Washington state and nationally.

WAETAG is a non-profit organization that empowers educators and communities to support the educational and social emotional development of talented and gifted students.

Washington State PTA is the state's oldest and largest child advocacy organization and a leading voice for children and youth for more than 115 years.

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