

**\*\*Privileged and Confidential\*\***

**RECOMMENDATION MEMO  
OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLOR**

**FROM:** Linda Chen  
**SUBJECT:** Gifted & Talented Identification of Students  
**DATE:** July 8, 2020

**Statement of the Problem/Issue Area**

The Gifted and Talented (G&T) program has been and continues to be a part of New York City's legacy of opposition to school integration, as the test has not resulted in fair access for low income students, particularly Black and Latinx children. Black and Latinx students represent 65% of the Kindergarten class, but only 37% of students testing and 17% of students who qualify for a G&T program<sup>1</sup>. According to the SDAG report<sup>2</sup>, since standardizing G&T admissions based on a centralized test, G&T schools have become even less diverse.

The Office of Assessment believes the assessment to be a valid and reliable measure of students' abilities. However, there are a number of external factors may cause disparate outcomes by race, including testing very young students, unequal access to formal educational experiences, geographic locations of G&T programs, and access to test prep.

In line with Equity and Excellence for All, discussions with SDAG and working groups started to discuss when and how eligibility to G&T programs should be measured and addressed, including the possibility of considering alternative options that do not rely exclusively on a single G&T test starting at 4-years-old. At the same time, the current DOE contract to assess eligibility to G&T program expired as of June 30, 2020 and is up to for a one-year contract extension vote with PEP members in August 2020.

As the DOE reimagines schooling in reaction of a global health pandemic and to center around a trauma-based lens, there's an opportunity to reimagine how G&T eligibility should be assessed to create more racially equitable outcomes. The following proposal lays out a multi-year recommendation to change how G&T assessments are administered and implemented.

**Recommendation**

**Recommendation for SY20-21**

The Office of Assessment recommends suspending Gifted & Talented (G&T) testing for only the 2020-2021 school year, for the following reasons:

- The impact of the current global health crisis on young students is still unclear, as is the effect it will have on their performance on high-stakes assessments. Testing in the winter of 2021 may not accurately measure students' abilities, as they have been undergoing stress, trauma, and extraordinary circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - The tests used for G&T were not standardized for use during pandemic conditions or normed on students undergoing a pandemic.
  - Research on the impact of Hurricane Katrina on affected students showed inability to concentrate and symptoms of depression for months after the disaster.
- Testing during this time could exacerbate inequities for an admissions program that is widely known to have disparate outcomes by race. Data shows that the pandemic has impacted poor and ethnically diverse New

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Commented [RA1]: @Huang Winnie @Ryan Michael Do we want to say, it is inappropriate to test giftedness at such young age as out top TP?

Commented [HW2R1]: After talking to Bonnie and Ronli, that's not the point they are trying to make. It's more about using 1 standardized test to test giftedness at 4 that is problematic

Commented [HW3]: @Bogdanski Bonnie - is there a link to this research?

Commented [RM4R3]: I added the link. Resolved.

Commented [HW5]: and here as well?

Commented [RM6R5]: I added the link. Resolved.

<sup>1</sup> SY1718 Gifted and Talented Admission Data

<sup>2</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/1c478c\\_1d5659bd05494f6d8cb2bbf03fcc95dd.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/1c478c_1d5659bd05494f6d8cb2bbf03fcc95dd.pdf)

York neighborhoods at higher rates than wealthier, predominately White ones. The difference in performance by racial and/or socioeconomic group could be increased by the impact of the pandemic, as students face loss of loved ones, loss of family income, food instability, etc.

- Funding used for this program could be redistributed to programs providing more essential services to students.

Once the G&T test is suspended, a G&T score will not be a necessary qualifier to apply to a G&T program for SY 21-22. Admissions to a G&T program, if continued, will be dependent on policies and considerations determined in collaboration with Office of Student Enrollment.

This is part of a multi-year process to phase out citywide G&T programs, and to move toward a G&T service model in which gifted students are not clustered together in the same classroom or school.

### Recommendation for SY 2021- 2022

In the second year of altering assessment process, OA recommends three big shifts:

1. Administer a universal screening for all students at Grade 2.
2. Use multiple pathways to evaluate gifted ability
3. Provide services for gifted students in an individualized service model, and not at a specific classroom or school.

### Universal Screening for All Students at Grade 2

Implementing universal screening would increase the number of students screened from the current opt-in model and could help to decrease disproportionality in identification.<sup>3</sup> Using a standardized, group-administered, machine-scored test would minimize any burden of administration on schools resulting from testing all students in a particular grade.

The DOE has often been criticized for measuring giftedness at a young age and/or for using a single assessment for determining eligibility. The DOE did shift away from using a school readiness assessment as part of its battery of tests, but the criticism remains that the current process favors students of privilege. That privilege may be proximity to schools with a G&T program, having been enrolled in school before the age of 4 when testing begins, or being able to afford to participate in test prep programs.

Universal screening is recommended at age six or later because researchers have found that it is difficult to make accurate IQ determinations before the age of six,<sup>4</sup> the reliability of psychometric testing is lower with younger children,<sup>5</sup> and children's discontinuous growth (different levels of maturation and spurts) at the preschool age makes identification particularly difficult.<sup>6</sup>

Delaying testing to a later age creates a more reliable test score to accurately identify students with gifted abilities, particularly students of color.

### Multiple Pathways to Evaluate Gifted Ability

The current approach to G&T admissions is eligibility based on a score on a single standardized test. In order to identify students from culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse backgrounds, evidence from multiple sources should be evaluated such that high performance in one area or on one criterion is sufficient for entry, rather than requiring high performance on all criteria. The full range of behaviors or performance characteristic of gifted students

<sup>3</sup> Card, D., & Giuliano, L. (2016). Universal screening increases the representation of low-income and minority students in gifted education. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 113(48), 13678-13683. (<http://www.pnas.org/content/113/48/13678.full>)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/gifted-education-practices/identification/tests-assessments>

<sup>5</sup> Robinson, N.M. and Robinson, H. (1992). The use of standardized tests with young gifted children. In P.N. Klein and A.J. Tannenbaum (eds). To be young and gifted (141-170). New Jersey: Ablex. (<http://psycnet.apa.org/record/1993-97373-006>)

<sup>6</sup> *Psychoeducational Assessment of Preschool Children*, edited by Bruce A. Bracken, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004. ProQuest Ebook Central. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/teacherscollege-ebooks/detail.action?docID=258940>.

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cannot be evaluated using typical assessments, but including varied evaluation methods introduces opportunities to provide evidence of giftedness. Requiring high performance on only one of a number of measures results in a diverse group of students.<sup>6</sup> Though young gifted learners are heterogeneous and may not be easily defined or assessed, a pattern of gifted behaviors and/or advanced performance can be seen as early as preschool.<sup>7</sup> Using scales, checklists, and student portfolios gives teachers opportunities to elicit behaviors characteristic of giftedness. Identification tools should vary by population (e.g., ELLs/MLLs, SWDs),<sup>8</sup> and any teacher-facing component should include anti-bias training<sup>9</sup> and training on identification and norm-referenced identification tools.<sup>10</sup>

For more details on OA's recommended approach see this [memo](#) from September 2019.

### Services vs. Classroom Model

Currently, G&T programs segregate high performing students into a stand-alone classroom or school for 5-10 years. The location of the programs tend to be geographically clustered in predominantly white or affluent neighborhoods. The underlying assumption of this recommendation is that there are gifted/advanced students in every school in NYC, and all schools should evaluate their own students in order to serve them appropriately. This model enables the provision of challenging, complex instruction to high-achieving and/or gifted students that is important to support learning and achievement for these students, especially high-performing minority students,<sup>7</sup> while mitigating the negative impact of separating/tracking students by ability on non-identified/tracked students.<sup>8</sup> Providing services to students in their own schools instead of testing for admission to a standalone G&T program is essential to the recommended identification method, as the method is most appropriate for low-stakes purposes.

### Recommendation for Passing the Contract Extension

In January 2020, DOE indicated to Pearson that it was planning a one-year extension on the G&T contract with the same terms and pricing for the winter 2021 administration. Regardless of whether the G&T assessment is administered in SY20-21, OA recommends a Pearson contract extension in order to ensure a G&T program can be in place for SY21-22.

The PEP vote on the contract extension has been delayed to August 2020 until Pearson identifies contingency plans in the event of potential school closures and blended learning model for SY20-21. In normal circumstances, students would take the test in-person at a school during the weekday or weekend in a 1:1 setting from January- February 2021.

The DOE asked Pearson to create a contingency plan to share with PEP members in advance of the next PEP vote. In response to COVID-19, Pearson is able to:

1. **Expedite material shipping** and scoring timelines to allow DOE to administer the exam later in case of immediate school closures. **Added Cost: TBD**
2. **Modify paper testing materials**, such as putting it on a Smartboard or one item per page, in support of social distancing proctoring. **Added Cost: \$370K**
3. **Upload the test on a digital platform**, such as TestNav or SchoolNet, in support of social distancing proctoring in a DOE building. However, there are major concerns with administering the test at a students' home. Additionally, moving the exam on a digital platform would require a comparability study (\$39K) to know how students will perform on a digital platform compared to paper/pencil. **Added Cost: \$400K**
4. **Offer a hybrid** of the options above. **Added Cost: \$100K- \$400K**

<sup>7</sup> Gamoran, A. (2009); Card, D., & Giuliano, L. (2016)

<sup>8</sup> Lavrijsen, J. & Nicaise, I. (2015; 2016)

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**Commented [RA7]:** A question that will come up is, why extend the contract if we are going to pause the administration? I recognize that we've discussed needing to keep it active in order to extend it in FY22 but wondering if the universal screener should be something new/different than what we have been using for multiple years?

**Commented [HW8R7]:** Yes, the universal screener could be something new, but we won't have the time to run the RFP and develop the new screener by FY22. As we've seen in the GAT RFP in 2016, it takes about 2-3 years to select it. Extending this means that we will use the Pearson as the universal screener for some time.

Based on what Pearson can do, test administration can occur in a DOE building as late as June 2021 for admissions for SY21-22. Once the contract extension is passed, DOE will have the flexibility to determine when and how to administer the test.

Extending the Pearson contract does not limit DOE's decision on whether, how or when to administer the exam in response to COVID-19. However, if the extension is not approved, the DOE currently does not have an alternative assessment available to assess gifted intellectual ability for admissions for SY 21-22.

**Option considered but did not pursue:**

While Pearson is able to administer an online test at a student's home, this is not a viable option for the reasons due to hardware access, test security risks on releasing questions to the public, and susceptibility to cheating.

- Cannot guarantee test security with a remote administration. The test would be susceptible to cheating or receiving help from other adults. The items on the test would be considered public and could not be used on future tests.
- Similar to the risks on any digital exam, there's currently no comparability study for OLSAT, and cannot determine if student scores will be affected with online testing.
- Not all students have the necessary devices and internet bandwidth for an at-home, online administration. For TestNav, families would need two devices: one for the test platform and the other for Zoom or other video proctoring.
  - Ex: There is no way for a student to 'raise their hand' during testing within TestNav
- Not all students have access to quiet, individual space for testing or will have a more tech-savvy adult available to support test-taking logistics. Administration under less standardized and less ideal conditions may have a differential impact on student scores.

**Time Frame**

A decision to move forward with the contract extension with Pearson needs to be made prior to the August PEP meeting.

**Analysis and Policy Considerations**

In the mid-2000s, prior administrations began to standardize G&T enrollment processes citywide, in part as a result of an inquiry from the Office of Civil Rights. In response, the DOE took several measures to improve its G&T program, including standardizing the assessments (and the minimum scores) used to determine eligibility for G&T programs citywide. Since then, the tests have changed, but not the vendor providing the assessments (Pearson).

The current G&T program requires families to request testing for eligibility to apply to approximately 86 G&T programs across the city. Approximately 40,000 public/charter school, private/parochial school, and unenrolled students in grades Pre-K-2 test each year, either during the school day (public school K-2 students) or on the weekends (all others). Students test for admission to grades K-3 and remain in the program through the terminal grade of the school to which they are admitted. Regarding public feedback and response, the DOE has publicly signaled that G&T is under review and highlighted inequitable results of the current program, suggesting that changes could be forthcoming.

It is also important to note that the recommendations of this memo represent a significant shift in how school and central office resources will be used for G&T identification. As a result of implementing universal screening, schools will need to

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test a larger number of students during the school day, meaning more teachers will need to be trained and dedicated to testing during the testing window. However, testing all students in a particular grade level makes the process less complicated for schools than pulling out those students whose families requested testing. In addition, there will be no testing for charter, non-public, parochial, and Pre-K students on the weekends, freeing up resources that can be allocated to schools to relieve some of the burden of universal testing and administering other identification tools (e.g., checklists, recommendations). OA is committed in engaging relevant stakeholders, including DOE offices, families/advocates, press, and elected officials.

**Equity or School-based Lens**

The DOE requires students to attain a composite score of 90 (District) or 97 (Citywide) in order to be eligible to apply to one of the 86 G&T programs that begin in grade K. The DOE has often been criticized for measuring giftedness at a young age and/or for using a single assessment for determining eligibility. The DOE did shift away from using a school readiness assessment as part of its battery of tests, but the criticism remains that the current process favors students of privilege. That privilege may be proximity to schools with a G&T program, having been enrolled in school before the age of 4 when testing begins, or those that can afford to participate in test prep programs.

Over the years, the DOE has worked to ensure that each district has at least one district-based program. Enrollment, however, does not match the demographic trends of NYC student population.

	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Other
<b>All K students</b>	17%	23%	40%	17%	3%
<b>G&amp;T K students</b>	41%	8%	10%	34%	8%

The DOE does have a small number of G&T programs that commence in grade 3. Admissions is based on multiple measures, including report card grades, attendance data, and teacher-completed checklists of indicators of giftedness. Students who are eligible are admitted to grade 3 of the program in their district. For those programs, the enrollment figures do more closely resemble the district demographics, but it is unclear whether citywide scaling would produce similar results.

Demographics of G&T students may begin to match NYC student population demographics more closely if the DOE adopts universal G&T screening<sup>9</sup> after the age of six and/or non-traditional measures of identification, including student portfolios and affective checklists.<sup>10</sup> Serving identified students in all schools, rather than limiting G&T programs to a relatively small number of schools citywide would interrupt the perpetuation of racial segregation caused by the program in its current state and motivate neighborhood schools to identify students with fidelity, eliminating a perceived loss of their highest performing students to admissions-based programs.

**Stakeholder Consideration:**

- o **Legal Considerations**

<sup>9</sup> [Card & Giuliano, 2015, 2016; Raines, T. C., Dever, B. V., Kamphaus, R. W., & Roach, A. T. \(2012\).](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Hodges, Tai, Maeda, et al., 2018](#)

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- Consideration of any continued requirement to adhere to the changes approved by PEP and implemented in mid-2000s in response to the OCR inquiry into DOE’s G&T programs
- **Financial Considerations**
  - Even if the contract is extended, as a requirements contract, there would be no costs incurred if the test is not administered, saving NYCDOE approximately **\$4 M** in FY21
  - For FY22 and beyond, additional costs would be necessary to cover testing and services. Exact costs would be dependent on the selected tool, and how services would be provided for gifted students.
- **Procurement Considerations**
  - Approximately 2.5 years needed to procure a new assessment program and prepare to administer, including RFP process and development of assessment and all related materials. With the contract extension, the DOE can continue using the Pearson assessment as part of the universal screening while a new assessment program is identified.
  - If continuing with Pearson for additional year(s):
    - Continued vulnerability of test exposure, particularly to prep programs and families that may utilize such programs
    - Benefit of additional time to prepare to implement new G&T policy
  - Limited number of vendors interested in and willing to propose for G&T assessments for NYCDOE
- **External – Advocates/Families, Press & Elected Officials**
  - In general, continued interest in the DOE’s plans around G&T, and whether any modifications to the existing program/grade levels exists across many stakeholders
  - Potential for negative reaction to shift away from screening students who are not currently enrolled in public schools for admissions to public school G&T programs
  - Potential for negative reaction to addition of a more subjective process of identification
  - Lack of cover of using a national, catalog set of assessments if results do not produce greater diversity of students eligible for G&T program
- **Internal – DOE Communications Plan**
  - DOE will need to identify an office to oversee implementation of G&T services by schools for SY2223
  - DOE will need to plan placement process of current district and citywide G&T seats, both for the short and long term

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**Appendix A:**

**RECOMMENDATION FOR CLOSING OUT TESTING FOR SY 19-20: RE-TESTERS (80 FAMILIES) AND PLAN FOR SUMMER TESTING (NEW NYC STUDENTS)**

For the 80-90 families who did not receive a G&T test score or appealed their score, the students will be retested at Tweed (52 Chambers Street), from **Monday, July 27<sup>th</sup> - Sunday, August 16<sup>th</sup>**. Additional times from August 17-21 may be added based on families' availability. Families will receive a G&T score by August 28<sup>th</sup> and will be placed into the admissions lottery based on admission priority before first day of school.

Families will receive this [email](#) on week of July 6<sup>th</sup> about the retesting plan. Special accommodations will be given to families with health concerns. Currently, we're working with the Reopening Team to acquire PPE materials and implement social distancing logistics. (Note: The materials are covered under the prior contract and Pearson will provide materials and scoring at no cost since it was their error.)

Every year, OA administers the G&T exam for new students who moved to NYC (~50 families). OA plans to **cancel** G&T summer test for SY2020-21 admissions.

Summer testing for new NYC families typically impacts a small number of families and yields few accepted offers into G&T programs. This year, summer testing administration presumes the contract extension will be approved. Considering budgetary constraints and contract uncertainty, OSE will not open up summer testing registration and will communicate to families who reached out on a one-off basis about the cancelation. (Note: only 2 families have reached out so far).

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**MEMO COVER SHEET**  
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**MEMO TYPE:** Recommendation / Rapid Response / Informational  
**FROM:** Document Owner & Senior Leader  
**SUBJECT:** Short Title Description  
**DATE:** (Insert date of submission)

**Departments Required for Approval:**

*Note: COS's signature will be added during clearance within the Chancellor's Office. Please scan this document once signatures are collected, and send to Nancy Baez.*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Division/Office</b>	<b>Signature</b>
Howard Friedman <i>via COS Adrienne Austin</i>	General Counsel	
Lindsey Oates <i>via COS Ben Schanback</i>	Chief Financial Officer	
Hydra Mendoza <i>via I.A. COS Kathleen Brannigan</i>	Community Empowerment, Partnerships, and Communications	
Cheryl Watson-Harris <i>via COS Sean Corlett &amp; Sandra Lo</i>	First Deputy Chancellor	
<i>Other Senior Leadership stakeholder - (INSERT NAME)</i>	<i>Other Senior Leadership stakeholder - (INSERT DIVISION)</i>	
<i>Other Senior Leadership stakeholder - (INSERT NAME)</i>	<i>Other Senior Leadership stakeholder - (INSERT DIVISION)</i>	
Cabinet Approval – from division responsible for memo (INSERT NAME)	Cabinet Approval – from division responsible for memo (INSERT DIVISION)	
Edie Sharp	Chief of Staff	

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