



# Performance Audit Division

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## Gifted Program

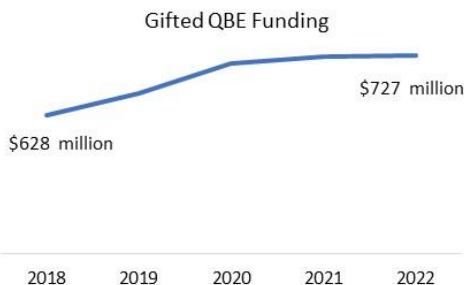
Services are not aligned with funding intent

### BACKGROUND

As one of 18 instructional programs funded by the state's Quality Basic Education (QBE) funding formula, the Gifted program serves intellectually gifted students. Under the QBE formula, state funding for the Gifted program is 30% to 68% higher than funding for general education programs.

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-specified criteria.

In fiscal year 2022, approximately 113,000 full-time equivalents were served through the Gifted program, generating \$726.5 million in QBE funding. (Each full-time equivalent represents six periods, or segments, of state-funded instruction to a student on a given day.)



### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

GaDOE should:

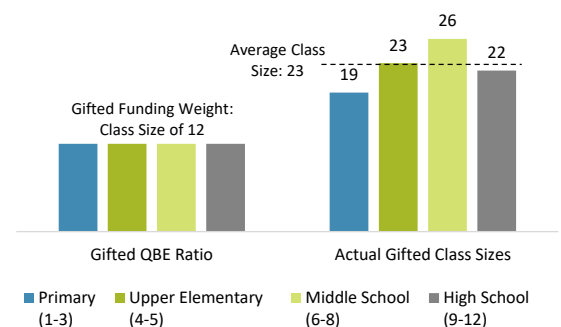
- Implement data controls to ensure Gifted QBE funding is only given for classes that meet state requirements.
- Review class data to determine the extent to which services align with the Gifted program's intent.
- Include additional guidance on identification strategies in its Gifted Resource Manual.

### KEY FINDINGS

Georgia's Gifted program uses many best practices; however, deviations from these practices reduce the program's effectiveness. Systems typically use larger class sizes than those set in the funding formula, and some do not follow the requirement to use a Gifted-endorsed teacher. Increased use of best practices may also help identify additional Gifted students, particularly from underrepresented groups.

**Implementation of the Gifted program diverges from the funding formula intent and best practices.**

- While state Gifted funding is based on a teacher/ student ratio of 12 to 1, over 77% of Gifted classes exceeded this ratio in fiscal year 2021. Gifted classes averaged 23 students per teacher.



- Local school systems earned Gifted funding for classes that did not meet state requirements related to student eligibility and teacher endorsements. The excess funding due to these issues totaled \$13.1 million.

- Gifted education is intended to provide differentiated instruction to students whose needs are not adequately met by general education services. However, not all of the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE)-approved models provide the same assurance that students will receive differentiated instruction.

**GaDOE could implement additional best practices to help improve gifted identification.**

- GaDOE requires systems to follow some best practices for gifted identification, such as using multiple objective and subjective eligibility criteria.
- GaDOE guidance does not include other recommended strategies to help identify students who might otherwise be missed. For example, GaDOE does not require universal screening, which is considered one of the most important tools in ensuring every student—particularly those in underrepresented groups—receives consideration for Gifted services.

**Systems face resource constraints in implementing Gifted services.**

- Resource constraints can inhibit systems from implementing best practices related to identifying Gifted students and can limit the number of Gifted-endorsed teachers a system can employ. These issues can reduce the funding that systems receive to implement the program, since student eligibility and teacher endorsement requirements cannot be waived.
- Resource limitations can impact which delivery models school systems select for their Gifted classes to ensure differentiated instruction.