

Case Study: Introducing Multiple Pathways to Enable Talented Students

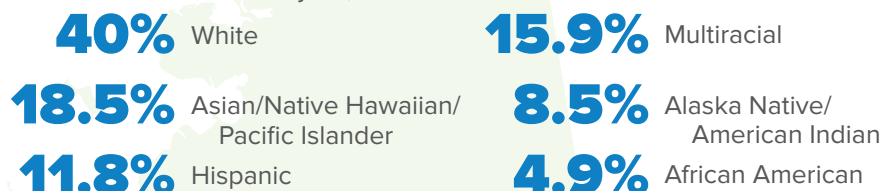


Executive Summary

Anchorage County Schools serves over 40,000 students in Alaska but struggled to equitably and effectively identify students who would benefit from gifted programs. Using the *Cognitive Abilities Test*™ (CogAT®) and national data from the *Iowa Assessments*™, Anchorage County transformed their screening process and requirements to equitably identify students for advanced placement and appropriately challenge their students at all levels.

Quick Facts

Nearly 43,500 students



- More than 130 schools and programs
- Encompasses nearly 2,000 square miles
- 80% of families speak English at home
- 20% of families speak a combined 110 languages



Key Challenges

- 1** Shifting from a purely achievement assessment-based approach to include ability screening, teacher referral, and classroom performance
- 2** Maintaining gifted programs throughout budget cuts and Covid-19
- 3** Ensuring equitable participation in special programs and schools



Overview of Systems

Anchorage County Schools employed the *Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)* and data from *Iowa Assessments* to gain an accurate perspective on each student's ability and achievement and to ensure a multifaceted search for students who qualify for gifted programs.

Having these systems in place allows Anchorage County Schools to:

- 1** Evaluate and monitor student performance in relation to both national and local norms
- 2** Engage students in individualized learning plans to optimize their progress
- 3** Identify students who underperform in class but demonstrate high ability
- 4** Use a standard, data-based rubric that qualifies students for gifted programs





Overview of Key Use Cases

Peter Ljubicich, Gifted Programs Supervisor for Anchorage County Schools, points to one particular Title I student who benefitted from the comprehensive analysis enabled through *CogAT*. Her achievement scores ranked in the 70th percentile nationally, but her teacher believed she should be considered for their gifted programs. When they looked at her results compared to the local norms among her Title I peers, she ranked in the 99th percentile.

The student took the full *CogAT* and scored in the 99th percentile nationally in multiple areas. At that point, she was qualified for the gifted program, but she also underwent an IQ test to see if she would qualify for their highly-gifted Magnet program. She met the criteria there, entered the Magnet program as a third grader a few years ago, and will move to the highly-gifted middle school program next year.

As Ljubicich says, “The big question has to be,

“Do we say no to that child because her achievement result is too low,’ or do we say, ‘You’ve demonstrated that you’re among the highest ability students in our city, and we should be serving you.’”

Currently, about 25% of the students enrolled in the Magnet program in Anchorage County Schools come from a neighborhood served by a Title I school. Ljubicich doesn’t expect their gifted programs’ population “to perfectly mirror the district population necessarily, but I want to see more kids from our Title I schools in our gifted programs. As we do this, there’s going to be more students at every school that will qualify for service because we’ve frankly been overlooking people that we should be serving.”

This student’s case demonstrates how pivotal it can be to utilize a multifaceted approach with students. Such an approach helps identify students who take advantage of the opportunities given to them and encourages their teachers and school communities to continue providing those students with the opportunities they deserve.



Multiple Measures to Support Equitable Placement

Students qualify for Anchorage County Schools’ gifted program (Ignite) by scoring 9 or more points based on the following rubric:

1

Achievement Tests
(done in the last year)

- a 3 points for $\geq 96^{\text{th}}$ percentile
- b 2 points for $\geq 95^{\text{th}}$ percentile
- c 1 point for $\geq 92^{\text{nd}}$ percentile

Ability Tests
(done in the last 3 years)

- a 3 points for $\geq 96^{\text{th}}$ percentile
- b 2 points for $\geq 95^{\text{th}}$ percentile
- c 1 point for $\geq 92^{\text{nd}}$ percentile

2

3

Teacher Recommendation & Classroom Performance

- a 2 points for a teacher recommendation form
- b 1 point for academic performance
75% of a student’s grades are $\geq B$ in Math, Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies

In utilizing multiple measures (including both objective and subjective criteria) Anchorage County demonstrates its commitment to quantify student progress as completely as possible to generate equitable learning opportunities for every student.



On Confronting Covid-19 and Budget Cuts

Anchorage County faced the common issue of budget cuts throughout Covid-19. Their school board members established numerous goals and guardrails for their superintendent. One goal was equitable participation in special programs and schools, providing an opportunity to fund *CogAT*.

At one point during Covid-19, tight budget restrictions threatened the Gifted and Talented program's existence, but parents and students rallied to gain over 3,000 signatures on a petition set up through **change.org**. The petition proved successful, thanks to the devotion inspired by the results apparent through the G&T program.

These budget cuts also prompted Anchorage County to restructure their enrichment group, where staffing declined by 33% over the last decade. Anchorage dedicated 4 members of their enrichment group to manage screening and testing, which left the remaining 20 instructional staff to focus solely on serving and teaching their students.

“As we do this, there’s going to be more students at every school that will qualify for service because we’ve frankly been overlooking people that we should be serving.”



Summary

Over the past decade, Anchorage County School District sought to improve their means of equitably and effectively identifying students who would benefit from Gifted and advanced academic programs. Despite budget restrictions throughout that time period, Anchorage County transformed their process through adding universal achievement screening like Iowa Assessments, supplementing achievement data with ability data from the Cognitive Abilities Test (*CogAT*), increasing support from their school board, superintendent, parents, and students, restructuring their enrichment group, and creating a multifaceted rubric to qualify students for their gifted programs.

This overhaul allowed Anchorage to accurately and equitably identify students who excel among their peers and provide the appropriate opportunities for those students to continue to challenge themselves and optimize their learning experience.



Anchorage School District
Educating All Students for Success in Life