

Quick Facts:

- 38,000+ students across 55 campuses
- 71% of the population are students of color
- 32% of students are Multi-Lingual Learners (MLLs)
- 55% of students are on free or reduced lunch

Challenge:

Richardson's Gifted and Talented program did not represent the demographics of its overall population due to biases in the referral process and inadequate tools to identify and nurture the potential of all students.

Solution:

Richardson partnered with CogAT and followed evidence-based practices to create a fair and equitable identification process for gifted identification: they began universally screening students, incorporated multiple measures for qualification, and utilized local norms. Through this work, they increased the number of 2nd grade students identified at a Title I campus by nearly 10x.

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Richardson ISD and CogAT: A playbook for advancing equity in gifted program identification

Richardson ISD is a school district where “one size does not fit all.” It is the sixth-most diverse school district in Texas with a demographically varied student body of nearly 38,000, across 55 school campuses that appear in every configuration imaginable. This diversity and variety has always been a strength of Richardson ISD, but it also comes with significant challenges.



Unintended Bias Creeps In

Monica Simonds, Director of Advanced Learning Programs and Services, conducted an analysis that showed their identified students did not proportionally reflect key demographics of their student population. At the time, Richardson ISD was relying on an outdated gifted identification process – students would be referred by teachers or parents and then be assessed with separate achievement and “nonverbal” reasoning tests. After doing her analysis, Ms. Simonds realized that her identification process was causing the following issues:

- **Bias in Referrals:** Reliance on teacher and parent referrals often overlooked minority and economically disadvantaged students.
- **Inequitable Assessment Practices:** Overreliance on achievement results for identification often excluded students had not been exposed to the same educational opportunities as their peers.

- **Narrow View of Student Potential:** Previous assessments used for identification did not assess students for multiple types of giftedness and therefore excluded many students with high potential.

Simonds recognized the inequity of her current identification system and set out to find a solution that could fairly assess student potential. Simonds stated that “Achievement tests are gatekeepers that don’t always allow for potential ability to be identified. Finding the right assessment was first and foremost on my list of priorities, and the results were very encouraging—we were finding kids we weren’t finding before.”

When Ms. Simonds was introduced to *CogAT*, she directed her department to make the shift in assessments immediately and never looked back.

Implementing CogAT for Greater Equity

Simonds implemented *CogAT* as part of a strategy to address each of the issues Richardson faced with their more traditional identification process and make its gifted programs more inclusive. This strategy followed evidence-based practices for equity in gifted identification and relied on *CogAT* to support each of its three pillars:

- **Universal Screening:** Administering the *CogAT* Assessment to all 2nd and 6th graders eliminated bias in the referral process and ended overreliance on achievement scores.
- **Multiple Measures for Qualification:** Richardson ISD utilized multiple components of *CogAT*’s unique multiple dimensions of reasoning — verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal — to assess students’ abilities holistically.
- **Local Norms:** Using district-wide, school-specific, and subgroup norms ensured fair comparisons in evaluating students.

The Results

Since adopting *CogAT*, Richardson ISD has revolutionized its identification process, making it more equitable and inclusive through universal screening and local norms. At one Title I school, these changes led to nearly ten times more 2nd-grade students being identified for as gifted. Simonds and her team’s efforts are truly giving all students a fair shot at being part of the Gifted and Talented Program.