

Comparing Washington’s Highly Capable Policies with National Best Practices

Executive Summary

Washington state’s Highly Capable laws are among the most clearly defined in the nation: structured, equity-minded, and informed by national best practices. Yet, like most states, Washington still struggles to translate policy into consistent, high-quality instruction for advanced learners. We lead in framework, but not yet in delivery.

Compared to a 2023 national report, Washington’s current Highly Capable framework aligns with much of the report’s 36 recommended state policies and practices for equitable, high-quality advanced learning.

The largest remaining gap lies in educator preparation—ensuring that teachers and leaders are equipped to recognize, challenge, and support advanced learners’ academic and social-emotional growth. Closing this gap would turn strong policy into meaningful classroom impact.

How Washington Measures Up

Focus Area	Key Practices	WA Alignment
Identification & Access	Universal screening, multiple measures, local norms, mandated K-12 continuum of services for identified students	Strong Alignment
Acceleration	Offer advanced pathways, subject and grade skipping, allow early kindergarten, concurrent and dual enrollment, automatic continuation of advanced services to middle/high school	Strong Alignment
Transparency	Public equity reporting, focus on student growth over static scores	Strong Alignment
Professional Development	Professional learning for all educators: pre-service, in-service, and district-level coordinators	WA has no Highly Capable professional development policy

Key Gaps:

Well-Prepared Educators & Professional Learning

National working group recommendations not yet implemented in Washington State:

24. Provide high-quality professional-learning opportunities about evidence-based advanced-learning strategies

25. Inform teacher-preparation programs with advanced learning practices

34. Ensure that preparation and in-service professional-development programs offer evidence-based instruction in advanced education, both for district-level coordinators and for teachers

35. Enforce the federal requirement that states explain how teacher-preparation programs are addressing education of special populations, including advanced learners

Summary

Washington's Highly Capable framework is among the nation's most clearly defined, but clarity alone isn't capacity. Strategic investment in educator preparation is the next essential step toward ensuring our schools can meet Highly Capable student needs.

Read the Report from the National Working Group on Advanced Education

*Building a Wider, More Diverse Pipeline of Advanced Learners
(National Working Group on Advanced Education, June 2023)*

fordhaminstitute.org/publication/pdfs/wider-more-diverse-pipeline-advanced-learners-final-report

