

Alexandria City Public Schools

Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee

December 8, 2020 Minutes

Meeting: Dec. 8, 2020, @ Zoom Webinar

TAGAC Members Present: Zion Bezu, Donna Brearley, Daphney Denerville-Davis, Tiana Dominick, Leigh Dugan, Reese du Pont, Mark Lacy, Dr. Gerald Mann, D Ohlandt, Laura Rose, Mary Beth Walker, Nicholas Miller

Dr. Terri Mozingo, Donna Brearley, and Rene Paschal attended as well.

Old Business:

None – will be discussed at next week's TAGAC business meeting

New Business:

The committee heard Dr. Jonathan Plucker, President of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) speak with us on what we can do to improve equity in gifted education.

Highlights from Dr. Plucker's talk follow:

Our guiding question was: *How do we make sure gifted services is equitable and how do we do what we can to make sure that our identification process is equitable?*

Advance Questions from the committee included:

1. Why were Talented and Gifted Services removed from Special Education services and the laws that protect those students' rights?

A: At the Federal level (and in Virginia), Gifted education has never been a part of Special Education Services.

2. What do you see the role of high-quality instructional materials in advancing high-quality education for all students?

3. How do you suggest schools provide gifted education while at the same time making sure this subset of students proportionally reflect the overall student population?

4. Is gifted education just another form of systemic racism?

5. What are the downsides to not offering gifted education in schools?

Plucker's hope is that in the future, technology will enable us to personalize learning as and RtI (Response to Intervention) approach. *Note that Personalization is not the same as Individualization.*

In response to question #2 (Instructional Materials) To promote advanced achievement, 2 things are most likely to influence learning

1. A high quality pre-differentiated curriculum

2. Ability grouping that is done flexibly and equitably

In the past, we have been taught that ability grouping is bad, but research says the opposite. Studies on Ability grouping by John Hattie show that students in the lowest quartile benefit the most from ability grouping with a high-quality differentiated curriculum.

Related to questions #3 and #4 (Proportionality of Representation and Gifted education as a form of systemic racism): Proportional Representation is the goal of most schools and school districts, but Plucker says that that's not his goal: his goal is to wipe out Excellence Gaps. His point is that even though we have equity in representation, *the goal should be equity in outcomes*.

The most important things to do to achieve equity in outcomes are

- Make sure to provide opportunities
- Make sure to communicate the value of those opportunities
- Make sure to locate the opportunities carefully so students can take advantage of them

Test everyone with Universal Screening (best grades are 2nd and 4th so that the early benefits of good preschool for certain socioeconomic groups aren't overstated).

Use Local Norms (within each school/community/city) to ensure that we are capturing students with high potential, not just high performance.

Ask the question: Do these students have needs that can't be met in the regular classroom? Then accelerate them.

Ability Grouping and Teacher Training – Professional Development in advanced education (both recognizing students who need advanced education and providing those services) is important. Only 4 states now require some form of coursework in advanced education.

Note:

Performance does not equal Potential (the goal of screening should be to find students with potential)

If we're only looking for students who perform at a high level, we'll never achieve equity.

Studies show that when you place students with potential (even though they are not yet achieving at high levels) within 1-2 years of starting a rigorous curriculum they have caught up and are achieving at a level such that they are indistinguishable from peers who started an advanced program years earlier.

Related to question #5 (the downsides of not offering Advanced Education opportunities) The downsides of not offering Advanced Education opportunities are, at their most basic:

- Families will leave
- Students who don't have social capital will be left without the advanced services that would help them, making the excellence gap even bigger

- Though it looks like not having Advanced Education means equity (look, nobody is treated differently) it really makes the problem worse and reduces opportunities for everyone. (examples in NYC and San Francisco)

It's okay to have Universal Screening at 1st/3rd grades like we have them, as long as there are other on-ramps to Advanced Education (including teacher Professional Development in identifying talent as well as self-nomination)

The goal is that we're finding all the advanced students who would benefit.

Strong frontloading programs such as Young Scholars have a big impact. Mentoring programs without curriculum are hard to study and might have a social impact that is harder to quantify.

Strong frontloading programs are really important in creating equity – Teacher training is essential – getting teachers to recognize potential in every child, no matter their color or economic background.

Testing shouldn't keep students out of programs:

You can rarely have a false positive with a test, but there are a myriad of reasons why a student might not perform well on a test, so it (one test on one day) shouldn't be something to keep a student out of Advanced Educational programming.

Ability grouping should be flexible, and based on both performance and potential: (multiple regrouping opportunities @6x/year)

Ability grouping with a strong differentiated curriculum can make a positive difference

Question about the weakest teacher/weakest curriculum with the lowest students? It's not that the grouping is wrong; it's that the execution of the program is wrong. Ability grouping can work with differentiated curriculum targeted for each group.

Note: in the average upper elementary classroom there can be an 8-10 grade level difference in student ability. Ability grouping can help in these instances to narrow the band of levels in a classroom to 3-4 grade levels.