

# Alexandria City Public Schools

## Advanced Academic Advisory Committee

April 15, 2024

### Minutes

**Current AASAC Members Present:** Evan Smith (Vice Chair), Lillian Pace, Willow Darsie, Amanda Shapiro, Matt Henry (Teacher Rep)

**Others Present:** Dr. Megan Tempel-Milner (ACPS - Staff Liaison), Carmen Sanders (ACPS), Christie Goodman (ACPS), Dr. Pierrette Finney (ACPS), Sarah Miller (member of public), Julie Anne Watko (member of public), Emmett Watko (member of public)

#### Vice-Chair's Opening Remarks

Thanks for understanding with timing of the meeting. I sat in for Chair Ohlandt for a session of the Ad-hoc committee where they spoke about the changes for the policies and procedures for the school board advisory committees. They are putting together a new calendar and a report template. This is very interesting and should provide more structure to our work.

Tonight we have Bob Falconi, ACPS School board counsel to talk about open meeting requirements and FOIA. Matt Smith who is the policy consultant who has been working with the school board on those changes. We can go through our committee's bylaws together and they are here to answer any questions.

#### Approval of March 5, 2024, Meeting Minutes

Item on the agenda to review and approve Minutes for March 5, 2024 meeting.

Willow Darsie offered proposed amendments:

- See her written submissions for exact amendments
- Changes discussed to Darsie's amendments include:
  - Clarifying that "A couple of committee members" discussed their wish to correct the record and erase mistaken impressions about gifted services.." rather than "committee members" .
  - Expanded on information in Carmen Sanders staff report to detail that the screening process currently underway is for K-8 students for GIA and SAA services. They sent 27 applications forward for summer residential governor's school. Students will be informed of their status by mid-April. ACPS will continue its partnership with UVA school of Education and Human Development to offer an online course series in gifted education. This can lead to a gifted education

endorsement in VA. ACPS pays for the coursework associated with the endorsement. Teachers may attend online session on March 24, 2024. We introduce Ms. Christie Goodman as the new AAS specialist in the ACPS office.

- Clarified the amendment stating that ACPS does not yet have an evaluation plan for the local plan to add that “ACPS has begun conversations with the Department of Accountability to develop an evaluation plan.”

March 5<sup>th</sup> minutes were adopted with the edits provided by member Willow Darsie.

### **ACPS Staff Remarks**

- Screening: K-3 GIA and 4-8 SAA schools will be notifying families via US mail by April 19<sup>th</sup>. Within the mailer parents will receive the matrix form as well as any information about appealing or the placement form.
- Grades 4, ACPS is doing a portfolio approach this year. Our schools have started the second round of the phase. Phase 1 is the referral process. Phase 2 is the screening process to narrow our pool. Parents will be notified by mail by April 19<sup>th</sup> if your child is moving to Phase 3. In that letter, parents will see the deciding document. The letter that we are sending home is translated in our typical languages. In phase 3, those students files will come to central office for screening. Classroom teachers, counselors, administrators, AAS teachers, EL teachers, psychologists will meet to review. Those notifications will go out by May 15<sup>th</sup> to determine final eligibility.
  - Phase 2 will look at growth from first quarter to second quarter. Phase 3 will look at growth over a long period of time.
  - Students will move to Phase 3 if they have three or more of these criteria: An ability score in the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher on MAP; 560 or higher on the SOL; progress reports include 3s and 4s; observation scale score of 50 or higher; work sample with 3.5 or higher; MAP considerable growth of 85% or higher, students move to phase 3 if they have three or more of those criteria.
  - The criteria above will be added online this summer once we move past screening.
- We are conducting interviews for our itinerant teacher pool (this means they will be in multiple schools) though we don't know how many positions we will have until budget is complete. We will have a group of people ready once we get final word. Our talent pool is strong this year.
- Question – Does this mean that school-level FTEs will remain the same? Yes, it will remain as it is. Any extra positions will be itinerant positions which means they can travel between schools, for example, to help with screenings.

### **Public Comments**

Sarah Miller, mother of a second grader who attends Douglas McArthur shared concerns about the changes to the local plan for the gifted, particularly the changes in services for students in grades K-3. Her full remarks were delivered to the committee and are attached below.

Julianne Watko shared concerns about the Young Scholars model noting that young scholars identification did not lead to AAS identification in schools where the highest numbers of students were identified in the program. She expressed concerns that talent development does not work in Alexandria City.

### **Presentation from Robert Falconi, ACPS School Board Counsel**

- FOIA covers public records and public meetings to ensure public access
- FOIA is intended to be liberally construed in favor of promoting awareness of the business of the public; exemptions shall be narrowly construed
- Public records presumed open unless they are designated exempt; they have to be tangible, not information floating around; need to occur within the terms of business and maintained by the public body; however, doesn't have to only be on a public e-mail account so long as public business is occurring
- Citizens and members of the media that reside within the state of VA may make FOIA requests; you have five business days to respond there is a process to request additional time but if the requester refuses you need to proceed to court to seek additional time.
- Exemptions include: personnel records, attorney-client privilege, legal memoranda and other work product, contract negotiations, procurement exemptions, account and routing numbers.
- As public meetings are considered to be open, and defined as any entity formed to advise a public body, this advisory committee is subject to FOIA. If a request comes in, contact ACPS' FOIA coordinator immediately and she will help initiate the appropriate process.
- Committee members can send e-mails to each other, even to the whole committee, however, don't respond two seconds later and then another respond two seconds later so it reads as a conversation. If you are e-mailing, make sure you put all e-mails in a drive or folder so you can pull that up at any time.
- Open meetings have to be noticed and posted in three locations and posted three working days before the meeting; if someone requests to receive direct notice of meetings then refer them to the Clerk to be added to the e-mail list
- Agendas should be distributed to the public at the same time it is shared with the public body including any materials shared with the public body relevant to the items on the agenda
- We can hold virtual meetings and participate virtually but school boards cannot
- Public records include social media so be careful not to have a quorum or three members discussing public business on social media

### **Work Session with Matt Smith, ACPS School Board Policy Consultant**

- Committee reviewed the bylaws for the advisory committee. Board is currently looking at bylaws and policies for advisory committees.
- There is no requirement for advisory committees to accept public comments. That was reference to public comments in the local plan. Page 56 of the local plan refers to our advisory committee and says that the committee will provide opportunities for public feedback at each meeting.
- That means this committee has tremendous flexibility in how we handle public comments. Since our bylaws do not reference much on public comments. We might want to include something in our governance on this area.
- The Committee discussed whether to include time limits on public comments in the governance section.
- Another area raised to address is to provide an orientation and welcome packet for new members. We might also look at this in context of the first requirements under Expectations of Members to ensure knowledge of AAS programs is not a barrier to entry.

#### **Committee End of Year Report Final Assignments**

- Open draft back for members to add additional feedback and recommendations
- Members will work offline via e-mail to populate a draft for discussion at our next meeting
- Vice Chair Smith will help structure the draft to fit the new template for the annual report.

#### **Adjourn**

Motion to adjourn approved.

## ATTACHMENTS:

### *Public Comment from Sarah Miller*

I'm speaking to this committee tonight to urge you all to help fix what has unquestionably been a disastrous first year of the new ACPS Local Plan for the Gifted. This plan is no longer hypothetical; we are living it, and we have seen its effects. Services for identified gifted learners in K-3 have been gutted, and these children are suffering. The AAS department and several people on this committee would have us believe that if only the plan were fully staffed, every gifted learner would be getting the services they need. Unfortunately, this false promise has been debunked repeatedly by the lived experiences of real students in ACPS. My son's elementary school has two AAS teachers, and one of them comes into his second grade classroom once a week for 30 minutes. The problem is that the activities the AAS teacher does with the classroom are not differentiated in any way, and it's been of absolutely no benefit to the identified gifted students who require – by law – appropriately differentiated curriculum. This new plan is seemingly designed to stunt the growth of gifted learners. Rather than provide them with the resources they need to achieve their fullest potential, ACPS seems determined to slow them down.

The draft recommendations from this committee acknowledge that this plan cannot be implemented if it is not properly funded. Well, this is no longer an "if". The budgeting process has made it all too clear that the superintendent and central office staff have no interest in prioritizing the staffing of this plan because it lacks credibility. As School Board member Megan Alderton asked incredulously in a budget work session – "You're going to use AAS or TAG teachers at the Tier I level? Absolutely not." The plan has always been fundamentally flawed because it misappropriates resources that are allocated for gifted services and uses them for whole class and remedial instruction.

You have an opportunity now to provide recommendations that modify the plan so that it once again serves gifted learners. It was interesting to see that all 2nd graders took the CogAT last month, which was not part of the original local plan. For the students who score exceptionally well on this, will they actually receive additional services in 3rd grade beyond what everyone else is receiving? Will they get a chance to work in small groups with a TAG teacher? Otherwise, what was the point of doing this universal screening?

In closing, I just want to say that the part I find most alarming about the current plan is that it justifies the dismantling of services through the implication that identified gifted learners are only identified because of some "privileged" status. Well let me tell you about privilege... My husband and I have no help -- no grandparents nearby to watch our child, no financial support of any kind. We

both put ourselves through college and graduate school entirely with our own money --- in fact, I'm still paying off my student loans to this day. We bought a house here in Alexandria without one cent from parents or any external sources. So please do not tell me that my child does not deserve to have his needs met when his parents have worked their tails off to get to where they are.

I sincerely hope that the members of this committee put forward and advocate for changes that put us in a better place than the unfortunate year we've just had. Thank you.