

Identification and Testing Subcommittee Report

The goal of identification for gifted and talented services is to find those students with the potential for learning at an advanced level. To achieve that desired result, the TAGAC recommends that ACPS focus on identification methods that assess students' potential rather than their current performance. In view of the foregoing, the TAGAC supports ACPS' continued use of universal screeners as a means of identifying students with the need for advanced academic services.

We recommend that ACPS continue to engage in the universal screening of all students in specific grade levels (first and third). Moreover, the TAGAC supports ACPS' decision to expand the universal screening of students during the 2021-2022 school year to all children in grades first through fourth due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We encourage ACPS to consider providing expanded screening opportunities on an ongoing basis at the elementary school level, as well as providing such opportunities at the middle school level.

In addition, the TAGAC supports ACPS' continued use of the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT) as a means of assessing a student's general ability. The NNAT can be used irrespective of a student's native language. Furthermore, it requires no specific prior knowledge. The test seeks to evaluate how a student has to think in order to complete a task rather than what the student needs to know to complete the task. Thus, the NNAT provides an equitable approach to assessment; and we believe its continued use will enable ACPS to acknowledge students who come from low income families, culturally and linguistically diverse environments, and English language learners.

For purposes of assessing a student's skills in specific areas, we recommend ACPS consider the use of the new Naglieri Verbal and Quantitative tests as a possible alternative to the current Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), which is currently used as a universal screener for third graders. The NTA Verbal looks at associative relationships between pictures and the NTA Quantitative examines relationships and patterns between numbers. These tests were designed to help educators equitably identify underserved populations because the tests do not require knowledge of English. Findings based on pilot testing of general ability tests closely matched the US population on key demographics such as race, gender and education.

We further recommend creating an assessment matrix that favors scores on tests like the NNAT. Also, we recommend testing and obtaining scores from all students with less reliance on referrals. To do otherwise risks creating or at least perpetuating inequities in the evaluative process because of flaws inherent in other assessment tools. For instance, traditional ability tests focus on achievement rather than potential and teacher referrals can sometimes present bias towards a student or group of students.

We also recommend that ACPS employ "local norms" as a strategy to improve the identification of students from all racial, cultural, and income groups. To do so, we recommend ACPS compare a student's performance to grade level peers in each individual school, rather than the

district as a whole. This would enable ACPS to better ensure that students are not being unfairly penalized for not having learned certain content because it would assess whether those students have academic needs that cannot be met in the regular classroom at their current school.

In closing, to measure the effectiveness of the general ability tests, ACPS must decide on how to obtain and evaluate data for each student. The type of information collected must be relevant and reliable. Also, the data collection methods must be consistent, secure and centralized. Also, aggregated data needs to be continually analyzed to identify opportunities for improvement.