

**DATE:** June XX, 2022

For ACTION  \_\_\_

For INFORMATION  \_\_\_

Board Agenda: Yes  \_\_\_

No  \_\_\_

**FROM:** Nicholas Miller, Chair, Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC)

**THROUGH:** Gregory Hutchings, Jr., Ed.D, Superintendent of Schools  
Gerald Mann, Jr., Ed.D., Executive Director of Instructional Support,  
Department of Teaching, Learning and Leadership  
Megan Tempel-Milner, Ph.D., Director of Gifted and Advanced Academic  
Programs

**TO:** The Honorable Meagan L. Alderton, Chairman, and  
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

**TOPIC:** SY 2021–2022 Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC) Year End  
Report

## Overview

During the 2021–2022 school year, the Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC) continued its work to improve the academic and social-emotional needs of Talented and Gifted (TAG) students in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) and focused the committee’s efforts on the following topics:

1. ACPS’s Five-Year Local Plan
2. Continuum of Gifted and Advanced Academic Services Within ACPS
3. TAG-Related Advocacy and Communication in and out of the Classroom
4. Accountability for TAG Services

This End of Year Report covers these topics as well as notes on the overall execution of the committee over the year.

## Summary

The Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC) continued its work to improve support to the academic and social-emotional needs of Talented and Gifted (TAG) students in Alexandria City Public School (ACPS). The work of this year included a few specific focus points: the updating of the five-year plan, which is significantly out of date, looking at how services are delivered across the whole of a student's academic career from identification to graduation, the advocacy received, and how services are assessed.

For the average student their TAG academic journey begins with identification that was instigated by a parent or auto-generated by a standardized test in early elementary school. Both approaches have equity issues that are widely accepted and difficult to address. These are not unique to ACPS and are subject to significant study on a national level. The five-year plan seeks to address these with current research, but in plain language ACPS needs to better train teachers to identify students with gifted attributes at all grade levels and provide them the support they deserve. Additional techniques of test score weighting, entry points by portfolio review and other community sourced advocacy for underrepresented populations should be explored via pilot programs. These additional techniques must be transparent with clearly defined success criteria.

Once in the TAG program a student will come in contact with a variety of delivery of service models and a significant variability of the rigor across the planning of instruction, delivery of services, and assessment of instruction for both the student and staff member(s). The movement between service models is often lacking transition support and explanation of the new service model to students and parents. TAGAC strongly recommends a pre-differentiated and high-quality district-wide curriculum be employed across ACPS across all subject areas and grade levels to set a standard for TAG services and a standard to which teachers and administrators can evaluate effectiveness of instruction. This base should also be clearly communicated to parents and students to set academic expectations.

Instruction for TAG students does not begin and end with academics. All students struggle with social-emotional issues as they grow and mature. TAG students struggle with these same issues as well as additional issues including managing the pressure of being asymmetric in their academic growth, perfectionism, performance anxiety and other struggles as compared to their peers. Providing differentiated social emotional support should also be a key level of support in the TAG program.

## **Background & Administrative Recommendations**

TAGAC discussed a number of potential items for its Scope of Work for the 2021–2022 school year. The committee split into several sub-committees to address each topic with small group discussions, research and various presentations from ACPS and external parties. The year was composed of seven meetings of the full committee in a mix of in-person and Zoom meetings.

The continued impacts of COVID-19 were definitely felt again this year by the TAGAC. While this is hardly a unique challenge, overcoming this did reveal some advantages to virtual meetings. We feel that the school board should investigate ways to make all meetings, school board and advisory councils, available in a hybrid format so that in person and virtual attendance is possible. We feel that this is possible with the current state of technology and would greatly increase the accessibility to the general public. We acknowledge that in-person TAGAC meetings of two hours in the evenings are generally more accessible to more people than midday or afternoon meetings. We recognize that transportation, child care, providing meals and general family time needs such as helping with homework are limiting factors to attendance for many people and communities we would like to be involved in the work of the TAGAC.

The TAGAC and ACPS staff continue to struggle with accessing data to support recommendations. At a base level data on how students enter the program, how successful the program is in helping students reach their full potential, and how we evaluate teacher success/effectiveness does not exist, isn't easy to find, or is hard to correlate and analyze. ACPS needs to put significant emphasis on making existing data easily accessible and requiring future data sets be well structured so that ideas can be tested and analyzed with concrete success criteria. While covered in the accountability section below it warrants discussion here as well because of the amount of work and stress it places on the staff to answer basic questions such as, "How many TAG parent referrals are successful" or show an inability to answer questions such as, "What is the subgroup breakdown of parent referrals" due to lack of rich data sets. Our inability to measure the magnitude of our failures limits our ability to plan for how to succeed.

## **1. ACPS's Five-Year Local Plan**

ACPS's last Local Plan for TAG students was approved in 2011 and covered 2012–2017. The school system has been operating under the approved plan for the previous 10 years. The rewrite of this plan in 2021/2022 to comply with current law as well as incorporate the best practices and current best practices of delivery of services with a focus on equity was a significant task for both the ACPS TAG office as well as the TAGAC.

The subcommittee assigned to report on the K-12 continuity of TAG services within ACPS has arranged this summary and analysis in three parts:

- I. Identification process, including talent development.
- II. The need for rigorous curriculum.
- III. A thoughtful time-phased approach for implementing the new plan ensuring ample opportunity for teacher/staff training and continuity of services for current students.

### **I. Identification Process**

Currently, there is some evidence of attention to the identification of students from underrepresented groups including low income, minority, English Language Learners, and twice-exceptional students to the TAG program through key features of the current identification process, including the use of a nonverbal measure and the use of multiple criteria that examine both ability and achievement data. However, no evidence suggests that attention is given to program alteration as a result of these students being selected, except for the value-added summer experience of the Young Scholars Program at K-5.

Previous observations and assessment reports suggest there is a discrepancy between the number of minority and low-income students in the current TAG program and their presence in the ACPS population. Focus group and survey data support this fact and many stakeholders are concerned about this issue.

TAGAC has generated a set of recommendations for improvement, mostly on issues of underrepresentation and communication to parents and others about student results and the overall identification process.

- Improve strategies and techniques for the identification of underrepresented groups through techniques recommended by both the evaluation team and the two multi-cultural consultants working with the ACPS TAG Local Plan Draft Steering Committee. These recommendations focus on the use of lower cutoff scores with more oversight of the school-based committee process.
- Incorporate use of research-based checklist items that promote recognition of giftedness in cultural, racial minority groups, English Language Learners, and other under-served

student groups, including dissemination through teacher materials, training, and community outreach activities.

- Continue the use of existing screening tools as they constitute the best tests available for the purposes intended in finding students from underrepresented groups, based on research data and as noted by all five consultants who reviewed them. We recommend modifying the cutoff scores on the two standardized ability instruments by two percentile points as it may decrease the underrepresentation of African Americans by as much as 5 percentage points, based on a three-year historical analysis of the NNAT data from 2014-16. A 2014-15 analysis of one year of CogAT data showed identification of Hispanic students would have increased by 2 percentage points. Based on the analyses of historical results of both tests, we think it is prudent to lower the score cutoffs in this way to assist in reaching the goal of reducing disparity among minority groups in the program.
- Train teachers and principals annually on the general and specific aptitude characteristics of gifted learners and those from underrepresented groups to improve identification and assist advancing TAG student diversity goals.
- Develop program strategies that tailor language arts and social studies curriculum for students from underrepresented groups, including choice of reading materials, content highlighting accomplishments of minority groups and individuals, including practice with higher level thinking using scaffolded materials.

## **II. Rigorous Tier I and advanced curriculum**

At the elementary and middle school level, ACPS has no standardized curriculum for either general education or TAG classes. To support all students, ACPS should adopt and implement a robust Tier 1<sup>1</sup> curriculum for all students. A rigorous, standardized, connected baseline curriculum - not developed in-house at ACPS from a variety of disconnected sources - supports all teachers and all students. For teachers, it provides a resource to reduce planning time and to provide extension of lessons for those students who need additional rigor. For students, it provides equitable access to educational rigor across classrooms and schools. Moreover, in order to successfully implement a talent-development approach for TAG identification, all students must have the opportunity to engage with rigorous instructional materials that allow for extension of learning beyond core concepts.

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<sup>1</sup> At Tier 1, all students should receive scientific, research-based core instruction implemented with integrity and emphasizing grade-level standards and school-wide behavioral expectations. Instruction at Tier 1 should be explicit, differentiated and include flexible grouping and active student engagement. To ensure 80% of students' needs are met at Tier 1, high quality instruction is essential (Chard et al., 2008).

In addition to high-quality Tier I curricula, ACPS should also adopt standardized advanced curriculum to support those students who need additional rigor. The advanced curriculum could be used in a variety of delivery models, including push-in or pull-out delivery of services. Particularly if ACPS moves to push-in delivery of TAG services in the upper-elementary school grades, standardized curriculum will be critical to supporting teachers in the differentiation of services.

### **III. A time-phased approach to implementation**

As the ACPS TAG Local Plan Draft Steering Committee continues its work, the TAGAC recommends observing proven best practices in implementing a thoughtful time-phased approach to implementing the new plan. The TAGAC urges the Steering Committee to consider a “whole-of-system” approach to ensure meaningful change across the division, pilot programs to facilitate implementation, and incorporate metrics for accountability. Any changes to the delivery of service model must be implemented in way that provides adequate time for acquisition of new curriculum, for training on that curriculum, and for staff to be recommissioned as appropriate (e.g., 4th/5th TAG teacher transitioning to instructional specialist or co-teacher) consistent with the plan’s proposed delivery model(s) for advanced academic instruction. Because no plan has yet been announced, the subcommittee recommends that delivery model changes be implemented for the 2023-24 school year at the earliest. While other changes may be able to be made during the upcoming school year (e.g., revisions to the identification process, identification and acquisition of standardized curriculum), changes to the delivery model are unlikely to be successful in the upcoming school year given the limited time remaining in this school year and the uncertainty of when the new TAG Local Plan will be adopted.

The TAGAC applauds the Steering Committee for reaching out to external experts (Davis, Ford, Naglieri, and Plucker) to assist in developing the TAG Local Plan. These experts and others can counsel on academic research, best practices, and lessons learned from similar districts to craft a successful plan for ACPS.

Implementing the needed reforms in delivering TAG services will require a system-wide approach. This approach should start with teachers. Teachers should be the key change agents to execute the new plan. They are the on-deck professionals that will actually execute the plan. Empowering teachers early in the process should provide them the knowledge and understanding of the supporting principles and assumptions of the Plan. **Training and broad acceptance of the Plan by all teachers, not just those accredited with delivering Advanced Academic services, should be the key to lasting success.**

Based on diversity across the division, TAGAC recommends the Steering Committee consider pilot programs in the implementation plan. Pilot programs have proven effective in providing better understanding to teachers, parents, and administrators in ACPS.<sup>2</sup> Pilots could foster teacher training

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<sup>2</sup> Health/PE Initiatives Using ESSA Funds (heart rate monitors); Virginia “Test to Stay” Pilot Program; Alexandria City Public Schools and Virginia Tech Launch Pilot Program in Partnership to Strengthen STEM Opportunities for Students

and empowerment with opportunities for teachers sharing experiences as well as providing valuable data to administrators on what works and doesn't work in the new Plan at ACPS.

Finally, the TAGAC recommends the Steering Committee determine measures of performance and effectiveness early in the Plan's development. Knowing how the Plan's success will be evaluated is essential to the broad understanding and commitment needed in implementing the plan. The right metrics should incentivize both teachers and administrators to focus on results of improving delivery of Advanced Academic Services to ACPS students.

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## 2. Continuum of Gifted and Advanced Academic Services Within ACPS

The subcommittee assigned to report on the K-12 continuity of TAG services within ACPS has arranged this summary and analysis in three parts:

- I. A list of existing entry points to TAG eligibility and TAG services delivered in all grades K-12.
- II. The subcommittee's interpretation of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing entry points and TAG services, and the continuity of services from grade K through grade 12.
- III. A brief list of recommendations for TAGAC, the Office of AAS, ACPS administration, and the ACPS School Board to consider moving forward.

### I. Summary of Existing TAG Services and Entry Points to TAG Eligibility in Grades K-12

#### Early Elementary grades K-2:

*Entry/identification:* ACPS conducts a universal screening for TAG eligibility in grade 1, using the NNAT. **This is the first of ACPS's two primary entry points to TAG-specific services.** All grade 1 students who score above the nationally-normed cutoff score are automatically entered into the Division's pool of TAG referrals, and determination of TAG eligibility takes into consideration performance on other tests, class assignments, as well as teacher and parent feedback. Parents/guardians must approve the full review process, and they may appeal the initial decision. Students in Kindergarten or grade 2 may be referred for full review by teachers, parents, or others; in most cases, the first step following a referral in K or grade 2 is to take or retake the NNAT.

*Delivery of services:* For TAG eligible students in grades K-2 (and 3), ACPS only delivers GIA (General Intellectual Aptitude, not subject-specific) services, in the form of differentiated instruction in the general education classroom. The depth and impact of these services varies from school to school and from classroom to classroom. When possible, the TAG teacher(s) at the elementary school assist the general education teachers with developing and delivering a Differentiated Education Plan (DEP) for each TAG-eligible student. In some schools the TAG teacher delivers these services to a group of TAG students outside the regular classroom on a weekly basis. Some TAG-eligible students receive additional counseling and support on a case-by-case basis.

*Young Scholars (YS):* Young Scholars identification and programming begins in grades K, 1, or 2 depending on the school. ACPS has now rolled out YS to all elementary schools.



### **Later Elementary grades 3-5:**

*Entry/identification:* ACPS conducts a universal screening for TAG eligibility in grade 3, using the COGaT. **This is the second of ACPS's two primary entry points to TAG-specific services.** All grade 3 students who score above the nationally-normed cutoff score in either **Language Arts** or **Math** are automatically entered into the Division's pool of TAG referrals, and determination of subject-specific TAG eligibility takes into consideration performance on other tests, class assignments, and teacher and parent feedback. Students in grades 3-5 are not automatically screened for subject-specific TAG eligibility in **Science** or **Social Studies**, or for GIA (General Intellectual Aptitude, not subject-specific) eligibility; a teacher or another individual, including the student him/herself, must refer the student for review for eligibility to be determined.

*Delivery of services:* TAG-eligible students in grade 3 may receive differentiated instruction in the general education classroom or thru a TAG teacher on a weekly basis. Students in grades 4 and 5 who are eligible for subject-specific TAG services in **Language Arts** or **Math** receive advanced instruction in Language Arts and accelerated instruction in Math, in a separate class environment from their homeroom class. Subject-specific TAG services in **Science** or **Social Studies**, as well as GIA services, are delivered through differentiated instruction in the general education classroom. The TAG classroom curriculum for Language Arts and Math is somewhat standardized across ACPS, but the depth and impact of differentiated instruction for GIA, Social Studies, and Science varies widely. Some TAG-eligible students receive additional counseling and support on a case-by-case basis.

All students in 5th grade receive academic counseling to assist them with their class choices at the middle school level. Since all TAG services in middle school are provided through the open-enrollment honors classes, TAG-eligible students are generally advised to choose honor classes.

Young Scholars (YS): YS programming continues through elementary school.

### **Middle School grades 6-8:**

*Entry/identification:* ACPS does not conduct any universal screening for TAG eligibility at the middle school level. Teachers are asked to look for "outliers" in their review of other tests and/or competitions. Students identified by teachers in this manner are entered into the Division's pool of TAG referrals, and final determination of TAG eligibility would take into consideration the teacher's report, as well as other available data.

*Delivery of services:* Differentiated classroom instruction is available in all content areas in which students were identified while enrolled in ACPS. TAG services at the middle school level have been previously evaluated by the outside consultant and found lacking on the grounds that DEPs are not rigorous, nor is the general honors curriculum.

The middle schools deliver two different types of curriculum: Honors curriculum and general education curriculum. For **Language Arts, Social Studies, and Science**, TAG-eligible students are clustered in open enrollment honors classes. A “cluster” is generally more than 3 students but may be less depending on the number of TAG-eligible students and scheduling conflicts. TAG clustering is done after schedules are created, which can make it hard to cluster students in classes such as Science and Social Studies because ACPS does not universally screen for TAG eligibility in those classes. Depending on the teacher, students may not be aware who or even that other TAG students are in the class. The honors curriculum is intended to ensure that there is more in-depth work than what is provided by the general education curriculum, but students do not necessarily have more work than other students. Overall due to the open enrollment nature of honors classes at the middle school level and the percentage of students that take advantage of the honors classes it is questionable that the differentiation is achievable. **Math** for TAG students is an entirely separate class because 4th and 5th graders identified for SAA in Math are accelerated and have completed the 6th grade curriculum when they reach middle school. There are a small number of students accelerated beyond the normal TAG designation.

A Young Scholars (YS) program is still in development at the middle school level. Currently ACPS ensures that YS students take at least 1-2 honors level classes.

*Continuity:* All students in grade 8 receive academic counseling to assist them with class choices in high school. This counseling is not TAG-specific and there is apparently little coordination between counseling at the middle school and the high school levels. All AP and advanced classes at the high school are open enrollment. TAG-eligible students typically indicate a desire to take as many AP classes as they can and sign up for everything. Math-accelerated students can take math beyond the graduation requirements, but Differential Equations is the only class for accelerated students only.

### **High School grades 9-12:**

*Entry/identification:* ACPS does not conduct any universal screening for TAG eligibility at the high school level. In grades 9-12, teachers and counselors review past performance in the classroom, scores on standardized tests, and advanced scores on Standards of Learning tests to identify a pool of candidates who would benefit from gifted services in specific academic aptitude such as instruction in the Honors and Advanced Placement classes.

*Delivery of services:* By policy TAG-eligible students in grades 9-12 are to receive both differentiated instruction in the general education classroom and individualized opportunities. Differentiated instruction in grades 6 through 12 is monitored by the school division. The TAG Coordinator utilizes the TAG Observation Form and Program Monitoring Form to ensure the appropriate implementation of differentiated curriculum and instruction for TAG identified students.

Students may also be offered opportunities to foster the development of their interests and abilities. Administrative and guidance department staff work cooperatively to design appropriate educational experiences and to inform parents and students about courses, as well as co-curricular and extra-curricular enrichment opportunities that are particularly suitable to the student's needs.

Counselors assist students in academic planning, including scholarship opportunities, and provide one-on-one counseling with students as appropriate. Honors, Advanced Placement, and Dual Enrollment courses are offered in numerous academic areas at the high school level.

## **II. Strengths, Weaknesses, and Concerns about Entry Points, Delivery, and Continuity of TAG Services K-12**

### **Continuity / K-12:**

- There is a lack of coordination between the three major levels of education (elementary/middle/high) that negatively impacts TAG-eligible students proceeding through ACPS with the appropriate levels of support.
- A lack of vertical alignment from elementary to middle school to high school reduces the potential impact of an ACPS education, particularly for TAG-eligible students.
- TAG-related support outside of the classroom and non-academic counseling tailored to TAG-eligible students are lacking in K-12. (Some areas might include: social skills, executive skills/organization, processing failure, managing perfectionism, project management (long-term projects), group skills, “boredom” and disengagement.)

### **Elementary:**

- Concern continues among parents, teachers, administrations, the school board and TAGAC that TAG referrals and eligibility identification are inequitable across demographic groups and schools.
- School-to-school variation in the depth and impact of differentiated instruction due to a lack of a baseline curriculum makes it difficult to provide continuity and progressive instruction as students move between grades and educational tiers
- The interaction between the Young Scholars program and TAG services is unclear.

### **Middle School:**

- The overall state of TAG services at the middle school has been previously identified by the TAGAC as an area of concern. The recognition that change is needed is a positive improvement.
- There are discussions about improving the rigor of the middle school curriculum for all classes which is a critical first step to providing meaningful differentiation opportunities in the curriculum for TAG students.
- TAG clustering at the middle school level and the delivery of TAG services via the honors program at the middle school level (outside of math) is sporadic and doesn't seem to provide significant, if any, differentiation.
  - The original intent of grouping to provide social-emotional support and to allow for placement with TAG certified teachers in a small group to facilitate in-class differentiation seems to have failed.
- Since there is no universal screening process for TAG identification at the middle school level, students who are new to the school system or who were not identified in elementary school might benefit from TAG-specific services, but they do not have access to them.

### **High School:**

- TAG services at the high school are limited to in-class differentiated instruction; however teachers and counselors are not equipped to provide TAG-specific supports, and TAG-eligible students are unaware of TAG-specific supports they could access.
- Honors curricula should be revised in order to identify clear objectives and expected outcomes for advanced learners. Research-based curricula should be used to determine objectives and ensure consistent levels of rigor.
- TAG students are generally expected to be self directed learners by this point taking classes (Honors, AP, DE) that fulfill their needs

## **III. Recommendations from the TAGAC Subcommittee on Continuity of Services K-12**

- Improve the rigor of the curriculum across all grades and all schools through the adoption and implementation of pre-differentiated, high-quality, Tier 1 curricula.
- Promote and implement project-based learning across the school division.
- Develop and provide consistent division-wide training for teachers and staff in:
  - Identification of students across all grade levels who show the characteristics of TAG students, particularly students from underrepresented groups
  - Facilitation of differentiated instruction in all subject areas
  - Identification and support of specific academic and social-emotional needs of TAG-eligible students
- Prioritize vertically aligning curriculum and support services K-12.
- Hire a TAG coordinator for the high school who can:
  - Provide instruction and support for teachers and counselors to address the needs of TAG-eligible students
  - Offer information sessions about honors classes
  - Train AP and DE teachers on TAG-eligible learners
  - Support high school teachers and staff in identifying TAG-eligible students in underrepresented populations
  - Lead Professional Development in gifted education for high school teachers
  - Build partnerships with groups (colleges/ organizations) that can support advanced courses for students identified as gifted learners.
- Institute community outreach procedures to tap into underrepresented groups within the community, including minority, low income, and ELL groups.



### 3. TAG-Related Advocacy and Communications in and out of the Classroom

The subcommittee assigned to report on the K-12 continuity of TAG services within ACPS has arranged this summary and analysis in two parts:

- I. A description of the issues related to advocacy and communication
- II. A brief list of recommendations for TAGAC, the Office of AAS, ACPS administration, and the ACPS School Board to consider moving forward.

#### I. Advocacy and Communication Issues

TAGAC is highly concerned about how a strong parental advocate, or the lack thereof, impacts the TAG program. Such advocacy specifically has an impact on equity and access to TAG services. It also has social-emotional impacts on students during the application, evaluation, and delivery of academic portions of the TAG program.

There is a perception across ACPS stakeholders that strong parent advocacy can drive access to the TAG program and that this drives some of the inequities in the program. This is not unique to ACPS, and is supported by peer-reviewed research: “Family income, parental education, and cultural capital also play more direct roles in the gifted identification process. The 2014-2015 State of the States Report (National Association for Gifted Children, 2015) indicated that the most common time for gifted identification to occur was following a parent or teacher referral. This point means that parents with the cultural capital to advocate for their child’s identification are more likely to have a student who is identified as gifted...the parents with the most social capital are likely the ones most involved with school policy decisions and also the ones most likely to have their students identified under the current paradigm...Allowing parents to obtain outside testing or putting in place policies that allow parents to override universal consideration data to place their child in the talent pool only serve to make inequity worse. Families should not be able to access a back door to gifted identification by virtue of their cultural or socioeconomic capital.”<sup>3</sup>

These access gaps should not be the case as there are specific academic milestones that need to be met to qualify for TAG services, but such strong parent support can provide access to experiences, access to resources, social and emotional support driven by an understanding of the TAG program, access to school staff, and the cultural capital to feel empowered to advocate for their child. These issues with access to TAG services are compounded when cultural and/or language barriers are at play.

Additionally, some parents have the means to research TAG services and build understanding of the identification process while others do not. Currently, building this understanding requires parents to

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<sup>3</sup> Peters, S.J. (2022). The challenges of achieving equity within public school gifted and talented programs. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 66 (2), 82-94.

take the initiative to do additional work and research, difficult for all parents to do but especially so when cultural and/or language barriers are involved. Family work schedules and access to the school building can also present barriers to activities such as explaining the TAG program and getting permission for participation in the program.

ACPS is working to address the experience and support aspects of this issue with access to the Young Scholars program. However, the Young Scholars program by itself does not directly address communicating effectively to parents about the TAG program, the identification process, and the benefits of enrolling in the program.

## **II. Recommendations from the TAGAC Subcommittee on Advocacy and Communication**

In order to overcome the equity issues inherent in the access gap, ACPS needs to engage in a strong and coherent communication plan about the TAG services available to students that aims to reduce the access gaps by providing access to all. We recommend the following is considered in developing such a plan:

- All stakeholders involved in TAG services must be considered in this communication plan, including administrators, School Board members, staff members, teachers, students, parents, and the general public.
- ACPS should expand its translation services to focus on communicating about the benefits of and the process for TAG services, and by making translation services more accessible for 1-1 conversations between the TAG-designee at each school and prospective parents.
- ACPS should recruit and train advocates across all subgroups who can speak about the benefits of the TAG program and the identification process. These advocates can be recruited from the teacher, parents, and TAG-alumni community, and even from TAG students currently enrolled at the high school. Advocates could be formally equipped with information about the TAG program and their contact information shared with TAG-designees at each school. They could act as a vital bridge between ACPS TAG staff and the varied communities from which potential TAG students can and do come from. In particular, these advocates could speak to how students who are intellectually advanced can benefit from additional support at school with no cost to the parents.
- The plan should take advantage of the creative communication methods ACPS utilized to overcome the limitations placed on communication by COVID. For example, relying on text-based communications as the norm and making sure that information is available via mobile

devices in multiple languages have been key enablers in improving communication, and they should be used by the TAG program as well.

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## **4. Accountability for TAG Services**

TAGAC believes that ACPS must also be accountable for executing the plan developed and communicated by the TAGAC in an effective manner. TAGAC has studied and codified recommendations on ways to assess the effectiveness of the TAG program and its delivery to ensure that ACPS provides students with the services they deserve. The subcommittee assigned to report on the K-12 continuity of TAG services within ACPS has arranged this summary and analysis in one part:

### **I. Recommendations to Improve Accountability**

#### **I. Recommendations to Improve Accountability**

##### **Adding a TAG Data Liaison:**

While great strides have been made over the last several years to properly identify and track informative data points to assess all TAG programs (YS, GIA, SAA, DE, etc.) there is serious need for improvement. Current challenges include:

- Data housed in disparate data systems (e.g., in some cases there are paper files for students while in other cases the files are kept electronically).
- Schools define data points differently (e.g., one school removes a student's YS marker when that student enters the GIA program while another school does not remove the marker).
- Some data, while captured, is not easily reportable, therefore requiring additional work to access and oftentimes facing competition for prioritization (e.g., the data on how many TAG parent referrals are successful)
- Some data not gathered at all (e.g., the data on the sub-group breakdown of parent referrals)

TAGAC believes none of these gaps in data are intentional; they serve to illustrate that the Department of Gifted and Advanced Academic Programs would be better positioned to meet its objectives to identify, deliver, and improve services for its students with more technical and data-driven support.

##### **Including Effectiveness of Differentiation in Measures of Staff Effectiveness:**

From an equity standpoint, the Young Scholars and SAA programs currently exhibit the capability of having a standardized teaching approach, primarily due to having an expected teaching structure (defined student group receiving the same service at the same time); it should be noted however that not every school is using and implementing the program as intended, and the lack of strong ACPS-wide high quality curricula presents a barrier to having a written guide to assess effectiveness of off.

Even with these challenges, principals and other administrators could observe teachers of these programs in their classrooms and make recommendations based on a set of centralized expectations.

GIA services delivered primarily at the elementary level and in-classroom differentiated instruction primarily used at the middle school level are the most challenging services to observe and assess for effectiveness.

These programs in particular would benefit from the development of a centralized set of expectations that are created and applicable to all schools. These expectations should include indicators in areas such as:

- Use of standard curriculum that has been identified for gifted students and/or pre-differentiated materials from standard Tier 1 curriculum
- Use of lessons plans demonstrating a tiered-teaching approach (ie.layered content, advanced questions, etc. for TAG students)

In addition, coaching should be provided by a group of trained administrators to assist teachers in providing differentiated instruction and aligning to the centralized set of expectations.

Teacher and Administrative promotions and bonuses should contain a metric on the proven ability to deliver differentiated services to students.

### **Revamping the DEP to Better Track Student Success:**

Clearly, one way to measure a student's success is by grades. However, ACPS aims to measure whether students are maximizing their potential. TAGAC believes that revamping the DEP's is the best mechanism for accomplishing this goal for students who receive TAG services.

TAGAC recommends that every student receiving TAG services (GIA, SSA, YS) receives a DEP. The format for the DEP should be revised to reflect progression across K-12 and across disciplines, focusing on continuity and long-term growth for the student.

The current DEP format relies completely on the comments added by the teacher to help structure an appropriate experience and support the student as they execute the plan so that the student's TAG experience is enriching and not just "more work". This requires teachers to be fully supported in this endeavor including coaching, preparation time and other incentives.

The TAGAC instead recommends that DEPs are restructured to focus across grade-levels and subject areas on goals outlined, strategies identified, and reporting on a numbered scale how the student is progressing towards those goals.

Additionally, teachers should be trained in how to personalize the DEP for each student and how to write the DEP in plain language that parents and students can easily understand.

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Superintendent recommends that the School Board approve the TAGAC 2021–2022 End of Year Report.

**Contacts:** Nicholas Miller, Chair, Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC),  
[KNMiller@gmail.com](mailto:KNMiller@gmail.com)

Megan Tempel-Milner, Ph.D., Director of Gifted and Advanced Academic Programs, [megan.tempel-milner@acps.k12.va.us](mailto:megan.tempel-milner@acps.k12.va.us)

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