

DRAFT

Date: 00 June 2021

For: ACTION___

For: INFORMATION ___

Board Agenda: Yes ___No ___

FROM: Laura Rose, Chair, Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC)

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

**THROUGH: Dr. Megan Tempel-Milner, Talented and Gifted Coordinator
Terri Mozingo, Ed.D., Chief Academic Officer
Gregory Hutchings, Jr., Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools**

TOPIC: TAGAC Guest Speakers Report

SUMMARY:

The Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC) hosted four guest speakers during the 2020-2021 school year to share knowledge and experience in providing special services to talented and gifted students. The 2020-21 guest speakers all offered insight that would facilitate efforts to build a more inclusive and equitable TAG program in ACPS. With the benefit of the speakers' presentation, the subcommittee recommends:

- 1) Increased and effective communication efforts with all parents, with particular attention paid to parents of children groups underrepresented in TAG.
- 2) Consideration of a more flexible grouping approach that would allow more students to be identified for TAG.
- 3) Implementation of high level curriculum across ACPS classrooms that will challenge students at all levels, both within and outside of the TAG program.

BACKGROUND:

TAGAC hosted the following speakers during SY2020-2021.

- *Ms. Dornswalo Wilkins-McCorey - President Elect, Va. Assoc. of Gifted Children, Va. Beach Schools.*
- *Dr. Jonathan Plucker - President of the National Association of Gifted Children*
- *Ms. Angela Greene- ACPS Department of Accountability*

- *Ms. Krishna Levya- ACPS Family and Community Engagement Center (FACE)*

The TAGAC Guest Speakers Sub-Committee reviewed TAGAC minutes, committee member notes, and TAGAC meeting video to produce relevant lessons and recommendations for improving Talented and Gifted (TAG) services in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS).

DISCUSSION:

TAGAC summarized the speaker's comments along a theme of "Equity and Access to Services" into three areas:

- Communications and outreach
- Flexible grouping, identification, and local norms
- Improving TAG services through improved curriculum, flexibility, and socialization

[Zion- Communication and outreach here]

Dr. Jonathan Plucker is the Julian C. Stanley Endowed Professor of Talent Development at Johns Hopkins University, and the current President of the National Association of Gifted Children. His research focuses on education policy and talent development.

Dr. Plucker's presentation to the committee focused on the successful outcomes that have been observed with ability grouping when implemented flexibly and equitably as one means to promote advanced achievement.

However, he noted recent studies have reconsidered its benefits when incorporating flexibility.¹ Flexible grouping, where students are frequently evaluated and often re-assigned during the school year, provides the benefits of ability grouping (e.g., easier teaching, focused learning) without the negative social impacts or inability to break out of a group once assigned. Flexible ability grouping could be determined in a variety of ways such as course subject, reading, or cognitive skills or most importantly by potential vs performance. Teachers could use flexible ability groups to assist in providing "personalized" (not individualized) teaching to their students as well as re-grouping when appropriate when a student's needs evolve.

Dr. Plucker also stressed that any ability grouping must be equitable. He elaborated that selection for flexible grouping must be universal (e.g., testing in 2 and 4th grades) but most also

¹ See, e.g. What One Hundred Years of Research Says About the Effects of Ability Grouping and Acceleration on K–12 Students' Academic Achievement: Findings of Two Second-Order Meta-Analyses. [Citation format.]

look for student potential not only performance or achievement. Often gifted students in early elementary may not necessarily be “high achieving” but do demonstrate “strong potential” through their classroom behaviour and personality (e.g., asking questions, curiosity, ability to concentrate). Moreover, he stressed that due to differences between schools or neighborhoods, he advocated adopting “local norms” for identifying students since central criteria might not apply to all situations.

The TAGAC believes there is merit in considering equitable flexible ability grouping in ACPS for the elementary and middle school levels. This model provides useful tools to provide personalized instruction to the widely diversified student bodies in the ACPS elementary and middle schools. The TAGAC feels that due to the vast array of courses offered at the high school level that the benefits of flexible grouping would be less effective. Flexible ability grouping could permit teachers and administrators to tailor services to the specific needs of their classrooms and neighborhood schools. Then with regrouping, there are additional opportunities for students to move to new groups that suit individual needs avoiding labels or stereotypes. However, selection must be equitable by looking for potential in addition to performance using local norms. Looking for potential and using local norms in student selection should be especially considered at the middle school level where the ability diversity within classrooms tends to be greater than elementary schools.

[Greene? - for identification to the extent that numbers continue to reflect racial and socioeconomic disparities.]

[Mary Beth- Improved TAG services here]

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In conclusion, the TAGAC recommends the following actions:

- 1) [Communications here]
- 2) Implement equitable flexible ability grouping in ACPS elementary and middle schools. Group and re-group students based on potential in addition to performance using local norms to improve personalized instruction.
- 3) [Improved TAG Services here]

IMPACT:

[summary of how all recommendations will improve ACPS TAG services]

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