



## DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

### MEMORANDUM

February 22, 2016

**TO:** Alexandra Griffin, Chair, Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee  
**FROM:** Donna Brearley, Coordinator, Talented and Gifted Program  
**SUBJECT:** Middle School Recommendations Memo Update  
**ACTION:** For Your Information

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In May of 2015, the Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee submitted recommendations for revisions to the delivery of services for Talented and Gifted students in middle school. An update was requested by the committee during the fall of 2015. This memo summarizes the recommendations, original staff responses, and the current status of each recommendation.

#### **Recommendation #1: Cluster TAG-identified students into TAG-only sections during advisory period.**

- **Initial Staff Response**

This recommendation is under consideration as master schedules are being built at this time. The impact on the balance of class size, demographics and gender within the homeroom period will be reviewed to determine feasibility.

- **Update**

Currently, the homeroom/advisory period is a 15 minute period used by both Hammond Middle School and George Washington Middle School to promote a number of student centered initiatives which include PBIS lessons, and School Wide AVID Organizational Strategies. Organizational strategies occur two days a week. All students benefit from organizational and time management strategies which allow them to continue to meet the rigorous demands of Honors courses. In collaboration with the principals, we will continue to explore ways for all students to utilize this time most beneficially.

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**Recommendation #2: Assign TAG-identified students to teachers who have completed (or are currently obtaining) a gifted endorsement qualification.**

- **Initial Staff Response**

It is a priority for ACPS to have highly qualified teachers working with all students. Our goal is to fully implement the Local Plan which calls for all teachers of middle school Honors classes to be trained in gifted education strategies by offering a variety of options.

- **Update**

Currently, there are 12 middle school teachers who hold full Gifted Endorsement. Additionally, all Honors teachers have been encouraged to participate in one of the professional development options described below (with participation rates included):

1. **Gifted Endorsement Cohort #3:** Provided in partnership with the College of William & Mary (with four college courses offered over a two-year period). 20 teachers are participating (including teachers from elementary, middle, and high school as well as teachers of English Language Learners and Special Education).
2. **Local Middle School Professional After School Learning Series Entitled “Teaching Honors—Strategies for Differentiation”:** Including best practices in gifted education, differentiation strategies, and techniques for implementing the ACPS Honors curriculum. Currently, 45 teachers are participating from both Francis C. Hammond and George Washington Middle Schools
3. **Honors Flipped Instruction Book Club and Intensive Study on Differentiation Strategies (Online):** This course provides teachers with two required books and one choice book to read focusing on differentiation strategies and mindset. Teachers discuss and share ideas through an online format. Currently, 10 teachers from Francis C. Hammond and George Washington Middle Schools are participating.

**Recommendation #3: Increase clustering minimums for TAG-identified students in core courses.**

- **Initial Staff Response:**

Clustering is a research-based practice shown to help meet the needs of gifted students by providing intellectual peers within their instructional grouping. Increasing the current cluster sizes in the Honors classes is a viable option for school year 2015-16. Every effort will be made to better enhance the size of TAG-identified clusters to eight (8) or more within each core Honors class.

- **Update**

Clustering has been increased significantly through scheduling efforts made at each middle school campus. This will be continually monitored and adjusted each year.

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**Recommendation #4: Require written TAG differentiation plans for each quarter core course.**

- **Initial Staff Response**

In addition to course syllabi, plans describing the differentiation for TAG students in the Honors courses will be developed in collaboration with the Honors teachers and the Middle School Resource Teacher.

- **Update**

Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs) have been written for all identified TAG students for Quarter 2 at Francis C. Hammond and George Washington middle schools and were mailed home. Jefferson Houston will begin sending home DEPs in Quarter 3. DEPs for the remainder of the year will be mailed home with each report card.

**Recommendation #5: Create sections of Language Arts 6, 7, 8 that are reserved for TAG-identified students.**

- **Initial Staff Response:**

Sample master schedules are being built and reviewed to determine possible impacts. Consideration must be given to the middle school team structure and schedule as well as the balance of class size and special course needs outside the grade level for some TAG-identified students.

- **Update**

Keeping in mind our philosophy is to maintain an environment for all children to learn, ACPS will continue to group students to the extent possible and, where appropriate, taking into consideration a variety of factors which include specialized programming needs.