

AASAC public comments

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ACPS does not comply with Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted Students.

Gifted students identified for AAS SAA Tier 3 in Science and Social Studies receive services from regular classroom teachers who are not trained to work with gifted students.

Schools do not assess gifted student outcomes. Schools do not send assessments to parents.

Teacher rating scale instruments are used in ways contrary to developer instructions. Misuse of teacher rating scales exposes students to biases that continue to prevent gifted identifications of students in underidentified groups.

See 8 VAC 20-40-40 (<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter40/section40/>) which states "Identified gifted students shall be offered placement in an instructional setting that provides: 1. Appropriately differentiated curriculum and **instruction provided by professional instructional personnel trained to work with gifted students**".

Elementary school AASTs are kept busy providing instructional services to K-3 classrooms including students who show no sign of gifted behaviors. This leaves no instructional time to spend with any gifted 4th nor 5th graders other than the SAA Language Arts and Math classes.

Regular classroom teachers get to pick and choose their own professional development classes. PD training does not have to be specific to the education of the gifted. Classes on gifted education are not mandatory. Nobody at ACPS is paid to track teachers' attendance at gifted-specific PD.

Last week, I visited George Washington Middle School during an Open House event. There, I met Stacy Palmer, GWMS's AAS Screening Lead. In a presentation to 5th Grade parents, Ms. Palmer said the following about AAS SAA Science and Social Studies identifications within ACPS: "a lot of elementary schools don't do that." She indicated that AAS SAA identified students take honors classes, which are open enrollment classes. I raised my hand and I asked whether said honors classes are provided by teachers trained to work with gifted students. She said "That's a question for Dr. Megan Tempel-Milner."

In a one-on-one conversation thereafter, I asked for more details. Ms. Palmer shared the following information: In previous academic years, school administrators used to receive a list of which teachers had been trained to work with gifted students. For this academic year, Dr. Megan Tempel-Milner made sure that school administrators no longer receive information about which teachers have training specific to educating gifted students. The Master Schedule is

created without this information. School administrators, and parents of AAS identified students, have **no way to know whether instruction is provided by teachers trained to work with gifted students or not.**

Ms. Palmer also admitted that middle school **teachers did not receive a list of which of their students had been identified as gifted** throughout Q1 of the current academic year.

I mentioned Virginia's Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted Students. Ms. Palmer indicated that Dr. Tempel-Milner has directed schools to treat state regulations as "just a suggestion."¹

During a tour, a middle school student ambassador stated "Every teacher teaches at least one regular class and one honors class." "Every teacher?" I asked. The student ambassador repeated "Every teacher is assigned to at least one regular class and one honors class."

Under these circumstances, it is not possible for ACPS to deliver "Appropriately differentiated curriculum and instruction provided by professional instructional personnel trained to work with gifted students".

See 8 VAC 20-40-40, which further states "Identified gifted students shall be offered placement in an instructional setting that provides: ... 2. Monitored and **assessed student outcomes that are reported to the parents** and legal guardians."

Parents/Guardians of AAS-identified students are told to expect a Differentiated Educational Plan (DEP) at the end of each quarter. Don't let the name fool you. It isn't a plan at all. It's a backward-looking document communicating what the teacher intended to provide in a quarter that has already ended. A DEP does not distinguish between educational content that was actually provided and educational content that the teacher meant to cover but didn't get around to. No specific goals are expressed in a DEP,² so there is no assessment of whether the student achieved any specific outcome.

¹ Dr. Tempel-Milner publicly repeated this sentiment during the AASAC meeting on 6 February 2024. After AASAC committee members received a list of "Professional Development Hours Offered" but not required, and a PD attendance table that is blank where "# of Participants" should be, Dr. Tempel-Milner concluded "we train them" about both the teachers who chose to attend any one or more classes **and the teachers who chose not to attend any of the listed classes.** I asked about the gifted students who are placed with long-term substitute teachers due to heavy staff turnover and a teacher shortage, but nobody in the room answered my question about whether substitute teachers are in any way trained to work with gifted students.

² See VanTassel-Baska et al, "EVALUATION STUDY REPORT: TALENTED AND GIFTED (TAG) PROGRAM ALEXANDRIA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS", October 2, 2017. See especially page 30 of this 2017 TAG audit, which concludes that elementary school DEPs "do not provide the specificity needed to constitute learning plans for TAG learners at grades K-5. Rather they are general lists of types of strategies and activities that might be used. As goals and outcomes are rarely indicated with specific activities and assessment approaches connected to them, the DEP has limited effectiveness as a communication tool for representing a TAG program delivery option."

As a hypothetical example, let's say that a teacher assigns the same independent research project to Student A as to Student B. Student A gets COVID-19 and misses so much school that he doesn't complete the research project. Student B performs the research and presents the research to her class. Later, the teacher sends identical DEPs to Family A and Family B. The different outcomes appear nowhere in the students' records.

Schools' refusal to assess gifted student outcomes prevents AASAC from fulfilling its duties to review student outcomes and gifted student academic growth, and to annually report the (in)effectiveness of the Local Plan to the School Board in writing, as set forth in 8 VAC 20-40-60.

See 8 VAC 20-40-60, which states "The plan shall include the following components: ... 7. Assurances that (i) the selected and administered testing and assessment materials have been evaluated by the developers for cultural, racial, and linguistic biases; (ii) identification procedures are constructed so that those procedures may identify high potential or aptitude in any student whose accurate identification may be affected by economic disadvantages, by limited English proficiency, or by disability; (iii) standardized tests and other measures have been validated for the purpose of identifying gifted students; and (iv) **instruments are administered and interpreted by a trained personnel in conformity with the developer's instructions**".

Naomi L. Brooks Elementary School screens AAS-referred students via the HOPE Teacher Rating Scale. In an effort to determine what instructions and training have been provided to the AAS Screening Lead, I submitted a FOIA request for the following documents:

All portions of the HOPE Teacher Rating Scale Administration Manual which were distributed to AAS screening lead Chantey McGee-Bailey at Naomi L. Brooks Elementary School during academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024.

All other instructions for using the HOPE Teacher Rating Scale which were distributed to AAS screening lead Chantey McGee-Bailey at Naomi L. Brooks Elementary School during academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024.

The FOIA officer indicated that it would take "6 hours of search time" to locate the manual and other instructions. Even though developer instructions were not readily at hand, the AAST proceeded to administer the HOPE teacher rating scale anyway.

The inventors of the HOPE Teacher Rating Scale instruct users to separately tally two subscores: the academic subscore and the social subscore. Each subscore is a separate indicator of giftedness.

Instead of following the developers' instructions as regulations require, a screening document called the AAS Eligibility Profile directs ACPS's AAS Screening Committees to violate the regulation by totaling the two subscores.

The Virginia Department of Education warned in September 2010, “Avoid combining multiple pieces of data into a single score; combining scores allows lower scores to depress the total score, thereby disqualifying students with strengths from gifted programs”.³ The HOPE academic subscale and the HOPE social subscale are multiple pieces of data; however, AAS Screening committees total the two subscores into a single score and compare it to a single cutoff. By ignoring this specific state guidance, Dr. Megan Tempel-Milner has created a systemic bias against identifying gifted students with disabilities who may excel in one subscore but not the other.

Furthermore, many of the human subjects studied by the developers of the HOPE Teacher Rating Scale went to schools devoid of multiracial/multicultural students. When comparing HOPE Teacher Rating Scale data of students categorized by race, the developers stated “Due to some level of noninvariance, student comparisons should only be made within their specific subgroup until the specific source of the nonequivalence can be further determined” and “such comparisons will result in a more accurate understanding of a student’s aptitude than if that student was compared to national norms or other less-specific norm groups.”⁴ Subsequent research⁵ revealed lower teacher rating scores (on both the academic subscale and the social subscale) for multiracial/multicultural students than for single-race students belonging to the mainstream race and culture.⁶ These results are not explainable by any difference in academic performance of multiracial/multicultural students; rather, the differences correspond to teacher bias against students whose cultures are unfamiliar. Teacher biases vanish when a teacher evaluates a student matching the teacher’s race and culture⁷, but teacher experience with multiracial/multicultural students does not result in any measurable reduction in teacher bias.⁸ Similarly, teacher experience in educating culturally and linguistically diverse students fails to correlate with any measurable decrease in teacher bias.⁹

³ VDOE, “Supporting the Identification and Achievement of the Twice-Exceptional Student: Frequently Asked Questions” (September 2010), page 9.

⁴ Peters and Gentry, “Additional Validity Evidence and Across-Group Equivalency of the *HOPE Teacher Rating Scale*”, *Gifted Child Quarterly* 57(2) 85-100, 97.

⁵ HOPE Teacher Rating Scale co-developer Dr. Gentry herself chaired the doctoral committee which approved this research.

⁶ Lee, Hyeseong, “Equitably Identifying Gifted Students From Low-Income And/Or Multicultural Backgrounds: Investigation Of The Hope Teacher Rating Scale”, dissertation, Purdue University (May 2021), 118.

⁷ Lee, Hyeseong, “Equitably Identifying Gifted Students From Low-Income And/Or Multicultural Backgrounds: Investigation Of The Hope Teacher Rating Scale”, dissertation, Purdue University (May 2021), 61, which discusses Grissom and Redding’s (2016) findings that “Black students were less likely to be referred for identification by non-Black teachers than by Black teachers” and “that Black teachers nominated proportional numbers of Black and White children, reinforcing the importance of diversifying the teaching work force.” See Grissom, J. A., & Redding, C. (2016). Discretion and disproportionality: Explaining the underrepresentation of high-achieving students of color in gifted programs. *Aera Open*, 2(1), 1-25.

⁸ Lee, Hyeseong, “Equitably Identifying Gifted Students From Low-Income And/Or Multicultural Backgrounds: Investigation Of The Hope Teacher Rating Scale”, dissertation, Purdue University (May 2021), 118, “level-2 factors, such as a teacher’s years of experience and the classroom characteristics (percentage of low-income students and multicultural students in the classroom), did not influence the HOPE Scale scores differences from the teachers.”

⁹ Burrell-Aldana, Liza, “The Relationship Between Teacher Referral and the Representation of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Students in Gifted Education”, doctoral dissertation, Virginia Tech (December 5, 2022). Dr. Burrell hypothesized that teachers experienced with teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students (CLD students) would be familiar enough with CLD students to refer them for gifted services in proportion to their

In a survey of ACPS teachers performed by former Principal of the Year Liza Burrell-Aldana, “The most common suggestion made was that the school division should provide more training in identifying gifted and talented students; suggestions included focused professional development, observations and assessments to help ensure teachers are applying the criteria properly, a standardized set of grade level-appropriate skills and tasks to establish a baseline for “average,” and providing more guidance on applying the criteria for assessment.”¹⁰ Why has ACPS saddled regular classroom teachers with the burden of identifying and serving gifted students without providing the specific type of training regular classroom teachers say they need?

The developers of the HOPE Teacher Rating Scale instruct users to consider economic data so that students will only be compared intragroup. The HOPE scale’s developers explicitly state “mean scores for student from low-income families on both scales were lower than their non-low income peers, providing evidence that **instruments need to be normed on the specific groups** for which their use is intended”¹¹ (emphasis added). For this reason, Prufrock Press publishes the HOPE Teacher Rating Scale with a blank for providing FARM data. Despite clear instructions from the developers to apply group-specific norms, ACPS’s AAS Eligibility Profile document appears to set forth a single numeric cutoff which is applied to the total of the academic subscore and the social subscore, rather than comparing the separate subscores to separate group-specific norms. In fact, the Naomi L. Brooks AASTs use a teacher rating form that appears devoid of the “Prufrock Press” brand name, wherein the FARM data field is inexplicably missing.

In sum, ACPS’s AAS screening process violates both state regulations and equity.

population. Dr. Burrell found that teachers believe their experience with CLD students makes them less biased (page 77), but when she attempted to measure any actual decrease in teacher bias “the results of the linear regression were not statistically significant” (page 77) because “**experience with CLD students did not significantly predict total teacher referrals of CLD students to gifted programs**” (page 76, emphasis in original).

¹⁰ Burrell-Aldana, Liza, “The Relationship Between Teacher Referral and the Representation of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Students in Gifted Education”, doctoral dissertation, Virginia Tech (December 5, 2022), 73.

¹¹ Peters and Gentry, “Multigroup Construct Validity Evidence of the *HOPE Scale*: Instrumentation to Identify Low-Income Elementary Students for Gifted Programs”, *Gifted Child Quarterly* 54(4) 298-313, 298.