

Kelley Organek - Public Comments to the AAS Advisory Committee
October 17, 2023

Good evening. My name is Kelley Organek and I've had a relationship with ACPS for over 25 years, first as a teacher and an administrator and then as a parent. My children are older, one graduated in 2022 from ACHS and my other two children are in the 9th and 11th grades.

I'm here tonight to share my concerns about the recent updates to the local plan, which were pushed through without adequate public input or even information. It seems that a majority of parents were unaware that the local plan was being updated and sweeping changes were being made to the implementation model for elementary students, specifically how GIA students are now having their needs met, as well as the elimination of math acceleration for grades 4 and higher math.

I find it troubling that the rich academic experience that was available to my children will no longer be provided to the children of Alexandria City Public Schools. My children received pull-out GIA services in elementary school. Two of my kids were accelerated in math, and my now college age daughter was able to take both AP Calculus and AP Stats while in high school. My son was accelerated even further by his elementary school teachers, which now means he was able to take AP Calculus BC as a sophomore and he's now enjoying AP Stats as a junior. As a senior he plans to take AP Computer Science or a DE math class through NOVA. These are options that are no longer available to ACPS elementary school children, and that is disappointing.

I hear the reasons for program implementation changes are rooted in equity, but what is equitable about limiting learning pathways for gifted students? Instead of taking away opportunities, our plan should seek to provide more and better opportunities. Unfortunately what we are left with is a local plan that will not adequately serve gifted children in Alexandria City. It will create a greater divide in our school system, because resourced and connected parents will push to accelerate their children or simply provide enrichment outside of the school. Or, they will send their children to private schools.

There has long been concern that high-ability students from underserved populations—those who are limited English proficient, disabled, or from minority or low-income backgrounds—are persistently underrepresented in advanced classes and in programs for students identified as gifted. ACPS was a place where students from all backgrounds were screened and considered for gifted services. Our program offerings exceeded what was available in private schools, and again, they were available to everyone, for free.

I will add one more point. The COVID-19 pandemic has made learning challenging for all students, including gifted learners. Any academic or learning data that you consider must be viewed under that lens. Our children were kept home and away from an effective learning environment longer than any other children across the country. So, instead of limiting their options, let's give them a chance to catch up and thrive in an environment that meets their exceptional needs. Thank you.