EVALUATION STUDY REPORT
TALENTED AND GIFTED (TAG) PROGRAM
ALEXANDRIA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

October 2, 2017

Joyce VanTassel-Baska, EdD

College of William and Mary, Principal Investigator

Janice Robbins, PhD

Gail Fischer Hubbard, MAT

Consulting Evaluators

In human affairs the logical future, determined by past and present conditions, is less important than the willed future, which is largely brought about by deliberate choices.

--Rene Dubos

Acknowledgements

The coordinator of gifted programs is to be commended for her tireless collaboration on this study. She has worked alongside us and provided information and data without which we would not have known how to structure many aspects of the report. She has graciously given of her time to clarify the systems in place around the TAG program and to provide access to written documents of relevance.

We would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the Department of Accountability, especially Clinton Page and Tina Constantine who worked on our behalf to respond to data requests that helped answer the research questions. They were invaluable in constructing the online surveys and coordinating the onsite visits internally. Moreover, they remained available to consult throughout the development of this report through formal conference calls twice a month and informal emails.

Finally, we would like to thank all the administrators, teachers, parents, students, and advisory committee members who took the time for interview and focus group discussions regarding the TAG program. These multiple perspectives provided invaluable insights regarding the program.

Table of Contents

Appendices

List of Tables

Tables

Tables

List of Figures

Figures

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted Program

Joyce VanTassel-Baska, EdD
Janice Robbins, PhD
Gail Fischer Hubbard, MAT
September 15, 2017

Section I: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this evaluation of the Alexandria City Public Schools' Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program was to render recommendations based on the current status of the program and expectations for the program that may move it forward to the next level of excellence.

Four key beliefs drove the evaluation study: 1) the fundamental role of evaluation and review is to provide information that can be used to improve and advance gifted programs, 2) evaluation and review is a collaborative enterprise among various stakeholders in the division and the consultants, 3) the use of multiple data sources helps to illuminate the complexity and salience of program issues that need to be considered, and 4) rational decision-making is mediated by values. Therefore, the nature and degree of change to be made in a program are influenced by the social and political variables at work in a given context. (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002)

Research Questions

The following research questions have driven the study design:

1. To what extent is the gifted program being implemented according to its stated goals and objectives?

2. To what extent is the program progressing in its attempt to identify underrepresented groups for the program?

   Sub-questions:

   - *To what extent is the identification approach meeting best practices at state and national levels?*
   - *To what extent is there congruence between the definition of giftedness and the identification criteria employed?*
   - *To what extent is information on the identification process effectively disseminated to families?*
   - *To what extent will the Young Scholar's Program impact on future identification of underrepresented groups?*

3. To what extent is the written, taught, and assessed curriculum sufficiently rigorous and differentiated for TAG-identified students?

   Sub-questions:

   - *How well-aligned is the curriculum from K-12 within and across subject areas?*
   - *How effective has the middle school honors curriculum been in meeting the needs of gifted students participating in such classes?*
   - *How effective is the professional development program in supporting teachers to work with the curriculum?*

4. To what extent is the program beneficial to students participating in it?

5. To what extent is the program perceived to be effective by relevant stakeholders?

6. To what extent is the program aligned with best practices in the field of gifted education?

7. What are the strengths and areas for improvement in the program? What are the recommendations for improvement in this area?

Study design

Data collected to investigate Question #1 involved both empirical and perceptual sources. Onsite visits to a sample of 8 elementary schools, both middle schools and both high school campuses, designated as providing services to TAG-identified students, were conducted at grade levels K-12. Moreover, relevant survey and focus group data were collected from teachers, administrators, students, and parents in the program to assess perceptions of program operation.

Data used to address Question #2 were trend analyses conducted to reveal the extent to which progress has been made on areas of underrepresentation of populations of students in the gifted program. An analysis of the current identification practices in ACPS was assessed against research-based best practice in this area of gifted education. Outside consultants with cultural expertise were employed to validate the identification processes recommended for use.

Data used to address Question #3 were current curriculum assessments according to content, thinking skills, metacognition, and differentiation features, the instructional strategies employed in TAG classes, the evidence of the nature and extent of professional development available for TAG teachers, and the degree of curriculum alignment across the grade levels served.

Data used to address Question #4 were 1) focus groups with teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels who provided direct and indirect services to gifted students, 2) focus groups of administrators who were involved with the administration of the program, including building principals, 3) focus groups of TAG parents, 4) focus groups of non-TAG parents, and 5) focus groups of gifted students who were in grades 5, 8 and 12 during the year of the evaluation.

Data used to address Question #5 were student impact data from the program, including achievement, outstanding performances, and other evidence of benefit. Trend data across three years were examined on relevant SOLs and AP tests. A survey on benefits to students was also analyzed.

Data collected to address Question #6 involved a discrepancy analysis between the National Association for Gifted children (NAGC) *Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards* and the Alexandria Talented and Gifted Program to determine the alignment of best practices in the six standards: Learning and Development, Assessment, Curriculum Planning and Development, Learning Environments, Programming, and Professional Development. Areas of strength as well as gaps were determined by this analysis.

Finally, Question #7 was addressed through the triangulation of all data sources probed in order to make valid inferences about the nature and scope of program strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations to be suggested for an action plan. An action plan was developed to recommend key improvements to be made to the program over the next three years and incorporated into the next iteration of the state plan.

Sampling plan

It was important to have a purposive sample that yields data of value in order to answer the questions of interest in the study. Over 60% of elementary schools were visited, 100% of the middle schools including the K-8 school, and 100% of the high school campuses. The selection of elementary schools was stratified to include Title I and non-Title I buildings, schools that had implemented the Young Scholars Program, schools that had a good distribution of underrepresented minority populations, and those where full implementation of the TAG program had occurred at the K-5 levels.

Classroom scheduling was done by the evaluators, based on lists of available classes for observation on the days selected for visitation. Every attempt was made to examine all grade levels and subject areas where TAG students were being served. Typically, 5-14 classrooms were visited at each school site. Focus group members were selected by school liaisons from randomized lists of eligible stakeholders. Every attempt was made to keep observations relatively equal across schools and levels in respect to time and application of the protocol.

Instrumentation

This evaluation study employed appropriate instrumentation to answer the questions of interest. Instrumentation included the following: 1) a review checklist for curriculum materials; 2) a document for review of other program materials; 3) online surveys with similar questions for stakeholder responses; 4) a focus group and interview protocol; 5) a classroom observation tool; and 6) the NAGC standards checklist for assessing the optimal match to best practice.

Instruments used for data collection were developed and/or tailored in collaboration with the ACPS team from the Department of Accountability and the TAG Coordinator. Sample instruments are included in the appropriate appendix of this report.

Interviews were conducted with the Superintendent, with three Executive Directors, and with the TAG Gifted Advisory Committee. On-line surveys were sent to designated building administrators, teachers, and parents. Focus groups were held, comprised of program stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students, and TAG and non-TAG parents), purposefully sampled into groups of 12-15 at school sites where observations were made.

Surveys related to perceptions of the program and its components were sent via email to building administrators, teachers, and all parents of TAG students. The researchers developed all surveys

for distribution and submitted them to the ACPS Department of Accountability for review. Parental and staff surveys were administered online and analyzed by the division while student surveys were administered and collected by the researchers during the focus group sessions with students.

In order to assess instructional practice in the TAG program, an observation tool that assesses differentiation was used. The Classroom Observation Scale-Revised (COS-R), validated for technical adequacy, and used in earlier studies, was selected for this purpose.

The review of written curriculum was accomplished via the use of a checklist of criteria for differentiated curriculum materials, appropriate for use in gifted programs. These reviews were done on 39 courses of study and 5 K-3 curriculum materials used for GIA and Young Scholars students. In addition, reviews were conducted on 24 text materials used in the TAG program at grades 4-8 and on 74 DEPs. Other documents also were reviewed, including the Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted, the Virginia Technical Review of the Plan, and the McRel Evaluation Report.

Finally, the evaluator analyzed the extent to which the division was meeting the NAGC Gifted Programming Standards for programs in gifted education, in collaboration with the TAG Coordinator in the division.

Table 1.1 illustrates the relationship among the evaluation question of interest, the data sources to address each question, and the specific instruments used.

Table 1.1
Relationship of Data Sources and Instrumentation to Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Question	Data Sources	Instrumentation
1. ***To what extent is the gifted program being implemented according to its stated goals and objectives?***	Materials review Curriculum review Surveys Focus groups Interviews Classroom observation	• Curriculum Review Checklist • Criteria for Assessing Challenge in Books • Surveys: Parent, Student, & Staff • Focus Group Questions • Interview Questions • Classroom Observation Scale-Revised (COS-R)
2. ***To what extent is the program progressing in its attempt to identify underrepresented groups for the program?***	Identification system Interviews Division 3-year trend data of TAG student demographics Division records	• Interview Questions • Consultant Review Template
3. ***To what extent is the written, taught, and assessed curriculum sufficiently rigorous and differentiated for TAG-identified students?***	Curriculum review Classroom observation SOL and AP data	• Curriculum Review Checklist • Classroom Observation Scale-Revised (COS-R)
4. ***To what extent is the program beneficial to students participating in it?***	Surveys Focus groups Interviews Classroom observation	• Surveys: Parent, Student, & Staff • Focus Group Protocol • Interview Questions • Classroom Observation Scale-Revised (COS-R)
5. ***To what extent is the program perceived to be effective by relevant stakeholders?***	Surveys Focus groups Interviews	• Surveys: Parent, Student, & Staff • Interview Questions • Focus Group Questions
6. To what extent is the program aligned with best practices in the field of gifted education?	NAGC Program Standards	• 2010 *Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards* Evaluation Checklist
7. ***What are the strengths and areas for improvement in the program? What are the recommendations for improvement in this area?***	Findings from multiple data sources	• All

Data analysis, interpretation, and findings

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in the analysis of the data collected. Descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and percentages were used to present the survey and classroom observation data. Focus group and interview data were content-analyzed, with identification of emergent themes. Content analysis and descriptive statistics were also used for all materials reviews.

Interpretation of findings from all data was made by the evaluation team. Additional multicultural consultants reviewed the data analysis and the findings developed for identification of underrepresented populations. Their perspectives were factored into the final recommendations in relation to identification.

Results from each data source were analyzed and interpreted as findings for each evaluation question. Triangulation of data sources was used to ensure strength in the findings for each question. Only when two data sources converged was a finding reported through the triangulation process.

Conclusions drawn regarding the research questions were based on the data available across sources. Commendations and recommendations were developed based on findings for the school division to use for program improvement. A plan of action was developed to convert recommendations into feasible, efficient, and effective program operation across three years.

Section II: Materials Review

The following section contains reviews of materials requested by the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) as a part of the gifted program evaluation overall. Reviews were conducted of the following materials:

1. The Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted (2012-2016) was reviewed. Each school division in Virginia submits a Local Plan that provides a specific framework for the school division's implementation of the Virginia Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted Students. While most school divisions use a five-year planning cycle, other planning cycles may be used. Local Plans are reviewed on an established cycle by review teams using the Technical Review Guidelines of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Local plans are reviewed by the Commonwealth, but are neither approved nor disapproved by the Commonwealth. The 2016 Technical Review Report was reviewed.

2. All curriculum guides and course guides submitted by the division in the major content areas of language arts, math, science and social studies were reviewed. This constituted a review of 39 separate materials. The review consisted of a narrative summary of the material, as well as numerical reviews, using a structured curriculum review checklist in the categories of differentiation, thinking skills and metacognition, and best practices in the relevant subject area. Two units of study were reviewed that were representative of the K-3 GIA curriculum. These units were assessed on interdisciplinarity, thinking skills and metacognition, and differentiation Three units designed for the Young Scholars Program were also reviewed (Appendix B).

3. Selected curriculum text materials were reviewed in the areas of mathematics and language arts. In the English language arts area, trade books were reviewed that are used in the grades 4-8 TAG program. A sample of 19 of these trade books were read and critiqued, using a scale for differentiating reading for gifted learners and additional narrative (Appendix C). Five texts used in mathematics at grades 4-6 in the TAG program were reviewed. The commentary is included in the body of the report.

4. Differentiated educational plans (DEPs) that were submitted to the coordinator of the program were reviewed by the evaluation team. These constituted 49 DEPs at the elementary level and 25 at the middle school level. Descriptions of these plans overall and a critique were completed. Suggestions for modifications in the DEP process at the levels of planning, implementation, and progress monitoring were provided. A sample DEP has been included in Appendix D.

5. Several division reports were reviewed that related to relevant evaluation questions about identification, programming, and curriculum. Some of these reports are reviewed in this section while others receive commentary in later sections as appropriate. These reports include the following: the McRel Curriculum Evaluation Report; the Department of Accountability (DOA) TAG Program Indicators Report (2017); the Young Scholars Report; Professional Development Report; AP Report (2014); division identification material; minutes of TAG Advisory committee meetings and of division-wide resource teacher meetings.

A. Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted

In Virginia, the Local Gifted Plan provides the structure for designing, implementing, and evaluating gifted education programs in each school division. Guidelines for developing the Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted are available on the Virginia Department of Education Gifted Education webpage (VDOE Gifted). The components of the Alexandria City Public Schools Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted (2012-2016), including identification, delivery of services, curriculum and instruction, professional development, and communication and community involvement, have been described in this section.

In its Local Plan, each school division in Virginia identifies the areas of giftedness served. Either General Intellectual Aptitude (GIA) or Specific Academic Aptitude (SAA) must be included. Both areas may be included. Career and Technical Aptitude (CTA) and/or Visual and Performing Arts Aptitude (VPA) may be included. ACPS serves students in GIA beginning in K-3 and in SAA in grades 4-12.

Part I: The Statement of Philosophy: The Statement of Philosophy reflects both the values of ACPS and the TAG program.

Part II: Program Goals and Objectives: Goals for Identification; Delivery of Services; Curriculum and Instruction; Professional Development; Equitable Representation of Students; and Parent and Community Involvement were included. All goal areas are included in the plan although the labeling of the Curriculum and Instruction Goal makes it difficult to identify.

Part III: Screening, Referral, Identification, and Service Procedures; Part IV: Notification Procedures; and Part V: Change in Instructional Services: These three parts all center on the identification and placement process. While the components of the process are clear and meet state and national guidelines, the process itself is difficult to discern. Although whole grade screening only takes place at grades 1 and 3, the plan indicates that identification takes place from K-12.

Part VI: Evidence of Appropriate Service Options: This is an extensive section that requires evidence that Service Options are Continuous and Sequential; Provide Instructional Time with Age-level Peers, Provide Instructional Time with Intellectual and Academic Peers; Provide Instructional Time to Work Independently; and Foster Intellectual and Academic Growth. In addition, the section requires evidence of Procedures for Assessing Academic Growth in Gifted Students.

Responses to this section provide a description of program design with options that fulfill these requirements. The function of the Differentiated Education Plan (DEP) to document specific services provided for identified TAG students with monitoring at the school and division level is described in this section. The Talent Nurturing Program modeled on Young Scholars is also included in the section. The cluster grouping options at K-3 and the separate classroom groupings at grades 4-5 are described in this section. At the middle school level, the description defines specific cluster groupings with a minimum number of TAG students with designated opportunities for academic interaction with other TAG students within honors classes at grades

6-8. At the high school level, the section includes descriptions of the options for honors, Dual Enrollment (DE), and Advanced Placement (AP) courses at grade 9-12. As data from the materials review, surveys, focus groups, and classroom observations were examined, program descriptions included in this section of the Local Plan were considered.

To address the requirement for procedures to be used by the division to assess the academic growth of gifted learners, the division includes transfer tasks, the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), Scholastic Math Inventory (SMI), Standards of Learning (SOL) results, and Advanced Placement Examination (AP) results as well as classroom assessment measures. (Now Imagine Math (NIM) has replaced the SMI cited in the plan.)

Part VII: Program of Differentiated Curriculum and Instruction: At the time of the development of the plan, curriculum for language arts, science, and social students was in the process of development. Mention is made of research-based curriculum with reading lists, balanced assessment options, with emphasis on thinking skills, authenticity, accelerated pacing, and student engagement. Math curriculum options are designated according to existent statements of acceleration at grades 4-8.

Part VIII: Policies and Procedures for Access to Programs and Advanced Courses: This section of the plan was completed by the full citation of the policy entitled "Programs for Gifted Students". (Since the current evaluation process began, an expansion of the Acceleration Policy and the Acceleration Regulations designed to support consistent implementation of the policy have been approved by the ACPS School Board on June 22, 2017.).

Part IX: Personal and Professional Development: At K-5, required training for full time teachers of the gifted includes an endorsement or MA in gifted education or an International Baccalaureate certification. Required training for part-time teachers of the gifted at the elementary level includes 6 hours annually of local training. At the middle school level, teachers of honors sections are required to complete one of the three following options: an endorsement in gifted education, International Baccalaureate certification, or 3 required sessions equaling 24 hours of local training each year. AP training is indicated for high school teachers.

Part X: Procedures for Annual Review of Effectiveness: Identification data are reviewed by the TAG Coordinator. Student grades and measures used to assess student growth (SRI, SMI) are compiled and reviewed for TAG students. Graduation rate, Honors, AP, and DE data are reviewed to determine TAG student success. The Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee reviews the plan each year and reports on implementation and effectiveness to the School Board.

Part XI: Procedures for Establishment of the Local Advisory Committee: The Alexandria City School Board receives applications and appoints the members of the TAG Advisory Committee.

Part XII Assurances: Legal assurances are signed by the Division Superintendent.

State Technical Review of Local Plan

In early 2017, ACPS received a report from the Commonwealth of Virginia based on a technical review of its Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted. The review was conducted on October 24, 2016. Technical review teams are constituted by the state and include experienced reviewers from throughout Virginia. The Technical Review Team provides a review of each Local Plan with a concluding commentary. The Commonwealth of Virginia does not approve or disapprove local plans. The Local School Board has the responsibility for approval of the Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted. The guidelines for the Technical Review of the Local Gifted Education Plan are available at the website, VDOE Gifted.

The commentary from the technical review team follows:

Overall the plan was judged as *Meets Standards* in most areas with components of the following sections noted as *Needs Additional Development.*

Needs Additional Development

Areas of Giftedness

- Clarification needed of phase in of GIA program and phase-out of arts program.

Part II: Program Goals and Objectives

- Goals and objectives should be specified separately and be designated in separate General Intellectual Aptitude (GIA) and Specific Academic Aptitude (SAA) sections.

Part VII: Curriculum and Instruction

- GIA scope and sequence of curriculum opportunities from K-12 should be significantly expanded (examples requested)
- Additional information about opportunities within curriculum and instruction for original research and production, for problem-finding and solving, and for interdisciplinary focus with examples requested
- Additional evidence needed about training for high school teachers to work with TAG students

Part VIII: Access to Programs and Advanced Courses

- Need to provide evidence for policy and procedures for gifted students to access advanced course offerings, including AP and DE, paced and sequenced commensurate with learning needs of gifted students.

A final statement by the review team reads:

We are aware that you are in a transition period, but we are sure your attention to detail will be well-reflected in your updated plan. In the beginning of the plan, it is unclear what applies to GIA and SAA. At times, the experienced review team had some difficulty understanding portions of the plan because of phasing in and out of specific programs. The cover sheet needs to have a

date approved by the school board. As changes to your approved plan are made, consider making an addendum to the plan.

Evaluator analysis

The technical review of the Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted, conducted in October of 2016, mirrors similar concerns raised during this evaluation process, especially in the areas of program development and curriculum and instruction. The evaluation team has collected and examined data from multiple sources that indicate the degree to which aspects of the current plan have been implemented. Recommendations in the areas of identification, delivery of services including student assessment, curriculum and instruction, professional development, and program assessment noted in Section VIII of this report provide a basis for the development of a subsequent research-based Local Plan that is more substantial, sequential, and comprehensive as required.

In Section X of the report, the evaluation team has constructed a three-year plan of action that provides a structure and timeline for developing and implementing strategies to reach specific goals derived from the report recommendations. These goals and strategies provide a framework for the development of the new Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted.

B. Review of Curriculum Guides and Course Syllabi

The following section presents details and ratings on curriculum guides and course syllabi provided for review in relation to the evaluation of Alexandria City Public Schools' program for gifted and talented learners. The goal of the review was to discern the degree to which each curriculum guide facilitated direct implementation of teaching and learning that supports programming standards for gifted learners. Moreover, the reviews attempted to address the research question related to curriculum differentiation and rigor for TAG students.

Each of the guides was reviewed using a modified *Curriculum Assessment Guide* (VanTassel-Baska, 2017), with sections selected from the instrument that addressed specific research questions selected for the evaluation study. The Curriculum Review Checklist Revised is included in Appendix B. The ACPS oversight team and the evaluator agreed to use the following subsections of the checklist for review of materials: thinking skills and metacognition, differentiation, and content area indicators. For the K-3 GIA curriculum resources, the interdisciplinary indicators were used in lieu of the content area indicators.

The checklist has been used to evaluate curriculum materials in all subject areas for the United States Department of Education in respect to their appropriateness for use in gifted programs (see Johnson, Boyce, Johnsen, & VanTassel-Baska, 1995). The indicators that make up each of the 15 categories on the *Curriculum Assessment Guide* reflect research-based criteria for judging the inclusion of differentiation features of a curriculum. Content indicators were derived from current national and state standards, linked to use with gifted learners. The validity of the indicators was established through expert review.

Reviewed in this section of material are the: 1) curriculum guides in all four core content areas, including those designed for TAG in grades 4 and 5, 2) Advanced Placement (AP) courses submitted for review considerations in the same subject areas (Other AP courses are offered in ACPS but were not included in this review.), 3) resource material for use in K-3 General Intellectual Aptitude (GIA) classrooms, and 4) units of study used with Young Scholars (YS).

The scale employed to judge the curriculum is a dichotomous one, indicating the presence or absence of the checklist indicator. Ratings were sometimes judged to be "unclear" or "not evident" if the presence of the indicator was ambiguous. A benchmark level of appropriate differentiation of materials, determined by the evaluator and used in prior studies, would yield a percentage of 80% or higher in a given category. The use of the scale is to assess strengths and weaknesses in materials for purposes of decisions on use with gifted populations and to aid in a revision process where appropriate.

K-3 GIA Curriculum Resources

ACPS provides a series of differentiated multiage primary (grades 1-3) curriculum units, published by Prufrock Press, as one component of the curriculum resources provided for K-3

GIA students. The cross-curricular units emphasize conceptual and thematic approaches to learning. Available units include the following: *Cycles, Discoveries, Faces, Gifts,* and *Symbols*. The *Cycles* and *Discoveries* units were reviewed for this study. The conceptual framework is clearly described in each unit, and each lesson is tied to one or more aspects of the organizing concept. The units explore multiple disciplines through the lens of the organizing concept. Lessons focus on hands-on activities that emphasize practical application to expand and evaluate student understanding of enduring understandings. The units include pre-and post-assessments.

Because these units are used from grades 1-3, material that could be challenging for students in first grade may be less challenging for students in third grade. In order to be effective, these units need to be taught within a comprehensive and sequential curriculum framework. Even when the unit was referenced specifically, the evaluation team did not observe instruction that addressed the conceptual framework of the unit.

The summary of the checklist review of these guides follows in Table 2.1, indicating that both guides reviewed met 100% of the indicators for interdisciplinary materials for the gifted. Yet neither guide met the standard for the use of thinking skills and metacognition. Differentiation was also judged to be insufficient for use beyond grade 2.

Table 2.1
Review of GIA K-3 Curriculum Resources (N=2)

Features	Yes	No	Unclear	Not Evident
Differentiation	Materials used at grades 1-2 would be effective.	Materials used at grade 3 would be ineffective.	100% (dependent on grade level use)	-
Interdisciplinary	100%			-
Thinking and Metacognition	22%	33%	44%	-

ACPS also provides additional curriculum resources for K-3 GIA students. These resources include *Jacob's Ladder* (Prufrock Press) for grade 1*, Journeys and Destinations* (Kendall Hunt) for grades 2 and 3, and units from *Project Clarion,* (Prufrock Press) for kindergarten through grade 2 in science. Additional specific units and materials are also provided. While the observation team did not observe these materials being used in the classroom nor, with one exception, in the TAG resource program, materials were available in each elementary school visited.

Young Scholars Program curriculum units

The Young Scholars program includes three curriculum guides, each used in a summer program for students who show potential for advanced studies. Each of the three guides provides a set of

activities focused on a particular science topic related to water: *Wetlands* (K-2), *Coastal Erosion* (3-6), and *Chesapeake Bay* (3-6).

The use of science as a core content area is a good fit for developing curiosity and motivation in young children. The analysis of the curriculum guides shows that this content area is not utilized to its best advantage in incorporating scientific thinking and investigation across the guides. Thinking skills are also developed less than they might be in terms of helping students learn and apply specific strategies and problem-solving abilities. A summary rating may be found in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2
Review of Young Scholars Curriculum Guides (N=3)

Features	Yes	No	Unclear	Not Evident
Thinking Skills and Metacognition	44%	56%	-	-
Differentiation	69%	19%	11%	-
Science	53%	44%	2%	-

English Language Arts TAG 4, 5, Honors, and AP Courses

Curriculum Guides for English courses were reviewed in relation to thinking skills and metacognition, differentiation for gifted/advanced learners, and English/Language Arts. Although each curriculum guide includes substantial informational materials on Virginia Standards of Learning and details on related declarative and procedural knowledge, as well as expectations for advanced transfer tasks, specific learning plans were considered the primary factors in evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum guide. Ratings (Yes, No, Unclear, or Not Evident) were tallied by category, and percentages were derived to reflect the degree to which the curriculum guide promotes effective teaching and learning for gifted/advanced students.

The review of the TAG English program in grades 4 and 5 indicates that critical areas of instruction are promoted through the curriculum guides, particularly in modifying instruction for advanced learners and presenting appropriately challenging curriculum. Some additional focus on higher level thinking skills in direct instruction and students' development and use of metacognitive skills seems warranted by the review. (See Table 2.3)

Table 2.3
Review of TAG ELA Curriculum Guides (N=2)

Features	Yes	No	Unclear	Not Evident
Thinking Skills and Metacognition	67%	22%	11%	-
Differentiation	88%	12%	-	-
Language Arts	80%	20%	-	-

Honors courses in grades 6-12 are presented as variations on the regular program curriculum guides, offering advanced reading materials and advanced transfer tasks. The data from the curriculum reviews reflect the content area of Language Arts as the strongest feature, followed by differentiation and, to a lesser degree, specific instruction in areas of thinking skills, and metacognition. (See Table 2.4)

Table 2.4
Review of English Honors Curriculum Guides (N= 7)

Features	Yes	No	Unclear	Not Evident
Thinking Skills and Metacognition	46%	46%	8%	-
Differentiation	63%	33%	4%	-
Language Arts	76%	13%	8%	2%

The following review of transfer tasks within the grade 7 honors English curriculum units illustrates issues associated with use of these tasks as an advanced curriculum challenge and/or assessment, noting issues of inconsistency and limited differentiation.

Example: Grade 7 Honors English

This course presents Honors Transfer Tasks as specific products for summative (culminating) assessments for each unit.

Tasks and Rubrics: *In Unit 1, a summary sheet is provided for the teacher, and a related student task sheet is included. Students are provided with criteria for success in the form of a list, but no related rubrics for assessment are included. Other units are inconsistent in their presentation and clarity of the transfer task. For example, the link to the Unit 2 task brings up the Unit 1 task. The task for Unit 7 is written with different requirements in three different places.*

For each task, the guide states that measurement topics assessed by each transfer task are available through a direct link to Measurement Topics developed for ACPS K-12 English Language Arts. It also states that rubrics are included, but they are not found. Although an excellent guide to specific areas of learning, these measurement topics have been developed as general guides to ACPS K-12 English Language Arts and thus are not differentiated or specifically delineated for advanced learners.

Analysis: *Transfer tasks for this course may be appropriate but are inconsistently available via links from the guide and not directly related to specific goals and objectives for advanced learner outcomes. Some tasks are embedded within the guide and have related rubrics and others are external links with no rubrics or assessment guides. Some of the related rubrics are overly complex, containing several assessment elements under one score (1-4), thus providing unnecessary difficulty for student reflection and self-assessment as well as teacher scoring.*

Summary: *Transfer tasks are inconsistently applied. When they are in place, they are not specifically differentiated or delineated for advanced learners.*

Two Advanced Placement courses, available for upper level high school students, were reviewed. A review of the syllabi available for these courses results in somewhat inconclusive data. Although significant details about curriculum, instruction, and assessment are not available, considering these courses follow the prescribed AP course guides, and that the syllabi are approved through the College Board process, some leeway was taken in rating the areas of content and differentiation. Evidence from the details in the syllabi indicates that additional attention to promoting the teaching of models and strategies for higher level thinking would be appropriate. (See Table 2.5)

Table 2.5

Review of AP English Curriculum Guides (N=2)

Features	Yes	No	Unclear	Not Evident
Thinking Skills and Metacognition	50%	3%	28%	17%
Differentiation	79%	0%	13%	8%
Language Arts	77%	3%	17%	3%

Mathematics TAG, Honors and AP Courses

Curriculum guides were reviewed for advanced math courses in grades 4-12. Guides for advanced math in grades 4-6 present a sequential program that is uneven in its plan for acceleration. For example, students ready for advanced instruction in grade 4 are provided a TAG program that encompasses SOL standards for grades 4 and 5 in one year. Fifth grade students are provided one year of sixth grade math instruction (TAG 5) based on Virginia SOLs, and advanced students in grade 6 receive instruction covering grade 7 math SOLs (Honors Math 7).

Although each curriculum guide includes substantial informational materials on Virginia Standards of Learning and details on related declarative and procedural knowledge, specific learning plans were considered the primary factors in evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum guide. Ratings (Yes, No, Unclear, or Not Evident) were tallied by category, and percentages were derived to reflect the degree to which the curriculum guide promotes effective teaching and learning for gifted/advanced students.

Table 2.6 depicts the scope and sequence of math SOL standards by course for TAG students. The Honors 7 program follows the same pattern, with all learning plans the same for honors and general education teaching and learning. One difference here is that all TAG-identified students in grade 6 are enrolled in Honors 7. In other words, the math curriculum should be more evenly accelerated within each grade level, not having two years acceleration in one year and only one year acceleration in other years. Moreover, differentiated math curriculum should be more than the use of basal text materials, but rather include an array of enrichment materials as well.

Table 2.6
Math Sequence for TAG Students (Grades 4-8)

TAG 4 (Gr. 4)	TAG 5 (Gr. 5)	Honors 7 (Gr. 6)	Algebra (Gr. 7)	Geometry (Gr. 8)
Grade 4 SOL	Grade 6 SOL	Grade 7 SOL	Algebra SOL	Geometry SOL
Grade 5 SOL	5 additional standards Gr.7	5 additional standards Gr. 8		

Table 2.7 focuses on the review scores for the two TAG math guides for grades 4 and 5. These TAG math curriculum guides include higher level questions, but no focus on specific models. Transfer tasks are used to support student planning and evaluating their progress.

As seen by the ratings, the guides were limited in the use of higher level thinking skills, including metacognition. Differentiation for gifted learners was also limited, with only 54% of the guides indicating the characteristics associated with it. The features of an exemplary math class were evident for 72% of the material.

The mathematics textbook series, *Math Expressions*, is used in the regular program as well as in the grades 4 and 5 TAG programs. The development of the TAG curriculum units incorporates the Virginia Standards of Learning for grades 4, 5, and 6. This results in a good deal of repetition of content areas across units, although each unit adds complexity to foundational mathematical understandings. While curriculum plans include plenty of emphasis on computation and standard procedures for solving math problems, little emphasis on real-world problem solving, reasoning, and considering alternative ways of thinking about problems and mathematical ideas was found.

Table 2.7
Review of TAG (Grades 4, 5) Curriculum Guides (N=2)

Features	Yes	No	Unclear	Not Evident
Thinking Skills and Metacognition	50%	50%	-	-
Differentiation	54%	38%	4%	4%
Math Content	72%	13%	3%	12%

Honors math courses are available for grades 6-7. A review of the curriculum documents for these courses indicates that limited adjustments to the regular math curriculum have been made. The 6th grade curriculum guide was written as a document combining the curriculum for regular Math 6 with Honors Math. Five 7th grade SOLs represent the different standards for the honors course in addition to transfer tasks at the Advanced/Extended level. This pattern is similar in the 7th grade guide.

Honors 6 is a course for 6th grade students who did not complete TAG math 5. The curriculum guides are essentially the same since the students taking Honors 6 math have just completed Math 5. Ratings for Math content reflect the non-specific way in which the curriculum supports advanced learners. ACPS leadership indicates that there is not an honors Geometry course,

because the delivery model in math is based upon acceleration. (See Table 2.8 for the review across these honors courses.)

Table 2.8
Review of Honors Math Curriculum Guides (N=3)

Features	Yes	No	Unclear	Not Evident
Thinking Skills and Metacognition	44%	56%	-	-
Differentiation	42%	42%	13%	3%
Math Content	63%	16%	9%	12%

The following review of transfer tasks within the grade 6 honors math curriculum units illustrates issues associated with the use of these tasks as an advanced curriculum challenge and/or assessment, noting their inconsistent and limited development.

Example: Grade 6 Honors Math

Unit One: Transfer Task

The accelerated/enhanced Transfer Task has the same content focus as the comprehensive and guided tasks, but the differentiation occurs specifically as "allowing independent exploration into a real-world application of interest to students rather than a prescribed task." This expectation is never directly indicated in the task as presented to students.

Task and Rubric: *The task for both the general (comprehensive) and advanced (accelerated/enhanced) asks students to create a comic strip to model usual misconceptions related to applying the order of operations. Each of the tasks is exactly the same except that the general students create one scenario, and the advanced students create three scenarios. Both student groups write a letter to the comic strip editor explaining their work ,but the advanced students compare the three scenarios, explaining how they are the same and different. The rubric used for both tasks is the same.*

Analysis: *The task asks students to spend significant time learning how to make electronic versions of comic strips and to invent story lines that incorporate math misconceptions. This seems like a lot of energy to show their mastery of the key concepts and operational skills, most of which are repetitious of prior learning. The modifications of expectations for advanced learners could be much stronger or more accelerated. The description of the "real-world application" as the key differentiation is not born out in the actual task since it is exactly like the general one. A pattern of "real world problem solving" for differentiation exists across several of the transfer tasks. This appears to be more intent than implementation of differentiation. In addition, a few units do not have advanced transfer tasks (eg Unit 3, 5).*

Summary: *Transfer tasks for this course are inconsistent, somewhat incomplete, and only partially developed to guide and assess appropriate differentiation.*

Advanced Placement courses are available for upper level high school students, AP Calculus AB, AP Calculus BC, AP Computer Science, AP Probability and Statistics, Computer Science Principles, and Computer Science A. The following ratings in Table 2.8 reflect the AP Calculus courses only.

Teachers annually submit their syllabi to College Board for approval. A review of the syllabi available for these courses results in somewhat inconclusive data. Although significant details about curriculum, instruction, and assessment are not available, considering these courses follow the prescribed AP course guides, and that the syllabi are approved through the College Board process, some leeway was taken in rating the areas of content and differentiation. Only the math content area was assessed because of the lack of details.

Table 2.9
Review of AP Math Syllabi (N=2)

Feature	Yes	No	Unclear	Not Evident
Math Content	59%	6%	22%	13%

Although curriculum guides support the plan for advancing learners in mathematics, the path of acceleration appears only partially to address common needs for gifted/advanced learners. Curriculum guides should draw from the standards, but recognize that pre-assessments should be used to pace instruction within and beyond those standards so that students are not required to repeat instructional elements. This should enable them to experience more opportunities for inquiry, complex problem-solving strategies, and metacognitive skills, areas which received lower ratings in the reviews.

Science Honors and AP Courses

Each of the science Honors curriculum documents begins with an overview of science in ACPS followed by a specific section on the honors student and the principles of teaching and learning in honors courses. Each of the documents includes grade level content from the Virginia Standards of Learning as well as Virginia Curriculum Frameworks which list expectations for declarative and procedural knowledge.

Curriculum units within each course include transfer tasks which are designed to document expected student outcomes. In the parallel regular courses, three options for transfer tasks at different levels of difficulty are offered. The Honors courses include the most advanced level of transfer task.

Each of the Honors Science courses in this series includes a set of expectations for instruction that promote inquiry, specific science investigations, and the use of modeling. Experimentation opportunities are expected that seek to reinforce student understanding that testing ideas and documenting outcomes are important parts of the scientific investigations. Examples of thinking like professional scientists are included. Units developed for each course/grade are built around these expectations. However, many of the units rely on this set of expectations as the narrative

for the unit's directives on teaching and learning rather than developing details related to the specific content and level of skill required for student growth in a particular unit of study. With additional specific guidance, these expectations/objectives for instruction could become more effective in directing instruction.

Although each curriculum guide includes substantial informational materials on Virginia Standards of Learning and details on related declarative and procedural knowledge, specific learning plans were considered the primary factors in evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum guide. Ratings (Yes, No, Unclear, or Not Evident) were tallied by category, and percentages were derived to reflect the degree to which the curriculum guide promotes effective teaching and learning for gifted/advanced students (see Table 2.10).

Table 2.10
Review of Honors Science Curriculum Guides (N=7)

Feature	Yes	No	Unclear	Not Evident
Thinking Skills and Metacognition	62%	38%	-	-
Differentiation	63%	30%	5%	2%
Science Content	63%	27%	6%	4%

Advanced Placement courses are available for upper level high school students. A review of the syllabi available for these courses, AP Biology, Environmental Science, Chemistry, and Physics, results in somewhat inconclusive data. Although significant details about curriculum, instruction, and assessment are not available, considering these courses follow the prescribed AP course guides, and that the syllabi are approved through the College Board process, some leeway was taken in rating the areas of content and differentiation. Only the science content area was assessed because of the lack of details (see Table 2.11).

Table 2.11
Review of AP Science Syllabi (N=4)

Feature	Yes	No	Unclear	Not Evident
Science Content	67%	4%	1%	11%

Social Studies Honors Courses

Curriculum guides for Honors courses in social studies grades 6-8 follow a pattern of presentation. Each is almost identical to the parallel general education curriculum guide in relation to both standards and learning plans. Similar resources are included in both honors and general education courses. Where they differ is in the details with the unit descriptors. Each unit descriptor provides an essential question that focuses the learning intent in relation to the accelerated transfer task for the unit and also offers specific primary documents to be used as possible information sources. Historical thinking is promoted at all levels. Primary sources are differentiated for honors courses, and their use is supported through instruction in reading and

interpretation. Although each curriculum guide includes substantial informational materials on Virginia Standards of Learning and details on related declarative and procedural knowledge, specific learning plans were considered the primary factors in evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum guide. Ratings (Yes, No, Unclear, or Not Evident) were tallied by category, and percentages were derived to reflect the degree to which the curriculum guide promotes effective teaching and learning for gifted/advanced students.

Honors courses at the high school level also parallel the general education curriculum content. As the documents are written, there is substantial dependence on transfer tasks as the vehicles for differentiation of instruction for advanced learners. Pre-and post-assessments are greatly underutilized within the instructional plans. Advanced instruction should be more directly present to differentiate honors courses from the general curriculum offerings (see Table 2.12).

Table 2.12
Review of Honors Social Studies Curriculum Guides (N=7)

Features	Yes	No	Unclear	Not Evident
Thinking Skills and Metacognition	63%	21%	2%	14%
Differentiation	57%	21%	10%	11%
Social Studies Content	75%	17%	4%	4%

Three advanced placement courses for upper level high school students were reviewed: AP Psychology, AP European History, and AP US Government and Politics. A review of the syllabi available for these courses results in somewhat inconclusive data. Although significant details about curriculum, instruction, and assessment are not available, considering these courses follow the prescribed AP course guides, and that the syllabi are approved through the College Board process, some leeway was taken in rating the areas of content and differentiation. Only the social studies content area was assessed because of this lack of detail. (See Table 2.13)

Table 2.13
Review of AP Social Studies Syllabi (N=3)

Feature	Yes	No	Unclear	Not Evident
Social Studies Content	64%	0%	21%	15%

Findings from the review of course guides and K-3 materials

1. **Curriculum guides are core tools for teachers in planning for instruction. Quality documents ensure that content directly address specific anticipated outcomes for students and recognize the diverse readiness and ability levels of students within any given classroom. The review of the Alexandria City Public School curriculum documents, intended for use in advanced classes, reveals both strengths and concerns related to individual documents as noted in the previous narratives and data charts. It also offers a window on the overall plan for directly addressing the instructional needs of gifted and advanced students. Recognizing that one size does**

not fit all, some areas that are intentionally incorporated into curriculum planning may require notations and modifications for certain students and groups of students. With that in mind, the following tablet details overall strengths of the curriculum as written.

Table 2.14
Curriculum Strengths

Overall Strengths
Uniform curriculum guide design
Backwards design as foundation
Stated expectations for differentiation
Developed principles for honors courses
Clear articulation of VA SOL Standards
Expectation of cultural responsiveness

There are, however, related concerns regarding the curriculum guides. The pattern of design may unintentionally drive the content in ways that do not support advanced learning. Moreover, the use of the design without overall introduction, stated rationale, and anticipated student outcomes is incomplete and difficult for a reader to comprehend. There are many areas of the documents where differentiation is not articulated for gifted learners, and the application of expectations and principles for honors courses are not articulated at the level of learning plans. Often there is no connection of the standards to instruction for advanced learners, and there is limited evidence of actualization of cultural responsiveness.

2. **Consideration for modifications in the approach to curriculum and the content of curriculum guides might include the development of clear objectives for TAG and Honors courses and specificity in ways those objectives may be translated into learning plans. Transfer tasks need to be vised for rigor and consistency.**

3. **Guidance on managing instruction of diverse learners, with particular attention to effective group and independent work for advanced students, is critical to productive instruction. All courses should incorporate strategies for inquiry, critical and creative thinking, and problem-solving, directly teaching them as learning strategies within the context of the disciplines.***

4. **Curriculum modifications should build upon the strengths evident in the curriculum plans already in place, enhancing the ability of teachers to make instruction more effective and learning more challenging for advanced TAG students.**

*** Science was clearly exemplary in doing this.**

C. Text Materials in the TAG Program at Grades 4-8

The evaluation team examined individual texts used in the TAG program at grades 4-8 in the subject areas of language arts and mathematics. In the case of language arts, the only materials reviewed were trade books that constitute major readings in the courses from grades 4-8. In the case of mathematics, the review consisted of examining six different texts to ascertain the extent to which the core materials used across the division are appropriate for gifted learners. Coupled with the course review summaries provided in Part B of this materials report, the materials commentary offers an important look at the ELA and math curriculum text materials being used in the program

Language Arts Materials for the TAG Program

The language arts materials provided for review consisted of a series of trade books and a list of other readings used in the program from grades 4-8. Samples of the books were reviewed using a checklist entitled *Criteria for Evaluation Challenge in Books for the Gifted* (see Appendix C). At grades 4-5, thirty trade books were provided for review, out of which eight were selected for rating and evaluator analysis. At grade 6, six books on the approved list were provided for review, and all six were examined. At grade 7, two books were provided, with both receiving a review. At grade 8, four books were provided, with each receiving an overall critique. Appendix C lists the books reviewed for this report.

Evaluator analysis of Grades 4 and 5 selections

Based on a review of sample selections from the grades 4 and 5 TAG programs (see Appendix C for complete reviews), it appears that the selections are a mix of very good options for gifted learners alongside ones that are too low level. This appears to be a problem at both grade levels. Once the reading level is designated to be lower than gifted students can handle, then it impacts both language and vocabulary as well, typically lowering the level of rigor and complexity. Other criteria are not as tied to the reading level, but are influential in other aspects of ELA instruction such as discussion and writing. An abstract concept is an important component to have as a theme or symbol in a text to create a focal point for discussion. The use of advanced literary elements also provides additional challenge in reading for the gifted. The presence of social emotional issues on the part of a protagonist elevates the relevance factor for these students.

Therefore, there is a need to assess carefully the degree of advanced reading in the selections used and to replace current texts with ones that meet these criteria as much as possible. The lead consideration, however, is the reading level (i.e. Lexile or grade equivalent) of the text to be used. Additionally, it is important to consider the use of more contemporary works. Young adults in particular are drawn to readings that don't seem to find their way into reading recommendations within the curriculum. Also, students in grades 4 and 5 are willing and eager to tackle more lengthy selections, and most of the current books on the list are quick reads for them.

Evaluator analysis of grade 6 selections

All texts reviewed that are used at grade 6 are at too low a reading level for gifted students at that grade placement. All of the texts are at the fifth-grade reading level, well below advanced readers and their levels that would range from grades 7-10. Thus, both language and vocabulary would not be challenging enough either. We would recommend replacing all of these texts, except *Nothing but the Truth,* with more advanced readings for TAG students in the Honors program. One merit of all of these texts is the use of African American literature. It would be important in selecting replacement literature to include multicultural reading selections, using both African American and Hispanic selections as a part of the final literature selected. Because the middle school program is an open enrollment one, often more than 50%-75% of the students enrolled are non-TAG. Consequently, it is critical that teachers provide differentiated reading texts for use in the class that will challenge TAG learners sufficiently.

Evaluator analysis of grades 7 and 8 selections

The texts selected for grades 7 and 8 appear to be more appropriate for advanced readers, both in level, content interest, and relevance. Many come from the classical mode of literature, often seen as appropriate for use at high school levels. These types of texts work well with gifted readers and serve as an appropriate entry into preparation for the level of literature that will be required on the AP exams. It is recommended that Socratic Seminars be one tool for discussion of these texts in small cluster groups of TAG students within the Honors classrooms. It is further recommended that the debate process be taught and organized by TAG students to present an issue of relevance found in one of the texts. Writing assignments might be further differentiated by deeper use of persuasive writing techniques that model Advanced Placement Examinations.

Math Materials for TAG Grade 4 and 5

Text materials were reviewed for the gifted program pull-out classes at grades 4 and 5. These texts constitute the same curriculum material used with all learners in the school district. What is distinctive is that students in the TAG program move through the materials at a faster rate, compressing both Math Expressions text books into one year at grade 4. The overall curriculum guides for TAG suggest how this might be done, however, they are mute on the compacting necessary to avoid repetition. The process of review involved examination of individual units of study as well as the material that connected the units one to the other. Special features of each text were also noted, where appropriate.

Math Expressions, Volumes 1 and 2

These texts are used as the support for the ACPS curriculum guide in TAG math. They are research-based texts, funded by the National Science Foundation and authored by Dr. Karen Fuson, a leading math educator. They are designed for all learners at grades 4 and 5, including students working in a Response to Intervention (RtT) environment. Thus, tiered activities and extensions are provided to enhance the learning of more advanced students.

The texts are being compacted by ACPS teachers assigned to teach the TAG math courses to accelerate math learning for gifted students at these two grade levels into one year. The texts

provide alignment to national standards (NCTM) and integrate research on learning math from both NCTM and the National Research Council. They emphasize conceptual learning in mathematics as well as standards-based math strands. A major feature in the instructional model advocated is to engage students in subgroupings by pairs and small groups for math talks about techniques of problem-solving. Homework is recommended to be assigned nightly. A helpful set of suggestions for pacing are included for each unit of study.

Twelve units constitute the grade 4 curriculum text that focus on multiplication and division problems (single and multidigit), multidigit addition and subtraction, fractions, decimals, angles and polygons and 3-dimensional figures, patterns, functions and graphs, quadrilaterals, the metric system, and the US customary system. Unit reviews and tests are included along with a limited set of differentiated instructional activities.

grade 5 has a similar organizational pattern throughout and covers the following mathematical topics in 12 units of study, many of which are the same as those used at grade 4: multiplication and division word problems, addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division with fractions and decimals, geometric shapes of circles, polygons, and angles, perimeter and area, volume, capacity and weight, algebra, functions and graphs, patterns and transformations, ratio, proportion, and per cent, and 3-dimensional figures. Unit reviews and tests are included along with a limited set of differentiated instructional activities.

Big Ideas Math

The grade 6 material, used by the ACPS students at grade 5, is called *Big Ideas Math* (Green version), one of three texts developed in the series. The whole series is calibrated to the Common Core Standards for Mathematical Content and Standards for Practice and with the assessment consortia testing of those standards. There is a Virginia edition that aligns the text content to the Virginia Standards of Learning as well. The text is organized around Essential Questions, thus matching a feature of the Understanding by Design model used in ACPS for curriculum design. For example, the unit on whole number operation, asks students to wonder about: "How do you know which operation to choose when solving a real-life problem?" or when studying parallelograms, "How can you derive a formula for the area of a parallelogram?" Metacognitive questions are also included at key points throughout the texts, asking students what worked, what did not and how they would change. Reviews, quizzes, tests and standards-based tests are included in each chapter. Technology-linked responses from each student allow the teacher to provide immediate feedback, along with error analysis.

The book includes several new unit topics, including statistical measures and data displays, integers and the coordinate plane, and equations and inequalities. Other topics are the same as in the grade 5 book.

Special ideas for projects that integrate math with the other disciplines are included at the end of the text. The polyhedron project and the science project are the most appropriate for gifted students. Each could be provided as an option to gifted learners when studying the relevant math topic.

Evaluator analysis

These materials frame the math program for TAG at grades 4 and 5 in a context of accelerated learning which is highly appropriate. However, the organization of the materials is not conducive to accelerative practice as it does not contain key features that would aid the implementation of the curriculum to a great extent. None of the texts contain pre-assessments, an important tool to engaging in the compacting process. Moreover, they are repetitive of topical coverage, especially the *Math Expressions* texts. The guidance for use with advanced learners is also minimal in respect to project ideas, advanced problems, or even strategies for re-organizing topics for a more conceptual point of view. For example, students who are talented in mathematics can handle the interplay of fractions and decimals since they are representational patterns that indicate the same operations. Thus, these chapters might easily be compressed. Work with ratio, proportion and statistics and probability are important topics for use with this population, yet little coverage of these topics is given until the end of the sixth grade text. Many teachers who engage with TAG students individually are compacting the coursework via the texts provided and the course guides. This might be better accomplished through a division-wide effort, using gifted compacting approaches. Such compacting would enhance rigor and reduce repetition at grade 4. The grade 5 *Big Ideas* book is used very extensively as the core text for TAG math at grade 5 in the majority of schools. Some of the teachers who are very strong in math do venture beyond the text to provide supplementary experiences in materials such as *Connected Math*, an NSF material designed for middle school students to provide project-based activities and *M3*, a research-based program differentiated for gifted students in mathematics. Use of this text as a core, along with strong supplementary materials such as those listed, would be highly recommended.

Math Material, Grade 6

Gifted learners selected for the grade 6 accelerated curriculum already have covered two years of the standard math curriculum in one year. Thus, grade 6 constitutes a year of advanced materials, but taught at a more normalized rate of learning. The text series reviewed below would typically constitute a grade 7 pre-algebra experience for typical learners.

Big Ideas Math (Red and Red Accelerated)

The grade 7 material, used by the ACPS students at grade 6, is called *Big Ideas Math* (Red and Red Accelerated versions), the second of three texts developed in the series. The whole series is calibrated to the Common Core Standards for Mathematical Content and Standards for Practice and with the assessment consortia testing of those standards. There is a Virginia edition that aligns the text content to the Virginia Standards of Learning as well.

The text is organized around Essential Questions, thus matching a feature of the Understanding by Design (UBD) model used in ACPS for curriculum design. For example, the unit on transformations in the Accelerated text, asks students to wonder about: "How do you identify congruent triangles?" or when studying graphing, "How can you describe the graph of the equation y=mx?" Metacognitive questions are also included at key points throughout the texts, asking students what worked, what did not and how they would change their problem-solving.

Reviews, quizzes, tests and standards-based tests are included in each chapter. Technology-linked responses from each student allow the teacher to provide immediate feedback, along with error analysis.

Special ideas for projects that integrate math with the other disciplines are included at the end of the first text in the Appendix. The history project on Greek mathematicians and the art project on patterns are appropriate for gifted learners and might be added to choices provided to the students in the advanced class at grade 6**.**

Evaluator analysis
The core text is strong in respect to the content covered and the familiarity that students would have with its organization and format, having just finished the grade 5 earlier level version. However, the same criticisms noted before apply to the grade 6 text as well as the grade 5. There is no use of pre-assessments, the opportunities for compacting are not explicitly made, and the level of problem-solving is sometimes insufficiently rigorous for the top students in the class. Clearly, supplementary materials would be needed to enhance the course of study designed around this text. *Mathematics: A Human Endeavor* by Martin Gardner contains rich thematically-based units of study appropriate for advanced students at this level. Of particular interest may be the unit on logic.

Math Materials for Algebra and Geometry Honors at Grades 7 and 8

These materials were not reviewed as a part of this study. However, it is our understanding that the *Big Idea* books in these subjects are also employed for these classes. If so, the same commentary applies as was used for critiquing *Big Book Accelerated* for grade 6.

Findings from review of text materials in reading and mathematics:

1. **There is a need to use reading materials that are more advanced in TAG programs, calibrated to grade level designations at least 1-2 grade levels above placement. This is a critical recommendation that affects all other subject area coursework examined as well.**

2. **The use of multiple advanced materials for reading in both literature and nonfiction is recommended. Materials that are already differentiated for gifted learners would be good choices for this purpose. Guides for differentiating language arts curriculum are available through the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) (Hughes, Kettler, Shaughessy, &VanTassel-Baska, 2014).**

3. **Math materials need to be differentiated by carefully compacting the combined accelerated courses currently provided at the division level rather than having individual teachers carry out the process. Current division materials do not use a compacting model for combining courses. Rather they have identified topics to be taught with no guidance as to how they might be integrated through careful pre-assessment and intervention.**

4. **Math acceleration should be tempered with the use of good enrichment materials at advanced levels. As is the case in reading materials, math materials that are already differentiated are available for use in these classes at grades 4-8 and should be routinely applied. Guides for differentiating math materials have been developed and are available from the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) (Johnsen, Ryser, & Assouline, 2014).**

D. Differentiated Education Plans

The ACPS Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs) for both elementary and middle schools were reviewed. A total of 49 education plans were reviewed at elementary level and 25 at middle school level. In addition to the paper review, the evaluators looked for the implementation of these plans in selected classrooms to see the extent to which they were being operationalized. With the exception of two elementary schools, none of the classrooms observed had students currently working on a DEP. At the school where products could be observed, they were also reviewed. The following section of the report describes the DEP model currently in use and provides suggestions for modification in the key features of format, implementation, and communication.

Elementary DEPs

The Differentiated Education Plan (DEP) at the elementary level is designed to structure specific learning experiences for Talented and Gifted General Intellectual Aptitude (TAG GIA) students in kindergarten through grade three and for students identified for services in science and social studies in grades four and five. While each DEP is an individual plan, groups of students with similar academic needs often have the same plan.

Classroom teachers, frequently in collaboration with a Talented and Gifted (TAG) resource teacher, develop plans to provide a structure for acceleration and/or enrichment for TAG students. Parents of TAG students receive the plan as communication about the specific opportunities for acceleration and/or enrichment offered for their child or children.

Forty-nine elementary DEPs from 9 elementary schools were reviewed. This total included 1 kindergarten plan, 5 first grade plans, 17 second grade plans, 11 third grade plans, 8 fourth grade plans, and 7 fifth grade plans. Because several TAG students could have the same DEP, 31 distinct plans were reviewed. One elementary school also shared six first grade culminating DEP projects with the evaluators for review. The description, analysis, and summary of the elementary Differentiated Education Plans may be found in the following text box:

Differentiated Educational Plans – Elementary Level

Description

These Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs) were designed for use with students at the K-5 level. The current form includes some basic information such as student name, school, grade level, and service designation for gifted learners. K-3 DEPs indicated that they addressed all subject areas, a designation aligned with the General Intellectual Aptitude approach used to identify students at those levels. Eleven elementary DEPs for students in grades 4 and 5 were designed for use in either science or social studies.

The first category heading varies by school but most use a heading called "Interdisciplinary" and list types of approaches or strategies used with gifted learners, the same set for each DEP in that school. The heading does not convey the types of items included, however, as they range from actually naming subjects to be used in the student work (i.e." TAG incorporates math, science, communications, and the arts") to ("Weekly enrichment lessons to develop critical thinking skills") to ("Student in reading group with higher level texts"). One school lists goals and outcomes under this column which they title "Expectations".

The category headed "Creative Thinking and Problem-Solving" lists generic strategies used to teach —higher level questions, divergent activities, group collaboration, and representation of work in linguistic and nonlinguistic form. This category appears somewhat consistent across schools although it was extended to "math projects, research, and choice of products" in some. A few DEPs included a reference to a particular program such as Socratic seminars as a technique for addressing the higher-level skills. One school uses an alternative column title that focuses on extension activities for use in each subject area.

The category of "Finished Products" follows. It contains typically 3-4 listed items that include the following—choice in projects, many products including writing, creating, discussions, presentations with visual media, and a list of acceptable forms of product development such as posters and brochures. One school uses a column called "Explanation of Student Progress" and lists a set of 18 learning behaviors for comment by the teacher.

The final category is called "Evaluation of Student Work". The list in this category includes a standard "Teacher evaluates product, class participation, assignment completion", found in each DEP reviewed. Other commentary notes that a rubric is used, in two schools collaboratively developed with the teacher and student, observations are used, the work may be judged by the teacher and peers and self-evaluation (2 schools), and a presentation may result. One school uses science notebooks and conferencing as tools in addition to specific project assignments. Another school uses a Student Progress Report form as its response to the column heading.

Analysis

The lack of specificity in the DEPs reviewed was a problem in respect to knowing what any given TAG learner or small group of TAG learners was doing as a result of having one. The forms constituted a list of possibilities rather than a plan for actual implementation by students or as a communication device for parents. The design of the form does not lend itself to representing a learning plan. Since goals and objectives were missing in most of the forms, it was difficult to discern the sense of the purpose or direction for the learning. Choices provided in the various sections did not clarify how the form would be used. Although some of the lists might be viewed as containing differentiated approaches, such as the use of higher level questions, they were not linked to any desired outcome. The use of the same language across the majority of the forms for all columns suggests that the DEP is not responsive to the age, grade level, or academic level of the learners served.

Summary

The DEPs submitted for review 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.

Middle School DEPs:

Classroom teachers in the four core subject areas at the middle school level develop plans to provide a structure for specific group or individual opportunities for acceleration and/or enrichment for TAG students. TAG students complete work within unit or project guidelines developed. Parents of TAG students receive the plan as communication about the specific opportunities for acceleration and/or enrichment offered for their child or children.

A total of 25 middle school plans were reviewed. In terms of subject area, seven English, seven Mathematics, six Science, and five Social Studies Plans were reviewed. Seven sixth grade plans were reviewed, nine seventh grade plans, and nine eighth grade plans. The description, analysis, and summary of the middle school Differentiated Education Plans may be found in the following text box:

Differentiated Education Plans - Middle School Level

Description

The Differentiated Education Plan (DEP) at the middle school level provides a structure for the delivery of differentiated services to identified TAG students in Honors level English/Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics, and Science classes. The middle school DEP format includes four categories: Academic Progress, Learning Process, Finished Products, and Evaluation of Student Work. Most of the DEPs used this common plan format. Some of the items under Academic Progress contain lists of general approaches to teaching the gifted such as "mastery learning" and "advanced content". Others contain aspects of learning outcomes such as "Analyze book and movie trailers and develop criteria for success with an audience." The next column for Learning Process is similar in the content provided, a mix of approaches and outcomes. Most Finished Projects indicated independent projects, presentations for peers, or research projects. Most Evaluations of Student Work suggested using self, peer, and/or teacher assessments with rubrics. Sample DEP products were shared at two of the middle school sites.

Analysis:

The categories of "Academic Progress" and "Learning Processes" are not clearly differentiated from each other. There is overlap in the type of entries found. The use of common phraseology found across DEPs suggests that they were designed for subgroups of learners within a class or for an entire class. The plans lacked specificity, with few plans including student outcomes. The use of general terms, such as "independent work", to describe what students are doing is not definitive. It is often unclear how teachers are facilitating the implementation of these plans. The use of the same plan across all subjects and grade levels suggests that distinctions are not being made by subject or grade level.

Summary

While middle school DEPs used a common format for development, the lack of specificity made it difficult for a reader to comprehend the nature of differentiation employed. Lack of defined goals and outcomes, and the general description of activities limit the effectiveness of the DEP to serve as a learning plan and communication tool.

Problems, Solutions, and Opportunities

The DEP can be an effective tool for providing a structure for the delivery of differentiated services to TAG students, however. Three processes: (1) the DEP form modification process (2) the DEP implementation process and the (3) DEP communication process require improvement to make that possible. Table 2.1 provides an overview of problems related to the current use of the DEP in the TAG program and suggests possible solutions, based on the review conducted at elementary and middle school levels.

Table 2.15
DEP Problems and Solutions

Problems Related to the DEP	Possible Solutions
Lack of clarity in DEP forms	--Modify DEP forms to focus on clear student outcomes with appropriate assessment. --Connect DEPs with subject and grade level curriculum and instruction so the DEP is an acceleration or extension of curriculum and instruction.
Lack of consistency in implementation	--Ensure that all teachers and administrators understand that the completion of a DEP is a requirement to plan, implement, and document services to TAG students at relevant levels. For both levels: ----DEPs should focus on academic opportunities that take the place of specific classroom assignments. ----Whenever possible, the DEP should support opportunities for TAG students to work with intellectual peers. ----Whenever possible, the DEP should have a cross-disciplinary focus and be applied at semester levels, not every 9 weeks.
Lack of communication	--Develop an internal and external ongoing communication plan to ensure that administrators and teachers, parents and students understand the DEP purpose and process.
Lack of monitoring to ensure consistency in implementation	--Develop electronic DEP model forms that can be completed with less teacher effort and be monitored by building administrators and central office staff members.

Problems Related to the DEP	Possible Solutions
Lack of collaboration in the development of DEP forms by resource and classroom teachers	--Develop multiple models of DEPs for multiple subjects and grade levels with an emphasis on developing cross-disciplinary plans where feasible. --Have TAG resource personnel create DEP models, using transfer task examples where feasible.

The evaluation team feels that the DEP is a promising initiative that should remain as a part of the documentation for the use of differentiation in the TAG program at the relevant grade levels and subject areas. A sample DEP for 3rd grade in the area of Reading is included in Appendix D to illustrate recommended changes in format. The focus in the sample plan is on goals, outcomes, and assessment, with teacher strategies, a checklist on thinking skills employed, and a section for the designation of specific materials. Such explicit plans should support implementation and facilitate communication.

Findings

1. **Because the DEP process is a promising practice in ACPS, it is well worth the effort to improve the plan format, the process of implementation, and the planning for communication.**

2. **DEPs are an inappropriate substitute for the routine use of differentiated classroom strategies and, in their current form, offer little information to parents about TAG curriculum and instruction. DEPs should augment in class daily differentiation.**

3. **DEPs can offer, and a limited number of DEPs already do offer, good instructional opportunities for TAG students. New plans can provide similar opportunities with adjustments in format.**

Alexandria City Public Schools: Curriculum Audit Final Report (McRel, 2016) Review of TAG-Related Materials

Another data source used to construct this section of the report was the recent audit of the ACPS curriculum, done in the last year by McRel and Associates, an external consulting firm that specializes in curriculum design and development issues.

This large-scale review of curriculum materials commented on the absence of curriculum guides and assessments that addressed the needs of TAG students, indicating only partial evidence of some curriculum materials relevant to the program. Our review of curriculum materials substantiated this finding as can be seen earlier in this report where the review indicated a lack of strategies and resources for use in implementing learning plans for TAG students.

McRel findings indicated that some transfer tasks were available for use with TAG students that offered accelerative opportunities. Our findings corroborated this but found transfer tasks to be inconsistently included. The McRel report found no instructional strategies for TAG were noted nor were pre-assessment ideas presented. Our review corroborated this finding; we also found a lack of TAG instructional strategies. Secondary materials noted two documents that offered general guidance for TAG classrooms but provided no explicit guidance for implementation in TAG classrooms (McRel Report, pp. 80-81). Our reviews also found limited guidance for teachers in the implementation of the curriculum for TAG students.

McRel also conducted classroom observations as a part of the review, noting that the majority of classrooms observed employed large group instruction, with a small minority of classrooms observed using small group or independent activities. Our findings from classroom observations, although using a different observation tool, noted low use of metacognitive strategies and moderate use of small group and/or independent activities. McRel also observed low levels of the use of metacognitive strategies and a low level of the use of formative assessment to provide feedback. The COS-R form, used as an observation tool in this study, did not examine the use of formative assessment to provide feedback.

In McRel focus groups, teachers commented on the lack of differentiated curriculum materials for use with TAG special populations, noting that such materials had to be found on one's own or not employed. Teachers also perceived few differences between the regular and honors level of the curriculum, "maybe one question" (McRel Report, p. 83). Our curriculum reviews also found few differences between regular and honors level courses. Focus groups that we convened, which included TAG teachers, also suggested the lack of materials ready to use with TAG learners. Other special population teachers voiced similar concerns about the lack of guidance in the ACPS materials. They also voiced concerns about its ease of implementation. Only 11% of classroom teachers rated the materials as providing thorough guidance for working with TAG learners.

In a survey of teachers' reactions to the challenge level and opportunity level of TAG by levels of schooling, ratings varied considerably, depending on level. Typically, teachers rated middle school opportunities low and elementary activities high. The intellectual challenge rating ranged from 28% at high school, 30% at middle school to 70% at elementary level. Our reviews did not

examine the challenge level of materials through surveying teachers for their perception, so this is not an area for comparison. However, parents of TAG students at the middle school level felt that the TAG program was not meeting their children's needs, according to our analysis of survey data. (McRel Report, p. 93).

Findings

Findings from the McRel report suggest the absence of emphasis on TAG classroom needs in respect to curriculum materials, strategies, and resources for differentiation. Teachers found the ACPS curriculum materials limited in respect to providing for top learners. These findings were also confirmed in this TAG review via four data sources, including materials review, survey data, focus group data, and classroom observations.

Conclusion

The materials section of this report analyzed the major curriculum materials used with TAG learners at K-12 levels, including course guides, units of study, and texts. DEPs, used at elementary and middle school, were also analyzed. External reports, specifically the technical report on the local gifted plan and the McRel evaluation of curriculum, were reviewed for comparison to this study's findings. In general, findings suggested the need to engage in further curriculum development of existing materials (i.e. course guides, units of study, DEPs,) for use with gifted learners and also to review the use of text and supplemental materials to ensure sufficient challenge. The findings also supported relevant findings from both the technical review of the local plan and the McRel audit of curriculum.

Section III: Survey of Stakeholder Groups: Parents, Students & Staff

Surveys were used to collect data from four stakeholder groups. These groups included parents, students, teachers, and administrators. Parent surveys were distributed to parents of TAG-identified students across all levels in the division. All teachers and administrators in the division also received a survey to assess their perceptions of the TAG program. Student benefit surveys were distributed to TAG-identified students at grades 5, 8, and 12 who had been randomly selected for focus group participation.

Parent and staff surveys were sent online to the targeted members of each group. Questions were constructed in a parallel way for both surveys in order to compare responses across groups as appropriate. Administrator responses were disaggregated for key questions as were the responses of parents by their child's level of schooling.

A copy of the parent survey may be found in Appendix E and of the staff survey in Appendix G. A copy of the student benefit survey is included with the results in the body of this report. Breakdowns by grade level responses for the student survey at elementary, middle, and high school may be found in Appendix F.

Results of Parent Survey

The parent survey contained 36 questions, three of which required an open-ended response. Parents of Young Scholars responded to three additional questions related to that program.

Demographic data

The parent survey was sent to all parents of students enrolled in the gifted program in Alexandria City School District (N=2002). A total of 569 surveys were completed, constituting a 28.4% response rate. If parents had more than one child in the program, they were encouraged to complete a survey for each child. Of those responding, slightly more than 62% had one child while almost 32% had two children in the TAG program and almost 5% had three children in the TAG program.

Almost 56% of respondents were parents of children at the elementary level, coming from all 12 schools. Jefferson Houston was counted as both an elementary and a middle school context. School-based responses ranged from .54%-11% of those receiving the survey. At the secondary level, 35% of the parents who were solicited responded. Elementary parents accounted for 64% of the total surveys received; 25% were middle school parents, and 11% were high school parents.

Percentage of responses by grade level ranged from 1% at kindergarten to 32% at 4th grade level. Grade levels that received the highest level of parental responses were fourth and fifth grade.

In respect to the subject areas in which their child is served by the TAG program, 62% of parents responding had a child in math, followed by 58% in language arts. In science, almost 20% of

parents responded while 17% of social studies parents responded. Among children identified as GIA, 25% of parents responded while 3% indicated they were parents of Young Scholars.

In respect to the program option in which students are currently receiving TAG services, the highest percentage among parent respondents were those who had a child in mathematics and/or the reading program at grades 4 or 5 (36%), followed closely by parents who had children in the honors program option in grades 6-12 (33%). General intellectual aptitude (GIA) parents, represented by the K-3 DEP option, accounted for almost 20% of respondents. Only 7% of AP parents, 4% of Young Scholars' parents, 3% of DEP science and social studies parents and 2% of DE parents responded to the survey. Slightly more than 8% of respondents (N=47) did not know the area in which their child was identified and were not aware of the nature of the services their child was receiving.

Table 3.1 shows the breakdowns regarding enrollment in current program options as noted by respondents (parents may have indicated more than one option):

Table 3.1
TAG Program Options

Program Option	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage of Respondents**
Differentiated Educational Plan (DEP) @K-3	111	21.%
TAG math and/or reading @4 and 5th grade level	203	36%
Young Scholars @ K-5	25	4%
Differentiated Educational Plan (DEP) @4-5 (science and social studies)	12	3%
Honors classes @ 6-12	184	33%
Advanced Placement (AP) @ 9-12	41	7%
Dual Enrollment (DE) @9-12	14	2%
Not aware of program option	47	8%
Total Respondents	**591**	

The self-reported ethnic group data for the parents were the following: 72% White, 11% African American, 7% Multi-racial, 6% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and fewer than 1% American Indian and Native Hawaiian. In a comparison to ethnic group membership in the program, survey respondents were over-represented by white parents by 8%, under-represented among Hispanic parents by 7%, equal to the percentage in the program among African Americans, and over-represented by the category of Other by 3%.

Identification

The basic program development component of identification relates to who will be served in a particular set of program options for gifted learners. Identification, based on universal or whole-grade screening, functions only at the K-5 levels in the Alexandria program, with two different age levels designated for the process to be formally activated (grades 1 and 3). Additional referrals may be made at any grade level, based on teacher nomination and/or SOL score data, up to middle school. There is little evidence, however, that student identification routinely occurs after the universal screenings at third grade. In fact, the limited number of students identified for social studies and science in grades 4-8 attest to that reality.

All respondents were queried as to their understanding of the identification process for the Talented and Gifted Program (TAG) in ACPS. A total of 444 parents or 81.3% of respondents indicated they "strongly agreed or agreed" that they did understand the process, with 107 (19.6%) indicating strong agreement with the statement. Nevertheless, 102 (18.7%) "disagreed or strongly disagreed" with the statement as to understanding the process.

In response to the question about the fairness of the identification process for finding students who need differentiated services beyond the norm, 330 (75%) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. Of this group, 59 (13%) strongly agreed with the statement. Furthermore, 25% of parent respondents "disagreed" or "disagreed strongly" with the statement. Clearly, fewer parents responded to this question than to the prior one on understanding the identification process (only 441 vs. 546).

Program emphases

The next set of questions queried parents in respect to the aspects of the TAG program that were helpful to their child in respect to social emotional development, counseling and guidance, acceleration opportunities, and grouping. They were also asked about the extent to which their child's strengths and needs were addressed through the program.

Social and emotional development and academic counseling

In the area of social and emotional development, 43% agreed or strongly agreed that the TAG program assisted with this area while 35% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Almost 22% of parents were unaware of the extent to which the TAG program assisted their child with social and emotional development.

In the area of academic counseling and guidance, 55% of TAG parents agreed or strongly agreed that the program met their child's needs for academic, college and career guidance while 26% disagreed or disagreed strongly. Almost 19% did not know.

Acceleration

In the classroom, the pace of learning often indicates whether students who are advanced are being well-served. On this survey, 65% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the pace of classroom instruction met their child's need for quicker learning. While 24% disagreed or strongly disagreed, 11% did not know.

Acceleration also involves a set of school-wide opportunities for advancement beyond the classroom. On this question, over half the parents did not know if their child could advance if needed (56%). Of the remaining responses, almost 26% believed such accelerative opportunities were available while 18% disagreed or disagreed strongly.

Grouping

How gifted students are grouped matters in respect to the learning that may accrue through differentiated instruction. Almost 50% of parents responding to the survey felt that the grouping model used was appropriate while almost 20% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Almost 30% indicated they did not know the impact of the grouping model employed in the TAG program on their child's learning.

Student strengths and needs

The parents responding to this survey were divided on whether the TAG program responded to their child's strength as well as his/her needs. In respect to responding to strengths, 63% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the program did; 52% agreed or strongly agreed that the program also responded to areas of need. While 20% of parents disagreed that the program responded to strengths, 16% indicated they did not know. On the issue of response to needs, 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed while 19% did not know.

Program goals

No program for gifted learners can be understood without having a clear sense of what the purposes of the program are, its goals and anticipated outcomes. On the positive side, 66% of the respondents indicated they were familiar with program goals. Over 34% of parent respondents, however, were not familiar with the goals and objectives of the TAG program in Alexandria. On subsequent questions related to the goals of the program, only 16% indicated a lack of knowledge, an 18% discrepancy.

The next set of questions queried the respondents on specific goals and outcomes commonly employed in gifted programs, some of which were stated goals of the ACPS TAG program. The first such question queried respondents on whether the teacher provided for advanced academic growth. While the clear majority of parents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed (almost 67%), 17% disagreed or disagreed strongly, however, while 16% indicated they did not know.

On questions related to goals (Q16-25), the responses in Table 3.2 were derived in respect to a particular goal and the parental perception of the teacher's promotion or development of it, listed in descending order. More than 50% and up to 72% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that each of these goals was addressed by teachers in the program, while less than 20% disagreed or disagreed strongly with any of the goal statements addressed. A range of 16-31% of parents did not know.

Table 3.2
Parental Perceptions of TAG Program Goal Implementation

Program Goals	SA/Agree	Disagree/SD	Don't Know
Critical and creative thinking	72%	10%	18%
Achievement and learning	70%	9%	23%
Advanced academic growth	67%	17%	16%
Conceptual understanding	67%	10%	24%
Self-directed learning	66%	11%	24%
Research skills	61%	17%	22%
Social skills and collaboration	61%	14%	24%
Advanced communication skills	57%	15%	29%
Real world problem-solving skills and products	57%	13%	31%
Self-understanding	52%	18%	31%

Program challenge level

Since several parents were unaware of the specific goals of the TAG program, the survey asked parents to respond to their understanding of the overall challenge level of the program. In other words, was it too hard, too easy, or just right. A full 60% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that it was sufficiently challenging for their child while 28% did not agree or disagreed strongly that it was, while 12% did not know.

The next four questions dealt with the degree of challenge in the program by subject areas. Table 3.3 displays the responses for the challenge level within the subject areas of English/Language arts, math, science, and social studies.

The majority of parents who responded to the survey found the specific subject in which their child was enrolled to be sufficiently challenging. In language arts, 69% of parents found the subject to be challenging for their child. In mathematics, 68% of parents found the curriculum challenging. Science was perceived as sufficiently challenging for 60% of the responding parents of students who were receiving it as a service while social studies was perceived to be so by 67% of the parents of students receiving services in that subject. See Table 3.3 for the breakdown by subject area. (Narrative description does not match table numbers or percentages because the percentages in the narrative were computed based on students who were receiving services.)

Table 3.3
Degree of Challenge by Subject Area*

Subject	SA/Agree	Disagree/SD	No service in a given subject
English Language Arts	275 (51%)	126 (26%)	141 (26%)
Mathematics	333 (62%)	76 (14%)	131 (24%)
Science	132 (25%)	87 (16%)	316 (59%)
Social Studies	146 (28%)	61 (11%)	328 (61%)

Criteria for judging program effectiveness

Parents as stakeholders in the TAG program must be accountable for their judgments about the effectiveness of the program. The next three questions queried the issue of how they judged whether the program was effective, and how they rated the communication avenues to understanding the program at the classroom and school level.

Over 80% of parents judged the effectiveness of the TAG program through the eyes of their child, the comments s/he made about the curriculum and the program at home. More than 75% of these parents judged it from the project work and products that were done in the program. Slightly over half of the parents (51%) judged TAG program effectiveness based on feedback from teachers, some suggesting the role of the teacher as crucial in understanding as well as judging the program. Only a minority of parents found that test scores were indicative of the quality of the program. For 11% of parents, program reports were useful tools in judging efficacy.

In respect to the role of communication in understanding the program and its consequences for a child, these parents rated the communication channel between the teacher and themselves as somewhat effective, with 56% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement while 45% disagreed or strongly disagreed. When the question was asked related to the communication channel with the school administration about the program, the response suggested that fewer than half of the parents felt it was effective, with 42% agreeing or strongly agreeing while 58% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Benefits of the program

In the final section of the questionnaire, parents were asked to provide their perceptions of the top three benefits of the TAG program to their child, using a forced choice format. In regard to benefits of the program, 69% of parents listed “developing higher level skills” as the top benefit of the program while 57% cited “having challenging TAG or advanced class work”. The third highest benefit was seen as “having opportunities to accelerate in TAG or advanced classes”. The only other benefit cited that was close to being in the top three was “developing creative

thinking", noted by 31% of parents. A list of responses from high to low that were noted by 10% of respondents or more is listed in Table 3.4:

Table 3.4
TAG Program Benefits as Perceived by Parents

Benefits	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Developing higher level thinking skills	353	69%
Having challenging TAG or advanced class work	296	57%
Having opportunities to accelerate in TAG or advanced classes	182	35%
Developing creative thinking skills	161	31%
Understanding new ideas and concepts	99	19%
Trying different ways to learn	91	18%
Developing research skills	89	17%
Developing communication (speaking and writing) skills	89	17%
Learning to reflect on the own learning	52	10%
Learning to work with others	50	10%

The parental responses to program benefits mirrors quite well their responses to the goals of the program, with similar percentages found for the top two benefits and the perception of its emphasis as a goal in the classroom.

Program changes

The final question on the survey asked parents to list the top three areas for change that they felt the program should undergo. Top-rated was the instructional process, cited by 44% of parents. The second area cited by parents was the identification process, noted by 39% of the parental group responding. Finally, the third highest rated item was the opportunity for greater gifted peer interaction, seen as critical by 35% of the parents responding. Closely following these top three areas for change were three other areas, all related to the fundamental structure of the program: 32% calling for curriculum change, 31% calling for assessment change, and almost 31% calling for a change in the goals and outcomes of the program. Only 27% of parents noted professional development as an area for change, even though they saw instructional change as their number one priority, a finding that usually suggests the need for professional development. (See Table 3.5 for the complete list.)

Table 3.5
TAG Program Parent Recommendations for Change

Recommendations for Change	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Instruction (how it is taught)	210	44%
The identification process	186	39%
Greater opportunities for gifted peer interaction	168	35%
Curriculum (what is taught)	154	32%
Assessment (how it is evaluated for student learning)	148	31%
Goals and beneficial outcomes	146	31%
Teacher Preparation and professional development	128	27%
Materials and textbooks	56	12%

No area of change was cited by the majority of parents, suggesting that the group who responded to the survey may not have been dissatisfied in the aggregate with the current program structure and operation.

Open-ended responses

In analyzing the open-ended responses of parents regarding desired changes, the evaluator looked for common responses by at least 20% of the parents. These common responses were cited as themes. In addition, selective quotations were included to illustrate or highlight the range of responses provided, as well as the relevance to the question asked. This same process was also employed with open-ended responses in the student and staff surveys.

A total of 176 parents (35%) added commentary following the question related to the changes they desired to see in the TAG program. Major themes voiced by at least 20% of the parents responding revolved around three concerns: 1) communication about the child's program and progress; 2) the need for a developed, challenging program; and 3) concerns about identification and labelling of students in the program.

A plurality of parents complained about communication in the program: They had strong concerns about the lack of communication from the teachers to them, from the program administration to them, and from the school to them about the program. Others cited instances where the time lag was months not weeks between identification and follow-up placement for programming. One parent noted "I am a very proactive parent, but information about the TAG program didn't come to me. I have had to ask for it and track down the teachers for information. More clear communication would be helpful."

On the theme of lack of services, parents complained about their lack of knowledge of what was happening in the program. One middle school parent noted: "I wasn't even aware there was a TAG program for middle school." Lack of services was noted by one parent in the following way, "I am terribly disappointed with the lack of TAG services for children K-3. It is incredibly inconsistent from year to year and is not serving the needs of the children that have been identified." Some parents complained that the program at grades 1-3 was merely a series of worksheets to be completed with no teaching provided: "Having my child complete packet after packet and sit and play computer learning games and watch YouTube videos as a form of instruction is not acceptable. This isn't my idea of teaching them to be independent learners." Many other parents commented on the absence of a program at grades 1-3.

Parents also cited concerns about the middle school honors courses, indicating that classes are merely regular level instruction, and the range of learners is too broad for the teacher to instruct at an honors level. Regarding the middle school program, one parent noted: "There doesn't seem to be any TAG program beyond honors classes. The ELA program has not read any books at grade level, much less above grade level all year. This is outrageous." Other parents suggested that the lack of instructional grouping at middle school level took away any semblance of a TAG program.

Regarding identification one parent noted, "I would like the communication process to be clearer. It is not well-known that a parent can recommend their child for the program, or what tests are the determining factor when placement is considered." Another parent stated, "Identification into the program is inconsistent, with some teachers referring no one at all." Another parent summed up the identification process by saying, "Navigating the identification process was extremely convoluted, complicated, and bureaucratic."

Only six parents commented on the extent to which their children enjoyed and benefitted from the program-these were parents who named a teacher who was responsible for the well-being and challenge experienced by their son or daughter while participating in the program.

The last question on the survey asked parents to comment on any aspect of the program that was not solicited in the questionnaire. The response rate was 82 parents (16%), and none of the comments on this question provided a plurality of responses. Most of the commentary mirrored the types of responses provided under the earlier, open-ended section of the questionnaire, such as the need for better communication, concerns about the lack of programming at K-3 and middle school, and identification concerns.

Based on parental responses in open-ended sections of the survey, it seemed appropriate to analyze the data by the grade level of students whose parents responded. Thus, we analyzed parental survey data by elementary, middle, and high school level responses.

Sub-analysis of parent responses by student level of schooling

The evaluator analyzed survey responses of high school, middle school, and elementary respondents in order to uncover any important differences across groups on key program development variables.

The demographic profile of each group responding follows: At the high school level 59 parents responded, with 37% from grade 9 and the rest distributed across grades 10-12 (15-29%) in decreasing percentages from early to later grades. Of the 140 middle school respondents, 41% were parents of 6th graders, 32%, seventh, and 25%, eighth grade. The elementary respondents included 360 for the first two questions but numbered 345 on most other item responses. The response rate also varied at other levels. Distribution among grade levels was highest at grades 4 and 5 (27-32%) and consistently lower across grades 1 -3 (11-15%).

The range of responses at the elementary level was from 1% to 17% of the total school population. Seventy three percent of middle school parents of one middle school responded, while 3% and 21% respectively of parents responded at the other two sites. Sixty-three per cent of high school respondents were from the main TC Williams campus while 37% were from Minnie Howard. At the high school level, the racial profile of respondents was 75% white and 25% minority; middle school yielded 73% white and 27% minority; and elementary figures were 71% white and 29% minority. These figures are generally consistent with the identification data, suggesting that a consonant proportion of parents responded to the survey, based on their ethnic identification.

Implications of these demographics suggest that parents at certain schools responded at differential rates as did parents with children at different grade levels in the program. No inferences can be made to the total group of TAG parents, however, based on the overall low response rates. Thus, the commentary is merely descriptive of those parents who did respond, as they were the minority of parents whose children are in the program, representing 28% of the total TAG parent population.

Subject matter/program services differences by level of schooling

High school parents who responded to the survey had students in three basic types of services: 78% had students who were in honors classes, while 68% were in Advanced Placement classes and 24% were in Dual Enrollment.

Middle school parents had students in honors classes almost exclusively (95%). Other options noted were AP, GIA, and less than 2% of parents checked that they did not know.

At the elementary level, 54% of parent respondents had children in the TAG math or language arts program at grades 4 and 5; 30% were on a DEP through their GIA identification; 7% were in the Young Scholars Program; 3% were on a science or social studies DEP, and 12% indicated they did not know the current program option that their child was in.

Because of the differences in program options at each grade level cluster of the program, marked differences in program perceptions were likely to arise from parents, based on this variable alone, not accounting for the other variables such as school and teacher.

Identification comparisons

Parents at the high school level were most consistent in their responses to the identification process as one that they knew and found fair, with 75% rating it so while 25% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Middle school parents who understood the process (80%) found the process fair (65%) while 35% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The largest percentages of parents who both knew and felt the process was fair were elementary parents: 83% reported understanding the identification process and 78% agreed that it was fair in finding students who need differentiated services beyond the norm.

A comparison of these figures by level of schooling suggests that more elementary parents are both familiar with and in favor of the current identification process in respect to its fairness than parents at any other level, although positive responses are relatively high across levels. Only at middle school level was there a plurality of parents who found the process unfair in respect to finding students in need of differentiated TAG instruction (35%). Since little or no identification occurs at middle or high school levels, it is unusual that such a high percentage of parents would remember the process well enough to rate it in this way.

Program comparisons by domains of service

The evaluator chose to examine how parents at different levels reflected on what their child was getting from participation in the TAG program, with the caveat that different programs might influence these perceptions. The areas of social emotional development, counseling and guidance, and acceleration were probed for differences in perceptions.

In the area of social and emotional development, only 30% of high school parent respondents felt their child was receiving assistance through the TAG program while 50% felt that the program was not meeting these needs. The percentage of parents who felt the program was meeting social and emotional needs dropped to 21% at middle school level where only 34% felt that the program met their child's needs. Over half (55%) of parent respondents at the elementary level felt the program was addressing their child's social emotional development, and 57% of parents also agreed that the program was meeting their child's needs in this area.

In the area of academic, college and career counseling, TAG parents were somewhat similar in their responses across levels: 43% of parents at middle school, 51% at high school, and 60% at the elementary level felt these needs were met. The majority of parents at middle school (57%), 49% at high school, and 40% at the elementary level did not feel the needs for academic counseling and guidance were being met.

In the area of advancement for their child, 53% of parent respondents at middle school level felt the pace of instruction was an optimal match to their child's capacity to learn faster while 64% of high school parents and 70% of elementary parents felt that way. Other forms of acceleration

were less known to parents at all levels, with 61% at elementary level not knowing, while 48% at middle school did not know, and 41% at high school.

It would appear from these data that more work needs to be done in respect to the services provided for social and emotional development of TAG students at the secondary level, both middle and high school. Moreover, the data suggest that the acceleration policy in the division, recently revised, needs to be broad enough to cover the myriad of possibilities for acceleration practices, from fast-paced instruction in the classroom to content and grade level acceleration. It would also appear critical, based on these data, that parents be informed about this policy in an overt manner.

Grouping comparisons

The differences among levels of schooling also reflect different patterns of grouping. Table 3.6 reflects the percentage of parents selecting a positive response to agreement with the types of grouping offered, based on their child's level and program.

Table 3.6
Parental Agreement with Grouping Model Employed in the Program

Level	Program	Grouping	Parental Responses		
			Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
High school	Honors, AP, DE	Open enrollment; elective choices	42%	25%	32%
Middle school	Honors	Open enrollment with some TAG clusters	34%	37%	29%
Elementary*	TAG. Math/Reading	Pull-out services Special class	58%	12%	30%
	DEP	Regular classroom clusters			
	Young Scholars	Clustered in regular classroom	68%	32%	

* Breakdowns by program at the elementary level (except YS) were not available.

The table reflects parental agreement levels for the TAG grouping model at the elementary, middle and high school levels. The elementary responses from parents of students in programs at that level appeared to be positive for 58% while 30% did not know and 12% disagreed. Young Scholar parents appeared satisfied with the cluster grouping their child has been a part of at the grades 1-3 levels but more satisfied with the summer program in which they participated as a special group.

These data suggest that the majority of parents at the elementary level agree with the grouping model employed for TAG students. At the middle school and high school level, the majority of parents either disagree or don't know the grouping model used. The lack of awareness of many parents at all levels about the nature and structure of their child's program, ranging from 29-32% on the grouping question, also suggests the need for a review of the dissemination channels that are provided for parental information and discussion.

Curriculum comparisons

Parental responses related to nine curriculum goals were fairly consistent across school levels. Parental familiarity with the TAG program goals ranged from 61%-67% across the three levels of schooling. Regarding advanced academic growth in content areas, the responses from elementary and high school parents were quite similar, separated by only two points (71-73%). At the middle school level, 50% of parents agreed that their child was receiving advanced content learning.

Asked about goals for higher level thinking, 81% of parents of high school students agreed that these goals were being addressed; as did 36% of middle school parents, and 77% of elementary parents. In respect to teaching for conceptual understanding, high school and elementary parents again showed strong agreement, with 78% of parents at the high school and 71% at the elementary level agreeing. In contrast, only 54% of middle school parents so responded. To the question on healthy attitudes toward learning and achievement, 73% of high school parents agreed, as did 55% of middle school parents, and 76% of elementary parents.

Other TAG program skill sets received a similar disparity of parental responses, with the middle school parents rating the addressing of the TAG goals to a lesser extent than all other grade levels by sizable percentages (15-30%). For each question, fewer than half of TAG parents at middle school saw any of the nine goals being addressed. In the rating of disagreement with the goals, more middle school parents disagreed or disagreed strongly than did parents at elementary or high school. Few differences existed between elementary and middle school parents in responding to the category "I don't know", with 20-25% typically indicating this response. High school responses ranged from 10-20% on this response choice.

The responses on the curriculum goals suggest a disparity between how parents at middle school level perceive the program to be working and how parents of elementary and high school do.

Challenge level of the program by level and subject area

Perceptions of the overall challenge level of the program was highest at the high school level, perhaps due to the fact that two-thirds of the coursework offered is at the level of college coursework (personal conversation with school liaison). Parental responses at the high school level were at 71% agreement that the challenge level was sufficient for their child. Again, only 47% of middle school parents felt that way while 64% of elementary parents did.

Examining individual subject areas allows us to see the variations in perceptions of challenge by level. Table 3.7 shows the level of parental agreement with the challenge level afforded by the TAG programs in each of the four core areas: ELA, math, science, and social studies. It also allows us to see how much more agreement there was related to program challenge by high school parents.

Table 3.7
Parental Perceptions of Challenge by Level and Subject

Level	Subject	Parental Responses		
		Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Elementary	ELA	52%	13%	35%
	Math	51%	13%	35%
	Science	13%	10%	77%
	Social studies	14%	8%	78%
Middle	ELA	42%	47%	11%
	Math	78%	14%	8%
	Science	36%	30%	34%
	Social studies	38%	23%	39%
High	ELA	67%	22%	10%
	Math	83%	14%	3%
	Science	66%	17%	17%
	Social studies	78%	7%	15%

As the table demonstrates, the challenge of TAG content-based courses is highest across all subjects at the high school level and highest in mathematics as an individual subject area at both middle and high. The most challenging content area was ELA at elementary level, rated 52%. Large percentages of parents at both elementary and middle school levels indicated that they did not know about the level of challenge in either social studies or science, probably due to the lack of identification of TAG students in these two subjects. The comparisons here speak to grade level distinctions, but also subject area distinctions of note, given the organizational structure of the program.

The analysis of this section of the survey highlights the issue of the under-identification of students for TAG science and social studies at elementary and middle school levels. While many of these students find their niche courses in these areas in high school, early

preparation is a crucial part of the development of talent in those areas, according to best practice.

Communication

While positive agreement was noted for the majority of parents at all levels regarding effective communication with their child's teacher (61-67%), the responses regarding the communication between the school administration and the parents about the program were rated as much less effective. Only 27-29% of parents at middle and high school felt the communication was effective. At the elementary level, the response rate for effectiveness was higher: 50% rated it effective.

The split in effective communication to TAG parents along elementary and secondary lines may be related to the differences in the programs and organizational structures involved. However, it could be due to poor communication as well. The need for more effective building-based communication from the administration to parents seems warranted.

Overall benefits of the program

In comparing across the three levels of the program in respect to benefits, there was a strong consonance. The first choice for all three groups of parents was "developing critical thinking skills", followed by "having challenging and advanced course work". For both secondary groups of parent respondents, the third choice was also the same: "having opportunities to accelerate". For elementary parents, there was a variation with their favoring "developing creative thinking skills" as their third-choice benefit.

Program changes

In comparing the parental responses across the three levels in respect to program changes, again the secondary responses were in accord as to 1) improvement in instruction followed by 2) teacher preparation to work with TAG students and 3) the curriculum. For elementary parents, the top three areas for change were the following: 1) identification, 2) peer interaction, and 3) assessment**.**

The differences noted for parents at the elementary level make sense when considering the program models at work. Concerns about peer interaction, for example, would be felt most acutely by grade 1-3 GIA parents who see that their children may have no peers in their classroom and who are expected to complete independent projects with little teacher oversight or guidance. Because these parents are closest to the levels at which identification occurs, they are in a position to be aware of the identification issues in respect to timely communication and placement. Moreover, these parents may also feel the pressures around the SOL testing as an interference with TAG curriculum delivery.

Findings from the parent survey

The results of the parent survey overall suggest the following:

1) **The ACPS parents of TAG students who responded to the survey were not very well-informed about their child's specific TAG program, its goals and outcomes. For each question related to goals and outcomes, about a third indicated they did not know. Consequently, these parents were not in a situation to make informed judgments about what the program actually provides.**

2) **Parents seemed to be supportive of the content base of the program in language arts and math at the elementary level (grades 4 and 5). However, a large percentage (77-78%) of elementary parents indicated that their child was not receiving services in the science or social studies areas. At middle school level, parents reported 34-39% of students were not receiving services in these areas. Whenever TAG students were receiving services, parents were generally satisfied. It was the lack of services, not the nature of them, that caused the greatest dissatisfaction.**

3) **The parents seemed to resonate to the benefits of having their child in a gifted program from the vantage point of higher level skills being learned and opportunities for advanced learning and acceleration. Social and emotional learning was not as highly marked as a benefit.**

4) **The parent respondents seemed only mildly interested in having the program improved, perhaps stemming from knowing so little about its actual intended structure.**

5) **There is a strong need for more communication to TAG parents about their child's program, its goals and outcomes, and how it is structured. Data would suggest that the school should take more responsibility for such communication, beginning with the school-based administration.**

A sub-analysis by elementary, middle, and high school levels yielded other findings worthy of commentary:

1) **There is a disparity in parental satisfaction with the TAG program, based on the level and type of program in which the child was being served, with the highest satisfaction being at the elementary level and the lowest at the middle school level, with less than half of parents agreeing with the grouping model employed and the degree of challenge in the program overall and even fewer agreeing that the challenge level was high in specific subjects.**

2) **Strong parental disagreement was noted at secondary levels (both middle and high) in respect to the provision of services in the areas of social emotional development and academic counseling opportunities with services specific for TAG students.**

3) **Program improvements cited by secondary parents stressed the need for the quality of instruction to improve and for professional development to remedy it while elementary parents emphasized the need for improvement in the identification system and peer interaction of TAG students with each other. This finding verifies that program changes may need to be considered by program type and the level at which the services are provided rather than "across the board" approaches.**

Results of Student Benefit Survey

Student benefit survey responses were completed by 127 students while in focus groups at their school site. Many of the students in each group of 10-14 had been in the program since early elementary school and were now in 5th (N=80), 8th (N=35), or 12th grade (N=12) respectively. Students were instructed to comment on the questions as they considered their experiences across years in the program, mark their responses and turn in the form. No discussion of this survey was conducted with the students. Table 3.8 reflects the number of years student focus group members have been in the TAG program.

Table 3.8
Overall Breakdown of "Number of Years in Gifted Program"
(N = 127)

Years in Program	0 (Not Indicated)	1	2	3	4	4+ (4 or More Years)	Total
Overall #	4 (3%)	17 (14%)	32 (25%)	26 (20%)	16 (13%)	32 (25%)	**127**
Elementary School (5th grade)	4 (5%)	15 (18.75%)	32 (40%)	16 (20%)	8 (10%)	5 (6.25%)	**80**
Middle School (8th grade)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (29%)	8 (22%)	17 (49%)	**35**
High School # (12th grade)	0 (0%)	2 (17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (83%)	**12**

Analysis of the questions on the Student Benefit Survey was accomplished by collapsing the first two categories of responses and the last two categories to get a dichotomous view of responses. Thus, we were able to collapse "strongly agree" with "agree" and "disagree" with "strongly disagree". Frequencies and percentages of responses were computed for each item on the scale, which ranged from "to a great extent" to "not at all".

Overall, students were quite enthusiastic about the benefits they have accrued from being in the TAG program over several years. Most of them cited the major benefits of the program to be well-aligned to the overall goals of the program and beyond.
Most of the students (over 90%) saw the major benefits of the program to be in the following areas: higher level thinking skill development, research skills, creative thinking, understanding new concepts and ideas, ways to learn, and communication skills. A full 88% saw it as a route to

accessing acceleration. Students also cited "working with others" (89%), and "reflecting on my learning" (90%) as other benefits of the program.

In respect to regular classroom opportunities to benefit from advanced learning, 71% said they had acceleration opportunities through the regular classroom while 29% said they did not. In comparing the challenge of TAG to the regular classroom, 88% said that TAG was challenging while only 25% found regular classroom work challenging. A full 75% of TAG students did not find the regular classroom challenging. These data, however, do suggest that the TAG students surveyed believe they are learning important skills and concepts in the gifted program. Mean scores on aspects of TAG program benefits range from 3.28 to 3.61, while mean scores related to benefits in the regular program range from 1.94 to 2.98. These differences demonstrate TAG students' perceptions regarding comparative benefits from each program placement. Table 3.9 shows the overall survey tallies. Appendix F provides the breakdown by elementary, middle, and high school responses.

Table 3.9
Student Questions on the Benefits of the Gifted Program (N=127)

Item	Strongly Agree 4	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	I Don't Know 0	Means
1. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my higher-level thinking skills.	*80* (63%)	*45* (35%)	*2* (2%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.61**
2. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my research skills.	*56* (44%)	*63* (50%)	*8* (6%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.38**
3. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my communication (speaking and writing) skills.	*65* (52%)	*50* (39%)	*8* (6%)	*3* (2%)	*1* (1%)	**3.38**
4. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my creative thinking skills.	*70* (56%)	*46* (36%)	*5* (4%)	*3* (2%)	*3* (2%)	**3.39**
5. Opportunities are given to accelerate (go faster) in my gifted or advanced classes.	*73* (57%)	*39* (31%)	*12* (9%)	*1* (1%)	*2* (2%)	**3.42**
6. Opportunities are given to accelerate (go faster) in my regular classes.	*37* (29%)	*53* (42%)	*34* (27%)	*3* (2%)	*0* (0%)	**2.98**
7. The gifted class work or advanced class work is challenging.	*44* (35%)	*68* (53%)	*13* (10%)	*1* (1%)	*1* (1%)	**3.20**
8. The gifted class work or advanced class work is boring	*5* (4%)	*13* (10%)	*65* (51%)	*42* (33%)	*2* (2%)	**1.82**
9. The regular class work is challenging	*5* (5%)	*26* (20%)	*53* (42%)	*43* (33%)	*0* (0%)	**1.94**
10. The regular class work is boring	*17* (13%)	*37* (29%)	*53* (42%)	*18* (14%)	*2* (2%)	**2.39**
11. Being in the gifted and talented program helps me try different ways to learn.	*68* (53%)	*50* (39%)	*7* (6%)	*2* (2%)	*0* (0%)	**3.45**
12. Being in the gifted and talented program helps me understand new ideas and concepts.	*78* (62%)	*42* (33%)	*4* (3%)	*2* (2%)	*0* (0%)	**3.53**
13. Being in the TAG Program helps me learn to work with others.	*52* (41%)	*62* (48%)	*11* (9%)	*1* (1%)	*1* (1%)	**3.28**
14. Being in the TAG Program helps me reflect on my learning	*57* (45%)	*57* (45%)	*8* (6%)	*3* (2%)	*2* (2%)	**3.29**

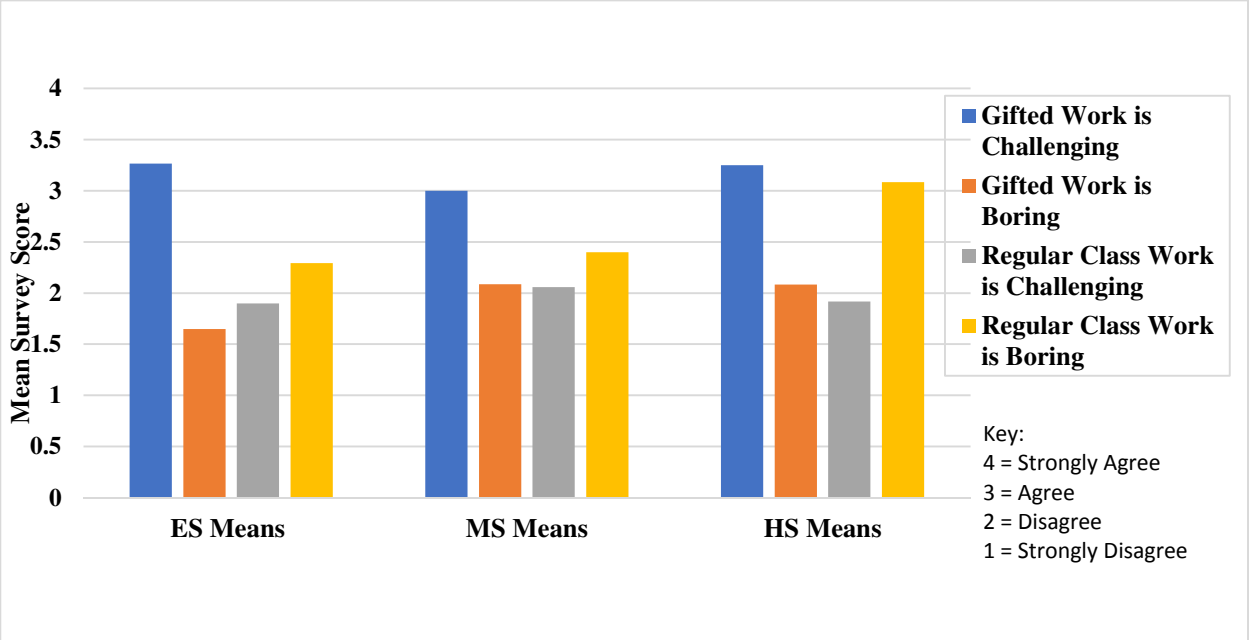
Analysis of means for the student benefit survey

As can be seen from the frequency and percentage analysis, students rated their benefits from the program over the years they have participated in it as very high. On a scale of 1-4, all ratings that specifically address the TAG program benefit issue were rated at 3.0-3.6, including the question related to the overall challenge of the gifted program, rated at 3.2. These ratings

indicate that students saw the benefits of being in the program as helpful in developing higher level skills and gaining access to advanced opportunities. When asked to comment on whether the regular classwork was boring, students responded at the 2.4 level, tending toward agreement with the statement more than not. When asked about whether the regular class work was challenging, they were more decisive in rating it less challenging (1.8).

The perception of the degree of challenge or boredom found in regular versus gifted classes may be seen more clearly in Figure 3.1 where the four questions (7-10) are broken down by schooling levels. The highest degree of challenge is perceived to be at the elementary level, followed by high school, with middle school rated the least challenging in respect to gifted work. Elementary students rated the gifted work as boring to a lesser degree than their counterparts at middle and high school. Regular class work was perceived to be less challenging and more boring for gifted students at all levels, the most so at high school.

Figure 3.1
Student Perception of Classwork as Challenging/Boring
by Grade Levels



Findings from the student benefit survey

1) **These data on student benefits suggest that the TAG students selected randomly for focus group participation believe they are learning important skills and concepts in the gifted program.**

2) **The items on the benefits scale which students rated as being beneficial to them correspond well to TAG program goals in ACPS, suggesting a strong correspondence between NAGC best practice gifted program goals and ACPS students' belief that those goals are being addressed in their program.**

3) **The disparity between TAG student perceptions of the challenge level of the regular and the gifted program further suggests that the pedagogy and the content employed in the TAG program appear to be well-suited to the needs of TAG students responding and that it is different from the regular classroom in important ways that stimulate and challenge the TAG learner.**

4) **The results also suggest that there was little difference registered by TAG students on the relative benefit of the program at different levels of schooling. Elementary and high school levels perceived the gifted program as somewhat equally challenging while middle school was rated slightly lower in challenge level.**

Results of the Staff Survey

A total of 368 surveys regarding the TAG program were returned from staff members out of more than 1255 that were sent out to instructional staff, denoting a rate of return at 29%. As with the parent surveys, the rate of return is too small to make valid inferences about total staff perceptions, only to those completing the survey.

Demographics

Over half of the respondents were from the elementary level (60%) while 15% represented middle school, and 18%, high school. Central office responses represented 6.5% of the total. The roles of those responding to the survey varied considerably from Central Office and building administrators to teachers in the specialty areas of English Language Learners and Pupil Personnel Services. In fact, 61% of the respondents were classroom teachers who were not designated to be teachers of TAG or related programs like honors, AP, or DE who numbered 16% of respondents. Eleven per cent of the respondents were administrators, 7% pupil personnel service personnel, and 13% Other.

The areas of teaching for those respondents who had a teaching assignment were in the core content areas, for the most part, with 63% teaching ELA, 56%, math, 44%, science, and 47%, social studies. "Other" was declared by another 16% of the respondents.

In respect to years of teaching, the respondents had a veteran's record, for the most part, with 83% having more than five years of experience while only 17% had fewer than 5 years. Twenty-

one per cent of the group had more than 20 years of experience teaching; 41% had 11-20 years; and 21% had between 6-10 years.

Background and professional development in gifted education

In respect to background in gifted education, the respondents could only choose one option, and they were to select the highest level of training acquired. The largest number of respondents cited that they had attended professional development workshops (N=177, 48%) while 79 (22%) indicated they had no background in gifted education. The efforts to provide more opportunities in this area appear to be increasing slowly in respect to formal coursework, with 10% (N=36) having taken one course, and 7% (N=27) having taken the 12 hours required for endorsement. Another 27 were moving toward endorsement with six hours of coursework to date. Fourteen staff members had coursework beyond the endorsement level, and seven held a master's degree or higher in gifted education.

The degree to which the ACPS staff is trained in gifted education appears limited, based on NAGC standard recommendations for 12 university hours. The APCS decision to have all middle school teachers in the core curriculum teach at least one honors section renders all of them teachers of the gifted and therefore needing appropriate training and preparation (Conversations with building administrators and TAG Coordinator). This forced choice for professional development may be partially at work in the low ratings given for the professional development services. It also could be the type of service teachers chose; school-based opportunities may not be as effective as others provided by the division that are more targeted and ongoing. Only 11 teachers at grades 6-8 responded to the question regarding the extent of training.

As with all school divisions in Virginia, training in gifted education is not mandated by the state. However, many divisions have moved toward getting teachers who work with TAG students (even in one course) endorsed in this area, including honors and AP teachers at the secondary level. National standards call for 12 hours of coursework to meet the standard for the preparation of teachers at the highest level. Since the survey only asked teachers to comment on their experiences with professional development within the last year, we may not be examining a broad enough picture of work completed. It also may be that teachers are currently enrolled in opportunities for professional development that did not appear on the survey.

Questions 25-28 probed further the nature of professional development that respondents received in the past year as well as the clock hours accrued. They were also asked to rate these experiences and to indicate other types of professional development they had experienced in TAG over the past two years.

In respect to types of professional development received in the past year, most respondents noted that they had had none (60%) while 21% had experienced one, 8% twice, 9% monthly, and 2% quarterly. The quality of the professional development was rated as excellent by 10 participants (3%), as very good by 30 participants (10%), and good by 77 participants (26%). The lower ratings were given by 89 participants who rated the professional development as fair (30%) and as poor by 94 participants (31%). Over the past two years, 66% of respondents had not

participated in a TAG professional development session. Workshops and courses online and in-state workshops each accounted for 8%. In-state conferences had been attended by 6% and national conferences, by 5%.

Identification

The next section of the survey dealt with the issue of identification, often the most contentious aspect of program development in gifted education. Of the staff responding to the questionnaire, 64% indicated that they understood the identification process in ACPS while 36% did not.

Regarding the extent to which staff members who were familiar with the identification process felt the process was fair and effective for finding those students in need of TAG services, 46% agreed while 54% disagreed. Probing the issue of identification further, 33% of those familiar with it felt the division was effective in finding underrepresented student populations while 67% disagreed with this statement. Respondents further identified those groups they felt were underrepresented by the program. At the top of the list and in descending order were the following: EL students (71%), minority students (66%), students from poverty (63%), underachievers (49%), and twice exceptional students (45%).

The majority of these staff respondents found the identification process to be unfair and ineffective, especially in respect to finding underrepresented groups of students. Their perception of the groups of underrepresented students in the program includes all groups that are frequently noted as underrepresented in gifted programs nationally.

Assessment data from the Department of Accountability across three years suggest that the underrepresentation of minority populations has been a long-standing problem in ACPS as it has been in most school systems nationally. Data over the past three years suggest that only small improvements on finding more of these groups have been made through the current identification system (Department of Accountability Report, 2014-16). Many of the facets of the identification system, however, do align with best practice, and the annual goal for increasing representation has been met for Hispanics this past year and remained stable over the last three years for other groups. Fewer students from poverty, however, have been identified during the past year.

Program goals and objectives

In order to judge the efficacy of a program, it is essential to know what that program is trying to accomplish. Thus, knowing the goals of the gifted program is critical in making judgments about its success. Only 54% of the staff respondents to this survey agreed that they were familiar with the TAG goals and objectives, while 35% indicated they were not familiar with the goals. Another 11% stated that they did not know.

The next three questions queried staff about basic provisions for gifted students through the TAG program in ACPS. They were asked if they agreed or disagreed with statements about opportunities for accelerated, differentiated and collaborative peer learning.

In respect to differentiated learning, 62% felt that it was available to TAG students while 20% disagreed and 18% did not know. In respect to accelerated learning opportunities, 77% believed

these opportunities were available to TAG learners while 12% did not and another 12% did not know. Finally, in respect to intellectual collaboration, 78% agreed that these opportunities were available while 8% did not, and 18% did not know.

A strong majority of staff (62-78%) perceive that the three core aspects of gifted education—differentiated curriculum, accelerated learning, and intellectual peerage—are provided in the Alexandria City School Division.

In a related section of the questionnaire, staff members were asked to agree or disagree with statements about the teachers at their school who were working with TAG students in respect to the goals being addressed in the classroom.

Each of the goals is listed in Table 3.10, with an indication of whether or not respondents felt that the goal was being addressed by the TAG program. A strong 63-74% of staff felt all but one of the goals was being addressed by teachers in the program. Seventy percent felt that critical and creative thinking, conceptual understanding, real world problem-solving, and product development were going on in the program. While 57% of respondents thought that self-understanding was being addressed by teachers in the program, 31% indicated they did not know if it was, and 12% thought that it was not.

Table 3.10
Staff Perception of TAG Program Goal Implementation

Program Goals	SA/Agree	Disagree/SD	Don't Know
Critical and creative thinking	73%	10%	18%
Conceptual understanding	70%	09%	21%
Advanced academic growth	68%	10%	23%
Achievement and learning	67%	11%	22%
Social skills and collaboration	66%	12%	21%
Research skills	65%	12%	24%
Advanced communication skills	63%	13%	25%
Real world problem-solving skills and products	63%	14%	22%
Self-directed learning	63%	12%	25%
Self-understanding	57%	12%	31%

On the question related to the overall sufficiency of the challenge of the program, staff members were divided in their perceptions, with 48% feeling that it was adequately challenging, 21% feeling that it was not, and 31% not knowing. (This contrasts with parent survey responses where 60% of the respondents found the TAG program sufficiently challenging.)

Nevertheless, there was strong congruence in the perceptions of staff that the TAG program was addressing the appropriate goals expected of gifted programs. Over half of the group agreed that the goal statements listed were being addressed with TAG students in classrooms at their school. Only a quarter of staff members indicated that they were not informed about TAG goals. Only a small percentage of staff disagreed with the goal statements, typically from 9-14%.

The results from this section of the questionnaire suggest a staff not fully informed about the program but generally in agreement with its intentions and current direction.

Program components

The approach taken to provide for gifted learners in a school system needs to include a focus on acceleration, opportunities for advanced learning by subject, by grade level, and by level of schooling (see Assouline, Colangelo, & VanTassel-Baska, 2015). Moreover, gifted learners need opportunities to collaborate on projects and other learning skill sets; thus, different forms of grouping are necessary to effect that goal. The next two questions on the survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which these opportunities were provided to TAG students in ACPS.

In respect to acceleration opportunities, staff seemed divided in their perceptions about the presence of such opportunities. Forty-one percent of the staff respondents indicated that they knew that the program offered opportunities such as grade skipping and early graduation while 19% indicated disagreement with the statement. A large plurality (40%) indicated they did not know.

In respect to the grouping model employed, there was almost an even split across the three options for response, with 35% of staff agreeing that it was appropriate while 30% disagreed. A large plurality of 35% did not know.

Program effectiveness

The question asking that staff comment on the criteria for judging effectiveness yielded interesting results. Over 52% of staff noted that they judge efficacy on the basis of the challenging curriculum being used and the products that students develop. Over 43% of them rely on the commentary heard from fellow educators, including administrators. For 32%, it is the feedback from students that they use for judgment. Only 34% use test scores as a basis for their judgment. Still fewer rely on program reports (11%). Up to three multiple answers per participant were possible.

Twelve percent of staff (N=44) also replied to this question in open-ended commentary, citing a wide variety of issues related to the program, and reiterating much of what was already noted in the more close-ended responses. A plurality (20%) mentioned again concerns about communication with the program at the school level in respect to its structure and outcomes.

It appears that staff members have a much stronger basis and more data sources to judge the program than do parents. They have familiarity with the curriculum being used, they have access to student work routinely, and they have feedback sources that are far more

regular. This may account for their being more critical of the operational aspects of the program than parents.

In respect to communication to parents, the staff respondents were split on both questions, with 36% and 42% respectively indicating they did not know. The distinction between the two questions was related to how effective communication was regarding identification versus other aspects of the program. For those who did know, 34% and 39% found themselves agreeing that the communication was effective while 30% and 29% felt that it was not. The differences in the responses to the two questions appeared negligible.

Benefits to TAG students

Staff members were also asked, as were parents, to rate the top three benefits to TAG students of being in the program. Over 68% of staff ranked higher level thinking as the number one benefit of the program, followed by creative thinking (44%), and doing advanced work (42%). Thirty six percent also listed opportunities for acceleration as a key benefit. Other benefits selected were: trying different ways to learn (21%), learning to reflect on one's own learning (20%), communication skills (15%), new ideas and concepts (15%), research skills (14%), and working with others (12%). Table 3.11 provides the complete list of perceived benefits in descending order.

Table 3.11
TAG Program Benefits as Perceived by Staff

Benefits	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Developing higher level thinking skills	237	68%
Developing creative thinking skills	153	44%
Having challenging TAG or advanced class work	145	42%
Having opportunities to accelerate in TAG or advanced classes	126	36%
Trying different ways to learn	74	21%
Learning to reflect on the own learning	68	20%
Developing communication (speaking and writing) skills	53	15%
Understanding new ideas and concepts	52	15%
Developing research skills	49	14%
Learning to work with others	42	12%

Administrative support

One of the key aspects of ensuring that TAG services work is to have effective leadership at both school and division levels (see VanTassel-Baska & Little, 2017; Johnsen, 2012). Thus, a cluster of four questions were asked of staff about the effectiveness and nature of administrative support available at both levels of the program.

The clear majority of staff respondents agree (74%) that the TAG program receives appropriate administrative support at the school level while 26% do not agree with that contention. Examples of such support cited were, in descending order: TAG processes and procedures (56%), professional development (27%), additional resources for the program (25%), and additional funding (15%). Other examples were also noted in the open-ended aspect of this question, but did not reach the plurality level of response.

The same clear majority of staff respondents agreed (74%) that division level administrative support has been forthcoming, while 27% do not agree with that statement. Sources of support most cited from the division level were, in descending order: administrative reports (45%), need-based professional development (42%), additional resources (27%), and additional funding support. Other sources were also cited in the open-ended portion of the question, but did not reach the level of themes.

Program change

The staff perceptions of needed program changes were quite different from those of parents. Over 70% of staff included the identification process as one of the top three areas for change. Almost half of the respondents also selected teacher preparation and professional development as an area for change. On a third area selected for change, they agreed with parents that gifted students needed more opportunities for peer interaction (28%). Over 20% of staff also felt that the goals and objectives of the program, its curriculum and its instruction, could benefit from change. Less than 20% of staff felt that either assessment or materials and texts needed changing. Table 3.12 portrays the list of suggested areas for change in descending order.

Table 3.12
TAG Program Staff Recommendations for Change

Recommendations for Change	Number of Responses	% of Responses
The identification process	242	71%
Teacher preparation and professional development	167	49%
Greater opportunities for gifted peer interaction	95	28%
Instruction (how it is taught)	86	25%
Curriculum (what is taught)	79	23%
Goals and beneficial outcomes	70	21%
Assessment (how it is evaluated for student learning)	65	19%
Materials and textbooks	40	12%

Sub analysis of administrator responses

A sub-analysis of responses from administrators who took the survey was conducted on key questions of interest to which they may have responded differently from other staff members. Therefore, only a few comparisons were made between the two groups where there was divergence in responses.

Forty-one administrators responded to the survey. Fifteen percent of them had no background in gifted education while 85% had participated in at least a professional development workshop.

In respect to identification of TAG students, 24% of administrators said they did not understand the process. Of those who understood the process, 27% found it to be unfair while 73% found it to be fair in finding students who needed special services. On the issue of underrepresented groups, administrators split: 47% felt the system was fair while 53% suggested that the identification system was unfair to such groups. The administrators identified the groups treated unfairly in the identification process in the following order: minority students (81%), students from poverty (76%), EL students (73%), underachieving students (51%), and twice-exceptional students (37%).

Of the administrators responding, 73% were familiar with the goals of the TAG program while 20% were not familiar. Twenty-two percent did not believe or know that TAG students were learning a differentiated curriculum. Higher percentages did not believe the program addressed advanced academic growth or experience with real world products and ideas. Thirty-two percent disagreed or didn't know if the TAG program was sufficiently challenging. Eight (20 %) did not know if the program promoted healthy attitudes toward achievement and learning. Ninety-three

percent of administrators knew that acceleration beyond the classroom was possible. Also, 33% of the group disagreed with the grouping models used in the program.

The administrators listed their top three benefits of the TAG program to be the same as the overall group of staff who had responded to the survey: developing higher level skills, being challenged, having advanced work, and developing creative thinking. Their recommended areas for change were also similar to the rest of staff responses. Administrators recommended that changes should occur in the following areas: identification (69%), instruction (46%), and teacher preparation/professional development (44%).

Findings from the staff survey

1) **Responses suggested that a quarter of the staff were somewhat unfamiliar with the workings of the TAG program. Many administrators, who technically oversee the program at the level of school or content area, also seemed to lack familiarity with the identification process and goal structure. A majority of staff, including administrators, found the identification process ineffective in finding students from underrepresented groups.**

2) **Staff judged the quality of the program through evidence of challenging differentiated curriculum being used and student project work and products.**

3) **More professional development for teachers in gifted education is needed as documented by the level of professional development currently attained compared to national standards and division expectations for providing services to TAG students, especially at the middle school level.**

4) **A statement of staff perceptions about the professional development program sums up many staff members' views: "There is no mandatory set of experiences that teachers must go through if they are to work with TAG learners nor is there a clear set of expectations as to what TAG teachers must do to meet standards for being an effective TAG teacher."**

5) **Staff members were divided in their perceptions of the challenge level in the program and on the grouping model employed. It is difficult to discern from the survey data why there were such discrepancies on these two critical questions.**

Comparative Analysis of Parent and Staff Survey Responses

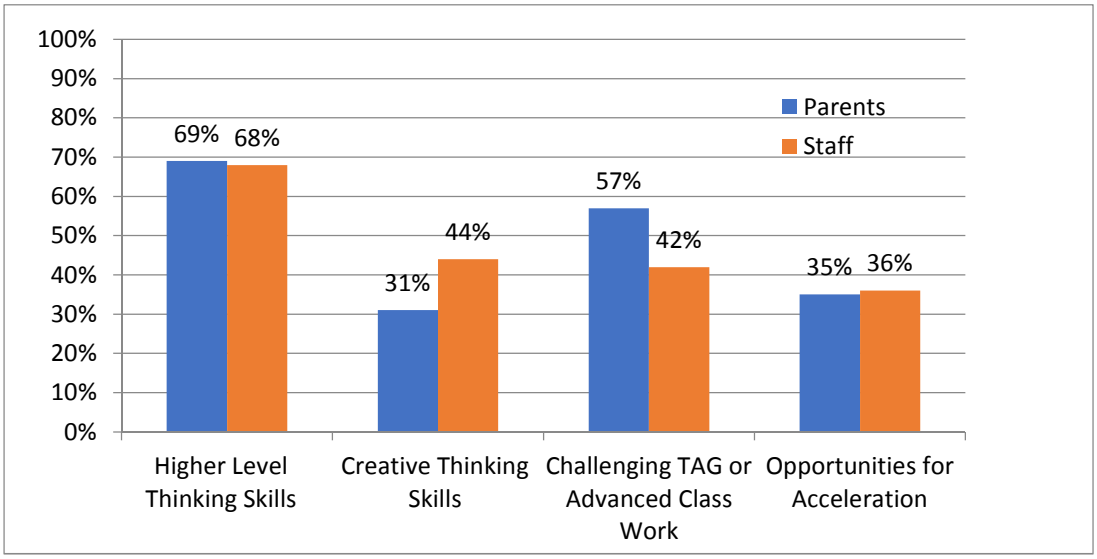
Table 3.13 shows the congruity between parents and staff on the benefits of the TAG program for students better than any other question. The highest ranked benefit was developing higher level skills, cited by 68% and 69% of parents and staff respectively. Having challenging and advanced work was the second highest rated benefit by both groups as well, with 57% of parents rating it high and 42% of staff doing so. Having access to

acceleration and advanced classes was perceived to be a strong benefit by 35% of parents and 34% of staff. The last comparison of interest was regarding the development of creative skills, valued by 31% of parents as a benefit and 44% of staff. Figure 3.2 depicts graphically this congruence between the two groups. Student perceptions of benefit were rated much higher than either adult stakeholder group.

Table 3.13
Comparison of Parent and Staff Responses on Student Benefits

Perceptions of Benefits	Parents # (%)	Staff # (%)
Developing higher level thinking skills	353 (69%)	237 (68%)
Developing creative thinking skills	161 (31%)	153(44%)
Having challenging TAG or advanced class work	296 (57%)	145 (42%)
Having opportunities to accelerate in TAG or advanced classes	182 (35%)	126 (36%)

Figure 3.2
Comparison of Parent and Staff Perception of TAG Program Benefits



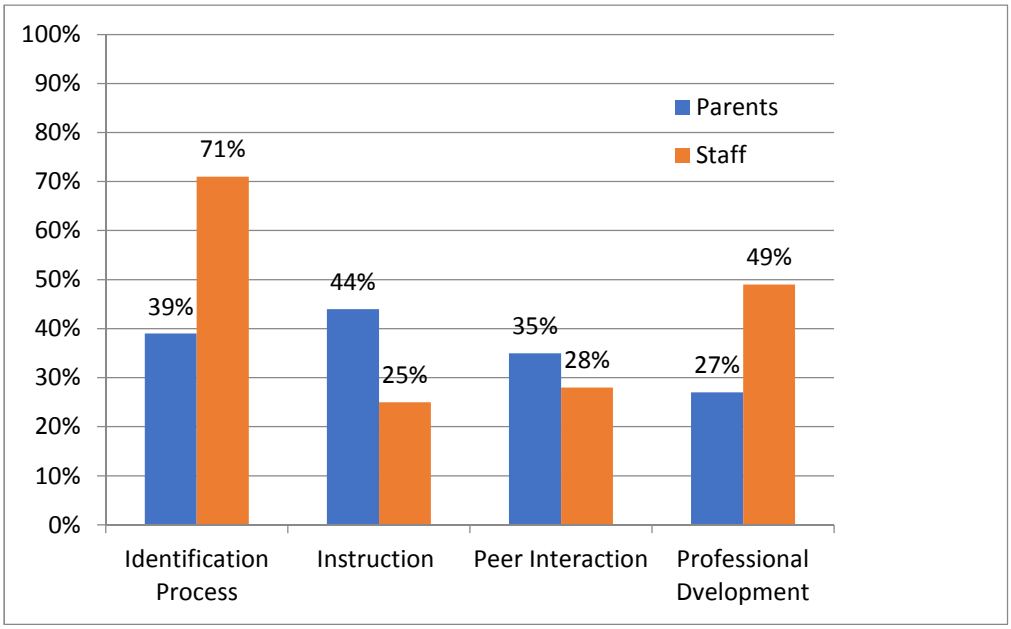
In regard to recommending areas for program change, the two groups again converged in most areas. The convergence was not as strong as on the benefits question, but still the areas were similar, although the rankings were somewhat different as might be expected given the earlier commentary. The most frequently selected recommendation for change, coming from the parent respondents, was in the area of instruction (44%). Staff, on the other hand, recommended changes to the identification process (71%) that allowed for greater representation of EL, minority and low-income students. The second most frequently rated item for staff in respect to change was in the need for teacher training/professional development (49%) while parents saw

the need for improvements to the identification system as their second most frequently reported priority (39%). The third area for change that was highly rated by parents was the need for greater interaction among gifted learners to be provided (35%). This was also the third highest priority noted by staff (28%). Table 3.14 portrays these comparisons in frequencies and percentages while Figure 3.3 portrays them graphically.

Table 3.14
Comparison of Parent and Staff Responses
on the Top Areas of Recommendations for Change

Recommendations for Change	Parents # (%)	Staff # (%)
The identification process	186 (39%)	242(71%)
Instruction (how it is taught)	210 (44%)	86 (25%)
Greater opportunities for gifted peer interaction	168 (35%)	95 (28%)
Teacher preparation and professional development	128 (27%)	167 (49%)

Figure 3.3
Comparison of Parent and Staff Responses
on Recommendations for Change



Findings from the comparative analysis of parent and staff surveys

1) **There was congruence across both parent and staff respondents on the effectiveness of the TAG program goal structure and challenge level of the program although major differences emerged as well, especially in respect to identification and grouping.**

2) **The identification process was judged to be ineffective by fewer than 25% of parents while 54% of staff who were familiar with the process found it ineffective. Parents commented that the process was cumbersome and lengthy while staff found the process to be unfair in respect to finding underrepresented populations. Nineteen percent of parents and 36% of staff did not understand the process.**

3) **While there was a difference between the parent and staff groups regarding knowledge of the identification process and the goals of the program, favoring staff, the respondents from both groups indicated strong agreement with the goal emphasis of the program. Both groups felt that aspects of the program were sufficiently challenging although close to 21% of staff did not find it so.**

4) **In regard to grouping, about half of the parent respondents were content with the nature of the grouping model their child was experiencing while close to a third (31%) of staff felt that the grouping model was inappropriate. Again, as with other aspects of the program, about 30% of parents did not know how to comment on the item.**

5) **Also, it should be noted that 48% of staff found the TAG program to be sufficiently challenging while 60% of parents found the program challenging. However, a fairly large percentage of staff indicated they did not know (31%), while 12% of parents indicated lack of knowledge on this item.**

Conclusion

The results from collecting survey data from 29% of staff and 28.4 % of parents of TAG students suggest that those who responded felt strongly about the nature of the TAG program, especially in the areas of identification, grouping, professional development, and instruction. These perceptual data, however, may not be used for making inferences to the total population of either staff or TAG parents.

Data have revealed a picture of uneven effectiveness in respect to the TAG program, especially regarding communication about the program to parents, a third of whom were unable to comment on key aspects of current operation. The survey data also suggest the need to examine the identification system and aim for improvement, a recommendation coming from both groups. Concerns also surfaced about the effectiveness of the instructional aspects of the program, suggesting the need for professional development opportunities to improve differentiated instruction. Finally, there is concern by over a quarter of staff and a third of parents to ensure more opportunities for intellectual peer interaction among TAG-identified students. Areas of greatest divergence of opinion between the two groups lay with how strongly they viewed the grouping model and its effectiveness and how they viewed the identification process.

Secondary parents viewed both benefits and areas for change differently from elementary parents. Comparisons of parent and staff responses were consonant in most areas. Student survey data on benefits echoed both staff and parent surveys in respect to the positive outcomes associated with the pervasive use of higher level thinking and advanced work by TAG teachers.

Section IV: Focus groups of Stakeholders: Parents, Students & Staff

The use of focus groups as a data source in this study allowed the evaluators to examine "up close and personal" the attitudes and perceptions of key stakeholders in the division. Focus groups provide for greater issue probing and discussion about concerns about a program, not possible through other forms of data collection. Consequently, they provide deeper insights into both problems and potential solutions for program changes (VanTassel-Baska & Feng, 2004; Stake, 1995). Stakeholder groups convened included TAG advisory committee members, parents, students, staff, and administrators. Two groups of non-TAG parents were also convened to share their views on the program. Top leadership personnel in the division were also interviewed to obtain their perspectives on the TAG program.

Research suggests that focus groups should include eight to twelve members in order to elicit high levels of participation and conversation about the relevant issues (Fern, 2001; VanTassel-Baska, 2006). These groups should also be formed to ensure that they are representative of the populations from which they have been drawn. Focus groups were organized according to randomized lists of parents of TAG students across grade levels, provided to school liaisons by the Department of Accountability. Directions were provided to confirm 14 participants, with the assumption that last minute cancellations and no shows would mean that the groups would not have fewer than eight participants. Students were selected in a similar way for participation. Purposive sampling was used for staff groups to ensure the inclusion of TAG personnel.

A set protocol was used for each group that queried them on seven questions related to the TAG program. These questions may be found in Appendix H. Interview questions, used with division leadership, paralleled the focus group protocols.

The focus group discussions were all held at school sites that had been selected for onsite visits. Each session lasted about one hour. The process involved each participant recording a response to each question on 3x5 cards supplied for the event. In addition, a facilitator tracked the discussion of each question on chart paper. All data were then collected and later entered into a computer file for analysis. Analyses were conducted by the levels of elementary, middle, and high school groups as well as by stakeholder role within each level as well as across groups within levels.

The collection of focus group data was done by the evaluators who facilitated each session. Sign in sheets were used to ensure documentation of attendance. These sign in sheets were given to the school liaison at the conclusion of each session.

The analysis of focus group data was conducted according to well-established qualitative research procedures (Stainback & Stainback, 1988; Stake, 1995; Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2014). The approach calls for an evolving constant comparison of data according to a systematic process that can be replicated. The first step used in the analysis was to look for patterns, concepts, and themes through words and phrases used by group members. The second step involved developing classification schemes to determine comparisons and relationships among the patterns and themes derived, ensuring that all perspectives were included. The third step involved selecting quotes that were representative of major themes within the data source.

Quotations selected were stated by one participant but echoed the sentiments of at least a plurality of participants. The next step in the analysis called for writing the results from each group, using the derived thematic classifications as the basis for reporting. Finally, using the individual comments and group discussion commentary as the basis for judgment, the written synthesis was reviewed by each facilitator of each focus group and checked against the original data collected on chart paper and cards to ensure comprehensiveness, verifiability, and accuracy.

Thematic findings from each type of stakeholder focus group are discussed at the conclusion of each group discussion, followed by a final set of themes that apply across all groups queried.

Interviews with Leadership Personnel

A series of interviews were conducted with the top administrators in the division and with the Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee. These interviews were used to provide context to understand how the program was viewed in the school division and areas of concern that might be voiced about its operation from groups and individuals more distal to the day to day functioning of the program.

Interviews were conducted with the Superintendent and his Chief Academic Officer and three Executive Directors in the division in order to ascertain attitudes and perspectives on the TAG program emanating from the leadership cadre in the Division. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to one hour in length.

The interviews proved to be useful to the evaluator in providing context about the central office leadership roles in the division and how they related to the TAG program. The interviews also served to validate many of the issues and concerns raised in the survey, focus group, and classroom observation data about areas of the program that needed improvement and how such improvement might be effected.

Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee

The evaluator met for two hours with the TAG Advisory Committee from ACPS. The session was divided between sharing with them the process for the evaluation, answering questions, and doing a modified focus group with them. Ten members of the Committee were present for the discussion about the effectiveness of the program. Questions selected for this group related to identification, curriculum, teachers, and areas for improvement.

Regarding identification, the Advisory Committee members were adamant that the process was not effective in its current iteration. Citing a lack of information about the process to parents, commentary centered on the need for a more comprehensive process that included more minority students and where both the voice of the teacher and parent were heard. The group also felt that criteria should be less stringent. One member noted: “The district has made concerted efforts through programs like Young Scholars, but the data still show disproportionality. We still can

do much better." One member also cited a lack of effective communication within the community as a source of the perception of the problem.

The Committee was consensual in their view that the pullout programs at grades 4 and 5 were very effective while noting that the middle school program was non-existent, employing minimal differentiation with no specific curriculum for TAG and too broad a range of learners to have TAG students accommodated. They felt strongly that not every teacher at middle school should have an honors class. One committee member noted: "The majority of teachers at the middle school have no clue as to how to teach TAG kids. There cannot be an assumption that all teachers can or want to teach TAG. Honors classes are a burden to them." Since most students were not identified for science or social studies at elementary level, these subjects were handled through a DEP, which one member found to be "a joke" in respect to noncompliance on the part of teachers, followed by learning drift on the part of students. The program for general intellectual aptitude (GIA) students at K-3 was perceived to be heavily school-dependent. Several members noted that the high school needed greater flexibility to allow for both AP and DE availability.

Committee members felt that teaching in the TAG program was only effective at grades 4 and 5, citing inconsistency at K-3 and non-existence at secondary level. Several Committee members noted that the honors program at both middle and high school was poor. One Committee member summed up by saying that: "Differentiation without assessment evidence does not work as a service model. It needs to be both purposeful and accountable."

In the areas needed for program improvement, more staffing for the program was at the top of the advisory committee list as "one person could not begin to make a dent in all the areas cited." The majority of the group called for separate honors classes for TAG students or large clusters in classes. They also called for giving students a voice in the development of their DEP to ensure motivation and engagement to follow through. They also suggested having a trained cadre of TAG teachers, not just using those who attended a few workshops, working with TAG classes. Moreover, they would like to see the Young Scholars Program at every school. A plurality also remarked on the need for consistent services at K-3. Finally, all asked for more parental involvement and transparency in the process of identification.

The evaluator also reviewed the reports of the TAG Advisory Committee to the School Board over the past four years, 2013-2017. In those reports, several of the concerns raised in the session were also noted as recommendations. Most prominent were the following recommendations to the division:

--Provide differentiation in content-based classes at grades 6-8

--Ensure that there are clusters of at least 5-6 TAG-identified students in each honors class.

--Ensure that teachers who work with TAG students at middle school levels have appropriate training.

--Provide better monitoring of the program at grades 6-8

--Establish an advanced honors class for TAG-identified students

Responses to these formal requests from the committee have been met positively by staff. Cluster groups were established where the schedule permitted. A plan to train all middle school teachers in gifted education was instituted and implemented such that all teachers have participated in at least one option offered for professional development in gifted education. However, it appears there is much drift when it comes to the actual implementation of a differentiated curriculum for TAG students at the middle school level, heavily dependent on the teacher, her attitude toward TAG students, and her pedagogical content expertise in delivering an advanced program.

Findings from the TAGAC session and review of recommendations

1) **The TAGAC appears to be well-informed about the program, its progress, and the need for making positive change in several operational variables.**

2) **The TAGAC has requested needed changes over the past four years, some of which have been embraced by staff and others met with limited response in respect to change.**

3) **The modified focus group findings from the TAGAC were consistent with those from other stakeholder groups, as an indication of neglect of TAG learners at K-3 and middle school levels, effective functioning in ELA and math at grades 4-5, and an elective set of varied options at high school.**

Parent Focus Groups

Parent focus group data were collected from parents of TAG students at eleven out of twelve of the visited school sites. A total of eleven such parent focus groups were held: seven at elementary buildings, one group at a K-8 building, two groups at middle school buildings, and one in a high school setting. The same seven question protocol was used for each group convened. A copy of that protocol may be found in Appendix H. A total of 103 parents of TAG students met with the evaluator to discuss the effectiveness of the TAG program.

Additionally, there were two focus groups held for non-TAG parents, at the request of the Department of Accountability, on both the east and west side of the city at one of the visited schools. The evaluators designed a separate protocol to respond to this request and then asked for information relevant to the knowledge base of the groups to be assembled. That separate protocol may be found in Appendix H. A total of five parents of non-TAG students attended these meetings.

Elementary parent focus group results

Eight elementary parent groups, comprising 2-14 people, for a total of 73 parents, met to discuss questions related to the TAG program. Each of the questions asked corresponded to the focus

group questions also asked of student and staff stakeholders. Table 4.1 lists the elementary schools where focus groups were held and how many parents attended from each school site.

Table 4.1
Elementary School Parent Focus Groups

School	Number of Parents in Group
John Adams	11
Patrick Henry	2
Lyles-Crouch Traditional	8
Douglas MacArthur	11
George Mason	11
Matthew Maury	14
James Polk	13
Jefferson-Houston K-8	3
Total	**73**

Perceptions of the elementary parents regarding the program varied, to some extent, based on the grade level of their child and the school. Some parents had more than one student in programs at different levels and therefore knew about the program experience at different levels and even schools. Parents also responded based on the program service that their child was receiving. Selection of focus group participants was done from a random list of parents provided by the school.

Overall impressions of the program were mixed. Parents in general perceived the program as advanced and accelerative and focused on higher level thinking. Most parents found the program to be challenging and engaging at grades 4 and 5, while others thought it was non-existent at the K-3 levels. Reactions to the Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs) were also mixed, with a few parents seeing them as busy work while others saw them as stimulating. Most parents were mystified over the ways DEPs were used from year to year, required from some teachers and not from others. Parents expressed strong concerns about communication and receiving information on the program that might help them work with their child at home.

A majority of parents were able to comment on the identification process. However, several parents did not remember or understand the identification process used. Several other parents felt it was too narrowly constructed around the use of a single test that may have limited the diversity of students in the program. They felt that the program clearly lacked diversity, especially the inclusion of minority and low-income students. They also felt the identification

process had improved over the past several years. Concerns were expressed over the role of parent and teacher advocacy in the process, suggesting that, while all students need champions, the use of influence to enroll students in the program seemed questionable as a practice. Many parents found the process to be nontransparent and bureaucratic, taking too long to carry out, and with information about results and placement options lacking at its conclusion.

Parents generally perceived the curriculum as well-matched to their student's abilities, especially in the language arts and math classes at grades 4 and 5. A few parents felt their child was not being appropriately challenged in these classes due to instructional approaches used or classes moving too fast in math. Some also expressed concern about the use of acceleration rather than enrichment in the math program. According to parents, concern for meeting SOL standards and performing well on relevant tests sometimes prevailed over any gifted emphasis in classes. Most grades 1-3 parents felt the lack of communication about the curriculum hampered their ability to respond to the question about its effectiveness.

Parents appeared pleased in general with their child's TAG teachers although they saw a degree of unevenness across the elementary staff. At the grades 1-3 levels, "unevenness" was the word used in respect to reactions to the teachers, based on lack of communication and the lack of an operative program at those levels. Parents noted that the TAG teachers at grades 4 and 5 fostered higher level thinking and engagement with learning in ways that were perceived as challenging for their children. Parents also noted a lack of professional development among regular classroom teachers at the grades 1-3 levels.

Views of effective assessments were limited. Many parents did not comment on this question due to lack of knowledge. They did perceive, however, that the assessment system did not vary for gifted learners. Information about TAG program effectiveness came from their children, often through conversations and having access to monitoring their child's homework.

Benefits of the program were perceived by the majority of focus group members to be the following: challenge of the curriculum, its faster pace, its individualized nature, and its focus on higher level thinking skills. The TAG classes were also perceived to bolster self-confidence, offering a space where students could be themselves as learners. Parents also felt strongly about the benefit of peer grouping, and of students working with others of similar interests and abilities.

Areas for improvement, cited by the majority of parent focus members, centered on the need for stronger communication to parents from the school and teacher about the program, indicated by all of the parents attending these focus group sessions. Parents also felt strongly that the curriculum needed greater definition and clarity, especially at grades 1-3. Parents indicated that it was important to improve the DEP process and add programs in science, social studies and the arts. Parents also called for improvement in the identification process and for more effective professional development in gifted education for classroom teachers, charged with responsibility for implementing the program at grades 1-3.

Middle school parent focus group results

Two middle school parent groups, comprising 9-10 parents, for a total of 19, met to discuss questions related to the TAG program. Each of the questions asked corresponded to the focus group questions also asked of student and staff stakeholders. Table 4.2 notes the middle school sites and corresponding parents attending a focus group session.

Table 4.2
Middle School Parent Focus Groups

School	Number of Parents in Group
Francis Hammond	9
George Washington	10
Total	**19**

Perceptions of the middle school parents regarding the program were varied, based on the grade level of the program that their children attended. Overall, however, middle school parents were most concerned about the lack of TAG services at grades 6-8, with one parent calling the current services a "sham". The majority felt their children "were being punished for being smart" by withholding appropriate services from them. A majority of parents decried the lack of sub-grouping within the language arts honors classes to attend to the needs of TAG students. Parents were not aware of grouping of TAG students together for science or social studies classwork.

Regarding identification, many parents were not well-informed about the process. However, several felt the system was not open enough at earlier stages to find all who might benefit and that teacher input was not considered sufficiently as a part of the process. One parent noted: "The program is effective in identifying students who are good at school, but I believe it misses students who do not present as classically gifted."

The open enrollment system at the middle school level for honors courses was not supported by parents, calling it an abdication of responsibility for serving top learners in an appropriate setting. Some parents felt that more choices for classes in science, social studies, and the arts and better teachers were needed in the program at middle school level. They also favored an option for a separate class of TAG learners in core areas.

Teacher quality and effectiveness was judged as positive by some parents although they did note unevenness among honors classes at the two middle schools. Several parents had concerns about the lack of TAG students receiving direct instruction from the teacher. One parent commented: "Teachers prepare daily lessons but do not teach the material. Students are left to figure out on their own what needs to be done." Parents further complained of little explanation of material and little or no guidance or feedback on projects.

Assessment of the program was not perceived to be different from grades and the use of SOL testing. DEP assessment was the main exception, when it was done.

Overall, parents saw the strength of the program in its goal to create higher level learning experiences in an environment of like ability students, taught through a strong curriculum by effective teachers. Several parents also saw early advancement and a challenging peer group as clear benefits of their child being identified for TAG services.

Areas for improvement centered on the need for the provision of services to TAG students at middle school level. A majority of parents felt strongly that there was a need for a rigorous curriculum taught directly by trained teachers to TAG students. Concerns were expressed, also by a majority of parents, that the DEP process was not working or not implemented in several classrooms. Moreover, a common concern by a majority of parents was the need for an improvement in the communication process to parents about their child's program and progress.

High school parent focus group results

One high school parent group, comprising 11 parents from both high school campuses, met to discuss questions related to the TAG program (see Table 4.3). Each of the questions asked corresponded to the focus group questions also asked of student and staff stakeholders.

Table 4.3
High School Parent Focus Group

School	**Number of Parents in Group**
Minnie Howard/T.C. Williams	11
Total	**11**

Perceptions of the high school parents regarding the program were varied, based on several variables, including the nature and extent of TAG programming their child had experienced to date. High school parents were focused on the efficacy of the teachers, noting the need for careful selection and training. Most parents had more than one student in programs at different levels and therefore knew about the program experience from different schools.

Overall impressions of the program were positive, parents being very pleased with the range of opportunities at the high school level, especially in the array of Advanced Placement courses. Parents also seemed content with the elective options of the high school level.

In respect to the curriculum, parents were divided in their reaction. Some saw it as not challenging enough while others perceived it as very challenging. Honors classes often were perceived as too easy, catering to the lowest level of students in the class, while Advanced Placement classes received high marks for their rigor and clarity in objectives and assessment.

The teaching staff at the high school received high marks from parents, for the most part, with AP teachers receiving the highest praise. However, unevenness was noted among the honors teachers with concerns expressed about their background in working with the gifted and their depth of content knowledge.

Judgment of the quality of learning was done by informal means in many homes. Parents commented on the quality of the conversation and discussion in which their children engaged as evidence of advanced learning. Other parents used enthusiasm, student desire to learn, and student interest as indicators of the positive program impact on learning. A few parents commented on more traditional indicators such as tests, homework, and grades.

Benefits to being in the program centered on the opportunities for advanced learning in math that had been available throughout the years in the program, with emphasis on critical thinking, challenging projects/activities, and the preparation for college-level work that was provided through both AP and DE.

Areas for improvement at the high school level centered on greater flexibility in access to both AP and DE classes and more counseling and communication about college and careers. A majority of high school parents expressed concern about services at the middle school level, commenting on the need for separate honors options that were TAG-only for students in all core subject areas, with a trained TAG teacher. A few parents expressed concern about services for twice-exceptional students at the high school level. A number of parents were also concerned about the need for additional professional development for teachers at the high school level.

Non-TAG parent focus groups

Two meetings were held in opposite parts of the city to attract non-TAG parents to discuss their understanding of the effectiveness of the TAG program. Randomized lists of parents who had applied to the program in the last year but had not been accepted and those who had not been referred were contacted, with an attempt to confirm 14 participants for each session. A total of five parents attended these sessions, held at two selected school sites. Questions asked of these groups were slightly different from those asked of parents with students in the TAG program. The question protocol for these parents focused more on communication about the program that they had received and how it was transmitted. Overall perceptions of the program were dominated by a lack of information: “I don’t have much knowledge of the TAG program” was a common quote from these parents at each of the two sessions. Two parents perceived that the program was challenging. Individual perceptions were also related to the advanced nature of the curriculum, that it provided more one-on-one opportunities, and that it improved student learning.

There was a perception by two parents in one of the groups that being identified as gifted was based on “who you know”, meaning there was a need to call around to get information, talk to the right people, and ask questions at PTA meetings. Another parent believed that test scores and teacher recommendations were a part of the process. Still another questioned the need to identify for TAG at the elementary level at all. “The maturity gap is too wide in elementary

school to measure potential. What really is the purpose? How do grades measure gifts?" Individual parents described the process that they experienced after being tested at third grade.

The comments of parents in these two focus groups did not support the designation of a theme related to either identification or curriculum discussions. Consequently, no themes are cited here. There was a clear message, however, that communication was lacking on the program out in the community, with several of the parents speaking of the program's invisibility. One parent noted that she only received information at the school orientation at the beginning of the year and at parent/teacher conferences if she brought it up. Another was told that she "didn't push enough", accounting for her child not being identified. Sources of information about the program came from websites, meetings attended, and word of mouth for these parents. There was no central source of information from which they received their understanding. Yet one parent opined that she "…was not aware of how important it was."

Perceived benefits from being in the program were cited as allowing students to be more creative, being a good place for "students who don't fit inside the box" and the level of encouragement for learning. One parent noted: "I think teachers and parents need to communicate on the abilities of the students so more kids could be pushed into the TAG program. TAG to me, is more about getting exposed to what they don't teach in regular school."

Areas for improvement cited by these non-TAG parents were in informing students and parents of opportunities, making teachers aware of TAG and acting on that knowledge in referring students, and ensuring that competitions like science fair are open to all. One parent noted that the program "should not be a country club." Finally, another parent noted that the program "should push students to believe in themselves."

Student Focus Groups

Student focus groups were organized at eleven of the 12 school sites. The groups represented students in fifth, eighth, and twelfth grades. Each group comprised 9-15 students. The facilitator used a set of seven questions to probe student perceptions of the effectiveness of the TAG program, modified slightly from the questions used with parents. Each session lasted one hour and was held during the school day at the student's school site. A total of 131 TAG-identified students participated in one of these groups, selected from a randomized list of identified students.

Elementary student focus group results

Eighty fifth grade elementary students from seven schools met in groups of 9-14 to discuss questions related to the effectiveness of the TAG program. Each of the questions asked corresponded to the focus group questions asked of parent and staff stakeholders. Table 4.4 lists the schools and numbers of students participating in the focus group at each site.

Table 4.4
Elementary School Student Focus Groups

School	Number of Students in Group
John Adams	12
Patrick Henry	11
Lyles-Crouch Traditional	14
Douglas MacArthur	12
George Mason	10
Matthew Maury	9
James Polk	12
Total	**80**

The students in general had a positive response to the TAG program, somewhat dependent on their TAG teachers at a given school. They found the program challenging, interesting, and fun. One student indicated that "it encouraged students to try harder." A second student indicated that "the right learning techniques were used." Those enrolled in the math program spoke about its advanced and accelerative nature.

Students had mixed reactions about the results of the identification process. A number of students believed the "kids who need to be in the program, are in the program." Other students had some reservations and believed that some students in the program were not willing to do the extra work and activities and therefore should not be in the program. Several students indicated "that some students, who should be in the program, were not in the program." All of the students strongly supported the idea that if you were in the program, "you should have a good attitude and be willing to work."

All of the elementary students in the group made positive comments about both the English/Language Arts (ELA) curriculum and the mathematics curriculum, noting that they found both challenging.

Students specifically indicated that their teachers "asked the right questions." While some students thought their teachers were very effective and made TAG class enjoyable, other students thought that the teachers were too strict and did not use enough hands-on interesting activities. Most of the elementary students were especially positive about their teachers' providing interesting and challenging work.

Elementary students explained how they knew what they had learned. Many students cited their ability to explain an idea to others, i.e. to teach them, as an indication they had mastered the concept. Others noted the importance of being able to apply the skill or concept to a new situation, transferring it to the real world beyond school. Some students described doing well on tests as a measure of what they had learned, and still others cited grades. Some students mentioned homework and projects as other indicators of what they had learned. One student also indicated that he knew he had learned when "it comes easier to me" and when he "could do something he had not known how to do before."

Students indicated that major benefits of their program included the interaction with their peers and the teachers and their way of teaching. They also mentioned projects and activities as strengths and believed that the readings and vocabulary program were effective.

Several students believed that the program could be improved if more opportunities for learning were provided, especially in the areas of science, social studies, and the arts. These students also listed having separate honors classes and more advanced work in subjects beyond math as critical areas for change.

Middle school student focus group results

Middle school students from three schools met in groups of 12-14 for a total of 39 students to discuss questions related to the effectiveness of the TAG program. At two out of the three schools, all students participating in the focus group were in the 8th grade. At the third site, students were representative of grades 6-8. Each of the questions asked corresponded to the focus group questions asked of parent and staff stakeholders. Students were selected randomly from lists of students in the program at the relevant school. The list of school sites and numbers of students participating in a focus group are listed in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5
Middle School Student Focus Groups

School	**Number of Students in Group**
Jefferson-Houston	13
Francis Hammond	12
George Washington	14
Total	**39**

Overall perceptions of the program were grounded in the experiences these students had had at the schools they attended, and the TAG program options they had experienced. Few students recalled the grade 1-3 experience while many remembered their language arts and math program at grades 4 and 5, finding them enjoyable and the beginning of their academic journey in school.

Middle school experiences, in comparison, were found to be empty, with several students noting the lack of services and attention from honors teachers.

The identification process was not remembered by most of the students who attended the focus group sessions. A few middle school students indicated that the identification process resulted in students entering the program who were "hardworking" and for whom the program was a good "fit". Another student noted that "more evidence should be considered in the identification process." This student noted that "Some kids are overlooked who should be in the program, and some kids [in the program] should not be in the program."

Middle school students also indicated that it was important for a teacher to be supportive and to have "a good sense of humor."

Regarding assessment, middle school students still used their own judgment about what had been learned over test results. Many commented that they reflected on what they had learned and tried to apply it outside of class. Others commented on discussing their learning with parents and realizing they had advanced significantly in their ability to talk about the learning accrued. The middle school students believed that rubric-based assessments supported their continued learning better than tests, citing the use of such rubrics on project work including DEPs.

Middle school students returned to the advantages of being advanced and accelerated and working with like ability peers as the highlights of the TAG experience.

In terms of program improvement, students strongly registered the need for a separate class, with a TAG teacher who was trained to work with them. They also felt the program should be "enforced", perhaps sensing that no one was watching what was going on in the honors classes. Middle school students who had a science or social studies DEP noted that the nine-week assignments could be better coordinated so multiple projects were not due at the same time. Some middle school students indicated that the TAG program could be improved if honors classes were faster paced and more attentive to the needs of TAG learners.

High school student focus group results

Twelfth grade students from T.C. Williams met in a group of 12 (see Table 4.6) to discuss questions related to the effectiveness of the TAG program. Each of the questions asked corresponded to the focus group questions asked of parent and staff stakeholders. Students were selected from random lists of students in the program.

Table 4.6
High School Student Focus Groups

School	Number of Students in Group
T.C. Williams	12
Total	**12**

Students in 12th grade gave the division high marks for the senior high program and its set of options. Several students were in the DE program, planning to use it as a stepping stone to a four-year college after NOVA. Most students were participants in AP, finding the program challenging, regardless of subject area.

The identification process was not remembered by most of the high school students who attended the focus group sessions. One senior high school student indicated "I do think some people are overlooked for the program." This student also thought that "teachers should have more input" and that only "if a student works hard enough" should the student be in the TAG program.

The importance of teachers' subject knowledge and passion for the subject were noted as important qualities: "All of my teachers are extremely knowledgeable in their fields." These students reiterated the importance of knowledge in a subject so teachers "know what they are talking about."

Regarding assessment, secondary students still used their own judgment about what had been learned over test results. Many commented that they reflected on what they had learned and tried to apply it outside of class. Others commented on discussing their learning with parents and realizing they had advanced significantly in their ability to discuss their learning.

Benefits of the program were cited as preparation for college and more challenging work. Some noted that it had helped frame their thinking about a career choice and college major. High school students felt that the middle school honors curriculum was the weak link in the program, not offering TAG students support for their learning. They were quite satisfied with the AP options provided them, however. Some of the high school students wished for more academic counseling opportunities and more rigorous honors classes, however.

Staff Focus Groups

At each of the 12 school sites visited in the evaluation, staff members who were involved in either the identification process for the TAG program or in the delivery of services for TAG students were organized into focus groups to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the TAG program. The same protocol was used with staff as was used with other stakeholder groups (i.e. parents, students, administrators). Each session lasted one hour and was frequently held after school. Staff members were invited to attend by the school liaison for this TAG evaluation. Each staff focus group was comprised of 4-19 teachers and other school personnel. The results for these groups are reported below by elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Elementary staff focus group results

Elementary staff members met to discuss the TAG program at seven designated elementary schools selected for observations. As with other focus groups, they were asked the same series of seven questions about the effectiveness of the program. Seven different elementary school staffs in the division met, including TAG teachers as well as regular classroom teachers,

spanning the years of K-5. Each elementary focus group numbered 6-13 staff members with a total of 68 participants. (See Table 4.7)

Table 4.7
Elementary School Staff Focus Groups

School	Number of Staff Members in Group
John Adams	8
Patrick Henry	10
Lyles-Crouch Traditional	11
Douglas MacArthur	8
George Mason	12
Matthew Maury	6
James Polk	13
Total	**68**

Overall impressions about the TAG program centered on the lack of consistency in program development or fidelity of implementation at K-3 levels as well as the sense that the grade 4 and 5 program was differentiated and fast-paced.

Comments were made by at least a plurality of staff members in each group about the need for changes to the identification process, as it appeared to be inequitable for underrepresented groups such as English Learners (EL). While some staff members thought that identification was effective, many had concerns. They noted that it did not include students talented in art or music; that it was subjective and parent-driven; and that it took too long to get services. Others saw the process as not flexible enough in respect to timelines and used teacher scales that were not valid, given the lack of teacher training on them.

In respect to curriculum, staff members commented that both the ELA curriculum and the math curriculum at grades 4 and 5 are very effective overall. They noted, as did students and parents, the lack of a curriculum for K-3 level students. One group of teachers felt that the DEPs should be made electronic and designed by gifted staff, rather than have them done by the regular classroom teacher. The staff also commented that there is no differentiated science or social studies curriculum for TAG at grades 4 and 5, only the DEP in those subject areas. Teachers viewed differentiation as too difficult for them to do, even though materials to assist were available.

Staff members indicated that the TAG program lacks importance in the system and is not a priority, due to competing needs. There is not much emphasis on training all teachers to work

with this population. There was inconsistency in staff reports on this issue; some felt that training was available and that teachers were trained to work with these students while in other schools the perception was that there was no training available on working with TAG students. Staff members generally rated teacher effectiveness as strong.

Assessment comments centered on the use of performance-based assessments and advanced transfer tasks, some of which were strong while others lacked consistency in scoring rubrics. Project assessments were also mentioned as a tool. In general, however, use of SOL-driven assessment tools was the norm. One teacher commented on the lack of time needed to do all of the assessments needed for TAG students.

Benefits of the TAG program were seen as the opportunity for gifted students to work together to advance their learning, the enthusiasm for learning that develops, and the increasing self confidence that accrues. One teacher noted: "They can find their tribe and be comfortable." Staff members also spoke of challenge that was provided to these learners through the TAG program. Staff also mentioned the opportunities for early advancement in subjects like math, higher level skills, and more opportunities for creative learning.

Areas of improvement cited were the need for an improved identification system; the need for a K-3 curriculum; and communication about how parents might work with their child at home. Several also cited the need for additional options for TAG students, especially science and art and music. There was also a clear call for differentiated materials and lesson plans to be used as models in regular classrooms with GIA students, and for more staff resources to support the K-3 part of the program.

Middle school staff focus group results

Middle school staff members met to discuss the TAG program. As with other focus groups, they were asked the same series of seven questions about the program. Teachers represented three different middle school programs in the district, each meeting separately to hold the discussion. Each middle school focus group numbered 4-11 staff members with a total of 24 participants. (See Table 4.8)

Table 4.8
Middle School Staff Focus Groups

School	Number of Staff Members in Group
Jefferson-Houston	11
Francis Hammond	4
George Washington	9
Total	**24**

Overall impressions of the program were dominated by the issues of student identification and placement, with several staff members concerned that identified students were not prepared for the rigor of the classes. One expressed it this way: "The honors class placement is a joke- -it devalues the entire program." Another felt the process was ineffective and misled students' perception of ability. Many staff members called for universal screening of all students in core subject areas at the beginning of the middle school level and indicated that identification should be ongoing. One teacher noted: "Extreme mixed ability classes in honors makes teaching TAG impossible and non-challenging for students." She cited an example of working at seventh grade level with students reading at third grade level and graduate school level in the same honors class. Several staff members commented on the loss of community that students felt when they no longer had a core group of TAG students to work with in class. Lack of advocacy for underrepresented groups was also cited as a potential problem in instituting an identification process at middle school level.

In regard to curriculum, these staff members felt that the curriculum was effective with their students in helping them think at higher levels but could be stronger in respect to more challenging work "if there was time to implement best practices." They did not think the curriculum was differentiated except for accelerated math and DEPs which were not used consistently and which they perceived as extra work, "with a checked box since they had no time to do it properly." They noted that more visibility and understanding of the TAG program was needed, including definition and goals and outcomes anticipated.

Teacher quality was perceived to be highly effective by this group of staff members. Many of them cited the use of a variety of strategies found effective with gifted students such as problem and project-based learning, differentiation with technology, and use of individualized approaches. They also felt that more training would be helpful for them to be more effective, feeling that there was limited attention to their needs. One teacher admitted: "There is a need for TAG-certified teachers to be working with TAG students." At one site, it was noted that when teachers were trained in TAG, it did not guarantee their placement with an honors class.

Assessment in the program, for the most part, was not seen as different from the regular program, using only the SOL scores to judge student learning. One staff member noted: "Authentic assessments are the exception, not the rule." Some teachers, however, reported using rubrics for DEP work and competitions like History Day and Science Fair as assessments for TAG students.

The strengths of the program were viewed as the quality of teaching and the content of the program. Benefits accrued included meeting requirements early for college, doing advanced work, and implications for learning at an appropriate level.

Areas for improvement were centered on the identification process, with concern that students should be reassessed at middle school and that the process be ongoing. Several staff members articulated the need for changing the entry and exit procedures for honors classes. They noted: "There is a need for a process for reassessment and removal of non-performing students in honors classes." Staff members at middle school level also felt that the TAG students would

benefit from having more programmatic options and more clustering. Suggestions were made for science and social studies classes as well as other electives.

High school staff focus group results

Two groups of high school staff members met at both campuses of TC Williams to discuss the TAG program. As with other focus groups, they were asked the same series of seven questions about the program. Staff members included teachers in honors, AP, and DE classes, the scope of what is offered to TAG students in the division. The two high school staff focus groups numbered 10 and 19 staff members for a total of 29 participants as seen in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9
High School Staff Focus Groups

School	Number of Staff Members in Group
Minnie Howard	10
T.C. Williams	19
Total	**29**

Concerns about the lack of acknowledgment of TAG students in the high schools (eg. teachers do not receive lists of TAG students in their classes) were expressed. It was suggested that not knowing who the TAG students are impacts the use of differentiation and how advanced the curriculum should be at the honors level. Teachers at ninth grade would like to receive the data on TAG students for use in planning differentiation. They also would like to see the TAG goals and scope and sequence of opportunities for grades 6-12. Staff members at both campuses noted that there are no standards for either entering or staying in honors classes.

High school staff members perceived open enrollment as a symbol of inclusiveness. Teachers felt that the rigor and high scores remain within AP classes under the open enrollment model. One teacher commented: “Rigorous classes provide a crucible from which students emerge stronger and more confident.” Based on division data, a high percentage of students are in AP or honors (70% +) although there still appear to be an underrepresentation of minority students enrolled in either option.

In the area of identification, concerns centered around the policies for entrance and exit from honors and AP classes. Two staff members noted: “An open-door policy encourages students to be placed in AP classes when many are not motivated, ready or possibly capable of doing the required work.” Another commented: “Once they get identified at elementary level, they are funneled through the system with no consideration for student preferences or talents.” Most staff members felt that there needed to be better strategies for supporting students once they are identified for programs. The role of the school counselor was cited as critical in facilitating placement of TAG students in appropriate classes.

In the area of curriculum, high school staff members felt the math curriculum for TAG was in need of revision to ensure continuity throughout the K-12 continuum. They also expressed concerns about the honors program that exists prior to AP placement. One staff member commented: "It is difficult to determine if a class is truly honors." Two others noted: "The needs of students are not met-curriculum is set by standards only." Staff members seemed to think that the curriculum for AP was protected because of a set curriculum and assessment model while there was no real direction for what honors classes should be. Staff members also believed scaffolding instruction for certain students was needed in order to ensure success in advanced classes.

Staff members reported that the curriculum is teacher-driven and coherent with standards at grades 11-12; but less so at grades 9-10. They felt there was a need for both honors and AP training in subject areas and for working with TAG students. "Teachers struggle to differentiate at both ends of the spectrum, but professional development is provided in [SPED]", one teacher noted, implying that such PD was not available for TAG. Another staff member commented that "training in gifted education is important, and many teachers without it don't realize what they don't know."

Regarding the quality of teachers, this group felt strongly that teachers worked hard to provide for advanced students. Teacher use of differentiated practices was consistent with the instructional area of the curriculum they were teaching (eg. critical analysis, experimentation, competitions, advanced texts based on reading level). Emphasis by many teachers appeared to be on projects and problem-solving (eg. History Day and Science Fair). One staff member summed up the feelings of many in the room: "Teachers seem to be quite prepared and able to differentiate between regular and advanced curriculum in terms of amount of work, type of work, and methods of student engagement."

In respect to assessment, high school staff members noted that AP scores were used to judge not just student learning but teacher effectiveness as well, a practice they did not support. One teacher suggested that pre-post testing was more appropriate to show growth. Another felt that AP scores were not the final arbiter in respect to student learning; grades in the course better showed actual work accomplished. Some felt that retired AP exams should be the primary assessment tool used in honors classrooms. Others supported the use of project assessments, document based questions, and competitions. Transfer tasks were perceived as top-down, difficult to implement due to time needed, and often lacked connection to the emphasis in the class. More vertical planning and articulation of a TAG curriculum would be ideal, according to several staff members.

Benefits of the TAG program commented on by high school staff members included: "Allowing students to work on challenging content with a master teacher," a comment voiced by several. Others felt that the program provided "the opportunity to take college-credit courses and accelerated classes" for which college level work and pacing was the norm. Clearly, these staff members saw the strengths of the program to be those course opportunities that moved students forward to be successful in their college experience.

Areas for improvement centered on needed training of teachers for their role, better placement procedures for students, and more parental involvement. Equally important, however, were concerns for vertical and horizontal articulation of the high school programs, better overall organization of the program, and strengthening of the honors curriculum.

Administrator Focus Groups

Two groups of administrators were queried about the effectiveness of the program. One group was comprised of seven Central Office supervisors of curriculum areas, and the second group was ten principals or their designees from across the division. A total of 17 division administrators were engaged in the focus group process. Each group met for one hour and received the same set of questions as did parents and students.

Overall perceptions of the program appeared to be quite negative among both groups, citing the program as both elitist and segregated, with an over-identification of white students and an under-representation of black students. There was also a perception by a majority of administrators that the program was considered as a status symbol by certain parents. Most agreed that the program had high expectations for student performance, however.

In the area of identification, administrators saw a host of problems. Some felt that there was a need for more measures to be used while others felt there needed to be more objective application of the criteria for identification. Most noted that there was an under-representation of minority students in the program, and that the program suffered from not accommodating "students who don't fit into traditional categories." Some felt that the process was a "parent-driven" process. Still others felt that the areas of identification should be expanded to include the arts and leadership.

In the area of curriculum, there was much agreement on the idea that the written curriculum differed in respect to implementation from one site to another, leading to a lesser degree of differentiation for TAG students in the classroom than was intended. This problem was further compounded by the emphasis on teaching to the SOL test, a process decried by the group. There was also a concern about the DEP model in its current form, suggesting the need for more specific strategies and expectations. Finally, the groups both noted that, in the end, the level of teacher skill drives instruction, even for TAG students.

Both administrator groups perceived that more professional development is needed on differentiation for TAG learners as well as more advanced content learning in core subject areas, with math being mentioned specifically. They admitted, however, that the existing range of training and expertise in this area is broad. They felt that the coordinator of the program had worked hard to provide great training and support for teachers, especially at the middle school level, where every teacher has been given honors classes. One principal commented: "Teachers work hard and want to do the right thing," defending what he saw as a good faith effort being put forth by teachers to differentiate for these learners.

While the administrators supported the use of performance-based measures, including transfer tasks, they admitted they were not frequently applied. Rather they noted that the same SOL data points are collected for TAG students as well as all others.

Benefits of the program were cited as primarily in the areas of accelerative and advanced learning that the program provides in mathematics, as well as the peer group support that the students receive from being in classes together and interacting on projects and other activities.

Areas of improvement noted by the administrative groups centered on the assessment process, both for identification and documentation of learning. In respect to identification, the group called for the use of more standardized measures, the inclusion of a middle school identification system that was more rigorous for entry to honors classes, and a process for including more underrepresented groups. In the area of learning, the administrators suggested the consistent use of performance-based learning assessments as a way to document the level of TAG learning. Other areas of interest for improvement lay with the grouping practices in place. A suggestion was made that a cluster grouping approach that would allow TAG students to receive instruction together in a differentiated context might work. Another suggestion was made to eliminate the pullout approach for language arts in grades 4 and 5, noting that the class is not differentiated enough from the regular curriculum to warrant it. Support was also voiced for putting in place a high school support system for students who are taking their first advanced class.

Across Focus Group Themes

After analyzing the focus group data by level and by group within each level, the evaluator examined the commonalities across focus groups on key issues in the TAG program that were of concern at each level of the program—elementary, middle, and high school. Where an idea was expressed in two or more core focus groups (i.e. parents, students, staff), the evaluator noted it as a theme. Common focus group themes by level and question are summarized in three tables included in Appendix I.

Elementary focus group themes

The following thematics emerged from analyzing across parent, student, and staff focus groups at the elementary level.

Identification

All of the focus groups expressed concerns about the identification process, even though they felt it had improved in recent years. Concerns centered on technical aspects of the operation of the process in respect to timing, how the process worked, and timeliness in results being communicated. Issues of parent and teacher advocacy also emerged, with teachers and parents seeing too such subjectivity in a system that allowed for such advocacy. Concerns also centered on the underrepresentation of minority groups in the program, noting that these children were not identified at a proportional rate to their presence in the division. Finally, there was concern that

the identification process was not being applied at the secondary level, making third grade the last time students were formally assessed for entry into the TAG program.

Curriculum

The issue of curriculum raised several themes seen throughout the focus groups. A high level challenge was noted in the grades 4 and 5 program and less so in respect to curriculum at the K-3 and middle school level. Of notable commentary was the theme of no differentiation or program defined at K-3 levels. Lack of communication about the curriculum was also voiced by all parent stakeholder groups at all levels (K-12).

Teaching

The theme of effective challenge was used to describe TAG teaching at the grades 4 and 5 level while regular classroom teachers were described as uneven in their ability to provide for TAG students at other elementary levels. Lack of professional development for regular classroom teachers was cited as a common reason for this situation.

Assessment

Limited evidence exists to support the idea that TAG students are assessed in different ways from their peers at the elementary level. Parents learn about their child's progress primarily from them in discussions at home or in some instances from project-based assessments done on the DEP assigned projects.

Areas of improvement

Common areas of improvement noted were the identification system, the curriculum base at K-3, the training of teachers in gifted education, the improvement of communication to parents, the adding of more options for TAG in subjects like social studies, science and the arts, and clarity around the use of the DEP.

Benefits

Elementary focus groups saw the major benefits of the TAG program to be in the opportunities for intellectual peer interaction that was provided in grades 4 and 5 in language arts and math, in the enhancement of self-confidence in learning, and in the acceleration of learning and commensurate challenge perceived in the curriculum at grades 4 and 5.

Middle school themes

The same technique of analysis across focus groups was applied to the middle school responses as well, with the resultant commentary.

Identification

The major theme related to identification at this level was the need for reassessment of the TAG population at the beginning of their middle school experiences. Concern for the process to be on-going and frequent was also cited. Concern for underrepresentation of minority groups was also raised as a caveat at this level as well.

Curriculum

At middle school level, the curriculum thematic was focused on the absence of clear differentiation in honors classes for TAG students. This was coupled by a clear concern for the spread of TAG students across honors classes, with all teachers assigned honors sections. The DEP model was also perceived to be ineffective in the areas in which it is used.

Teaching

Comments from focus groups on middle school teaching may be described by the word "uneven", some teaching being perceived as strong while other teaching perceived as weak. Clear concern for the preparation of teachers to work with TAG students was frequently voiced across all groups.

Assessment

Across all groups, there was a theme related to no different assessment of learning for the gifted. In some, however, the DEP product is used, as are the projects from History Day and Science Fair, required annually from TAG students. This also represented a theme on assessment at the elementary level.

Areas for improvement

The theme cited by all groups was the need for dedicated classes of TAG students, taught by teachers who were endorsed in gifted education, using a differentiated curriculum. Other themes of interest for program improvement at this level of schooling were stronger communication with parents and greater visibility for the program.

Benefits

The themes that emerge in analyzing the data across focus groups were the positive benefits and challenge of an intellectual peer group coupled with advanced and accelerated learning opportunities.

High school themes

The same technique of analysis across focus groups was applied to the high school responses as well, with the resultant commentary.

Identification

The thematic at this level regarding identification was in the realm of satisfaction with the method of self-selection used for course selection at both high school campuses, perceiving that it enhanced diversity in honors and AP classes.

Curriculum

The main theme here was the differences noted between the written, taught and assessed curriculum, especially in the honors program which is judged to be more uneven than AP in this

regard. The curriculum was perceived to be teacher-driven and department-controlled, with little concern for TAG students per se.

Teaching

Positive experiences were noted with most teachers, with perceptions of AP teachers the most positive. All groups perceive the teaching to be high level, with teachers prepared to work with TAG learners.

Assessment

Assessment practice themes revolve around the use of AP scoring rubrics, used from old exams, as a way to offer off-level assessments to TAG learners. Other alternative assessments cited include Document-Based Questions (DBQs), and projects targeted for competitions such as History Day and Science Fair.

Areas for improvement

Major areas cited across groups included the need to select teachers carefully for background in content and gifted education, need to establish standards for remaining in honors classes, and a need for more specialized professional development in both gifted education and in the content areas of honors and AP.

Benefits

Thematic consensus across the groups is the challenge of AP, the opportunity to accelerate, and the focus on college skill sets necessary for success.

Overall findings from the focus group data

Based on the analysis of focus group data by levels of schooling, by stakeholder group, and then across stakeholder groups, it is fair to conclude the following from a review of these data analyses:

1) **The findings on the TAG program are significantly different from school to school but more strongly so from level to level in the program. Since the biggest variable in the program is the nature of the services provided at different levels, it is fair to focus on different levels of schooling for rendering conclusions. The perceptions of stakeholders are much more positive about the TAG program at the elementary levels of grades 4 and 5 and the high school levels, where students may elect AP courses, than they are at any other level or in any other program option. These findings suggest that advanced classes that provide strong emphasis on the goals of the TAG program in critical and creative thinking, in accelerative opportunities, and in collaborative intellectual grouping are held in high regard by all stakeholder groups.**

2) **Stakeholders at the middle school level, (i.e. parents, students, and staff) find the lack of services in honors classes for TAG students to be ineffective and inappropriate. These stakeholders also couple their concerns about the lack of**

differentiation in these classes with concerns about the level of training of honors teachers and the lack of grouping of TAG students together in these classes, seeing all three of these variables as critical to an effective delivery service for these students.

3) **Elementary stakeholders have universal concerns for the need to improve the identification system through streamlining procedures to enhance communication, removing subjectivity in teacher and parent involvement from the process, and ensuring greater representation of low income, English Learners, Twice-Exceptional, and minority students in the program. Other levels of the program (i.e. middle and high school) do not currently identify many new students for TAG so stakeholders had fewer comments on identification issues.**

4) **The need to ensure that both teacher selection and professional development are working to find the best trained teachers in gifted education to be placed in TAG classrooms at appropriate levels appears to be a general concern. Advanced content background also surfaced as a concern in math at all levels. While the division is addressing this issue, it is apparent from focus group data that many teachers assigned to work with TAG students are without adequate preparation to do so, and some staff members commented that available trained teachers are not always assigned to work with these students.**

5) **Focus group data suggest that parents and staff perceive the program and the curriculum in grades K-3 to be limited or non-existent. Participants in parent and staff focus groups perceived the DEP as not a substitute for a program and quite ineffective at these levels, given the ages of the learner who may require more teacher guidance in the process of working independently.**

6) **Parent and staff focus groups were dissatisfied with the extent to which assessment measured the performance of gifted students. Many felt that the learning assessments should be product-based and tailored to the level of a gifted learner.**

7) **Staff stakeholder groups expressed concerns about not having current information on TAG student aptitudes and achievement levels in order to work more effectively with their children and to advocate for underrepresented groups. Parent focus groups at the middle school level were concerned about the lack of information on their student's level of functioning in specific subject areas beyond SOL score reports.**

8) **Stakeholder groups concur on the need for more TAG program options and opportunities, especially at elementary and middle school levels. Advanced courses in social studies, science, and the arts were common recommendations from the groups queried at both levels.**

Conclusion

Focus group data suggest a positive response by stakeholders to the grade 4 and 5 program and Advanced Placement options. However, the data also indicate that stakeholders perceive a lack of TAG services at K-3 and at grades 6-8. At the high school level, staff stakeholders were not aware of which students were identified for TAG services. Concerns about identification and especially the underrepresentation of low income and minority groups also dominated the discussions about the need for changes in the TAG program at all levels. In addition to curriculum development, professional training for teachers, and the consistent use of assessments appropriate for TAG learners to show growth were perceived to be important avenues for positive change.

Section V: Classroom Observations

The purpose of classroom observations is to gain firsthand knowledge of the instruction being provided for gifted learners at all relevant school grade levels. The focus of observations is not on the evaluation of individual teachers but on the prevalence of best-practice instructional behaviors for advanced students in these classrooms. A copy of the Classroom Observation Scale -Revised (COS-R), used in this study, has been included in Appendix J. This classroom observation instrument contains 26 different research-based, best practice instructional strategies. It is not expected that all instructional behaviors listed on the form would be seen during any one observation. Having at least 30 minutes per observation captures a snapshot of the overall instructional practices within a given classroom. The program evaluation team realizes the limitations of the form and its utilization across a small window of instructional time. Nevertheless, when multiple classrooms are observed, inferences can be drawn that support or refute data collected from other sources such as focus groups, surveys, and materials review.

Sample

To ensure a representative picture of gifted students and opportunities for them at school sites, the evaluation team observed classes at each elementary school site in the division that was purposively selected by the evaluation team for involvement in the onsite portion of the evaluation. Consequently, seven elementary schools were observed along with elementary classrooms at Jefferson-Houston. Both middle schools were selected for observation as well as middle school classes at Jefferson-Houston as were both high school sites. Through these onsite visits, it was possible to see how classroom implementation functioned by school and level in the program. Table 5.1 presents the breakdown of observations by school. A total of 120 classrooms were observed that contained 2527 students. Class size ranged from 4-32 in the observed classrooms. Observation time ranged from 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the length of a given lesson.

Table 5.1
Distribution of Classroom Observations by School

School	Total
TC Williams-King St. Campus	14
T. C. Williams-Minnie Howard Campus	14
George Washington Middle	13
Frances C. Hammond Middle	15
Jefferson Houston School	12
George Mason Elementary	7
Matthew Maury Elementary	4
Patrick Henry Elementary	8
James K. Polk Elementary	5
John Adams Elementary	6
Lyles Crouch Traditional Academy	12
Douglas MacArthur Elementary	10
Total number of classroom observations	**120**

Purpose of the scale

The COS-R form allowed the evaluation team to probe several areas of instruction: curriculum planning and delivery, accommodation for individual differences, critical thinking strategies, creative thinking strategies, and analysis and inquiry. These categories represent best practice in teaching in general as well as best practice for gifted learners in particular.

Analysis of the COS-R data

The following analysis was done on the total sample of classrooms visited. Sub-analyses were also conducted by elementary, middle and high school levels. Content area differences were also analyzed. TAG and non-TAG designated classrooms at the elementary level and AP and non-AP at the high school level were examined but not found appropriate for analysis, based on small numbers. Individual school breakdowns were calculated but not included in this report.

The COS-R captures both frequency of individual teacher behaviors and the effectiveness of those behaviors. Both dimensions are reported in the analyses that follow. Effectiveness was determined by a rating of 3-1 on the form, 3 being "effective", 2 being "somewhat effective", and 1 being "ineffective". The not-observed category (N/O) indicates the behavior was not attempted or used in the observed lesson. Expanded definitions for each rating are found on the COS-R form in Appendix J.

Computing the item and overall categorical effectiveness mean scores on the form was done by eliminating consideration of the "not observed" category. Thus, all effectiveness mean scores reflect only teachers who were using the behavior and receiving a 3-1 rating on it. Both item and categorical means are recorded in the chart. Categorical means were calculated as means of means, derived from item mean scores.

Expectations for frequency of use of specific strategies may vary, depending on the level, subject, and group of learners observed. In general, it would be expected that higher level thinking strategies, such as critical thinking, creative thinking, and inquiry, would be employed in every classroom observed in some form (VanTassel-Baska, Quek, & Feng, 2007). Moreover, evidence of accommodations for gifted learners would be expected such as subgrouping, individual conferencing, and/or use of differentiated materials or assignments. Absence of the use of any of these strategies suggests the lack of a routine for working with gifted learners that should be a hallmark of effective practice. High percentages of "not observed" ratings (i.e. over 50%) in a category indicate a problematic lack of frequency in the use of differentiated practices. This may also be observed at the grade level, school level, and/or the content area.

Expectations for teachers of gifted learners would be that the effectiveness mean scores in the areas observed would be at the 2.5+ rating level, signifying that, for these behaviors, teachers were moving toward effectiveness. In the 2.5-2.0 range, teachers would be perceived as having a satisfactory use of the behaviors, although not yet effective as described on the form itself. Mean ratings below 2.0 would suggest that the strategy was being used ineffectively, calling into question the teacher's capacity to sustain specific differentiated practices (VanTassel-Baska, Quek, & Feng, 2004).

The following findings were computed on 120 observations across elementary, middle, and high school classrooms. Charts with breakdown of data by level may be found in Appendix J.

Findings

In regard to the first category of instructional behavior entitled *Curriculum Planning and Delivery*, Items #1 and #2 were observed in 95% and 93% of classrooms respectively and generally at an "effective" or "somewhat effective" level. Items #3 and #5 that reflect on the use of metacognition in the classroom were rated lower across all schools and levels. Item #3 on metacognition related to "planning, monitoring, and assessing their learning" was observed in 47% of classrooms and Item #5 that deals with having students reflect on what they learned was observed in only 22% of the classrooms. These lower ratings on metacognitive activities as seen in Items #3 and #5 is troubling in that the division curriculum stresses these skills as does best practice literature in gifted education. Item #4 on encouraging student expression was observed in 71% of classrooms. Teachers who were observed using this cluster of behaviors were overall "effective" (2.50) in the overall category of curriculum planning and delivery. (See Table 5.2)

Table 5.2
Curriculum Planning and Delivery

Curriculum Planning and Delivery	**3 Effective**	**2 Somewhat Effective**	**1 Ineffective**	**N/O Not Observed**	**EF Means**
The teacher…					
1. set high expectations for student performance.	58 (48%)	49 (41%)	7 (6%)	6 (5%)	**2.44**
2. incorporated activities for students to apply new knowledge.	64 (53%)	41 (34%)	7 (6%)	8 (7%)	**2.50**
3. engaged students in planning, monitoring, or assessing their learning.	28 (23%)	27 (23%)	1 (1%)	64 (53%)	**2.48**
4. encouraged students to express their thoughts.	49 (41%)	30 (25%)	6 (5%)	35 (29%)	**2.62**
5. had students reflect on what they had learned.	15 (12.5%)	8 (7%)	3 (2.5%)	94 (78%)	**2.46**

Overall Categorical Effectiveness (EF) Mean Score
(classrooms with observed differentiated behaviors): 2.50

The behaviors in the second category, entitled *Materials and Strategy Utilization,* were not much in evidence across the school sites as seen in Table 5.3. The lack of the deliberate use of differentiated materials for the gifted in the classrooms was quite evident, noted for 68 % of the classrooms observed (Item #6). Only slightly more than half of the classrooms (55%) used any discernible grouping approach for instruction (Item #7). In only six classrooms (5%) was there the use of models of thinking (Item #8). Finally, only slightly more than half of the classrooms observed (57.5%) employed research-based instructional approaches such as concept mapping or graphic organizers (Item #9). Because of the high range of "not observed" for items in this category (42.5%-95%), there may be little value in reporting the overall mean score. However, in classrooms using these behaviors, the overall rating was 2.46, suggesting the teachers observed were moving toward "effective" in dealing with the differentiation behaviors in this cluster.

Table 5.3
Materials and Strategy Utilization

Materials and Strategy Utilization	**3 Effective**	**2 Not Effective**	**1 Ineffective**	**N/O Not Observed**	**EF Means**
The teacher…					
6. showed evidence of using program-relevant differentiated materials for the gifted in math, science, social studies, or language arts. (circle which subject applied).	25 (21%)	13 (11%)	0 (0%)	82 (68%)	**2.65**
7. used cluster, pull-out, self-contained, or advanced class grouping to target gifted learners for instruction. (circle one or more)	33 (28%)	23 (19%)	9 (8%)	55 (45%)	**2.36**
8. used models of thinking to promote deeper conceptual understanding and advanced content learning.	3 (2.5%)	3 (2.5%)	0 (0%)	114 (95%)	**2.50**
9. employed evidence-based instructional strategies, such as graphic organizers, to enhance student higher level thinking.	27 (22.5%)	39 (32%)	3 (3%)	51 (42.5%)	**2.34**

Overall Categorical Effectiveness (EF) Mean Score
(classrooms with observed differentiated behaviors): 2.46

Accommodations for Individual Differences, the third category of observation, were in evidence across the majority of classes observed in respect to Item #13, discovering ideas through structured activities or questions (72%) as seen in Table 5.4. Slightly over 79% of the classrooms demonstrated opportunities for independent or group learning to promote depth in understanding content (Item #10). This latter instructional strategy is intended to encourage students to find meaning for themselves, rather than to parrot back predigested subject matter. Its widespread use is very positive. Less positive was the finding that only 51% of classrooms observed encouraged multiple interpretations of events (Item #12). A little more than a third (39%) of classrooms accommodated individual differences through conferencing, different assignments, or choice of materials (Item #11). The overall effectiveness mean score for classrooms observed yielded a 2.48 score, indicating that teachers using strategies in this category were moving toward "effective" in that implementation.

Table 5.4
Accommodations for Individual Difference

Accommodations for Individual Differences	**3 Effective**	**2 Somewhat Effective**	**1 Ineffective**	**N/O Not Observed**	**EF Means**
The teacher…					
10. provided opportunities for independent or group learning to promote depth in understanding content.	46 (38%)	45 (38%)	4 (3%)	25 (21%)	**2.44**
11. accommodated individual or subgroup differences (eg., through individual conferencing, student or teacher choice in material selection and task assignments.)	25 (21%)	19 (16%)	2 (2%)	74 (61%)	**2.50**
12. encouraged multiple interpretations of events and situations.	33 (27%)	27 (23%)	1 (1%)	59 (49%)	**2.52**
13. allowed students to discover key ideas individually through structured activities and/or questions.	45 (37.5%)	38 (32%)	4 (3%)	33 (27.5%)	**2.47**

Overall Categorical Effectiveness (EF) Mean Score
(classrooms with observed differentiated behaviors): 2.48

In the category dealing with *Critical Thinking Strategies*, only one of the four items was observed in over half of the classes, that of encouraging students to judge or evaluate situations, positions, or issues (63%) (Item #14). Item #15 dealing with engaging students in comparing and contrasting ideas was less in evidence, seen in only 44% of classrooms. In fifty classrooms (51%) there was evidence of moving students from concrete to abstract ideas, a critical indicator for engaging in higher levels of thinking (Item #16). The fourth item, Item #17, which dealt with student synthesis of information within or across disciplines, was observed only in a minority of classrooms (31%). (See Table 5.5) It should be noted that in several of the high school classes observed, teachers were seen as very effective in their use of some of the strategies. Mean scores based on teachers observed using these behaviors suggest teachers were within the effectiveness range when strategies were implemented, with a 2.50 mean score.

Table 5.5
Critical Thinking Strategies

Critical Thinking Strategies	**3 Effective**	**2 Somewhat Effective**	**1 Ineffective**	**N/O Not Observed**	**EF Means**
The teacher…					
14. encouraged students to judge or evaluate situations, problems, or issues.	40 (33%)	33 (27%)	3 (3%)	44 (37%)	2.48
15. engaged students in comparing and contrasting ideas (eg., analyze generated ideas).	29 (24%)	24 (20%)	0 (0%)	67 (56%)	2.54
16. provided opportunities for students to generalize from concrete data or information to the abstract.	27 (22.5%)	23 (19%)	1 (1%)	69 (57.5%)	2.50
17. encouraged student synthesis or summary of information within or across disciplines.	20 (17%)	15 (13%)	2 (2%)	83 (68%)	2.48

Overall Categorical Effectiveness (EF) Mean Score
(classrooms with observed differentiated behaviors): 2.50

Most of the items in the category on *Creative Thinking Strategies* were infrequently observed. The most frequently observed item dealt with solicitation of diverse ideas (Item #18), observed in 35% of classrooms. Only 21% of classrooms showed evidence of an exploration of diverse viewpoints to reframe ideas (Item #19), yet the provision of opportunities to develop and elaborate these ideas was apparent in 39% of the classrooms (Item #21). About 21% of the classes encouraged open-mindedness from students (Item #20). The mean score effectiveness in this category was 2.42 indicating that the strategies were "somewhat effective to effective" in the classrooms where they were employed. (See Table 5.6)

Table 5.6
Creative Thinking Strategies

Creative Thinking Strategies	**3 Effective**	**2 Somewhat Effective**	**1 Ineffective**	**N/O Not Observed**	**EF Means**
The teacher…					
18. solicited many diverse thoughts about issues or ideas.	21 (17.5%)	19 (15.5%)	2 (2%)	78 (65%)	**2.45**
19. engaged students in the exploration of diverse points of view to reframe ideas.	12 (10%)	13 (11%)	0 (0%)	95 (79%)	**2.48**
20. encouraged students to demonstrate open-mindedness and tolerance of imaginative, sometimes playful solutions to problems.	10 (8%)	14 (12%)	1 (1%)	95 (79%)	**2.36.**
21. provided opportunities for students to develop and elaborate on their ideas.	23 (19%)	21 (17.5%)	3 (2.5%)	73 (61%)	**2.42.**

Overall Categorical Effectiveness (EF) Mean Score
(classrooms with observed differentiated behaviors): 2.42

The final category, *Analysis and Inquiry,* focuses on several behaviors that promote higher level thinking and reasoning in students through deliberate teacher behaviors. The specific behaviors of using inquiry processes to encourage higher level learning (Item #22) was observed in 47% of classrooms, while encouraging students to draw inferences from data and represent them in appropriate forms was seen in 31% (Item #26). The majority of classrooms (59%) used activities that encouraged analysis of text, use of models, or other symbolic sources (Item #24). The use of higher level questions (Item #23) was also evident in 57% of classrooms and building argument (Item #25) in 41%. These last two skills are prominently featured in preparation for AP classwork in most subjects and in the relevant content standards required that lead up to that level of work. The effectiveness score for observed classrooms for this category was 2.55, indicating that teachers observed using the behaviors were within the effectiveness range in implementing the indicators. (See Table 5.7)

Table 5.7
Analysis and Inquiry Strategies

Analysis and Inquiry Strategies	3 Effective	2 Somewhat Effective	1 Ineffective	N/O Not Observed	EF Means
The teacher…					
22. employed the inquiry process to stimulate high level learning.	30 (25%)	23 (19%)	3 (3%)	64 (53%)	**2.48**
23. asked high level questions that encouraged students to think and ask their own questions.	39 (32%)	26 (22%)	2 (3%)	53 (43%)	**2.55**
24. employed activities that required analysis of text, use of models, or other symbolic sources.	41 (34%)	26 (22%)	4 (3%)	49 (41%)	**2.52**
25. employed activities that required students to build argument orally, visually, in written form, or by using models and symbols.	29 (24%)	17 (14%)	3 (3%)	71 (59%)	**2.53**
26. asked students to collect and draw inferences from data and represent findings in a relevant form.	25 (21%)	11 (9%)	1 (1%)	83 (69%)	**2.68**

Overall Categorical Effectiveness (EF) Mean Score
(classrooms with observed differentiated behaviors):2.55

Just as it is important to examine effectiveness data on teachers using the behaviors at a range of levels, it is also important to comment on the teaching behaviors in respect to their use (frequency) in classrooms. Table 5.8 shows the number and percent of behaviors that were observed and not observed by category and item on the COS-R. As can be seen from these data, the most observed behaviors were under the category of Curriculum Planning and Delivery, Items #1, #2, and #4 which reflect good teaching behaviors but not necessarily differentiated ones. In addition, under Materials and Strategy Utilization, Items #7 and #9 were observed in more than 50% of classrooms. Under Accommodations for Individual Differences, Items #10, #12, and #13 were also observed at the 50% or higher level, as was Item #14 under Critical Thinking Strategies. Finally, Item #23 and #24 under Analysis and Inquiry Strategies were observed in 50% or more of classrooms. In all, 11 out of 26 differentiation strategies were used in over 50% of classrooms observed.

On the other hand, the teaching behaviors that were more limited in frequency of use (used in fewer than 50% of classrooms), ranged from Item #8 which was not observed in 95% of classrooms to Items #3 and #22 not observed in 53% of classrooms.

In Curriculum Planning and Delivery, Item #5 was not observed in 78% of classrooms; Item #3 was not observed in 53% of classrooms. In Materials and Strategy Utilization, both Items #6 and #8 were not observed in 68% and 95% of classrooms respectively. In Accommodations for Individual Differences, Item #11 was not observed in 61% of classrooms. In Critical Thinking Strategies, Items #15, #16, and #17 were not observed in 66%, 57%, and 68% of classrooms respectively. In Creative Thinking Strategies, no items were observed above the 50% level. In Analysis and Inquiry Strategies, Items #22, #25, and #26 were not observed in 53%, 59%, and 69% of classrooms respectively.

Table 5.8

Number and Percentages of Differentiated Teaching Behaviors Observed and Not Observed by COS-R Categories

Categories on the COS-R	Observed		Not-Observed	
Curriculum Planning and Delivery	***Number***	***Percentage***	***Number***	***Percentage***
1. High Expectations	114	**95%**	6	5%
2. Application of new knowledge	112	**93%**	8	7%
3. Planning, monitoring, or assessing learning	56	47%	64	**53%**
4. Expressing thoughts	84	**71%**	35	29%
5. Reflection	26	22%	94	**78%**
Materials and Strategy Utilization	***Number***	***Percentage***	***Number***	***Percentage***
6. Differentiated materials use	38	32%	82	**68%**
7. Sub-grouping for instruction	63	**55%**	55	45%
8. Models for thinking	6	5%	114	**95%**
9. Evidence based strategies for higher-level thinking	69	**58%**	51	42%
Accommodations for Individual Differences	***Number***	***Percentage***	***Number***	***Percentage***
10. Independent and/or group learning	95	**61%**	25	21%
11. Accommodation for individual/subgroup differences	46	39%	74	**61%**
12. Multiple interpretations	61	**51%**	59	49%
13. Self-discovery of ideas	87	**73%**	33	27%
Critical Thinking Strategies	***Number***	***Percentage***	***Number***	***Percentage***
14. Evaluating situations etc.	76	**63%**	44	37%
15. Comparing and contrasting	53	44%	67	**66%**
16. Generalizing from concrete to abstract	51	43%	69	**57%**
17. Synthesis or summary of information	37	32%	83	**68%**
Creative Thinking Strategies	***Number***	***Percentage***	***Number***	***Percentage***
18. Many diverse thoughts	42	35%	78	**65%**
19. Application of diverse points of view	25	21%	95	**79%**
20. Use of open mindedness and imagination	25	21%	95	**79%**
21. Elaboration of ideas	47	39%	73	**61%**
Analysis and Inquiry Strategies	***Number***	***Percentage***	***Number***	***Percentage***
22. Inquiry process	56	47%	64	**53%**
23. High level questions	67	**57%**	53	43%
24. Analysis of text, models, and symbols	71	**59%**	49	41%
25. Building argument in multiple forms	49	41%	71	**59%**
26. Draw inferences	37	31%	83	**69%**

Teaching behaviors observed in more or less than 50% of classrooms are bolded in the table.

The evaluation team chose not to disaggregate the item data by grade levels or schools because of the small sample size. Appendix J reports the overall frequency and effectiveness findings from the Classroom Observation Scale (COS-R). The team did, however, analyze differences by level of schooling.

Sub-analysis by level of schooling

A sub-analysis was conducted by disaggregating results on the COS-R by elementary, middle and high school ratings. The total observations by level are indicated in Table 5.9.

Table 5.9
Number of Observations by Level

Level	**Number of Observations**
Elementary School	57
Middle School	35
High School	28
Total	**120**

Figure 5.1 shows the mean frequency percentages for observed classrooms by level of schools and observation category. The mean frequency percentages were derived from calculating the number of observed classroom behaviors within categories and dividing by the total number of observations at that level of schooling. Figure 5.1 illustrates the variation among elementary, middle, and high school classrooms in respect to these percentages of observed behaviors.

In general, the highest percentages of observed behaviors by level were for high school observations with the exception of the category of Materials and Strategy Use. Elementary percentage levels were high predominantly in the categories of Curriculum Planning and Delivery and Accommodation for Differences. Middle school percentages were equally high for Curriculum Planning and Delivery. Comparatively, middle school percentages were the lowest of all levels of schooling in three categories; Materials and Strategy Use, Accommodations for Differences and Creative Thinking.

Figure 5.1
Comparative Mean Frequency Observed Percentages by Category and Level

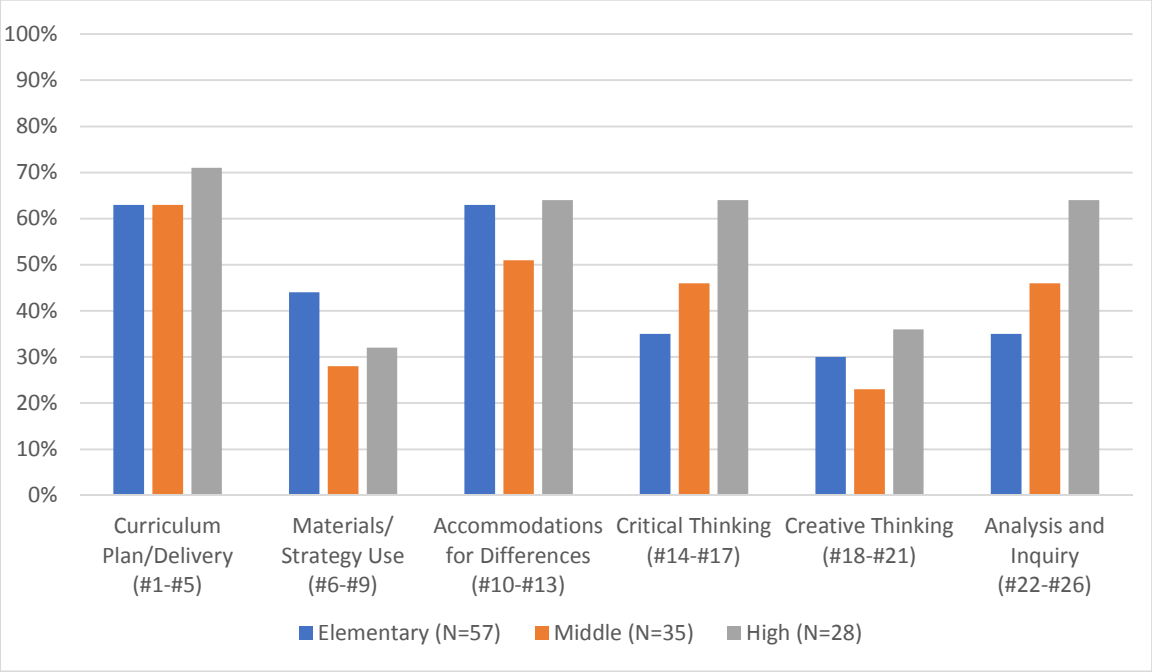
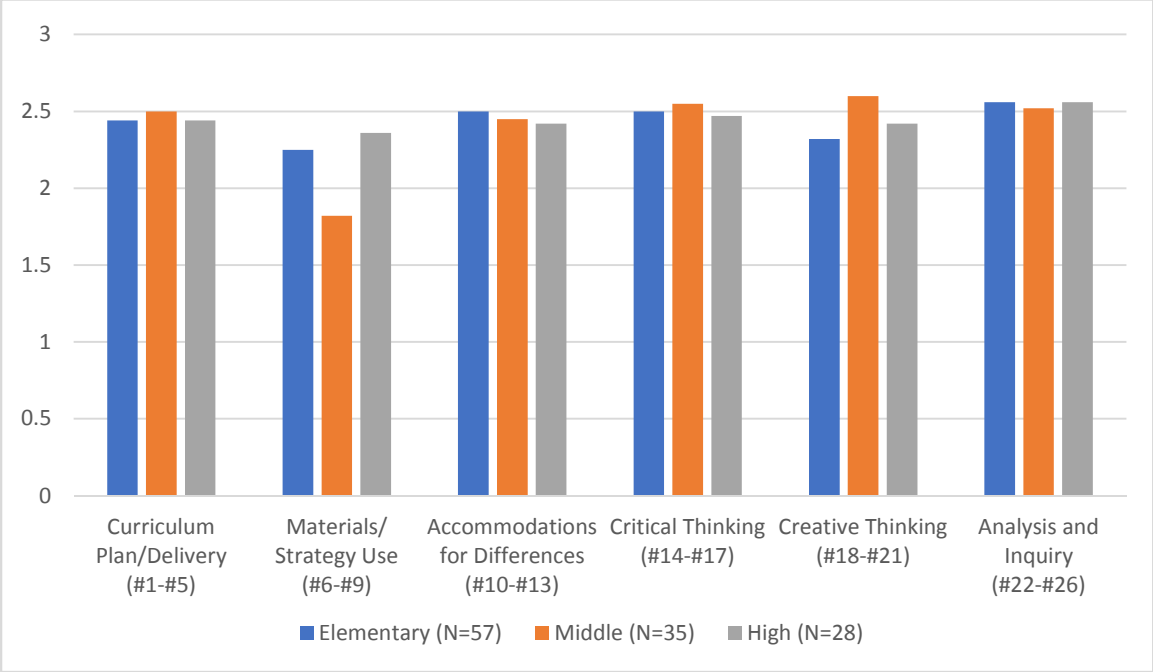


Figure 5.2 demonstrates the comparative mean effectiveness scores for each category on the COS-R by level of schooling. Appendix J contains these data by item. It is striking to note that these mean scores show very little variation across levels of schooling with the exception of Materials and Strategy Use where the effectiveness rating was below 2.0 at the middle school level. These results suggest that where teachers are using differentiated teaching behaviors, they are in the range of "somewhat effective" to "effective" in all categories and at all levels with the middle school exception noted above.

Figure 5.2
Comparative Mean Effectiveness Scores by Category and Level



Sub-analysis by subject area

The data were also disaggregated by subject area although sample sizes for science and social studies classrooms were smaller than for the two core areas of language arts and math as Table 5.10 demonstrates. Language arts had the largest number of observations.

Table 5.10
Number of Observations by Subject Area

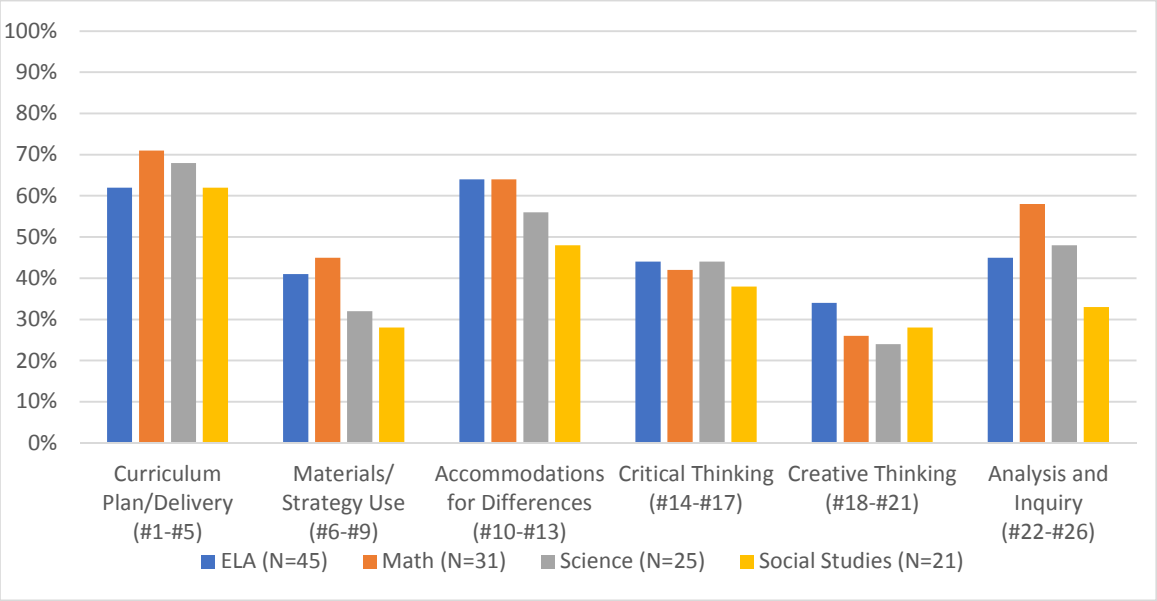
Subject	Observations
ELA	45
Math	31
Science	25
Social Studies	21
Total	**122***

*Double Observations were made where two subjects were observed during the same period, accounting for two extra observations counts in subject areas

Figure 5.3 shows the results of the frequency of classroom observations by subject area and category. Math classrooms exceeded all other subjects in the use of differentiated strategies with the exception of critical and creative thinking. Both math and science classrooms exceeded language arts and social studies in the use of "Curriculum Planning and Delivery", and "Analysis and Inquiry" strategies. Language arts classrooms were strongest in the use of "Creative Thinking". Social studies classrooms were rated lower than other subject areas on four of the six domains of the scale. In only three categories on the form did the frequency of strategy use exceed 50% for any subject area. Those three were Curriculum Planning and Delivery in all four subject areas, Accommodation for Differences in all but social studies, and Analysis and Inquiry in math.

Figure 5.3

Comparative Mean Frequency Observed Percentages by Category and Content Area



Sub-analysis by TAG and non-TAG classrooms

The evaluation team also examined the classroom observation data by TAG and non-TAG classes at the elementary level, meaning we looked at differences between the 4th and 5th grade ELA and math pullout classes and 3rd grade resource pullout classes in comparison to other classes observed that might have had a small cluster or a few gifted students in them at all grade levels. The breakdown for comparison was: 24 TAG classrooms (designated as grades 3, 4, and 5) and 35 non-TAG classrooms (designated regular classrooms grade 1-5). Very few differences emerged between the two types of designations on average. Large variations were seen in individual schools at the elementary level, however, in these comparisons. Because these data showed so much variation from school to school, the presentation of averages is not meaningful. Therefore, individual data sets are available for use by separate schools but are not included in this report.

Sub-analysis by AP and non-AP high school classrooms

A sub analysis was also done to compare high school classrooms with respect to best practice by program type. In the comparison of AP (N=6) and non-AP classes (N=8) at the high school level, data suggest that Advanced Placement classes use significantly more differentiation strategies than do honors or dual enrollment classrooms, especially in the areas of both critical, creative thinking and analysis and inquiry. However, the numbers of classrooms observed of each program type rendered inferences about the differences between or across them questionable, especially since the school offers multiple sections of most AP classes with multiple honors opportunities leading up to them. Therefore, the evaluation team believed the sample size was too small to make inferences about the program type.

Findings

The evaluation team presents the following findings, supported by the classroom observation data.

1) **Many strategies that are markers of differentiated practice were not observed in many classrooms and schools. The extent of use (frequency), including the use of advanced curriculum and concomitant materials, high level strategies, and accommodations for individual differences were lacking at all levels and in all subject areas. Most worrisome was the relatively low number of observations of higher level thinking in the form of critical, creative, or metacognitive thinking in classrooms.**

2) **Where differentiated behaviors were observed, teachers were rated as "somewhat effective" to "effective" in their practice, indicating movement toward effectiveness in the use of differentiation strategies appropriate for gifted learners. These findings suggest that a cadre of teachers in ACPS are demonstrating important skill sets in working with TAG learners.**

3) **There is evidence that suggests that the use of differentiation strategies differs by content area and level of schooling. Our analyses show that math classes use more higher-level thinking skills than other subjects although language arts used more creative thinking. High school classrooms observed used more strategies than any other level of schooling. Elementary classrooms appeared to be best attuned to making accommodations for individual differences.**

4) **There is evidence across the classrooms observed that many instructional strategies that support learning for gifted students are being used by both TAG and non-TAG teachers. The range of effectiveness varies by school and individual teacher.**

Conclusion

The data source of classroom observations revealed both the frequency of use and effectiveness of differentiation in ACPS classrooms that included TAG learners. Findings suggest the need for greater use of those strategies. Data also suggest that when teachers are using the strategies, they are doing so effectively.

Section VI: National Standards Review

In 1998, the National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC] established a set of program standards for use by local school districts in upgrading their programs. These standards were revised in 2010 to align with new teacher education standards for gifted education. The NAGC Gifted Programming Standards are divided into six categories related to planning, implementation, and maintenance of program development indicators. The six categories include the following: learning and development, curriculum planning, assessment, learning environments, programming, and professional development.

A simple framework was used to determine the status of key indicators within each area assessed in the ACPS TAG program. If any indicator was seen to be used across the program, it was marked "yes". If the indicator was seen in only one component of the gifted program reviewed or only at one level, the evaluator judged the indicator to be "uneven". If an indicator was in the process of being applied to the program through discussion with the coordinator of the TAG program, it was rated as "developing". Some indicators appeared to be inapplicable to the ACPS program as designed so those indicators were noted as "not observed".

The process of marking the 97 indicators for the six standards was done collaboratively, with the evaluator conferring with the Talented and Gifted (TAG) Coordinator to ensure accuracy of interpretation in respect to program variables. The results then have been modified to reflect that collaboration. (See Appendix K for the completed form)

Findings

The findings are reported by area of learning of gifted students as noted above. Indicators of the behavior as a basis for the rating are provided for many of the individual items. Some items are often related to other standards beyond the one first rated. Thus, a high rating in one area may lead to the same in another. This situation is also true in the reverse. A low-rated item may influence choices in another area, leading to a lower rating there. The evaluator has tried to pinpoint when and where that situation occurs.

The NAGC Standards address the processes related to effective practices. As such, they are most useful for designing a program. They do not address outcome variables related to program implementation. Therefore, a district may have a high score on any given standard, but not have evidence of effective implementation of that standard.

Standard 1 Learning and Development

In the area of learning and development (Standard 1), the division received 3 "yes", 4 "no", 4 "uneven", 1 "developing", and 1 "not observed" ratings.

The issue of unevenness was especially evident in the lack of research-based grouping of identified gifted students at primary and middle school levels. It was further noted in the attention paid to the development of individual strengths through deliberate program interventions. Other areas of deficiency, for which the division received a "no" rating centered on the lack of an affective emphasis in the program, where students had access to

a specialized counseling program that addressed psycho-social needs, academic planning needs, and career education needs.

The TAG Coordinator provides email assistance and phone support to parents as requested. While TC Williams offers Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) guidance support and the regular counselor provides the basic academic planning opportunities, no special monitoring of TAG students occurs in respect to counseling needs. Moreover, items relating to underachievers, use of individual data to design programs and work with families on recommendations for their child did not appear to be regularly addressed in the school program. Intervention plans are available for development across K-8, but fewer than 10 are developed each year to address problems with individual gifted student progress. Collaboration with families was an area noted as "developing", as the TAG Coordinator cited that resources in the form of readings were being made available to parents in some of the programs. Outside opportunities which the program brokers for students include the following: Odyssey of the Mind, Governor's School, History Day, Science Fair, and the Jack Kent Cooke Student Scholarship.

Standard 2 Assessment

In the area of assessment (Standard 2), the division identification approach was evaluated, using the Commonwealth of Virginia guidelines as a basis. However, this process was also judged on current research findings. On this standard, the district received 12 "yes", 3 "no", 2 "uneven", and 5 "developing" ratings.

Most of the assessment processes used in the ACPS identification process do meet national standards. Procedures for comprehensive identification, accompanied by an appeals procedure, are well-defined. The division processes 20-26 appeals per year, according to the TAG Coordinator. The only area not receiving a "yes" rating in this aspect of assessment was 2.1.2 that dealt with providing information directly to parents regarding characteristics associated with giftedness in general and in specific populations. Identification information and testing is available in Spanish. Information on the program is available from a printed brochure, translated into four languages (2.3.3). Most schools provide an orientation session for parents at the beginning of the year; a few (N=3) schools do not. Twice exceptional students are identified (2% is the current number in the division) in collaboration with Specialized Instruction and school psychologists. Tutoring in the completion of IEP specifications is provided as needed at the school level.

In the aspect of the standard that deals with student assessment of learning, there is a lack of collecting pre-assessment data and using them for curriculum and program planning and an absence of learning outcome data being collected and reported systematically. The SOL test results are only gross indicators of these students' performance and should be used cautiously in rendering judgments about individual learner capabilities or program efficacy.

In the area of using products to assess gifted student learning, there have been efforts since fall, 2016 to collect product data from student Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs) (2.4.2). Off-

level assessment is used routinely in Advanced Placement (AP) and Dual Enrollment (DE) courses. Data on performance in the grades 4 and 5 programs employ tools that might be employed off-level (i.e. Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) in reading and Think Through Math (TTM) in math) (2.4.3). Assessment of learning is done predominantly in the content area, not in higher level thinking skills or affective development (2.5.2). Assessment data have been disaggregated on gifted student performance by the Department of Accountability in 2016 (2.5.3). Potentially, such data could be available each year for comparative purposes.

Regarding program evaluation data, the gifted program has never been evaluated K-12 in the past, except for Virginia reviews. Currently, it is engaged in a comprehensive review that will recommend continued efforts on an annual basis to collect student outcome data and satisfaction surveys from relevant stakeholders and to disseminate results to relevant publics on how the data will be used (2.6.1-2.6.3).

Standard 3 Curriculum Planning

In the area of curriculum planning (Standard 3), the division received 2 "yes", 1 "no", 13 "uneven", 2 "developing", and 2 "not observed" ratings.

Positive responses were given for the use of technologies, for individualization, and the use of metacognitive models. Curriculum is currently being aligned to national gifted standards, not just to Virginia standards. The middle school programs were found to be not meeting standards in the areas related to differentiation of the honors curriculum for gifted learners in all areas. Although DEPs were the delivery vehicle in science and social studies in grades 4-5, their use was uneven from teacher to teacher in respect to being offered or completed (3.1.3). This appeared to be the situation at K-3 as well.

Acceleration and compacting of learning was evident only in the math curriculum from grades 4-12 (3.1.6). Modification of the curriculum to accommodate gifted learners was seen only in the ELA component of the program in grades 4-5 (3.1.3). A scope and sequence of learning is only well-articulated in the grades 4-5 program, not at K-3, not in 6-8, nor in 9-12. Designing curriculum that addresses cognitive, affective, social, and leadership domains is in development, according to the TAG Coordinator. Moreover, the lack of a targeted counseling component also makes the uniform application of addressing social and emotional needs and academic and career guidance somewhat haphazard.

Standard 3 also addresses the use of talent development approaches, instructional strategies, culturally relevant curriculum, and resources. ACPS was judged as uneven in all of these indicators. Comments earlier on the lack of differentiation at grades K-3 and at middle school impact strongly on the indicators in this section of the form as well. For example, while the ELA classes at grades 4 and 5 engage students in research through the I-Search model, other levels of schooling are uneven in the effective use of research with gifted students. While DEPs offer the possibility of such applications, analysis of them yields uneven results in that application (3.3.3). The focus on deep exploration of culture, language and social issues related to diversity are not a deliberate emphasis in the program (3.5.3).

There is real unevenness in teacher and administrator awareness and knowledge of special resources for the gifted, often using materials that are below grade level or inappropriate for these learners (3.6.1). While resource teachers are building relationships in buildings, building administrators do not consistently support these efforts to share gifted materials with other staff members.

Standard 4 Learning Environments

In the area of learning environments (Standard 4), the division received 5 "yes" 4 "no", 4 "uneven", and 4 "not observed" ratings.

The program is strong in setting high expectations for learning, but less effective in teaching specific affective strategies that would help students with psycho-social growth. An emphasis on leadership skills was absent. Lack of specific counseling and academic guidance services led to negative responses on several indicators in this category (4.1.2-4.3.3). In the classrooms of trained teachers of the gifted, especially resource teachers, these behaviors were observed to some extent, depending on the lesson under study. Research projects done for History Day and Science Fair at middle school levels addressed some of these issues, according to the TAG Coordinator. Such projects were not routinely analyzed for such content, however. Of those that were, little attention to interests was observed.

The ACPS gifted program typically provides opportunities for interaction with regular and intellectual peers although not all of these opportunities would be in an ongoing designated grouping model. The program also provides opportunities for collaboration with diverse peers on common goals through group project work at all levels, and demonstrates sensitivity to diverse backgrounds and languages. Cultural competence workshops have been planned, according to the TAG Coordinator, to further this emphasis. Communication tools in technology have been provided in grades 4-12 in the form of Chrome books. Behaviors related to discrimination, multiple language use, or culturally designed materials were not observed.

Standard 5 Programming

In the area of programming (Standard 5), the ACPS TAG program received 2 "yes", 2 "no", 6 "uneven", 2 "developing", and 1 "not observed" ratings.

The division has approved a new policy on acceleration that responds to Virginia requirements and addresses the need for the use of multiple approaches (5.1.1). At the present time, the division employs content acceleration in math from grade 4 on, and the use of college level courses in the form of AP and DE courses at the high school level. These opportunities for acceleration benefit some of the population but not others, especially students in content areas such as science, the humanities, and the social sciences.

The division received credit for offering programming to all qualified gifted students and for serving students as part of the regular school day as well as encouraging out of school opportunities (5.1.2). Grouping issues are problematic in the division, with some grouping occurring through clusters in some schools at certain levels but not at others. Only at grades 4

and 5 is instructional grouping of gifted learners guaranteed (5.1.3). Middle school classes need to use clustering to manage the open enrollment procedure currently in place, according to the TAG Coordinator. Use of mentors is uncommon in the division although at the high school level it is more frequent. Online learning is available at the high school level as well (5.1.4). Use of technology and communication skill development received an affirmative response (5.1.5). Budget delineation was also seen as satisfactory although the extent to which gifted programs receive a fair share of the division or individual school budgets was not probed in this review (5.1.6). Not all administrators in all schools provide appropriate services. There is strong evidence of resources and materials being provided to the program upon formal request, however. In respect to collaboration across areas for program planning, the strongest efforts have been with the subject matter specialists who are critical to the implementation of advanced courses of study (5.2.1). Less consistent involvement with EL and Specialized Instruction was initiated beyond involvement with the appeals committees, according to the TAG Coordinator.

The areas of deficiency in programming appear to be in the lack of systematic collaborative planning across general and specialized instructional services in relation to the needs of the gifted, the lack of a targeted counseling system, the lack of individualized options such as mentorships, and the current lack of provisions for gifted students in acceleration in all content areas and grade levels as warranted by data.

Standard 6 Professional Development

In the area of professional development (Standard 6), the district received 8 “yes”, 0 “no”, 2 “uneven”, and 2 not “observed ratings.

The area of professional development (PD) for gifted education in ACPS is very well-organized and executed. The TAG Coordinator has a professional development plan that provides levels of opportunities for all teachers in the division, including paying for courses that will lead to endorsement in gifted education (6.1.1-6.1.2). Teachers in ACPS use multiple modes to receive the professional development in gifted education (6.3.3). Elementary teachers meet monthly for professional development sessions; middle school teachers have in-school offerings in a 6-workshop series. There are two cohorts of 20 teachers each year who are going through the endorsement program. Only the two high school campuses are not actively engaged in providing building-based professional development in this area.

The coordinator also routinely pays for teachers to attend gifted conferences at state and national levels, encouraging teachers to present their work in these arenas (6.1.4-6.1.5). All honors teachers at grades 6-8 are involved in some form of professional development in gifted education, a sign that the opportunities represent a positive change in professional development in gifted education.

The area of greatest deficiency in professional development rests with the lack of qualification of some of the personnel working in the program in regard to formal preparation in gifted education and prior experience in working with gifted students, a result of their not taking advantage of the opportunities provided, not doing them at the level of depth required in the William and Mary endorsement classes, and/or not applying

the strategies learned in any of the delivery models employed. Some of the teachers in the program do not have coursework or deep experience in working with these learners, hampering their effectiveness to differentiate and to relate appropriately to gifted learners. New teachers may lack professional development experiences that would socialize them to the curriculum framework for the program and the specific curriculum materials employed. Moreover, the monitoring of the impact of professional development was very uneven (6.3.2) as was an emphasis on social and emotional development (6.2.1).

Table 6.1 reflects the overall scores for the ACPS TAG program on the six national standards reviewed. As can be seen from the table, Standard 2 and Standard 6 include the greatest number of indicators "met", while Standard 1 and Standard 4 have the greatest number "not met". Moreover, in Standard 2, while most indicators related to identification were met, indicators related to learning assessment were more disparate in ratings, with five under the "developing" category. Also seen in Table 6.1, the ACPS TAG program received a total of 32 "yes" and 14 "no" out of a total of 97 indicators that comprise the six standards assessed. The breakdown is as follows: 32 "yes"; 31 "uneven"; 14 "no"; 10 "developing", and 10 "not observed"**.**

Table 6.1
Overall Ratings for the ACPS TAG Program
on NAGC National Gifted Programming Standards

	Yes	Uneven	No	Developing	Not Observed
Standard 1 Learning and Development	3	4	4	1	1
Standard 2 Assessment	12	2	3	5	0
Standard 3 Curriculum Planning	2	13	1	2	2
Standard 4 Learning Environments	5	4	4	0	4
Standard 5 Programming	2	6	2	2	1
Standard 6 Professional Development	8	2	0	0	2
Total Scores	**32**	**31**	**14**	**10**	**10**

Findings

1) **Areas of strength for ACPS, based on this standards review, were in identification and professional development where research-based processes are in use. However, other data sources suggest that these areas of program development are not necessarily producing desired outcomes for students.**

2) **Areas in need of attention in the program are in assessment of student learning, the need for a systematic approach to guidance and counseling, more individual opportunities for learning based on need, and better alignment and articulation of advanced curriculum with appropriate grouping for instruction.**

Conclusion

The review of the TAG program, using best practice standards was effected in collaboration with the TAG Coordinator. The preponderance of evidence suggests that the division is addressing well the standards indicators in identification (part of Standard #2) and professional development (Standard #6) processes. All other standards and underlying indicators suggest the need for more attention to and emphasis on program development in specific areas related to counseling and academic guidance, acceleration in subjects other than math, use of curriculum based assessment, and a cohesive program and curriculum scope and sequence.

Section VII: Analysis of TAG Program Development Components

The evaluation team reviewed ACPS documents that reflected current TAG program operation in key components. These components included identification, program design and curriculum, assessment, and professional development. In each of these areas, the evaluators provided an analysis of strengths and weaknesses followed by recommendations for changes that might improve the overall functioning of the program. The analyses were also considered as an important data source for the development of the overall evaluation recommendations.

A. Identification

Division context

Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) includes 12 elementary schools, a few with a specific theme or identifiable designation, one P-8 building, two middle schools, and two high school campuses, one just for grade 9 students and the second for grades 10-12. Overall, 14,392 students are served in the division across the grades and schools designated. Approximately 1772 students, or 12% of the school division's population, receive gifted services (SY 2015-16). In Table 7.1, Black, Hispanic, and students of low socio-economic status are underrepresented in the TAG program although they represent the following distribution in the school division:

Table 7.1
Distribution of Under-Represented Populations in ACPS TAG Programs (SY 2015-16)

Designated Population	% in division	% in gifted program	Disparities
African American	29%	16%	-13%
Hispanic	36%	11%	-25%
Asian	5%	5%	+.37%
Other races*	3%	5%	+2%
EL	37%	7%	-30%
Low income	59%	20%	- 39%
Twice-exceptional	11%+	2%	Data Unavailable
Whites	27%	62%	+35%

*Students identified as American Indian and Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific islander or multi-racial are included in this category.
+Students identified for Specialized Instruction, including but not Limited to Twice Exceptional Students
Source: *Talented and Gifted Program Indicators*, Department of Accountability, February 2017

All ethnic minorities except Asians are underrepresented in the TAG program identification. Across the school years 2014-16, the percentages of underrepresented groups identified has remained constant except for Hispanics and Low-Income students, whose identification increased one percentage point in 2015-16.

At the middle school level, identified TAG students constitute 33% and 46% overall of honors classes at Frances Hammond and George Washington respectively. Breakdowns by ethnicity within the TAG program are not possible to calculate, based on available data from the Department of Accountability, 2016-17.

A preliminary analysis run by the Department of Accountability in June 2017 suggests that lowering cut-off score on the instruments used would yield a few more students from underrepresented groups. The Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT) data from Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 suggest the proposed change might yield 6-13 additional black students, 7-9 more Hispanic students, and 2 more multi-racial students for gifted program consideration. The same change would yield 15-24 white students as well. The same analysis from 1 year of Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) data suggests that 2-4 additional black, 1-4 additional Hispanic, and 1-2additional multi-racial students might be added for gifted program consideration. The same change would yield 24 more white students for consideration. These changes may not make a significant difference in the disproportionality of underrepresented groups.

The current identification process and the context for programming

According to the Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted for 2012-2016, the Alexandria City Public Schools' Talented and Gifted Program provides direct services to students grades 4-12 in Specific Academic Aptitude (SAA) in all four core academic areas and in the visual and performing arts. Expansion of identification to the area of General Intellectual Aptitude (GIA) was phased in for K-3, beginning in the 2013-14 school year. The visual and performing arts program was phased out as of 2013.

At K-3, the division initiated a Young Scholars Program in 2013-14 to provide support at targeted schools for promising students from poor and minority backgrounds. Students in the Young Scholars Program are served through a summer enrichment program and then clustered into general education homerooms for continued differentiation. General Intellectual Aptitude (GIA) services are provided to identified students through Differentiated Educational Plans (DEP) and limited pull-out or push-in services weekly for 30 minutes.

At grades 4 and 5 in language arts and math, TAG students are served in self-contained settings with endorsed teachers of the gifted. In science and social studies, TAG students are served in regular classrooms through a Differentiated Education Plan (DEP). At grades 6-8, TAG students participate in honors classes, offered in each core subject area. The honors program is open enrollment, with some clustering of TAG students within these classes. At grades 9-12, students

continue to participate in honors classes, followed by Advanced Placement (AP). Dual Enrollment (DE) options are also available at the high school level.

Identification procedures are extensively outlined for locating underrepresented students, with a goal of increasing these students' participation in TAG programs by one-sixth each year. Limited progress has been made each year toward more underrepresented groups being included, such as ethnic minorities. Involvement in the Young Scholars Program, the use of multiple criteria for identification, the use of student profiles to make holistic assessments, and the use of a selection committee made up of diverse educators are all described as current identification approaches for finding more diverse learners for the gifted program.

Identification process currently in place

The following steps are aspects of the identification process used in ACPS, beginning at kindergarten:

Identification at kindergarten-grade 1

--Prior to the 90th day of school, students can be referred for TAG services by parents, teachers, community members or self-referral. School data are used both in the fall and spring of each year to generate automatic referrals.

--Following a referral, letters are sent home to parents of referred students to request permission to continue the TAG evaluation process.

-- Teachers complete a Gifted Rating Scales (GRS) (Pfeiffer & Jarosewich, 2003) for referred students. Students are judged on intellectual ability, motivation, and creative abilities. Superior ratings are at 90+ percentile on those scales. The GRS scales have strong reliability and validity data for all scales used. The forms also have artistic and leadership scales, but these are not used by the division at the present time.

--A product rating is used, derived from the use of transfer tasks (built into the division general curriculum guides) relevant to the program area and grade level.

--Once a student has three qualifying pieces of data, no additional data are collected.
The teacher scale is not required as one of the supporting pieces but is routinely collected as part of the process.

At grade 1, there is a universal screening on the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT), with a superior range cutoff of 96th percentile. In grade levels without universal screening, individual ability tests are given, if needed, by the school psychologist upon student referral.

--Students are placed in the program, based **on a combination of any 3 out of any of the following criteria at threshold cutoff percentiles** as long as one is a standardized test score:

NNAT, CogAT or other ability test--96th percentile
Achievement test i.e. Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), Think Through Math (TTM) – 96th percentile used for SAA eligibility only
Gifted Rating Scales - 90th percentile on any applicable scale

Standards-based performance (grades) in the area of identification - 3.1 on a 4 pt. scale
Transfer task score - 3.5 on a 4 pt. scale
Interview - superior
Observation- superior

--Additional achievement and performance data are collected on these students for further review, including standards-based performance. Sometimes the kindergarten screening form is used.

--Students for whom there is a question about eligibility are referred to a school-based committee, comprised of the TAG designee, who chairs the committee, a school psychologist, a TAG teacher, and an administrator.

--This committee reviews the files of students who have inconclusive results and may need additional data or information to be collected. This could result in retesting, gathering additional work products, or conferring with other teachers who have knowledge of the student prior to a decision being made. Students who have missed a lot of school or who have transferred into the division are examples of such situations.

--State regulations require that divisions employ three criteria, one of which must be a standardized ability test, in order to qualify for services. The committee then examines the individual eligibility profiles of students in their building to decide who should be placed in the TAG program at kindergarten and beyond.

--Once a decision is made, a letter, notifying parents of the decision, is sent home by the school's TAG Designee who is available to answer any questions.

--An appeals process is in place for parents who wish to appeal the decision about selection for services by their child within 10 days of the receipt of the letter.

Identification at grade 3

The identification process changes in important ways at grade 3, due to the addition of specific academic aptitude services instituted at the intermediate levels of grades 4 and 5.

--In grade 3, all students are tested on the CogAT which is administered at the beginning of the school year. CogAT performance is expected to be at the 96th percentile on at least one of the subtests for GIA identification in the fall; in the spring of third grade, the CogAT scores are reviewed again for automatic referrals for 4th grade separate TAG classes. Of particular interest are the sub-scores in verbal and mathematical aptitude, each required at the 96th percentile for entrance into the respective advanced class of reading or math.

--The Gifted Rating Scales GRS), completed by teachers at the beginning of the year, address academic, motivation, and creative areas.

-- Profile sheets are then developed for each student that include each subject area, including social studies and science.

--Each eligibility profile form includes 1) the ability scores on CogAT, 2) the achievement level on ITBS for social studies and science, the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) for language arts, and available division-wide math standardized assessments such as Think Through Math (TTM) and Logo (AIMS web) for math, at the superior level of 96th percentile, 3) the standards-based performance of students (SOL) at the superior level as described by the ACPS Progress Report, 4) the Gifted Rating Scales, with a superior rating at 90% or higher in any one scale, and 5) product assessment on performance based assessment (PBA) transfer tasks, scoring at the advanced level.

--Again, students must show superior ratings in three out of the five areas to qualify for services. The CogAT, or a similar ability test, or a standardized achievement test must be one of the three areas used.

--Parent letters are sent home to all students being considered for identification, with the appropriate information provided.

--An appeals process is in place for parents who wish to appeal the decision about selection for services by their child.

Although the division suggests that assessment is ongoing beyond the published cycle of testing, there is not much evidence that this occurs from the perspective of stakeholders in the division. The TAG Coordinator notes, however, that "Every fall and spring TAG Designees review all division-administered assessments to determine if additional individual assessments/reassessments are needed." There is also no division-wide census testing of children after the third grade year for the TAG program.

--All forms for use in identification have been translated into Spanish.

Services provided to students at the primary level are predominantly delivered by the classroom teacher through the development of a DEP which describes an independent project for the individual TAG student to work on in an area of ability. At grades K-3, there are some pullout/push-in services available where teachers work with a set of interdisciplinary materials on a concept such as cycles or patterns. A form also has been developed to assist in the improvement of performance of students receiving TAG services. The completion of this form and its activation is essential before exiting the program would be considered as an option.

Young Scholars identification process

The Young Scholars (YS) identification process is followed for students nominated in the four pilot schools implementing the program. Two of these schools were observed during the observations for the evaluation. The components of the YS identification include:

--teacher referral based on student profile data,

-- a behavioral continuum checklist of potential for success in the program after higher level thinking skill lessons have been implemented, completed by the intervention team and the classroom teacher,

--a characteristics scale completed by the teacher,

--a classroom monitoring form, and

--a referral form for Young Scholars services, completed by the teacher.

--Parents are notified if their child has been identified as a Young Scholar and permission for the child to be placed into the program and attend the summer enrichment experience is sent home.

An overall portfolio is kept on each Young Scholar candidate. This is reviewed annually to determine growth and to examine additional data for use in the formal TAG services referral process.

Commendations of the current identification model in ACPS

The current model of identification follows Virginia and national best practice guidelines in several areas:

--the use of multiple criteria (at least three),

--the use of tests found sensitive to underrepresented groups in respect to assessing nonverbal ability (both the NNAT and the CogAT meet that standard).

--the use of local norms on both tests rather than national norms to select students for the program,

--the focus on domain-specific areas for identification by 4th grade, found to be more effective for finding underrepresented groups,

--the use of local committees, made up of educators representing diverse backgrounds and expertise on the issue of TAG identification, to examine profiles of students not automatically selected for the program.

--the use of a holistic assessment, where each student profile is discussed and considered using multiple assessment measures, and

--the development of a Young Scholars model, a research-based program, designed to identify more underrepresented students for gifted services.

Even so, there appears to be much concern in the division about both the process and the outcomes from the process in identifying underrepresented students, as judged from both survey responses and focus group discussions by teachers, administrators, and parents. These concerns have led the evaluator to organize the set of issues identified and to ask two outside consultants who are experts in the identification of minority and low-income students for gifted programs to comment on what might be the best solutions to the concerns raised.

Dr. Joy Lawson Davis, Consultant #1, is currently a Professor of Education at Virginia Union University. Formerly she has been a State Director of Gifted Programs in Virginia and a local coordinator of gifted services in Lancaster County and a teacher of gifted students. Dr. Davis also works as a consultant on issues of diversity, especially the inclusion of black students for

gifted program services. She has recently published *Bright, Talented & Black*, a book on her work (Davis, 2014).

Dr. Rosina Gallagher, Consultant #2, has been a gifted program school psychologist for Chicago Public Schools for over 25 years with primary responsibility for the identification and programmatic placement of students from underrepresented groups in the district that includes over 90% of such students. She has more recently worked as a consultant to various agencies to address the underrepresentation of Hispanic populations in gifted services. She is the Past-President of SENG (Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted).

Proposed recommended changes to be made to the identification system, based on evaluation data

While most of the stakeholder groups in ACPS suggest that the identification process has improved in recent years, all of them voiced concerns about its current iteration in several areas. Feedback from stakeholders in the division from both survey and focus group data and current research in the field were used to craft Table 7.2. It captures the issues identified by various groups, the data sources for those issues, and proposed solutions to them. This table was reviewed by the Department of Accountability and the TAG Coordinator, prior to sending it to the consultants. A rating scale was provided for each issue and solution set in the table for the two outside consultants to review. The scale was developed to determine the extent of agreement that the consultants had with the proposed solutions: scores of 1 indicated "strong agreement", 2 indicated "agreement", 3 indicated "disagreement", and 4 indicated "strong disagreement" with each of the proposed solutions. The outside consultant ratings are noted in the table as well.

Table 7.2
Analysis of Identification Issues by Data Source and Proposed Solution

Issue/Problem	Data Source	Proposed solution	Degree of Agreement with Solution (Rating 1-4 1 high -4 low)
Lack of representation of minority and low-income children in TAG	**Survey data, Focus groups, Interviews Classroom observation**	**Change the process for screening and identification to target more students in these groups for identification for TAG.**	**Consultant #1: 1 Consultant #2: 1**

Issue/Problem	Data Source	Proposed solution	Degree of Agreement with Solution (Rating 1-4 1 high -4 low)
Lack of teacher knowledge in identifying underrepresented groups; the role of teacher advocacy	Focus groups, Interviews	Provide teacher training on the identification system, with an emphasis on look-fors in identifying underrepresented groups	Consultant #1: 1 Consultant #2: 1
Lack of analyzing data to assess intake of underrepresented groups at the screening level	Scores on Naglieri, Teacher recommendation form Gifted Rating Scale (GRS)	Change cutoff scores, as needed, to ensure inclusion of target groups; Use a teacher recommendation form that includes characteristics of minority groups	Consultant #1: 1 Consultant #2: 1
Uneven distribution of TAG-identified students by school, leading to perceptions of over- and under-representation	Focus groups, Interviews, Classroom observations	Develop school-based norms as well as district norms for the program.	Consultant #1: 4 Consultant #2: 1
Communication of the identification process to parents, teachers, et al.	Survey data, Focus groups	Multiple modes, including face-to-face meetings	Consultant #1: 1 Consultant #2: 1
The over involvement of parents in the process; parental advocacy	Focus groups, Interviews	Design a process that involves parents as nominators at the screening level only.	Consultant #1: 2 Consultant #2: 1

Issue/Problem	Data Source	Proposed solution	Degree of Agreement with Solution (Rating 1-4 1 high -4 low)
The role of student samples	Focus groups, Interviews	Design a process to ensure comparable products being judged (eg. performance-based assessment with standardized rubric)	Consultant #1: 1 Consultant #2: 1
The use of school-based committees for selection that are comparable in process and execution	Research in gifted education, Virginia regulation	Develop a process for holding selection committee meetings on one day at a central location with resources to check and confer.	Consultant #1: 4 Consultant #2: 1
The use of multiple criteria that are balanced in perspective (tests and other sources receiving consideration)	Research in gifted education, Virginia regulation	Develop a system that uses at least three criteria that weigh equally in the final selection.	Consultant #1: 2 Consultant #2: 1
The need for reassessment at middle school level	Research in gifted education, Focus groups	Use a content-based aptitude measure for all core areas to ensure identification for advanced coursework at grades 6-8 (eg. DAT) for universal screening	Consultant #1: 1 Consultant #2: 1

Issue/Problem	Data Source	Proposed solution	Degree of Agreement with Solution (Rating 1-4 1 high -4 low)
Lack of an effective identification process for science and social studies at elementary level	**Survey data, Focus groups Division data**	**Modify teacher checklists to include science and social studies behaviors; Use performance-based assessments in each area (Fowler Test, DBQs); Examine relevant CogAT data**	**Consultant #1: 1** **Consultant #2: 1**
Young Scholars Program limited in scope; limited impact beyond summer program experience (14% identified for gifted program by grade 3)	**Focus groups, Interviews**	**Expand the Young Scholars Program to eligible elementary schools by grade 1; Provide support for in-school follow-up during the academic year.**	**Consultant #1: 2** **Consultant #2: 1**
Lack of high school acknowledgment of TAG students (including under-represented groups)	**Focus groups, Interviews, Classroom observation**	**Teachers provided with list of identified TAG students to address differentiation in the classroom; Appoint a TAG coordinator for each high school complex to provide guidance, coordination of extracurricular experiences, and assistance in honors, AP, and DE issues.**	**Consultant #1: 1** **Consultant #2: 1**
Lack of the arts as a TAG program area that would attract more underrepresented students	**Survey data, Focus groups, Interviews**	**Consider the arts as an important program expansion area within two years.**	**Consultant #1: 1** **Consultant #2: 1**

Based on data from the above multiple sources, the following questions were asked of each consultant. Questions were framed, based on the concerns noted by stakeholders and evaluators. A synthesized version of their responses is included following each question. The full text of their responses may be found in Appendix L.

Questions for consultants: (Dr. Joy Lawson Davis and Dr. Rosina Gallagher)

1. In your experience, what research-based approaches to identification have resulted in finding more underrepresented populations, especially minority and low-income students?

   Both consultants provided assistance in response to this question in the form of resources to be consulted for considering new alternatives to teacher and parent checklists for use in identification and curriculum-based criteria for inclusion. Specific examples are included in their respective reports. The major performance-based recommendation from Consultant #2 is currently a part of the identification process used by ACPS for the Young Scholars Program.

2. Given that the Naglieri Nonverbal Test (NNAT), which assesses general ability in a nonverbal format, and the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), which assesses verbal, nonverbal, and mathematical aptitudes, have been found to be helpful in finding underrepresented populations, are there ways to use those tests that have proven to be most effective?

   Consultant #2 demurred from comment on this question while Consultant #1 suggested lowering the percentile cutoffs to 85% in order to enhance the inclusion of more underrepresented populations. Both agreed these were the best aptitude measures to be used in finding these populations.

3. What are the pitfalls in using teacher nominations? Parent nominations?

   Each consultant commented on the issues with the use of each type of nomination. They noted that teachers should not be gatekeepers for who is selected for the program, that they need to be trained in the use of any checklist to be employed, that the checklist used should have characteristics associated with the underrepresented groups to be found, and that teachers need to be aware that these children will often be strong in only one academic area and may only be showing potential in their cultural context, not in a traditional academic one.

   Consultant #1 stressed the need to have Black teachers be in a position to nominate Black students. She also stressed the need to use parent and community-based nominations as a part of the process, noting that research suggests the efficacy of such an approach. Her comments also suggested the need for a community outreach effort to find and train parents of underrepresented groups in order for them to become a part of the process.

4. What mix of criteria work best in ensuring a better representation of children from low-income backgrounds in the selection of gifted learners?

Both consultants supported the use of multiple criteria for identification that would include ability measures, achievement measures, nominations from trained adults via a checklist that includes the characteristics of students from underrepresented groups who are potentially gifted, and other indicators available through work sample reviews. Performance-based assessment was supported by both consultants as an important criterion to be applied as was the use of community referrals. At the technical level of applying criteria, Consultant #1 stressed the need for universal screening and use of subtest scores, two practices ACPS already employs. Consultant #2 also provided a checklist of behaviors associated with finding minority students and the recommendation of two other scales that might be helpful for use with teachers in looking for students of poverty.

5. What instruments have you found to be most effective for use in an identification system* to help ensure representation for African American students? For Hispanic learners, many of whom are EL?

   Both consultants acknowledged the use of CogAT and NNAT through universal screening and lowered threshold cutoff scores were useful along with individual testing (preferably by Black or Hispanic psychologists). They both recommended other tests that might be considered as well. Other ideas included: 1) assessments should be given in the student's first language, 2) EL teachers should be encouraged to initiate referrals, 3) increased involvement of minority parents in the process, and 4) targeting of Title I schools for gifted education training.

6. If you were the coordinator in this division, what changes would you effect to improve the existing identification system? Please indicate what the identification system* would look like.

   Each consultant outlined a set of guidelines she would use in changing the identification process. The list of recommended practices from Consultant #1 included the use of measures and criteria already discussed in earlier items, community outreach in the form of materials and presentations to community groups on the issue, the use of advocacy points for underrepresented students, and teacher referrals after sensitivity/cultural competency training. Consultant #2 suggested greater collaboration with the minority group structures in the schools and the community, the development of a parent group, the development of an acceleration policy that would allow Hispanic children to move to advanced coursework earlier in their native language and literature, the use of professional development on a broad scale to include specialized instruction and bilingual program staff, and an enhanced role for school psychologists, not just in testing but also in follow-up interventions.

7. Please provide feedback on Table 2 provided above. Are the solutions appropriate? What would you add or delete from consideration?

   Consultant #1 rated two items on the list at the 4 level. She expressed concerns about the feasibility of one centralized meeting across schools to engage in the process of

identification and recommended against school-based norms. (See full report in Appendix L)

Consultant #2 gave all solutions proposed the highest rating (1).

*The identification system would include: criteria and levels needed, instrumentation used with cutoff scores or ranges applied, process of screening, process of identification, placement procedures, appeals process, and other considerations.

Recommendations for the identification process

The consultant advice was used as an additional basis (in addition to the data sources noted above) for shaping the recommendations for changes to the identification process in ACPS. The major recommended changes, discussed with the TAG Coordinator, are the following:

1. *Reduce the threshold cutoff scores on the NNAT and CogAT to the 94th percentile from the current 96th percentile. Consistent with research and best practice for finding underrepresented groups, this change should increase access to the gifted program to more of these students. A preliminary analysis, done in June 2017 by the Department of Accountability on three years of NNAT data, suggest that 18-24 additional students might be found and on a one-year analysis of CogAT data, that 10 additional students from underrepresented populations would be included for consideration for gifted program identification. (Changes in the disproportionality for black students may be from 2-5% based on 2014-16 NNAT data. No change was seen on the CogAT, based on examining 2014 data. Changes in the disproportionality of Hispanic students may range from a -1% to a positive 3% on the NNAT and a positive 2% on the CogAT).*

2. *Have the division-wide appeals committee review each school's identification process annually by having the liaison present the process to the committee after its completion.*

3. *Institute a more formalized identification of students in social studies and science at the primary level that would include performance-based assessment in each subject area, relevant subtest scores on the CogAT, and teacher recommendations.*

4. *Expand the Young Scholars program to other Title I schools in the division. Current data collected suggest that 14% of these students are identified formally for the gifted program, but all are receiving comparable in-class instruction to that of identified GIA students. Thus, the benefits of the program are accessible to them in the current arrangement of placement in the regular classroom in a cluster group at schools where that organization is in place.*

5. *Add a second inventory of gifted student behaviors for underrepresented groups to use as a supplement to the GRS (or add a subscale to the GRS itself). Provide training to teachers in these behaviors as well as the subscales used from the GRS; collect*

recommendations for underrepresented students at the conclusion of the training.

6. *Institute a grade 6 universal screening on the Differential Aptitude Test or a similar tool to find top students in each content area, ready to participate in an honors level program. Grade 5 teachers would also offer recommendations to supplement the testing. Evidence of prior achievement would also be considered. Performance-based assessment may be also be used in each subject area to provide additional data on current levels of functioning in the subject area that may be used to identify students for additional middle school options that are content-based or interdisciplinary.*

7. *Appoint a part-time TAG coordinator for the high school with responsibility for providing data to teachers on who the TAG students are, providing guidance and counseling opportunities for them, and offering seminars on special topics of interest. Special focus would be on providing assistance on issues of social and emotional development and/or referring them to appropriate personnel to address serious affective issues.*

8. *Add a K-3 full-time position for the TAG program that would provide community outreach to parents and community members from underrepresented populations, monitor the identification process implementation at each elementary school site, provide oversight to the Young Scholars Program and its expansion, and implement intervention opportunities for K-3 TAG students.*

B. Program Design and Curriculum

Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) designates a differentiated curriculum base for gifted and advanced learners at all levels of schooling, except for Advanced Placement where the syllabi are set by College Board and Dual Enrollment where the syllabi are set in collaboration with cooperating colleges and universities.

The **K-3 General Intellectual Aptitude (GIA) program** has a recommended curriculum base that uses five different interdisciplinary units of study, available to classroom teachers but used primarily by resource teachers. Based on classroom observation, these units appear to be either not taught at all or used randomly. Additional resources are available on recommended supplementary lists provided by ACPS but not routinely known about or used by teachers. These include the materials mentioned in the materials section of this report.

The Young Scholars Program, designed for low income students at K-3 to prepare them for advanced work, provides a set of advanced curriculum experiences in the summer program, but no follow-up materials for use during the academic year. The summer curriculum consists of three units, organized around the concept of systems and backed by the M^3 math program, a research-based option. These Young Scholars are clustered, however, in a YS-trained teacher's classroom for instruction during the academic year where the theme of systems is to be continued in application to learning in all subject areas. Very little evidence (i.e. one classroom) was available through classroom observations to suggest that this process was used for YS.

The program is currently in four schools, with careful data collection on successes of the program. Pre-post curriculum assessments, done each summer, track the student gains in the science units. Data suggest that students grow extensively in the skill and concept areas assessed in these units. Evidence also shows that 14% of YS have been accepted into the regular TAG program by fifth grade.

The **pullout programs for math and language arts** at grades 4 and 5 have a designated list of advanced readings, texts that require effective compacting in math, and supplementary materials provided by ACPS that are research-based for use in each subject area. At the middle school and early high school, **honors classes** in ELA have a list of readings available for use, most of which are not advanced. The advanced math program continues to employ texts that match the subject being taught: pre-algebra, Algebra, and Geometry. These texts represent a sufficient challenge level for most of the math students as the subjects are geared to one grade level above. Honors classes in ELA at middle school level are perceived as ineffectual, based on multiple data sources, related to curricular, instructor, and grouping features. Science and social studies honors classes are also available for students in grades 6-8. No materials for these classes, with the exception of course guides, were submitted for review.

The **Differentiated Education Plan (DEP**) is geared to provide structure for quarterly special projects for the gifted at elementary and middle school levels. These plans provide the only curricular support for the TAG program from grades 4-5 in science and social studies. In

addition to honors classes, DEPs are used in all core subject areas in grades 6-8 to provide support for TAG learners. The DEP is also used at K-3 to provide and document specialized opportunities for students to do independent and small-group work in the classroom. Lack of effectiveness in the DEP model was indicated in both the materials review and classroom observation.

At the high school level, TAG students may be enrolled in a series of **elective courses**, based on guidance and choice. Most appear to opt for **honors and STEM** at ninth grade, and **AP** when they arrive at TC Williams, typically by 10th grade. **DE options** are available at grades 11-12. No specially designated gifted materials are made available at either high school campus. In fact, the TAG designation is not used at all at the high school level, with teachers at each campus not knowing who the earlier identified TAG students are.

Findings for program design, curriculum and program leadership

1) **The TAG program overall lacks comprehensiveness, continuity, and cohesiveness, meaning there is no clear implementation of the program as intended, at K-3 or at middle school level before it disappears by name at the high school level.**

2) **Little if any programming systematically occurs for K-3 students in most elementary buildings visited. All TAG students at these levels are served in regular classrooms, with occasional visits by a TAG resource teacher once a week for 30 minutes. Contact time for any group does not exceed 30 minutes weekly. Curriculum used varies, based on the TAG resource teacher discretion. (TAG-designated materials have been reviewed elsewhere in this report.)**

3) **The math and language arts program at grades 4 and 5 appears to be functioning well, according to parents, students, and staff. The math program was rated slightly higher than language arts in respect to challenge level. Observation data also suggest these programs are employing differentiated practices effectively, depending to some extent on the school and the teacher.**

4) **The middle school program is dysfunctional in all areas of learning except math where advanced classes continue to be offered to TAG students. ELA teachers of honors classes report that they do not differentiate for TAG learners who are unevenly clustered in their classes. These classes are comprised of students who are functioning at very different levels in language arts, using many texts that are below the grade level taught. Honors classes are also offered in science and social studies. Although DEPs are designed to provide additional support for TAG learners in the four core subjects, both teachers and students report that they are treated as "optional".**

5) **Honors classes at high school level vary considerably in effectiveness, based on teacher and subject and level of the class (i.e. 9-12th grades). Ninth grade honors classes appeared to be most effective at Minnie Howard, where a STEM option was also offered, in which many TAG students enrolled. High school AP programs appeared to be effective with gifted learners as attested to by all stakeholder groups and classroom observation data. Analysis of course guides yielded strict adherence to the College Board requirements; therefore, the ratings were lenient. DE options appeared to be effective, depending on the class and teacher. Instruction was highly dependent on NOVA requirements for the courses.**

6) **Even though an acceleration policy has been in place in ACPS, there has been little systematic application of it within content areas other than mathematics and the calibrated advanced coursework in AP and DE. Hopefully the new acceleration policy and regulation will be used expand acceleration services at all levels of learning to ensure that students who are advanced in any academic area receive appropriate level instruction. This is especially critical in language arts (reading, in particular) at K-8, math at K-3, science at grades 1-8 and social studies at grades 1-8.**

Recommendations for program design and curriculum

K-3

Students identified as GIA should be placed in advanced clusters at each school at the appropriate reading and math levels for their aptitudes in those subjects as assessed by achievement measures used in the school. Advanced reading materials linked to discussion groups should be provided by resource teachers in ELA. Advanced problem-solving via the Mentoring Mathematical Minds (M^2 & M^3) material should be provided in math cluster groups. If these groups are to be handled in a pullout situation, then they may be cross-grade grouped (K-1, 2-3). If they are to be handled in class, then the clusters should include Young Scholars students who show promise in the given subject area. Interdisciplinary work, via a range of materials, should be provided and facilitated by the resource teacher and/or the trained regular classroom teacher during the academic year.

Grades 4 and 5

Continue to offer the replacement curriculum in both ELA and math for identified students. Identify more students at the end of third grade for social studies and science, using both CogAT and other measures outlined in the identification section of this report. Advanced opportunities in classrooms for students identified in these areas should be provided by classroom teachers trained in working with the gifted. Students who were not identified for either math or language arts at these levels should receive advanced instruction in a STEAM model of instruction.

Grades 6-8

Within the application of the acceleration model, there is a lack of consideration for the development of talent in all domains of learning, with options being offered in only one area (i.e. mathematics).

A middle school set of accelerated options should be provided across the three years in as many subjects as needed, given the level of performance of prospective students. Advanced learners in English, science, social studies, and world language capability should be able to access advanced rigorous standards-based options comparable to the offerings in math as early as sixth grade. Criteria for classroom placement should be developed that match the requirements for the course to be offered. These criteria might be the following:

In the English language arts:

--reading at two grade levels above placement as demonstrated by Lexile levels derived from RIS
--writing at advanced levels (Rubric scores of 4 or 5) as shown in a persuasive writing piece of 5-paragraphs.
--evidence of a PowerPoint presentation prepared to make on a topic of interest

In science:

--advanced level of science fair or comparable independent science project from grade 5
--grade in science of B+ or higher from grades 4 and 5
--results from a performance-based task in scientific design

In social studies:

--advanced level of History Day project (or comparable level work)
--reading level one grade level above
--portfolio of six social studies-based assignments from the prior year

Moreover, given the perceived success of the STEM program at Minnie Howard, it would be advisable to "design down" that program for advanced students who want to participate at middle school as well. This set of STEM opportunities would be available, upon application and with guidance, to students at each middle school in grades 6-8.

To balance these STEM opportunities, it is suggested that a humanities block be developed for students at each middle school as well, with offerings at grades 6-8, that include philosophy,

history, art, music, and literature. Students would apply for each program, with numbers capped at class sizes comparable to the school's class size averages.

Grades 9-12

There is a need to have a coordinator of the high school program who serves both school sites and provides communication and guidance to TAG students, teachers, and their parents at grades 9-12. Meeting with all stakeholders at this level to ensure appropriate student placement in advanced coursework, guidance for college and career interests, social and emotional needs support, and related areas of need appears to be warranted. At the present time, teachers do not know who their TAG students are, thus rendering any use of differentiation practices somewhat arbitrary. Data from parent and student stakeholders suggest that such support is needed.

Recommendation for program leadership at the building level

The TAG program also lacks coordination at the building level in several elementary schools and in the middle school context where an appointed TAG coordinator, some with no background in gifted education, has responsibility but no authority to carry out needed tasks. No one other than the ACPS TAG Coordinator has responsibility for the program, a situation that is not the case in Specialized Instruction, EL, or other NCLB special programs. The program suffers from not having someone in each building in charge of basic programmatic activities like meeting with staff regularly, monitoring classrooms, reviewing curriculum, planning targeted professional development, and designing programs and curricula in collaboration with the building principal and his/her staff. In elementary buildings where that role is working, the assigned person does take on the tasks required and is trained in gifted education. In other buildings, where the principal or the liaison does not monitor services for TAG students, the service delivery is not as effective. It is important that administrative decisions at the building level reflect best practice to support effective program implementation.

C. Assessment of TAG-identified students in ACPS

Research-based best practice (Johnsen, 2012) and Virginia *Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted Students* would suggest the need for analyzing the academic growth of TAG students at all levels of programming. The lack of differentiated assessment data for gifted students across the grades makes it more challenging to judge the efficacy of the TAG program at levels prior to AP. Performance-based assessment data were not routinely collected to assess the levels of learning accrued by TAG students. Transfer tasks are an example of this type of data, however, they were found in the study (see Section II), to require revision in order to achieve consistency and appropriateness for use with gifted learners (i.e. advanced transfer tasks need to be off-level, focus on higher level thinking and problem-solving, require student articulation of ideas, and exhibit a degree of open-endedness). Consequently, the evaluators examined the results of SOL data even though they are not the best source for understanding the level of learning outcomes within a TAG program.

Many school districts struggle to collect off-level data on gifted learners. In order to collect such data, there is a need for additional testing or the use of curriculum-based assessments that may not have been reviewed for technical adequacy. Moreover, because the percentage of students is so small and the effort to collect data so great, many districts choose not to add this to their data collection efforts. Consequently, the field of gifted education has been left with state tests that have too low a ceiling to detect high levels of performance and AP test results which are not available until high school.

Data that were reviewed were the following:

--Disaggregated results for TAG students on the State Standards of Learning (SOL) Assessment across the three years of 2014-16 in four content areas,

--Disaggregation of Advanced Placement results for TAG students across the three years of 2014-16.

Pattern of results of SOL testing in core subject areas for TAG students

Results for TAG students suggest that the majority of these students score at the proficient or advanced levels on these measures at elementary, middle, and high school levels. The range of scores was from 96th percentile to 99th percentile. Highest scores at the Advanced Level were in social studies. **So, one pattern identified is strong achievement of TAG students on SOLs, with 96+ %of TAG students passing at proficient or advanced levels in all subject areas across the three years of data provided.**

A second pattern that may be discerned, however, is the limited percentage of TAG students, fewer than half typically, performing at the advanced level in each subject area across the three years of 2013-14 to 2015-16. Data across the three years suggest a range of performance in each of the following subjects by year, subject, and level as follows in Table 7.3:

Table 7.3
Percentage Comparison of TAG Student Advanced Performance on SOLs Across 3 Years (2013-14 to 2015-16)
By Level and Subject

Year	Reading			Math			Science			Social Studies		
	E	M	H	E	M	H	E	M	H	E	M	H
2013-14	50%	49%	22%	46%	36%	37%	53%	41%	28%	84%	71%	38%
2014-15	63%	59%	28%	47%	37%	34%	43%	59%	29%	76%	73%	47%
2015-16	56%	52%	32%	50%	28%	40%	55%	46%	43%	82%	66%	45%

E=Elementary School; M=Middle School; H=High School

Given that these students were initially identified on an ability measure that suggested high intellectual performance across subjects, these results are somewhat surprising at the elementary level. In reading, the range of advanced scores was from 50-63% across the three years while in math, scores ranged from 46-50%. In science, TAG student scores at advanced levels ranged from 43-55% while in social studies, the range was 76-84%. Based on evaluators' professional experience, we would expect advanced performance in at least one subject for elementary TAG students. Lower performance at middle and high school levels may be more easily explained by the specific aptitudes becoming a critical variable in coursework selection and areas of subsequent performance. In math, the use of an accelerated math program may impact advanced SOL scores negatively due to the timing of the test.

Across the three years of data provided, fewer than 50% of secondary TAG students scored at advanced levels in most subject areas. In reading, TAG students scored in a range of 49-59% at middle and 22-32% at high school level. In math, they scored in the range of 28-37% at middle 34-40% at the high school level. In science, the scores ranged from 41-59% at middle and 28-43% at high school level, depending on the year. In social studies, the score range was 66-73% at middle and 38-47% for high school. High school scores were also lower than at elementary level in the advanced SOL designation for all years and subject areas.

Based on the evaluators' professional judgment, a reasonable expectation still would be that 50% or more of TAG-identified students would be scoring at the advanced level at each testing point in all core subjects. This standard has not been met by ACPS TAG students in most content areas and levels. Reading at the high school level in the last two years and Math at all levels across all three years except for elementary in 2015-16 demonstrated this trend. Science showed more positive results at elementary level and at high school. Social Studies was highest at elementary school.

A third pattern discerned was the difference by subject areas of advanced proficiency among the TAG population. At all levels, TAG students generally performed better in social studies and reading than they did in science or math, suggesting that verbal performance indicators were more outstanding areas for these students.

Finally, TAG students performed better on advanced levels of the SOL Test at elementary level than they did at middle or high school levels. This pattern was true for most of the three years of data examined.

Advanced placement results for TAG students

At the request of the TAGAC, the Department of Accountability developed a report to provide data on the comparative participation and performance of TAG students in Advanced Placement courses.

Data across the three-year period suggest that 84-91% of TAG students are taking AP exams as early as their 10th grade year. (Ninth graders may be taking examinations but are not included in the analysis.) Each of the three years, TAG students took an average of 2.8-2.9 exams in six disciplines of the program. TAG students took the most exams in history and social science AP, followed by English and science in 2013-14 yet showed a declining pattern of exam completion in both the social sciences and English in succeeding years. Exam-taking in the sciences was uneven across the three years. A small upward trend was apparent for math and computer science AP exams. The Arts exams and World Language exams attracted fewer TAG students, with uneven numbers of exams taken across the three years.

In regard to performance levels on the AP exams, it is notable that 71% -82% of examinations taken by TAG-identified students were scored at a level of 3 or higher. National averages are around 50% for pass rates of three or higher, although there are variations, based on the subject area. Thus, ACPS TAG students exceeded this national average.

In respect to the highest score on the exams, a 5, 23-25% of examinations taken by TAG-identified students were scored at that level. In respect to receiving national honors for their AP performance, 62-99 TAG-identified students did so across the three-year period analyzed.. Across the three years, 15-20 students received National Scholar Awards from the College Board, based on AP accomplishments. Percentages were not available for reporting national data regarding the frequency of these awards.

Findings

1) **The assessment results on AP participation and performance for ACPS TAG-identified students were strong, suggesting that a rigorous program produces strong performance in these students.**

2) **At the advanced level of performance on the SOL measures, TAG-identified students showed differential patterns of high performance by subject, by level of schooling and by year. The greatest pattern of stability appeared to be by subject**

across years within levels of schooling.

3) **In general, SOL scores were lower at middle and high school levels for TAG students across subjects and years.**

4) **Advanced performance levels of TAG-identified students on the SOLs were depressed at high school level while AP scores were ascendant.**

5) **The lack of appropriate off-level, performance-based measures to analyze performance in the TAG program at K-9 levels suggests that limited systematic data collection is ongoing to assess TAG student learning in the gifted program per se prior to AP. One exception to this is the Young Scholars program where pre-post data were collected and analyzed in the program report, with favorable growth gains reported.**

Learning Assessment Recommendations

1. *ACPS needs to add pre-post performance-based approaches that can drive appropriate instructional practice to their programs at grades 4 and 5 in ELA and math, and grades 6-8 and 9-12 in honors subjects. These courses require an off-level, problem-solving and critical thinking assessment to match the nature of the courses.*

2. *ACPS should continue to routinely disaggregate TAG SOL and AP data annually for analysis of trends. It is important to set benchmarks for progress expected from these students that is higher than for other populations assessed but should match their identified aptitude area.*

3. *For GIA in grades 1-3, assessment of learning should come through pre-post performance-based assessment coupled with increased assessment of products as warranted to enhance instruction and demonstrate student growth.*

4. *High school advanced placement and dual enrollment assessment practices are designed into the course syllabi. This practice should continue for TAG learners.*

D. Professional development in TAG programs

A professional learning plan reviewed for 2016-17 documented a consistent model for providing an array of training opportunities. The model offers many avenues for all teachers to become trained in gifted education. These avenues are available annually and subsidized by the division. They offer in-division professional development points and, in the case of the teachers engaged in obtaining endorsement in gifted education, master's level university credit as well.

The offerings include the following:

1) Gifted Endorsement classes for any staff in the division (4 university graduate classes offered over 2 years)
2) TAG teacher meetings held monthly for elementary and middle school resource teachers who work with TAG students to share information and develop TAG-related curriculum (9 sessions)
3) Introduction to Young Scholars (YS) for teachers who identify and work with YS in the classroom (6 sessions)
4) Differentiating and nurturing YS in the classroom for teachers who have YS in their classrooms. (7 sessions)
5) Differentiation for General Intellectual Aptitude (GIA) students in the regular classroom for K-5 regular classroom teachers (12 points and general emphases on DEP development and resources)
6) Teaching honors strategies, Part I for secondary honors teachers (10 sessions with topical outline, focusing on using differentiation strategies in the classroom) Part II has been conceptualized as 6 sessions for second semester for honors teachers who have completed the first course.

International Baccalaureate Middle Years certification is offered at Jefferson Houston for targeted teachers. Training is offered in three categories: the IB model, assessment and methodology in the classroom, and discussions on content-based implementation issues. The funding is not a part of the TAG budget.

Data show an increase in teachers trained over the past 3 years (2013-14 to 2015-16) from 121 in 10 courses in 2014 to 239 in 12 courses in 2015. Over the same three years, 111 staff members have received endorsement in gifted education. (Department of Accountability Indicators Report, 2017). Current year data are pending.

Alignment to best practice

The professional development model employed in the TAG program at ACPS incorporates many elements of best practice. In fact, the approach employed meets the process requirements in the NAGC standards on this topic in most of the areas cited. Most laudatory is the use of multiple modes of delivery and multiple approaches to providing opportunities. The division also employs a leveling approach that allows for teachers to become state-endorsed in gifted education if they wish, attend 12-hour workshop sessions at the school in topics in gifted education, and engage in other school-based activities. The division also pays to send teachers to

Virginia and national conferences and encourages them to present workshop/conference sessions on the ACPS program.

Findings on professional development

1) **Lack of mandatory training at the level of endorsement courses for teachers who work with TAG students.**

   While more teachers are engaging in at least one form of professional development annually and opportunities continue to be available, there is still a problem of oversight in respect to the nature and extent of training received. Both TAGAC and the School Board have supported mandatory training for any middle school teacher who works with gifted learners. ACPS assigns all teachers in the core subject areas a section or more of honors classes that include TAG students. Therefore, principals should be tracking the status of teachers in this regard, both in respect to formal training and follow-up implementation in the classroom.

   Classroom observations suggest that differentiation is not occurring in the majority of middle school classrooms visited, with teachers verifying that they are not differentiating for TAG students. Focus group data further suggest that TAG differentiation is not a staple of regular classroom practice at any level of the division. Mandatory training in relevant pedagogy for TAG differentiation is essential for all levels with teachers who are working with TAG learners, suggesting that there are gaps in both the extent of training and effective implementation.

2) **Lack of an identifiable set of teacher strategies that are embedded in the content to be taught.**

   Based on a review of the content covered in each professional development option, it is unclear whether teachers are guided to employ specific curricular materials that are already differentiated as a model to develop their own adaptations as needed. Research-based materials are available in all core subject areas for that purpose, according to the TAG Coordinator. However, it is unclear whether there are a set of differentiation strategies that are routinely employed with TAG learners at each stage of development. For example, it was difficult to see differentiation being employed in middle school classes through the systematic use of inquiry-based strategies, a staple of differentiation. In the ELA elementary classrooms at grades 4 and 5, the use of advanced readings was not in evidence. One might expect such use to be a consequence of training on the use of advanced materials with the gifted.

3) **Lack of monitoring the implementation of the professional development provided.**

   The need for systematic follow-up in classrooms where TAG students are being served is apparent. Yet there is little evidence that it is occurring. A review of the Teacher Evaluation system employed in ACPS found very few items related to

differentiation for the gifted, and no special section is used to look for differentiated behaviors. It appears that TAG teachers are evaluated by the building administrator in the same manner as all teachers. The TAG Coordinator of the program does engage in observing TAG teachers on a predetermined schedule, sharing her results with the building principal.

4) **Lack of training in gifted education for principals.**

   No evidence that there is a mandatory principal training related to facilitating the implementation of a TAG program was found. Only 19 administrators responding to the survey indicated any background in gifted education. No mention of principals as a crucial set of stakeholders is included in the 2016-17 professional development plan either. Moreover, a plurality of principals who responded to the survey indicated a lack of understanding either of the identification process for TAG or the curriculum goal structure and its implementation. This situation calls for a more focused and standardized approach to administrator preparation in TAG matters, especially in identification processes and expectations for finding underrepresented groups, in the use of acceleration, when and why, the use of classroom-based strategies that should be visible in TAG classrooms, and the use of alternative assessments to judge the growth of these learners in a specialized program. Therefore, there is a need for building-based administrators in charge of TAG teacher evaluation and the implementation of the TAG program in their building to have relevant and targeted training in this program area.

*Source: *Talented and Gifted Indicators Report*, Department of Accountability, 2017

Recommendations for professional development

1. *ACPS should ensure that mandatory training requirements are addressed for teachers who work with TAG students, focusing on a pre-selected set of strategies that may be used to differentiate instruction daily in the classroom. These strategies may be found in NAGC National Standard 3 and in the classroom observation scale (COS-R) item indicators.*

2. *ACPS should provide training for principals in the core elements of the program (i.e. identification goals and outcomes, curriculum and instruction, student assessment).*

3. *ACPS should develop a system of monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of professional development so that evidence exists to indicate that professional development has been successful (fidelity of implementation).*

Conclusion

This section of the report analyzed division data available on core program components including identification, program and curriculum, learning assessments, and professional development. The analysis of each of these components resulted in findings that called for changes and, in the case of program and curriculum areas, new development work. Recommendations were made, based on the core component of the program analyzed. Data sources that corroborated the findings of this section included research on gifted program development, the use of consultant expertise, and both Virginia and national standards in gifted education.

Section VIII: Triangulation of Findings by Data Source & Research Question

As a buttress to the recommendations that follow in Section X, the evaluator constructed a table of findings derived from each data source used in the study. Each of these data sources provide a window into understanding aspects of the TAG program in ACPS and provide insights into the changes that need to be considered in moving the program forward.

Materials as a data source

The materials section of the evaluation report was an important data source in respect to understanding how the TAG program is defined in both writing and translation in the classroom. The curriculum guides and syllabi also attest to how the TAG program is aligned to the regular curriculum and its relationship to the Standards of Learning (SOL) for the State of Virginia.

The materials reviewed included the following:

1. The local gifted plan,
2. The state technical review of that plan in 2016,
3. Course guides from the GIA grades 1-3 program (N=2),
4. The course guides from the summer Young Scholars Program (N=3),
5. The course guides and curriculum syllabi that constitute the guiding documents for the TAG curriculum at grades 4-12 (N=39),
6. The curriculum materials used in grades 4-8 of the program in ELA and math (N=24),
7. Samples of DEPs used at both elementary and middle school levels (N=74), and
8. A series of reports related to the identification process, the program, the curriculum, and the assessment of students (N=8).

The Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted was reviewed using the Virginia technical review guidelines, the same guidelines used for the state October review of the plan. The review of course guides was conducted, using a structured checklist of characteristics used in other studies. The ELA trade books were reviewed using a checklist for selecting literature for the gifted while math materials were reviewed, using a materials review checklist in modified form. DEPs were reviewed, using a modified materials review form and the format provided in the elementary and middle school plans. A content analysis of the relevant sections of the McREL report was employed. (See Section II and Appendices A-C for descriptions of the review forms used).

Findings from this section suggest that curriculum materials are limited in their capacity to address the needs of TAG learners, due to lack of providing specificity in objectives, strategies and materials for use in learning plans at the classroom level. Transfer tasks, defined as the differentiated off-level task demands intended for these learners, are insufficient and often inappropriate to serve as agents of differentiation. Lack of direction for the use of small group and independent work is also missing from most of these guides. These comments are especially relevant for all subjects except science where inquiry-based approaches are central to the guides provided for review.

Text reviews support the findings in the curriculum guides and suggest more areas of concern. In addition to the ELA material providing limited support for TAG learners in respect to advanced reading, the math material is not carefully organized through using appropriate compacting approaches for accelerating the learning. Finally, findings from the analysis of DEPs suggest that the format, implementation, and monitoring of these plans require improvement at the levels and in the subjects addressed.

Surveys as a data source

The surveys provided important data on stakeholder perceptions of the program in respect to its perceived benefits to TAG students and its operational elements such as identification, curriculum, instruction, grouping, and assessment. Because the same questions were asked of parents and staff, it was possible to compare findings across those two survey groups on questions of interest.

Surveys were distributed to several stakeholder groups, including parents of TAG, staff members in the division (teachers, administrators, support personnel), and TAG students who participated in focus groups at grades 5, 8, and 12. All but the student survey was distributed online, with a return rate of 25% for parents and 27% for staff. Almost all students (97%) who participated in the focus groups completed a survey.

Survey data were analyzed, using descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages, and means to report out quantitative findings. Graphs were constructed to illustrate comparative analyses where appropriate. Qualitative analyses of responses were used to provide an understanding of findings from open-ended questions. The parent survey is included in Appendix E and the staff survey in Appendix G. Appendix F includes a copy of the student benefit survey used and the results of the student survey, broken down by levels of schooling and questions sets.

Findings suggested that parents lack important information about the program and its operation in respect to identification and curriculum as well as other program mechanisms, with a third of those responding indicating they had no knowledge of these components. This lack of knowledge permeated the responses across the parent survey. Although fewer staff indicated a lack of knowledge, still 25% indicated a lack of familiarity with the program operation.

The majority of parents across levels found the TAG program challenging overall although felt the need for more attention to revising the identification process to include underrepresented groups and more peer interaction.

Sub analysis of parent surveys by their child's level of schooling yielded interesting differences, suggesting that elementary parents were more positive about the program in respect to curriculum and instruction while secondary parents found it wanting in respect to opportunities for social and emotional development and guidance, along with concerns for targeted academic opportunities in all areas of the curriculum for which their child qualified. The sub analysis further showed dissatisfaction with the middle school program on most aspects of program development.

Student surveys revealed a strong positive reaction to the program benefits overall, citing the emphasis on critical thinking and advanced work at their challenge level to be the most beneficial, a finding similar to the other groups surveyed as well. Student surveys also revealed that students found the TAG work more significantly challenging than regular class work which they found "boring".

Teachers and administrators (staff) who responded to the survey were most concerned about the identification process employed that failed to find underrepresented groups. While parents were most concerned about the process of identification (i.e. timing and communication), staff members were clearly concerned about the outcome of the identification process as indicated by the lack of children of color in the program. A plurality of staff members also were concerned about the grouping, the curriculum, instruction, and assessment used in the program although the majority rated its challenge level as high.

Focus groups and interviews as data sources

The focus groups provided a deeper look at data related to stakeholder perceptions of the TAG program, allowing participants to voice issues and concerns that they held about the program as well as to voice its positive aspects. A protocol of seven questions, six questions for non-Tag parents, was employed in each group, with slight variations based on the group assembled. Quotes from stakeholder groups are included in the report to provide the voice of participants in their own words.

Focus groups were held at each of the schools included in the sample which represented eight elementary sites, three middle school sites and two high school sites. The evaluation team met with focus groups of parents, students, and staff at school sites in sessions lasting one hour. Two focus groups of administrators, one composed of building level administrators and one of central office staff members were also held. Two to 19 individuals attended these sessions where individual attendance had been derived from a random listing of relevant stakeholders. Non-TAG parents attended two sessions, structured for them in opposite ends of Alexandria. Overall, 377 individuals participated in these sessions.

Interviews were conducted with the Superintendent and his Chief Academic Officer and with the three Executive Directors to establish the perspectives of the division leadership team related to the TAG program. TAG Advisory committee members were also interviewed related to the program. These data were content-analyzed and used as another source of data for considering focus group findings from other stakeholders.

Focus group data were content-analyzed from two data sources—the list of commentary resulting from the hour-long discussion and individual note cards, containing individual commentary provided by each member of the group. Each source was coded and included in the list of perceptions held about each question asked. Themes were drawn that represented separate parent, student, and staff stakeholder group perceptions as well as overall themes across stakeholder groups. The focus group protocols are included in Appendix H while the common focus group themes across groups are described in Appendix I.

Findings from the focus groups paralleled many of the same revelations found from the surveys, namely that the three stakeholder groups tended to converge on many issues, including the identification of underrepresented groups not occurring, the need for the development of TAG programs at K-3 and grades 6-8 beyond the program currently operating, and the need for TAG students to be placed with trained teachers who have the skills to instruct them in a differentiated way in a curriculum base that is advanced.

Positive responses were almost universal for the pullout program at grades 4 and 5 in language arts and math, commenting that the programs were challenging and rigorous for their children. The DEP approach was not understood or appreciated as a way to serve TAG students at K-3, at grades 4-5 in science or social studies, or as an additional service approach for TAG students in honors classes in the core subject areas in grades 6-8. Advanced Placement classes also received universal recognition for having sufficient challenge for TAG learners.

Findings also suggested that TAG programs that were effective for the gifted emphasized higher-level thinking and provided advanced work opportunities in each subject area, regardless of level.

Classroom observations as a data source

Classroom observations provide a view of the program in action, demonstrating the implementation of written curriculum and program emphases. This data source is invaluable in seeing how the program operates in real time, and the extent to which elements like curricula, structure, assessments, and grouping all work together to benefit TAG learners.

Classroom observations were conducted in all school sites selected to be part of the study. The eight elementary schools were purposively selected, with concerns for stratification of Title I and non-Title I sites, a sample of at least two schools where the Young Scholars Program was in place, and school sites that enrolled high concentrations of minority children and those that did not. All middle school sites were visited as were the two high school campuses. In all, 120 observations were made of classrooms that had TAG students in them at all levels and in all subject areas. The evaluation team constructed the schedule of visitation for each site, based on data provided by the Department of Accountability.

The instrument used to observe differentiation practices in each selected classroom was the *Classroom Observation Scale-Revised* (COS-R), used in several studies to assess best practices in gifted education and validated for technical adequacy (VanTassel-Baska, Quek & Feng, 2007). A copy of this instrument is included in Appendix J. Numerical data, based on frequency and effectiveness means for the use of differentiation practices at elementary, middle and high school may also be found in the same appendix.

Findings from classroom observations may be summarized in the following way:

Teachers are under-utilizing differentiation strategies at all levels of the program, especially in the application of higher level thinking. In classrooms where differentiated practices are being used, teachers are generally effective in their use of these strategies. High school AP teachers

and some TAG elementary teachers were most effective in the use of best practices in the classroom.

In a comparison of teachers by level of schooling they teach, frequency of strategy use often favored elementary teachers while effectiveness favored high school teachers. In a comparison of subject areas, math teachers were most effective, followed by language arts and then science and social studies teachers.

National Standards as a data source

The instrument used to conduct the national standards-based review of the program was designed in 2010 and adopted by the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) for the purpose intended in this study—to provide feedback to school districts on their practices in identification, student assessment, program evaluation, learning environment, curriculum planning, instructional delivery, program development, and professional development.

The lead evaluator met with the TAG Coordinator to assess the presence of 97 indicators of best practice, compiled on a form. The two met for three hours to discuss and rate each indicator using the following designations: "Yes", "No", "Uneven", "Developing", or "Not Observed". The two reached consensus on all indicators. After a content review of the written form and related commentary, the findings from that review are now finalized and may be found in Appendix K.

Findings on the NAGC Standards review suggested that there was a strong consonance between ACPS practices in identification and professional development and best practice nationally in gifted education. Acceleration practices in the standards also appeared to be consonant with the new policies and regulations just adopted by ACPS (June 2017).

However, in other areas ACPS did not always meet the national standards. A system of counseling and guidance was missing, suggesting that TAG students are not receiving psychosocial, academic planning, and career guidance needed. An assessment of learning approach for TAG learners prior to AP was lacking, such that outcomes of TAG learning were not assessed. The TAG curriculum at all levels needs to be further integrated with the division curriculum while remaining distinctive and specific in its use of instructional approaches that emphasize inquiry, higher level thinking, problem solving, and the use of concomitant research-based resource materials that are organized around such strategies.

Program development reports as a data source

The evaluation team reviewed a series of reports available from ACPS related to identification, program design and development, professional development and assessment of student learning. Because of the concerns about the underrepresentation of minority and students from low income backgrounds in the TAG program, the evaluation team provided two outside consultants of national stature to review the recommended processes to be employed in the division and to comment on their views related to the best approach to take for increasing representation, especially of Black and Hispanic children. Their full reports may be found in Appendix L, and a synthesis of their findings may be found in Section VII of this evaluation report.

All reports were content-analyzed for relevant themes. Descriptive data were analyzed in a similar way. For example, the learning assessment data for SOLs were disaggregated for TAG students for three school years. One-year data (2015- 2016 school year) were disaggregated for students identified at 4th grade for specific academic aptitudes. Evaluators were interested in patterns of performance on the SOLs at advanced levels in areas where students had demonstrated aptitudes. AP data were disaggregated across three years for TAG students. In the content analysis, evaluators were interested in participation rate patterns in AP programs as well as performance patterns in those courses for TAG learners. Tabular data in all reports were analyzed for patterns that might answer research questions about the impact of program development practices.

Findings from these reviews are summarized by the following program development areas:

Identification

Consultant reviews of identification practices have yielded a set of findings as a basis for recommendations for improvement, mostly on issues of underrepresentation and the process of communication to parents and others about student results and the overall process (see Appendix L of this report for detailed recommendations). Key findings related to identification include the need for increased identification of students from underrepresented groups, need for additional teacher nomination of students from these groups, need for increased oversight of school-based identification processes, and the need for a more visible identification model at grades 6-12. These findings reflect that even though standards-based processes were in place, consistent effective outcomes did not result from the application of these processes. Data supporting these findings were emergent from reports, survey data, focus groups, and classroom observations.

Program design/curriculum

The findings related to program/curriculum reviews showed a need to respond to gaps in the program at primary and middle school levels primarily. The grade 4-5 program in language arts and math was found effective as was the high school AP set of options. Findings suggest that there is a need for program development at K-3 and grades 6-8 in order to constitute a vertically articulated program model. Findings also identified the lack of a curriculum framework and scope and sequence for the program, both recommended aspects to meet the state requirement for local plans. Data from materials reviews, surveys, focus groups, classroom observations, and national standards review support these findings.

Professional development

The findings in the area of professional development suggest the need for teachers to be trained in more targeted classroom strategies that are differentiated for gifted learners. Although a range of professional development offerings are regularly provided by ACPS, data suggest that they are not rated highly by teachers as seen in the staff surveys, nor are they translated effectively in classroom practice as indicated by classroom observations.

Survey data further substantiate the need for professional development for building administrators on the basic components of the TAG program. Thus surveys, focus groups, and classroom observations suggest the need to monitor professional development outcomes as well as processes.

Assessment

The findings in this area are made from analyzing several reports from the Department of Accountability, including the SOL data and AP data. Findings support the continuing data analysis of disaggregated scores of TAG students on SOLs and AP exams in order to monitor basic TAG student performance in the core program and in TAG-related programming (ie, AP). Findings further suggest the need for off-level and/or performance-based assessment approaches for the TAG program at levels K-3, 4-5, 6-8, and honors classes at the high school level. The collection and analysis of such assessment data would provide evidence related to the effectiveness of the TAG program at those levels. While the SOL data provide some evidence of performance in the core program, they do not sufficiently monitor the performance levels of TAG students. Data from the TAG Indicator Report was used in crafting these findings as were classroom observations and the review of transfer tasks and DEPs.

Research questions and responses

This section revisits the research questions and how they have been answered through the study data sources just described and reviewed. In addition to the findings that were derived from the data sources that have become the basis for the specific recommendations in the next section of this report, the evaluator has crafted responses to the specific questions that were formulated in the proposal to conduct the evaluation process. These responses are as follows:

1. **To what extent is the gifted program being implemented according to stated goals and outcomes?**

Evidence from both survey data and focus groups suggest that the goals of the TAG program are being carried out to some degree, depending on the level of the program. No outcomes, however, are being tracked except for the Young Scholars Program and Advanced Placement. Lack of differentiation in the division curriculum materials further suggested that there has been limited attention to TAG curriculum development. Classroom observation data suggest that differentiation is not frequently employed beyond the grades 4-5 pullout program and AP courses. National standards ratings on identification and professional development indicated the use of appropriate processes for program development, while ratings of the other four standards were mixed. The preponderance of evidence suggests that the program is being implemented unevenly, depending on the program type, level of services, and school site.

2. **To what extent is the program progressing in its attempt to identify underrepresented groups for the program?**

There is some evidence of attention to the underrepresentation issue of low income and minority students in the gifted program through key features of the identification process including the use

of a nonverbal measure and the use of multiple criteria that examine both ability and achievement data. No evidence suggests that attention is given to program alteration as a result of these students being selected, however. Observations and assessment reports suggest there is a discrepancy between the number of minority and low-income students in the current program and their presence in the ACPS population. Focus group and survey data support the fact that stakeholders are concerned about this issue. Consultation with multicultural specialists in gifted education produced similar responses, with suggestions for changes to be effected.

3. To what extent is the written, taught, and assessed curriculum sufficiently rigorous and differentiated for TAG-identified students?

The majority of stakeholders voiced some concerns about key curriculum and instructional components when the evaluation team inquired about them through survey and focus group questions. Concerns were voiced about the lack of a defined curriculum at K-3 and middle school, and about the alignment of the elementary program with middle school opportunities. Student survey data revealed a concern for the lack of a defined middle school program within the honors model. While support is relatively strong for the existence of an instructional program for the gifted, there are several areas that need attention and improvement. The use of DEPs was seen as ineffective and not a reasonable curriculum replacement for K-3 students. The limitations of the current honors curriculum, which is not well adapted to the needs of TAG students at middle school levels, was perceived to be problematic. Instructional capacity of teachers to deliver a differentiated curriculum to TAG students was questioned by parents who had children in the K-3 GIA and grades 6-8 honors programs. The written curriculum also was viewed as deficient in respect to differentiated strategies and resources being identified for classroom use. Finally, classroom observation data corroborate these concerns in respect to limited use of differentiated instruction.

4. To what extent is the program beneficial to students participating in it?

Evidence of program impact on students is anecdotal and relies on subjective self-report by students, parents, and teachers. There is no consistent system in place for measuring gifted student growth over time in the program. Nevertheless, stakeholder group members perceive the program as highly beneficial to students. Gifted students who have been in the program for four years or more also hold positive views of program benefits. Based on the overall AP data provided across the last three years related to participation and performance, it is clear that the multiple options provided by the division attract large numbers of TAG students who perform at advanced levels (passing rates of 3, 4, or 5). While there is a listing of program options at each level, there is not a stated connection among them in respect to student growth and other benefits.

5. To what extent is the program perceived to be effective by relevant stakeholders?

Overall satisfaction with the program varied, depending on the stakeholder group and the aspect of program design being addressed in the query. Perception of the challenge level of the program varied among these groups with the majority of students and parents seeing it as sufficiently challenging while staff was divided on this issue. All stakeholder groups saw the

need for changing the identification process to make it more responsive to the inclusion of underrepresented groups. Both parents and staff also saw the need for improvement in the middle school program. Parents expressed concerns about the program response to social and emotional developmental needs, classroom instruction, and professional development at the secondary level and identification and parent interaction opportunities at elementary level. Students were, for the most part, satisfied with the TAG program except for the middle school level. Areas suggested for improvement centered on the areas cited by parents as well as more evidence of differentiation. The TAG Advisory Committee shared most of the concerns expressed by other stakeholder groups. The advisory group noted both the lack of attention to TAG learners at K-3 and middle school levels and the effective functioning of the program at grades four and five in both languages arts and math.

6. **To what extent is the program aligned with best practices in the field of gifted education?**

The NAGC national standards review indicates that there is room for growth of the program in most areas defined. While identification and professional development processes used in ACPS resulted in those two standards being met, there continues to be a need for growth in those areas in respect to outcomes. Moreover, appropriate learning assessments need to be developed. Indicators for the categories of programming, assessment for learning, counseling, and differentiation practices suggest a need for further development. Several of the program recommendations flowed from the areas for growth noted through analyzing this data source. Teachers who use best practice strategies with gifted learners are doing so effectively, but classroom observations suggest the need for greater frequency of use of differentiation strategies in TAG classrooms.

Section IX: Commendations and Recommendations

The following commendations and recommendations are made, based on a triangulation of the data collected and analyzed from *five* different sources— a) review of materials/program documents/reports, b) surveys, c) focus groups, d) classroom observations, and e) national standards review. (See Table 9.1 and Appendix M) They are also made based on the experience and expertise of the evaluators in gifted education.

This section of the report focuses on the best aspects of the program observed and those areas in need of improvement. Commendations tend to display aspects of the TAG program that are already on a path to excellence. The areas for improvement are organized by the aspect of program development that needs attention in order for the program to improve. Many of the recommendations should be viewed in tandem with each other as changes will need to be effected across areas of program development.

Commendations

1. ACPS has in place a comprehensive Advanced Placement program that produces strong results longitudinally in participation and performance of TAG students. The school division is to be commended for its long-term commitment to these learners through offering AP opportunities and ensuring positive learning outcomes for TAG students across multiple years.

2. The option of Dual Enrollment courses provides multiple opportunities for receiving credits for community college (NOVA) for TAG learners. It is seen by our evaluation team as a particularly strong option for underrepresented groups who may be first generation college students.

3. The pullout program at grades 4 and 5 (replacement curriculum) in both language arts and math provides the opportunity for advanced curriculum challenge in these two key areas of the curriculum. It is perceived by parents, students, and staff to be an effective intervention at those levels of learning. Classroom observation data also confirm its effectiveness.

4. The Young Scholars' program at grades K-5 in four schools provides a welcome addition to efforts to find and nurture promising learners from underrepresented populations who may be identified for the TAG program by fourth grade. It represents a promising start to the effort of identification by already finding 14% of these students eligible for TAG services and providing summer program experiences to strengthen their math and science conceptual learning. While more development work is needed to ensure academic year differentiated experiences, the implementation of the program is laudatory.

5. The development of a revised division acceleration policy and accompanying regulations has been effected. The revised documents were approved by the school board on June 22, 2017 and represent a progressive stance on the role of acceleration in working effectively with gifted learners at all stages of development and in all content areas of the curriculum.

Table 9.1
Data Sources for Recommendations

Recommendation	Data Sources				
	Division Materials and Reports	Survey	Focus Group/ Interview	Observation	NAGC Standards Review
1. Appoint program coordinator for K-3 and Young Scholars	X	X	X	X	
2. Appoint program coordinator for high school level	X	X	X	X	
3. Design/develop K-3 program options	X	X	X	X	X
4. Expand the Young Scholars Program to additional Title I schools	X	X	X	X	
5. Design and develop additional grades 6-8 program options; revise honors courses	X	X	X	X	X
6. Identify underrepresented learners via multiple techniques and strategies; improve the identification processes	X	X	X	X	X
7. Revise curriculum guides to include TAG differentiation features in learning plans; revise transfer tasks	X	X	X	X	X
8. Review text materials for use in TAG and honors classrooms	X	X	X	X	
9. Develop a curriculum framework and scope and sequence for TAG K-12		X		X	X
10. Revise DEP model	X	X	X	X	
11. Use flexible grouping at all levels		X	X	X	X

Recommendation	Data Sources				
	Division Materials and Reports	**Survey**	**Focus Group/ Interview**	**Observation**	**NAGC Standards Review**
12. Mandate professional development for teachers and principals on TAG program elements, especially TAG identification and assessment for learning		**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
13. Select and analyze performance-based assessments for TAG learning at all levels prior to AP; select content-based pre-post measures for use in TAG classrooms	**X**	**X**	**X**		**X**
14. Develop a targeted counseling component for TAG students at middle and high school levels		**X**	**X**		**X**
15. Monitor implementation of program and curriculum development initiatives	**X**			**X**	**X**
16. Provide multiple modes of communication and education to stakeholder groups		**X**	**X**		**X**
17. Expand website and develop other resources for communication		**X**	**X**		

Recommendations

The recommendations that follow are parsed into the categories of program development representing 1) identification, 2) program development at primary, elementary, middle school, and high school, 3) curriculum, 4) learning assessments and 5) professional development. These recommendations should be implemented in an integrated way and not be perceived as separate or totally independent. The evaluation team has also aligned these recommendations to the Virginia *Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted Students* and the requirements for the Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted.

Identification

1. Improve strategies and techniques for the identification of more underrepresented groups through techniques recommended by both the evaluation team and the two multi-cultural consultants. These recommendations focus on the use of lower cutoff scores with more oversight of the school-based committee process.

2. Incorporate use of research-based checklist items that promote recognition of giftedness in cultural, racial minority groups, EL, and other underserved student groups and disseminate through materials, training, and community outreach activities.

3. Continue the use of existing screening tools as they constitute the best tests available for the purposes intended, based on research data on finding students from underrepresented groups and as noted by all five consultants who reviewed them. We do recommend modifying the cutoff scores on the two standardized ability instruments employed 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. On a 2014-15 analysis of one year of CogAT data, identification of Hispanic students would have increased by 2 percentage points. Based on these analyses of historical results on both tests (Department of Accountability, 2017), we think it is prudent to lower the score cutoffs in this way as it assists in the goal of reducing disparity among minority groups in the program. As a result, however, more students from all groups will be identified for TAG services.

4. Train teachers and principals annually on the general and specific aptitude characteristics of gifted learners and those from underrepresented groups.

5. Develop program emphases that tailor curriculum for students from underrepresented groups, including choice of reading material, highlighting accomplishments of minority groups and individuals within them in the context of teaching language arts and social studies, and including practice with higher level thinking through the use of scaffolded materials.

Program design and development

1. Design and develop a General Intellectual Aptitude program around advanced content at K-3 level, consistent with the 4-5 curriculum structure and delivered to clusters of students in the classroom. Independent projects, informed by DEPs, should be done sparingly, given the developmental considerations of the age group.

2. Extend the Young Scholars' Program to other Title I schools; revise curriculum guides for the Young Scholars' Program to include pre-post assessments and in-school follow-up activities.

3. Revamp the middle school TAG program so that it includes opportunities for an accelerated ELA, science, and social studies program beyond honors which currently fails to provide differentiated curriculum or instruction. Develop an interdisciplinary option in the humanities and STEM areas for students who have aptitudes and interests in the underlying areas of learning.

4. Use flexible grouping at all levels of the program to support the need for intellectual peer interaction of gifted learners. Cluster grouping, special class pullouts, and advanced course clusters all support these needs from elementary through secondary levels.

5. Appoint a full-time K-3 program coordinator a) to support the development of the K-3 program and curriculum options; b) to oversee the implementation of the K-3 identification process; c) to coordinate and develop the Young Scholars program at additional Title I sites and monitor implementation at all sites; and d) provide communication and outreach to minority communities about the TAG program.

6. Appoint a part-time high school coordinator for the TAG program to offer guidance and counseling assistance that extends beyond the typical services provided to all learners, to provide information to honors, AP and DE teachers on the profiles of TAG learners, to facilitate the process of identifying new TAG learners, and to coordinate professional training opportunities for high school teachers in gifted education.

Curriculum

1. Revise curriculum guides in all grades and content areas to incorporate best practices in each content area for gifted learners. Revisions in the general education curriculum guides should ensure that differentiation is specific to include models and strategies, content depth, and pre-post assessments that can document academic growth of TAG learners. Recognizing that current transfer tasks and charts with generic critical thinking processes are insufficient, revise tasks and charts to drive appropriate differentiated curriculum and assessment.

2. Revise Honors course curricula to document clear objectives and expected outcomes for gifted learners. Take advantage of using research-based curricula, matched to course objectives, in order to ensure consistent levels of rigor. (See p. 167 for a list of materials)

3. Select advanced text materials for all courses at K-12. Select advanced reading texts for all TAG ELA classes. While math materials are used in an advanced way, often the choices could be more appropriate and include multiple materials for use with TAG learners.

4. Redesign DEP formats and develop examples for use by classroom teachers that focus on goals and outcomes, with assessments and strategies to meet outcomes.

Assessment

1. Select learning assessment tools for use with TAG students, using performance-based measures appropriate for gifted learners from early elementary through honor classes in high school. Existing transfer tasks and DEPs are insufficiently designed for this task, lacking both differentiation and scope.

2. Select and analyze pre-post performance measures in core subject areas that "go beyond" the SOL standards, using off-level measures linked to the differentiated curriculum employed and/or measures in critical thinking. These approaches are recommended as best practice in the NAGC Gifted Programming Standards and research on gifted assessment (see VanTassel-Baska & Hubbard, in press).

Professional development

1. Ensure that all teachers with responsibility for teaching gifted learners meet the NAGC knowledge and skill standards in gifted education, including facilitation of all forms of grouping.

2. Provide professional development sessions on learning assessments for the gifted, using product samples from student work, the AP program samples of performance-based assessments, and the Young Scholars pre-post curriculum measures already being used. Augment such training with materials-based training that demonstrates how to differentiate effectively for these learners.

3. Monitor data on teaching preparation in gifted education and assign teachers who are well trained to teaching assignments with gifted learners at all levels.

4. Provide professional development for principals to ensure clear understanding and expectations for gifted identification and programming, aligned with Virginia and national gifted standards.

5. Provide tailored professional development for curriculum specialists, Title I, EL, and Specialized Instruction leadership to ensure their understanding of differentiation curriculum features and learning expectations for TAG learners.

Best Practice Recommendations

Recommendations for follow-up in this area of best practice cut across all areas of the program, with specific concerns for program development in the area of guidance and counseling, individualized practices with the gifted, use of acceleration techniques, and a system of monitoring of both identification and professional development processes. Survey and focus group data from secondary parents also strongly support the need for more counseling services.

Recommendations for best practice include the following:

1. Provide professional development for principals to ensure clear understanding and expectations for gifted identification and programming, aligned with Virginia and national standards. Delineate the role of the building administrator in program oversight.

2. Provide tailored professional development for curriculum specialists, Title I, EL, and Specialized Instruction leadership to ensure their understanding of differentiation curriculum features for TAG learners.

3. Develop a counseling component for TAG students at middle and high school levels. This would be a major aspect of the job description of the proposed part-time high school TAG coordinator and the existing middle school coordinators.

4. Monitor products resulting from the DEP process and facilitate the use of individual conferencing as a tool to personalize TAG student program services.

Additional Recommendations

In addition to the findings and recommendations that emerged by research question and by review of national standards, it was also apparent that several findings coalesced around mechanisms and systems not formally probed in the study. One of these was the system for communication about the program that is currently used and the extent to which it is ineffective in addressing the concerns raised by various stakeholders about the program.

Survey findings suggested that parents lack important information about the program in respect to identification (19%) and goals and objectives (34%). This lack of knowledge permeated the responses across the parent survey. A plurality of staff also indicated a lack of knowledge about identification (36%) and goals and objectives of the TAG Program (35%). Focus group data further corroborated the lack of understanding about the program by both parents and staff in these areas.

Materials review and classroom observation data suggested that there is limited connection of the program from one level to the next, especially at K-3 and 6-8. This creates fragmentation of the scope and sequence of the curriculum itself within subject areas. Furthermore, implementation of the taught curriculum varies considerably from school to school. Both issues cause a lack of coherence, leading to parental confusion and concern.

Recommendations, based on concerns for communication and ensuring the transparency of TAG program practices for all stakeholder groups, are the following:

1. Design strategies for gaining principal support and advocacy for the program in each building through provision of materials, professional development, and new initiatives such as Young Scholars.

2. Institute community outreach procedures to tap into underrepresented groups within the community, including minority, low income, and EL groups.

3. Develop parent education programs at each school, focused on the TAG Program.

4. Design a scope and sequence of program offerings at each grade level and in each content area, linked to the overall philosophy, goals, outcomes, and assessments used in the gifted program. Disseminate to all stakeholder groups.

5. Expand the website to include additional information and resources on program and curriculum features for each level and option offered.

Section X. Plan of Action

Based on the recommendations noted in Section IX, the evaluation team has constructed a plan of action to effect changes over the next three years. It also should serve as the basis for the new state plan for the gifted. Selected goals may be considered for inclusion in the new Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted, with additional commentary as required by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Recommendations from this report should be integrated into the action plan at appropriate junctures. In most instances they have been cross-referenced to pages in the report. Moreover, Section VII includes very specific recommended steps for revising the identification model and offers ideas for the development of the K-3 and 6-8 programs. It also references a sample DEP model in Appendix D. The course guide reviews, found in the supplementary electronic and printed material, have detailed comments for revising specific course curriculum. A checklist for selecting appropriate level reading selections for the gifted may be found in Appendix C.

Goals and Outcomes for the Action Plan

1. **Overarching goal: To implement evaluation recommendations in respect to personnel, identification, and the expansion of the YS program development model (Yr. 1)**

    - Hire a full-time coordinator for the K-3 program who has training and background in gifted education.

        – Develop a job description consonant with recommendations in this report for the role of a K-3 coordinator of YS, community outreach, identification oversight, and GIA program development.

    - Appoint a part-time high school coordinator with a background in teaching honors and/or Advanced Placement coursework and training in gifted education.

        – Develop a job description consonant with the recommendations in this report, including curriculum development, professional development, annual evaluation, and program model changes to be enacted at 9-12 levels respectively.

    - Expand the K-5 "Young Scholars" program model that focuses on finding and serving underrepresented students at these levels.

        – Identify expansion schools, based on criteria.
        – Integrate the YS identification model into the overall division ID model.
        – Design the in-school curriculum base for the YS Program.
        – Design pre-post assessment for in-school YS program.

- Design, develop, and implement identification recommendations at the grade 1, 3 and 6 levels. (see Table 7.2 and pp 119-132)

  - Incorporate identification recommendations from the evaluation report in collaboration with a group of school-based liaisons at grades 1, 3, and 6.
  - Develop dissemination materials on the revised system.
  - Design teacher training on the revised identification system.

- Provide professional development for all teachers and principals on relevant topics in gifted education, based on evaluation recommendations and revised identification and the YS program model to be adopted.

  - Create a professional development model for sharing the revised program components: identification, training of school personnel, including principals
  - Deliver professional development, in collaboration with Advisory Committee members and liaisons, to all school sites, meeting with parents, students, and staff.
  - Assess the effectiveness of the professional development sessions and revise as needed.

2. Overarching goal: To provide curriculum rigor, challenge and differentiation for advanced learners K-11. (Yr. 2)

- Design and develop a curriculum framework and scope and sequence of curriculum and materials for division-wide use in collaboration with curriculum specialists.

  - Create goals and outcomes K-12.
  - Develop linkages of strategies, resources, and assessment strategies to these goals and outcomes.
  - Align work to existing division and TAG curriculum and integrate into appropriate course guides.

- Review and adopt research-based curriculum materials for gifted learners.

  - Critique curriculum materials designed for use with gifted learners.
  - Select a menu of options for use in K-3, 4-5, and 6-8 classrooms
  - Develop training modules for use with targeted classroom teachers.

- Modify the existing curriculum guides to reflect differentiation for gifted learners at the level of learning plan in strategies and resources (See Review of Materials pp. 12-22 and *Appendix B Curriculum Review Files electronic format*).

  - Organize the revision of curriculum guides and courses to integrate differentiated strategies and materials into learning plans.
  - Provide orientation to the new materials designed.

- Implement the 2017 policy and regulation on acceleration.

  - Provide orientation sessions with principals and other administrators on the implications of the 2017 policy and regulation for content and grade level acceleration.
  - Conduct sessions for parents on the new policy and regulation.

- Select appropriate reading materials for gifted learners in ELA classrooms grades 4-8 and add supplementary materials for math classrooms (See Materials Review, pp. 23-28 and *Appendix C*).

  - Organize a task force of ELA 4-8 teachers of gifted learners to select appropriate level text materials; collaborate on the selections with curriculum specialists in ELA.
  - Design study guides for use of these texts at appropriate levels.

- Adapt DEPs according to suggestions for changes in format, implementation, and monitoring (See Materials Review, pp. 29-33 and Appendix D for exemplar).

  - Organize a task force of TAG teachers across the division to design revised DEP guidelines and templates.
  - Pilot the new model at K-3 and grades 6-8.
  - Collect data on effectiveness of the pilot and revise accordingly.
  - Implement the new DEP model.

- Provide professional development on differentiated materials selected and related instructional strategies to targeted teachers at all levels.

  - Design training modules.
  - Deliver training to targeted groups of TAG teachers at all relevant levels.
  - Assess the follow-up implementation of the materials in targeted classrooms.

3. **Overarching goal: To design and develop program options for K-3 and middle school levels that are appropriate for TAG learners at those levels (Yrs. 1-3) (See pp. 131-135)**

   - Design a K-3 program that provides for in-class cluster grouping supplemented by pullouts that provides advanced instruction in all core areas of learning.

     - Create a task force of teachers at K-3 level to design goals, outcomes and assessments for the TAG program at these primary levels.
     - Develop or locate appropriate curriculum resources for use by teachers; select curriculum materials to use with the model.
     - Design relevant training modules; provide appropriate training for K-3 teachers in the use of TAG materials.
     - Pilot the program at one school site and revise based on feedback.
     - Implement the revised program model at all elementary sites.
     - Assess the efficacy of the program model annually.

- Provide middle school opportunities for an accelerated ELA, science, and social studies program in specialized classes.
  - Create a task force of middle school teachers in each subject area to design content-based goals, outcomes, and assessments for the TAG program at relevant levels.
  - Design a program model that describes and links the identification, program features, curriculum scope and sequence, assessment, and grouping features.
  - Develop an interdisciplinary option in the humanities for grades 6-8
  - Develop a STEM program at grades 6-8 for students who have aptitudes and interests in the underlying areas of learning.
  - Select research-based, differentiated curriculum materials for use in each content area.
  - Design relevant training modules; provide appropriate training for 6-8 teachers in the use of TAG materials and assessment tools.
  - Pilot the program at one school site and revise based on feedback.
  - Implement the revised program model at all middle school sites.
  - Assess the efficacy of the program model annually.

4. **Overarching goal: To provide an annual review to monitor gifted student learning and gifted program implementation (Yr. 1) (See pp. 138-141).**

- Design an assessment system for use in the TAG P\program at K-10 levels
  - Convene a group to examine data on gifted student performance at all levels. Employ the use of performance-based and portfolio models to judge performance.
  - Review possible learning assessment tools in content areas that accompany advanced materials and assessments of higher-level thinking and problem solving.
  - Select appropriate assessments for use at relevant grade levels and program types.
  - Describe the system and disseminate to relevant stakeholders.
- Implement the assessment system for TAG programs.
  - Collect pre-and post-assessment data, based on selected instrumentation annually.
  - Analyze data, using descriptive statistics for reporting results.
- Develop program accountability through annual reporting of assessment results to the advisory group and others as requested.
  - Work with the Department of Accountability to prepare a report that documents assessment findings; interpret findings for the gifted community.
  - Prepare a power point presentation that shows the relationship of gifted student outcomes to assessment results and sets benchmarks for annual improvement.

5. **Overarching goal: To systematize the professional development of teachers for working with gifted learners K-12 (Yrs. 1-3) (See pp 142-144).**

    - Develop a three-year professional development plan for teachers, based on defined program goals, strategies, materials, outcomes, and assessments.
    - Define the role and expectations of teachers who work with gifted learners at all levels in respect to their role (eg, use of differentiation, collaboration with other teachers and communicator to parents) and mandate their training for the daily use of differentiation practices.
    - Train all principals in the basic framework of the gifted program in respect to identification, curriculum, grouping, instruction, and assessment.
        - Share the COS-R as a tool for judging gifted differentiation practices in the classroom.
        - Provide materials for principals' to disseminate to parents and community members on the TAG program.

6. **Overarching goal: To establish systems of learning for the gifted 12 (Yrs. 1-3)**

    - Revise the identification system to include strategies for the inclusion of more underrepresented populations
    - Revise program design variables to ensure that TAG students receive differentiated services.
    - Develop an annual professional development plan that ensures mandated sessions for principals and teachers who work with TAG students.
    - Develop an assessment of learning system that ensures that gifted learners are annually assessed appropriately.

7. **Overarching goal: To design, develop, and disseminate program materials to relevant stakeholders. (Yrs. 1-3)**

    - Design a curriculum framework document that includes a scope and sequence of offerings appropriate for TAG learners at each stage of development.
    - Develop new documents consistent with new program plans and disseminate to relevant stakeholders.
    - Develop web page material consistent with program and curriculum changes.
    - Develop a program handbook for new staff and principals on program dimensions, systems, and updated policies and procedures.

Relevant References

Adams, C.M. & Chandler, K. (2014). *Effective program models for gifted students from underserved populations.* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Assouline, S., Colangelo, N., & VanTassel-Baska, J. (2015). *A nation empowered: Evidence trumps the excuses that hold back America's brightest students* (Vol.1). Iowa City: University of Iowa, the Connie Belin and Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development.

Buchanan, N.K. & Feldhusen, J.F. (Eds). (1991). *Conducting research and evaluation in gifted education*. NY: Teachers College Press.

Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Davis, J. L. (2014). *Bright, talented & Black: a guide for families of African American gifted learners.* Phoenix, AZ: Great Potential Press

Fern, E.F. (2001). *Advanced focus group research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Ford, D.Y. (2013). *Recruiting and retaining culturally different students in gifted education.* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press

Hughes, C., Kettler, T., Shaughnessy, E, & VanTassel-Baska, J. (2014). *A teachers' guide to using the CCSS with verbally gifted and advanced learners*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Johnsen, S. (ed.) (2012). *The preK-12 program standards in gifted education*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Johnsen, S., Ryser, G.R., & Assouline, S.G. (2014). *A teachers' guide to using the CCSS with mathematically and advanced learners*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Johnson, D., Boyce, L.N., & VanTassel-Baska, J. (1995). Science curriculum review: Evaluating materials for high-ability learners. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 39,* 36-43.

Kitano, M., Montgomery, D., VanTassel-Baska, J. & Johnsen S. (2008). *Implementing the Gifted PreK-12 Teacher Education Standards*. New York: Corwin Press.

Olszewski-Kubilius, P. & Clarenbach, J. (2014). Closing the opportunity gap: Program factors contributing to academic success in culturally different youth. *Gifted Child Today*, 37, 103-110.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Pfeiffer, S.I. & Jarosewich, T. (2003) *Gifted Rating Scales (GRS) manual*. Bloomington, MN; Pearson.

Plucker, J.A., Hardesty, J., & Burroughs, N. (2013). *Talent on the sidelines. Excellence gaps and America's persistent talent underclass*. Storrs: University of Connecticut, Center for Education Policy Analysis.

Slocumb, P.D., Payne, R.K. (2000). *Removing the Mask- Giftedness in Poverty*. Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc.

Stainback, S. & Stainback, W. (1988). *Understanding and conducting qualitative research*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Stambaugh, T. & Chandler, K.L. (2012). *Effective curriculum for underserved gifted students.* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

VanTassel-Baska, J. (2002) Considerations in evaluating gifted programs. *The Communicator, 33* (2), 20-24.

VanTassel-Baska, J., & Feng, A. (Eds.). (2004). *Designing and utilizing evaluation for gifted program improvement*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

VanTassel-Baska, J. Ed. (2006). *Assessment of gifted students*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

VanTassel-Baska, J. (2006). A content analysis of evaluation findings across 20 gifted programs: A Clarion call for enhanced gifted program development. *Gifted Child Quarterly,* Summer, Vol. 50, No 3, 199-215.

VanTassel-Baska, J., Quek, C. & Feng, A., (2007). Developing structured observation scales for instructional improvements in classrooms accommodating gifted learners. *Roeper Review.*

VanTassel-Baska, J., & Little, C. (Eds.). (2017). 3rd Ed. *Content-based curriculum for high-ability learners.* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

VanTassel-Baska, J., (2017). Considerations in curriculum for the gifted. In S. Pfeiffer's (Ed) *APA Handbook of giftedness and talent* (pp 349-370). Washington, DC: APA.

VanTassel-Baska, J., & Hubbard G.F. (in press). Learning assessments for gifted learners. In J Roberts & T. Inman (Eds.) *Introduction to Gifted Education.* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005) 2nd Ed. *Understanding by design.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Wyner, J.S., Bridgeland, J.M., & DiJulio, J.J. (2007). *Achievement trap: How America is failing millions of high-achieving students from low-income families*. Washington, DC: Jack Kent Cooke Foundation

A Matrix of Research-based Curriculum Resources

Subject	K-3	4-6	7-8	9-12
Math	• *Everyday Math* • *TIMS (Teaching Integrated Math)* • *TOPS (Techniques of Problem Solving)* • NCTM *Navigating Through ..* series • *M2, M3* (*Mentoring Mathematical Minds*) • William and Mary Unit: *Spatial Math; Beyond Base Ten*	• *Everyday Math* • *TIMS* • *TOPS* • *NCTM Navigating Through..* series • *Connected Math* • *M3* • William and Mary units: *Beyond Base Ten and Spatial Reasoning*	• *Transition Math* • *Mathematics, A Human Endeavor* (Harold Jacob) • *TIMS* • *TOPS* • NCTM *Navigating Through..* series • William and Mary PBL unit on *Models*	• *Discovering Geometry: An Inductive Approach* • *TOPS (*Techniques of Problem-solving*)* • NCTM *Navigating Throug*h.. series • Twists and Turns and Tangles in Math and Physics • AP Syllabi in Calculus and Probability and Statistics
Social Studies	• College of William and Mary Social Studies Units • *Touchpebbles*	• College of William and Mary Social Studies Units • MACOS (*Man: A Course of Study)* • *Voyage of the Mimi*	• College of William and Mary Social Studies Units • *Contemporary Perspectives* (Greenhaven Press)	• College of William and Mary Social Studies Units • PBLISS (Problem-Based Learning in Social Studies by S. Gallagher) • *Contemporary Perspectives* (Greenhaven Press) • AP Syllabi in American History, Psychology, Economics, European History, World History, Human Geography
Language Arts	• College of William and Mary Language Arts Units • College of William and Mary *Navigator Novel Study Guides* • *Junior Great Books* • *Jacob's Ladder (W&M)*	• College of William and Mary Language Arts Units • College of William and Mary *Navigator Novel Study Guides* • *Philosophy for Children* • *Junior Great Books* • *Jacob's Ladder* (W&M)	• College of William and Mary Language Arts Units • College of William and Mary Navigator Novel Study Guides • *Junior Great Books* • *Jacob's Ladder* (VT-B &Stambaugh)	• College of William and Mary Language Arts Units • College of William and Mary *Navigator Novel Study Guides* • Conversations: Readings for Writing • AP/IB Syllabi
Science	• College of William and Mary Science Units (Project Clarion) • *FOSS (Full Option Science System)* • *GEMS (Great Explorations in Math and Science)* • *Insights: A Hands-on Elementary Science Curriculum* • *Science for Life and Living*		• College of William and Mary Science Units (PBL) • *FAST* (Foundational Approaches in Science Teaching) • Middle School Life Science	• Modeling Instruction in High School Physics • AP/IB Syllabi

Appendix A

Materials Review

Document Review Form

The concepts of the document review form were addressed in all materials reviews. This general form was replaced by review criteria appropriate for each specific materials review.

Virginia Guidelines for the Technical Review of the Local Gifted Education Plan were used to direct the review of the ACPS Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted. These guidelines are available on the Virginia Department of Education website.

A *Criterial Checklist for Assessing Challenge in Books for the Gifted* was used to structure the review of language arts trade books used in the program.

Document Review Form

Title of the document:
Name of the reviewer(s):
Date of review:

Part I. General Evaluation

1. What is the purpose of the document?

2. Who is the intended audience?

3. What is the relationship of the document to the gifted program? How is it used by program staff?

4. Content outline (Please attach a copy of the table of contents and supply a brief description of the content to help clarification.)

Part II. Quality Indicators

1. Is the material in line with the best practices in gifted education?
   ___Yes

   ___No

   Comments:

2. Does it provide sufficient scope and depth to represent program intent?

   ___Yes

   ___No

   Comments:

3. Is it clear and consistent in its statement of theoretical framework or rationale?

   ___Yes

   ___No

   Comments:

4. Is it audience-appropriate and user-friendly?

   ___Yes

   ___No

   Comments:

Appendix B

Curriculum Review Checklist

The complete *Curriculum Review Checklist* is included in Appendix B.

Selected components of the checklist were used to review specific curriculum documents in collaboration with the evaluation team of Alexandria City Public Schools.

Components used included the following:
Thinking Skills and Metacognition
Differentiation for Advanced/Gifted Students
Interdisciplinary Applications (K-3 only)
Checklists for content area where appropriate
All content areas
(language arts, math, science, social studies)

The following reviews have been provided in electronic format.

English/ Language Arts Curriculum Review Files (11)

Math Curriculum Review Files (7)

Science Curriculum Review Files (11)

Social Studies Curriculum Review Files (10)

K-3 TAG Curriculum Review Files (2)

Young Scholars Curriculum Review Files (3)

Curriculum Review Checklist

Adapted from the Curriculum Assessment Guide, VanTassel-Baska, J. (2003) *Curriculum planning and instructional design for gifted learners*. Denver, CO: Love Publishing.

Key: Y indicates Yes: N indicates No; U indicates unclear: N/E indicates Not Evident

General Curriculum Elements	Indicators			
	Y	N	U	N/E
Are the **rationale and purpose** of the curriculum clearly stated?				
Are **affective considerations of the gifted** been integrated, including an emphasis on identity development, academic planning, and career planning?				
Is the curriculum **accelerated for advanced learners?**				
Are the curriculum **outcomes and instructional objectives addressed** systematically through lessons and activities?				
Are the **outcomes /objectives measurable**?				
Do the lesson outcomes or objectives emphasize **high-level concepts, skills, processes, and ideas?**				
Are **the materials** selected, based on considerations for the needs of advanced learners?				
Are opportunities for **independent as well as group project work** specified?				
Is the content substantive and **developmentally appropriate** for advanced learners?				
Does the curriculum emphasize **moral and ethical decision-making**?				
Has the curriculum been **aligned to national, state, and/or local standards?**				
Does the curriculum include objectives, activities, questions, assessments, resources, and any other **curricular elements needed for implementation?**				
Is **homework** specified within the curriculum at each level and in each subject area?				
Comments and clarification:				

Curriculum Activities	Indicators			
	Y	N	U	N/E
Is there a proper **balance of teacher-directed and student-directed** activities?				
Do the activities **explore, discover, clarify, and/or extend content**?				
Are there opportunities for students to engage in **worthwhile extension activities**?				
Do activities allow students to **discover ideas and concepts** more often that they are told ideas and concepts?				
Are activities **developmentally appropriate**?				
Do the activities include hands-on exploration and **active student involvement**?				
Comments and clarification:				

Instructional Strategies	Indicators			
	Y	N	U	N/E
Are **varied instructional strategies** incorporated in the curriculum?				
Are there **varied approaches to grouping**, including opportunities for small-group and independent work?				
Do the instructional strategies engage students in **problem-finding and problem-solving**?				
Do the instructional strategies engage students in **sharing ideas and perspectives**?				
Do the instructional strategies engage students **in practicing decision-making strategies**?				
Do the instructional strategies engage students in **developing and asking thoughtful questions** about what they are studying?				
Does the curriculum include **specific questions** to ask students?				
Are various **types and levels of higher order questions** incorporated?				
Comments and clarification:				

Assessment of Learning	Indicators			
	Y	N	U	N/E
Is the **assessment process comprehensive** based on the outcomes?				
Are **assessment activities embedded** in individual lessons?				
Is **authentic assessment** employed (i.e. performance, product, and/or portfolio)?				
Does the assessment process incorporate **multiple types of assessment** (eg. portfolios, observational behavior checklists, product evaluation, and self and peer evaluation?)				
Does the curriculum employ **pre- and post-assessments**?				
Are both student **processes and products acknowledged and assessed**?				
Does the curriculum include **appropriate rubrics and other criteria** for student assessment?				
Is a means of **overall curriculum evaluation** suggested?				
Comments and clarification:				

Thinking Skills and Metacognition	**Indicators**			
	Y	**N**	**U**	**N/E**
Does the curriculum incorporate techniques for **enhancing thinking skills** (eg., teaching the steps of a specific reasoning process)?				
Does the curriculum include **questions for discussions and writing** that emphasize higher-level thinking?				
Does the curriculum routinely emphasize **instruction in thinking skills** within the context of teaching content?				
Do the activities and questions engage the learner in **various levels and types of thought**?				
Does the curriculum employ a model or **models of thinking** that guide instruction in thinking skills (eg., Bloom, Guilford, Paul)?				
Does the curriculum strategically engage students **in thinking about their thinking strategies**?				
Are opportunities for **modeling metacognition** included at relevant junctures in the curriculum?				
Does the curriculum engage students in **planning, monitoring, and evaluating** their progress on a project or activity?				
Does the curriculum engage students in **reflecting on their performance and the process of learning**?				
Comments and clarification:				

Communication	**Y**	**N**	**U**	**N/E**
Does the curriculum emphasize **communication skills** relevant to the content area?				
Does the curriculum engage students in **active speaking and listening** activities?				
Does the curriculum encourage students to **respond to one another's presentations** through questions, discussion, and critique?				
Does the curriculum provide for **advanced reading in the content area**?				
Does the curriculum engage students **in more than one type of written or spoken communication** (eg., technical, persuasive, creative communication) in the content area?				
Comments and clarification:				

Research				
	Y	**N**	**U**	**N/E**
Do students engage in **research related to the content area**?				
Are students **taught a research model**?				
Is student research **issue-based**, focusing on issues involving multiple perspectives and stakeholder groups?				
Are the opportunities to engage in **research practices authentic to the discipline**?				
Are students encouraged to participate in the development of **researchable questions**?				
Is research work shared with **multiple audiences**?				
Comments and clarification:				

Technology	**Indicators**			
	Y	**N**	**U**	**N/E**
Does the curriculum encourage students to **use technological tools** in conducting research?				
Is the technology use **relevant to the content** and **complementary to the instruction**?				
Does the curriculum employ **relevant software programs?**				
Does technology use provide **access to resources unavailable** in other formats?				
Is technology used to engage students actively in **higher-order thinking** skills and activities?				
Are activities that involve the use of technology considered **for various levels of technological competency**?				
Comments and clarification:				

Interdisciplinary Applications	**Indicators**			
	Y	**N**	**U**	**N/E**
Do the curriculum materials center on an **organizing concept that promotes interdisciplinary thinking**?				
Is the **concept being studied demonstrated in at least two other disciplines**?				
Are there lessons that focus on making **interdisciplinary connections**?				
Are interdisciplinary connections fostered at a **conceptual abstract level**?				
Are there opportunities for students to develop **interdisciplinary skills** in the content area?				
Comments and clarification:				

Materials and Resources	**Indicators**			
	Y	**N**	**U**	**N/E**
Do the materials and resources sufficiently **support lesson activities**?				
Do the **handouts** contribute to the enhancement of learning?				
Do the materials and resources pull from **multiple types of sources**, including primary and secondary sources, technical and creative material?				
Are resources that support student **extension activities** identified or provided?				
Are resources to support **teacher background knowledge** identified or provided?				
Comments and clarification:				

Differentiation for Advanced/Gifted Students	**Indicators**			
	Y	**N**	**U**	**N/E**
Are the selected activities, resources, and materials sufficiently **challenging** for advanced learners?				
Are **concepts** treated in sufficient depth?				
Are there opportunities for **creative production**?				
Are there opportunities for working with integrated **higher-order thinking and problem-solving processes**?				
Are students given sufficiently **complex issues, problems, and themes** to explore?				
Are students given ample opportunities through curriculum opportunities to **construct meaning** for themselves?				
Does the content and instruction provide a sufficiently high level of **abstractio**n?				
Is the **reading material sufficiently advanced**?				
Does the curriculum allow for implementation with **different levels of advanced ability**?				
Is there adequate **articulation of open-ended questions** that encourage multiple or divergent responses??				
Are there appropriate opportunities for **independent learning**?				
Are there sufficient opportunities for **meaningful group project work**?				
Comments and clarification:				

Language Arts	**Indicators**			
	Y	**N**	**U**	**N/E**
Is the **choice of literature** or reading material based on intellectual, affective, and multi-cultural considerations?				
Does the curriculum emphasize **moral and ethical behaviors**, based on the use of real world dilemmas?				
Does the curriculum provide activities conducive to developing and practicing **critical reading skills?**				
Does the curriculum incorporate **textual analysis** of **conceptually rich literature**?				
Does the curriculum include **higher level questions** that promote **deep discussion of literature**?				
Is there a balanced perspective on at least three **diverse cultures** in the reading materials, classroom activities, and discussions?				
Does the curriculum provide opportunities to **apply data and evidence to making judgments?**				
Does the curriculum emphasize **persuasive writing**?				
Does the curriculum emphasize **affective development**?				
Does the curriculum promote the use of workshopping techniques and revision in the **writing process**?				
Does the curriculum emphasize the development of **word relationships**, such as synonyms, antonyms, and analogies?				
Does the curriculum include opportunities to learn **advanced vocabulary**?				
Does the curriculum encourage the development of **linguistic competence** in English, with emphasis on grammatical structure?				
Does the curriculum include opportunities to learn about the **history of language**, etymology, and/or semantics?				
Does the curriculum promote the use of **persuasive speaking and debate?**				
Comments and clarification:				

Mathematics	**Indicators**			
	Y	**N**	**U**	**N/E**
Are important **mathematics concepts covered in sufficient depth** (i.e. understood, explored, and developed)?				
Is the mathematics presented **clearly and accurately** using examples and nonexamples**?**				
Is there an emphasis on **connections within the domain** (eg. connecting "representing and interpreting data" across grade levels)?				
Is there an emphasis on **connections across domains** (eg. connecting Measurement and Operations to Operations and Algebraic Thinking by solving measurement problems)**?**				
Is **problem-solving** an integral part of the curriculum?				
Is there an emphasis on relevant **real-world mathematical problems and connections**?				
Do activities emphasize **oral and written communication** of ideas and strategies?				
Do students **communicate ideas and concepts in visual form**, such as through graphs, posters, or diagrams?				
Does the **content** include the **history of mathematical ideas** and the biographies of mathematicians?				
Are there opportunities for **collaboration** on mathematical problems and issues?				
Do activities provide opportunities for students to **pose hypotheses** and attempt to verify or prove them?				
Does the curriculum promote the **habits of mind of mathematicians** (eg. curiosity, tenacity, collaboration, skepticism)?				
Do activities provide opportunities for **creativity and innovation**?				
Do activities provide opportunities for application of **various thinking processes** to solve a given problem?				
Comments and clarification:				

Science	Indicators			
	Y	N	U	N/E
Are important science **concepts covered in sufficient depth**?				
Is the science **content accurate and presented clearly**?				
Is the content **linked to broad scientific concepts** and to other areas of learning?				
Is there an emphasis on the **integrated scientific research process**?				
Is the curriculum **problem-based or project-based**?				
Are there opportunities for **collaboration** on scientific issues or problems?				
Does the curriculum include considerations for the **moral, ethical, and historical dimensions** of science and technology?				
Are there opportunities for **open-ended scientific investigation**?				
Are **laboratory work and fieldwork** integral to and integrated with the curriculum?				
Are there opportunities for students to **collaborate on investigation of real-world scientific and technological problems**?				
Does the curriculum include opportunities for **building and testing hypotheses**?				
Does the curriculum allow for **questioning of assumptions and diverse opinions** on scientific topics and concepts?				
Comments and clarification:				

Social Studies	Indicators			
	Y	N	U	N/E
Are important **concepts in the social studies disciplines covered in sufficient depth**?(eg. economics, geography, government, history, psychology, sociology)				
Is there an emphasis on the **meaning and the process of the discipline** rather than on isolated facts and events?				
Is there evidence of attention to **cultural diversity** in the selection of reading materials?				
Are materials utilized with attention to **multiple points of view** and different stakeholder perspectives?				
Is there sufficient utilization of **primary source material**?				
Do students utilize **multiple secondary sources** to examine concepts and issues?				
Is **critical thinking** developed as an analytical tool for use by students?				
Are simulations or scenarios created that involve students in **collaborative problem-solving opportunities**? (eg. PBL)				
Is the **social science research model** taught and employed with students?				
Are students encouraged to develop their own **research projects**, given a research model?				
Do learning opportunities or examples **link content to current events or real-world problems**?				
Comments and clarification:				

Appendix C

Review of Text Materials

Criterial Checklist for Assessing Challenge in Books for the Gifted

Review of ELA Trade Books

Criterial Checklist for Assessing Challenge in Books for the Gifted

The following five criteria should be rated on the scale provided from 1-4, 4 being high and 1 being low. Any text selected for use with gifted students should be rated from 3-4 on the first two criteria. For the final three criteria a total score of 8 should be attained.

(A) Reading level

It would be expected that books used in a language arts program for gifted learners would be 1-2 grade levels above the tested level of students in the program. Most students in these advanced classes would be expected to be in this range.

4 Meets the criterion
3 Meets the criterion somewhat
2 Approaches meeting the criterion
1 Does not meet the criterion

(B) Advanced use of vocabulary and language

Texts used in gifted programs would employ rich and sophisticated vocabulary and language constructions.

4 Meets the criterion
3 Meets the criterion somewhat
2 Approaches meeting the criterion
1 Does not meet the criterion

(C) Employment of an abstract concept

Appropriate level texts would be centered in a concept that students could identify and discuss. Often the concept of change is employed as well as others at that level of abstraction.

4 Meets the criterion
3 Meets the criterion somewhat
2 Approaches meeting the criterion
1 Does not meet the criterion

(D) Use of advanced literary elements

Texts to be used in gifted programs would employ the use of symbolism, metaphor, and other literary devices that require abstract reasoning.

4 Meets the criterion
3 Meets the criterion somewhat
2 Approaches meeting the criterion
1 Does not meet the criterion

(E) Social emotional issues explored

Texts that are most effective with gifted learners also would have themes that relate to the social emotional needs of the population of interest, often having a protagonist who is gifted and experiences problems related to that identity.

4 Meets the criterion
3 Meets the criterion somewhat
2 Approaches meeting the criterion
1 Does not meet the criterion

Review of ELA Text Materials

List of Reviewed Books by Grade Level:

Grade 4	Grade 5
From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankwieler	*A Wrinkle in Time*
Maniac McGee	*Bridge to Terabithia*
Number the Stars	*The Phantom Tollbooth*
The Little Prince	*Tuck Everlasting*

Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Nothing but the Truth	*The Pearl*	*The Giver*
Peak	*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*	*Lord of the Flies*
Fever		*Animal Farm*
White Lilacs		*The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*
Chains		
Woman Hollering Creek		

Fourth Grade TAG

From the Mixed-up files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankwieler

The book presents a charming portrait of brother and sister runaways who spend a week in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They learn a lot about art and New York City along the way as well as the importance of a search for meaning in life. The reading level is 4.7, slightly above the grade level at which it is being used.

Overall rating:

Reading level 2

Vocabulary and Language 3

Concept 4

Literary elements 4

Social emotional issues 3

This book seems well-placed as a 4th grade TAG novel at 4th grade. Although reading level is not particularly advanced, gifted students love this book.

Maniac Magee

This book presents the story of a young orphan boy in the context of a society that has left him homeless and alone, facing the terror of the streets as he encounters racism in a small town in Pennsylvania. The book was quite popular when it came out, with a film being made of it. Diverse gifted learners especially enjoy the dialogue of the book and exploring its themes. The reading level is 4.7.

Overall rating:

Reading Level 2

Vocabulary and Language 2

Concept 4

Literary elements 2

Social emotional issues 3

This book seems well-placed as a 4th grade selection although both vocabulary and reading levels are not particularly advanced.

Number the Stars

This book explores the life of a young girl who lived through the Danish rescue of Jews during World War II. It explores the courage of Danish families in taking in Jews to save them from the Nazis and overall efforts to save over 7000 by getting them to Sweden. The book is excellent in its exploration of prejudice and humanity, juxtaposed as thematic tensions. A Newbery Award winner, the book is historical fiction and can be paired with historical accounts of the times. The reading level is 4.5.

Overall rating:

Reading level 2

Vocabulary and Language 2

Concept 4

Literary elements 2

Social emotional issues 3

This book seems too low level for use in the TAG program at grade 4. It might serve, however, as one resource for cross-disciplinary work in history and for exploring contemporary themes.

Fifth Grade TAG

A Wrinkle in Time

This classic for young people presents a portrait of a gifted group of young protagonists, all working in time and space to locate a missing scientist. They encounter many problems that they must solve and experience many issues associated with their own sense of differentness and identity. It is a rich book in respect to language. Reading level is 5.3, at the grade level used.

Overall rating:

Reading level 2

Vocabulary and Language 4

Concept 4

Literary elements 4

Social emotional issues 3

This book is well-placed in 5th grade TAG. While the reading level is lower than some, the book is so interesting to TAG readers and sophisticated in its use of vocabulary, language and literary elements, it should be kept at this level.

Bridge to Terebithia

This book presents the poignant story of a young boy losing his best friend through death. Told with sensitivity and insight, the novel offers students rich language and strong themes. It is especially effective in its treatment of emotional issues related to being alone and feeling different. Reading level is 4.6, slightly below the grade level at which it is used.

Overall rating:

Reading level 1

Vocabulary and Language 3

Concept 4

Literary elements 3

Social emotional issues 4

This book should be moved to 4th grade TAG. It is not advanced enough for use at the 5th grade level.

Tuck Everlasting

The book explores the interesting theme of immortality and whether humans would choose to have it if they could. A young girl finds herself in possession of a family secret that is central to defining who she is. The book is simply written but rich in meaning and nuanced language use. The reading level is 5.0, an at-grade level book.

Overall rating:

Reading level 1

Vocabulary and Language 3

Concept 4

Literary elements 2

Social emotional issues 3

This book should be moved to 4th grade TAG. It is not advanced enough for use at the 5th grade level. It is often on the regular reading list for this grade level.

The Phantom Tollbooth

The book features a protagonist who is bored with everything until he assembles his tollbooth that takes him to fantastic places beyond his current world. It is imaginatively told, using clever puns and metaphors as a way to draw the reader into the story. The reading level is 6.7.

Overall rating:

Reading level 4

Language 4

Concept 3

Literary elements 4

Social emotional issues 3

This is a great book for use in 5th grade TAG. It has a male protagonist, an advanced reading level, and wonderful use of metaphor, puns, and imaginative thinking.

Sixth Grade TAG Reading Selections

The books listed below were reviewed primarily according to reading level since that level affects in important ways other criteria on the review form. For example, the level of vocabulary and language use in any text is influenced by the reading level at which it is written. Literary elements employed, especially in respect to abstraction (i.e. theme and symbol), are also influenced by reading level

White Lilacs

This text is written at the 5.5 reading level, well below what TAG students should have as a central text for literary analysis and interpretation.

Chains

This text is written at the 5.2 reading level, well below what TAG students should have as a central text for literary analysis and interpretation.

Woman Hollering Creek and other stories

This text is written at the 5.2 reading level, well below what TAG students should have as a central text for literary analysis and interpretation.

Nothing but the Truth

This satirical text by Avi tackles issues of racial conflict and tension in a high school setting. With strong insight, it also shows how a young man with strong intellectual ability but fewer social skills is unable to navigate a rigid system to his advantage. It offers an important thematic on individual differences and how they are understood by the person as well as those who interact with him. While the reading level is not advanced, the subject matter and style compensate to make it a good choice for TAG students at this level. It may best be used in combination with other nonfiction readings related to the topic.

Fever

This text is historical non-fiction and written at grade level or slightly below. It may be an excellent choice if combined with a differentiated project related to the topic of the book—the yellow fever epidemic.

Peak

This text is written at the 5th grade level and is nonfiction. As such, it could be used in the 4th grade TAG classroom as a supplementary text to be used for interdisciplinary project applications.

TAG Reading Selections at Grade 7

The Pearl

This text is well-placed for TAG students at grade 7. It is often used in TAG programs as late as grade 9. The thematic, the symbolism, and the taut language of Steinbeck make this a special book for TAG students to read. It is one of the most accessible of his texts for young readers.

Overall rating:

Reading level 4

Vocabulary and Language 4

Concept 4

Literary elements 4

Social emotional issues 4

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

This is a great text for use with regular 4th graders as that is the reading level assigned (940 Lexile score). It is an excellent text for all learners but not advanced enough for gifted learners, even at 4th grade. However, the focus on an African American writer is important for inclusion in the TAG program as are Hispanic authors and Arabic writers. I suggest selecting another text by an African American for inclusion at elementary and middle school TAG. Ratings for this book would be low for both reading level and vocabulary and language, however.

Overall rating:

Reading level 1

Vocabulary and Language 1

Concept 3

Literary elements 3

Social emotional issues 4

TAG Reading Texts at Grade 8

The Giver

This text is a classic in the field of adolescent literature, and the author is renowned for her work in writing for this population. It offers a rich reading experience for advanced 8th graders, not so much in reading level as in the imaginative ideas about life that are woven throughout the text. What is the gift of being chosen? Why is being accepted by the community important to Jonas? These questions of the theme of belonging haunt the novel and lead students to think about their own journey toward adulthood. It rates high on using a concept and social and emotional issues effectively.

Overall rating:

Reading level 3

Vocabulary and Language 3

Concept 4

Literary elements 3

Social emotional issues 4

Lord of the Flies

This text is well-placed at the eighth grade level for gifted learners. Often reserved for high school, it portrays advanced concepts related to what we do when no one is there to keep control. Like Animal Farm, the power thematic is carefully explored. A unit on this book could also link to the power idea noted earlier. It is a great stimulus for writing and for debate as well as comparative analysis with other texts.

Overall rating:

Reading level 4

Vocabulary and Language 4

Concept 4

Literary elements 4

Social emotional issues 4

Animal Farm

A classic book that exploits the literary devices in many ways, especially personification. It is a great study of power and how the collective may come out on top. The reading level is appropriate for gifted learners at this stage of development and contains advanced language usage and vocabulary. Paired with source materials that may be found in DBQ materials, it would make an interesting conceptual unit of study.

Overall rating:

Reading level 4

Vocabulary and Language 4

Concept 4

Literary elements 4

Social emotional issues 4

The Boy who Harnessed the Wind

This is a non-fiction text, written about an African boy who figured out how to use wind energy to help his village. It is a text that focuses strongly on the concept of self-determination and how ingenious a young boy might be in solving a larger societal issue. This text would be well-placed in the TAG program at an earlier stage when there is an opportunity to link it to a science project on the use of alternative energy sources.

Overall rating:

Reading level 2

Vocabulary and Language 2

Concept 3

Literary elements 2

Social emotional issues 3

Appendix D

Sample Elementary School DEP

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

SAMPLE TALENTED AND GIFTED DIFFERENTIATED EDUCATION PLAN

Student: Student A_____ Subject: Reading Program Option: GIA Grade: 3rd

School: Elementary A_____ Classroom Teacher:_____

DEP Developed by_____ Services Provided by_____

Semester Plan (circle one) 1 2 Frequency: Two hours a week Date: September 10, 2017

Goal (s)	Outcomes (TAG students will be able to…)	Assessment of Outcomes
To develop higher order thinking skills, including critical, creative, and metacognitive, in reading	-Analyze at least two pieces of fiction, designated as above grade level, for character, setting, and theme of the works.	Develop a three-paragraph written piece, comparing and contrasting the fiction readings in terms of character, setting, and theme to be assessed using a pre-structured rubric.
	-Summarize the main ideas found in the literature and show how these ideas apply to art, music, and/or history.	Use a concept map to demonstrate the connection between or among the pieces assessed through student discussion and teacher evaluation.
	-Evaluate at least two off-level non-fiction reading selections, indicating how these sources are similar and dissimilar to the fiction readings.	Complete a two-column chart with similarities and differences between the pieces of fiction and non-fiction read. Create a brief presentation to share this information with classmates.
	-Create a multimedia, artistic, dramatic, musical or literary product that demonstrates understanding of one important idea found in either fiction or non-fiction readings.	Justify in reflective writing (artist's statement) the reasons why this product is appropriate to illustrate the idea selected. Reflect and comment on what you learned from doing the artistic project.

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Strategies to Achieve Outcomes:

1. Pre-select advanced fiction and non-fiction readings for student choice.
2. Provide students practice in analyzing for character, setting, and theme.
3. Provide students with rubrics developed for assessment at the beginning of each assignment.
4. Develop a set of resources that students may use in the classroom to clarify their understanding of analysis of text.
5. Provide resources in the classroom and/or online for students to access art, drama, and music for comparison purposes**.**

Use of differentiated higher level thinking used in this DEP (+ indicates students used these specific thinking skills)*					
Critical Thinking		**Creative Thinking**		**Metacognitive Thinking**	
+	Students were encouraged to evaluate situations, problems, or issues.	+	Students offered many diverse thoughts about issues or ideas.	+	Students were engaged in planning and monitoring their learning.
+	Students were engaged in comparing and contrasting.		Students explored diverse points of view to reframe ideas.	+	Students were engaged in assessing their learning.
+	Students had opportunities to generalize from concrete information to the abstract.		Students demonstrated open-mindedness and tolerance of imaginative problem solutions.	+	Students reflected on their learning.
+	Students were encouraged to synthesize of information within or across disciplines.	+	Students had opportunities to develop and elaborate on their ideas.		
+	Students were required to analyze text and/or use models, or other symbolic sources.		Students offered multiple interpretations of events and situations.		
+	Students were required to build argument orally, visually, in written forms, or by using models and symbols.				
	Students collected and drew inferences from data and represented findings in relevant form.				

***These categories and/or items may be found in the COS-R and the NAGC Gifted Programming Standards.**

Materials Used: **-**Above grade level fiction and non-fiction texts with a common theme
-Classroom and online resources in art, drama, and music

Appendix E

Parent Survey

Parent Survey

1. How many children do you have receiving TAG services (including the Young Scholars program) in Alexandria City Public Schools?

- ○ 0
- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5 or more

Thinking about one of your children who is receiving TAG services (including the Young Scholars program), please answer the following questions.

2. Which school does your child currently attend?

- ○ John Adams Elementary School
- ○ Charles Barrett Elementary School
- ○ Patrick Henry Elementary School
- ○ Jefferson-Houston School
- ○ Cora Kelly School for Math, Science and Technology
- ○ Lyles-Crouch Traditional Academy
- ○ Douglas MacArthur Elementary School
- ○ George Mason Elementary School
- ○ Matthew Maury Elementary School
- ○ Mount Vernon Community School

- ○ James K. Polk Elementary School
- ○ William Ramsay Elementary School
- ○ Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School
- ○ Francis C. Hammond Middle School
- ○ George Washington Middle School
- ○ T.C. Williams High School Minnie Howard Campus
- ○ T.C. Williams High School

3. What grade level is your child in school?

- ○ Kindergarten
- ○ 1st grade
- ○ 2nd grade
- ○ 3rd grade
- ○ 4th grade
- ○ 5th grade
- ○ 6th grade
- ○ 7th grade
- ○ 8th grade
- ○ 9th grade
- ○ 10th grade
- ○ 11th grade

- ○ 12th grade

4. In what area(s) is your child identified for receiving TAG services? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Language Arts
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Social Studies
- ☐ General Intellectual Aptitude
- ☐ Young Scholars
- ☐ I don't know

5. Through which program option(s) is your child currently served? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Young Scholars (Grades K-5)
- ☐ Differentiated Educational Plan (Grades K-3 for General Intellectual Ability)
- ☐ Differentiated Educational Plan (Grades 4-5 for Science and Social Studies)
- ☐ TAG Math and/or Reading (Grades 4-5)
- ☐ Honors classes (Grades 6-12)
- ☐ Advanced Placement (AP) classes (Grades 9-12)
- ☐ Dual Enrollment (DE) classes (Grades 9-12)

☐ I don't know

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement(s) with regard to the ACPS TAG program identification process.

6. I understand the identification process for the ACPS TAG program.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

7. I believe the process employed for identification is fair in finding students who need differentiated services beyond the norm.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements with regard to your child's current needs being met through the ACPS TAG program.

8. The TAG program assists my child with social and emotional development.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

9. The TAG program meets my child's need for academic, college, and career guidance.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

10. The TAG program provides the appropriate pace of instruction to meet my child's need for quicker learning.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

11. The TAG program provides opportunities for my child to advance grades, if needed, through early entrance to advanced grade levels or early graduation.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

12. The grouping model (i.e. how the classroom is organized to allow for children who are advanced to work together) employed by the TAG program is appropriate.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

13. The TAG program addresses my child's areas of strength.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

14. The TAG program addresses my child's areas of need.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

15. I am familiar with the goals and objectives of the ACPS TAG program.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

Thinking collectively about your child's current TAG class(es), please indicate your level of

agreement with the following statements with regard to your child's experience. TAG classes at the secondary level include Honors, Advanced Placement (AP), and Dual Enrollment (DE).

16. In my child's TAG class(es), the teacher(s) provides for advanced academic growth in core content areas.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

17. In my child's TAG class(es), the teacher(s) develops self-understanding.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

18. In my child's TAG class(es), the teacher(s) encourages self-directed learning.

- ○ Strongly agree

- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

19. In my child's TAG class(es), the teacher(s) promotes critical and creative thinking.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

20. In my child's TAG class(es), the teacher(s) develops conceptual understanding.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

21. In my child's TAG class(es), the teacher(s) develops research skills.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

22. In my child's TAG class(es), the teacher(s) fosters healthy attitudes toward achievement and learning.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

23. In my child's TAG class(es), the teacher(s) promotes advanced communication skills.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

24. In my child's TAG class(es), the teacher(s) develops social skills and collaboration with others.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

25. In my child's TAG class(es), the teacher(s) develops real world problem solving skills and products.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements with regard to the current challenge provided to your child in the ACPS TAG program.

26. The TAG program is sufficiently challenging for my child.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

27. My child is challenged by the services of the TAG program in Language Arts.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Not receiving services in this area

28. My child is challenged by the services of the TAG program in Mathematics.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Not receiving services in this area

29. My child is challenged by the services of the TAG program in Science.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Not receiving services in this area

30. My child is challenged by the services of the TAG program in Social Studies.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Not receiving services in this area

31. What criteria do you use in judging the effectiveness of your child's TAG program?

- ☐ Comments from my child about the curriculum/program
- ☐ My child's test scores
- ☐ My child's project work and products

- [ ] Feedback from teachers
- [ ] Feedback from the principal
- [ ] Program reports
- [ ] Other (Please specify) _____

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements with regard to ACPS TAG program communication.

32. The communication between my child's TAG teacher(s) and me is effective.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

33. The communication between school administration and me about the TAG program is effective.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

34. What are the top three benefits of the TAG program to your child?

- [ ] Developing higher level thinking skills
- [ ] Developing research skills
- [ ] Developing communication (speaking and writing) skills
- [ ] Developing creative thinking skills
- [ ] Having opportunities to accelerate in TAG or advanced classes
- [ ] Having challenging TAG or advanced class work
- [ ] Trying different ways to learn
- [ ] Understanding new ideas and concepts
- [ ] Learning to work with others
- [ ] Learning to reflect on their own learning

35. If you could change three things about the TAG program, what would they be?

- [ ] The identification process
- [ ] Goals and beneficial outcomes
- [ ] Curriculum (what is taught)
- [ ] Instruction (how it is taught)
- [ ] Assessment (how it is evaluated for student learning)
- [ ] Materials and textbooks
- [ ] Teacher preparation and professional development

- [ ] Greater opportunities for gifted peer interaction

36. Please describe the nature of the TAG program change(s) you would like to see for your top rated items in the previous question.

37. Are there any comments you would like to share regarding the TAG program that have not been asked in this survey?

38. Please select your ethnic group from the categories listed below.

- ○ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ○ Asian
- ○ Black or African American
- ○ Hispanic
- ○ White
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ○ Multi-Racial

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements with regard to the Young Scholars program.

39. The Young Scholars summer program was beneficial to my child.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

40. The Young Scholars grouping approach is effective.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

41. The Young Scholars study of the theme of "systems" is helpful in my child's understanding of connections in learning.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

42. Are there any comments you would like to share regarding the Young Scholars program that have not been asked in this survey?

Appendix F

Student Benefit Survey

Student Benefit Survey Instrument

Student Benefit Survey
Elementary School TAG Means

Student Benefit Survey
Middle School TAG Means

Student Benefit Survey
High School TAG Means

Graphs of Student Perceptions of Benefits
(Questions 1-3, 4-6, 11-12, 13-14)

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Student Survey Questions on the Talented and Gifted Program

Number of years you have been in the gifted program (Circle one): 1 2 3 4 more than 4

Your current grade level (Circle one): 5th 8th 12th

Which school do you currently attend: _____

What area of TAG services do you currently receive? (Select all that apply.)

TAG Math TAG	TAG Science	General Intellectual Aptitude
TAG Language Arts	Tag Social Studies	I Don't Know

For each item, circle the number that tells the extent to which you agree with the statement.

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Don't Know
1. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my higher-level thinking skills.	4	3	2	1	0
2. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my research skills.	4	3	2	1	0
3. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my communication (speaking and writing) skills.	4	3	2	1	0
4. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my creative thinking skills.	4	3	2	1	0
5. Opportunities are given to accelerate (go faster) in my gifted or advanced classes.	4	3	2	1	0
6. Opportunities are given to accelerate (go faster) in my regular classes.	4	3	2	1	0
7. The gifted class work or advanced class work is challenging.	4	3	2	1	0
8. The gifted class work or advanced class work is boring.	4	3	2	1	0
9. The regular class work is challenging.	4	3	2	1	0
10. The regular class work is boring.	4	3	2	1	0
11. Being in the gifted and talented program helps me try different ways to learn.	4	3	2	1	0
12. Being in the gifted and talented program helps me understand new ideas and concepts.	4	3	2	1	0
13. Being in the gifted and talented program helps me learn to work with others.	4	3	2	1	0
14. Being in the gifted and talented program helps me reflect on my learning.	4	3	2	1	0

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Student Benefit Survey

Student Questions on the Gifted Program
Elementary School TAG Means (N=80)

Score &Overall Mean is Bolded; *Number of Respective Replies;* (Frequencies)

Item	Strongly Agree 4	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	I Don't Know 0	Means
1. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my higher-level thinking skills.	57 (71%)	23 (29%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**3.71**
2. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my research skills.	40 (50%)	36 (45%)	4 (5%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.45**
3. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my communication (speaking and writing) skills.	44 (55%)	30 (38%)	3 (4%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	**3.43**
4. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my creative thinking skills.	50 (62%)	*23* (28%)	2 (3%)	2 (3%)	3 (4%)	**3.43**
5. Opportunities are given to accelerate (go faster) in my gifted or advanced classes.	50 (62%)	27 (34%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	*1* (1%)	**3.56**
6. Opportunities are given to accelerate (go faster) in my regular classes.	26 (33%)	37 (46%)	17 (21%)	0 (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.11**
7. The gifted class work or advanced class work is challenging.	*30* (38%)	*43* (54%)	*7* (8%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.70**
8. The gifted class work or advanced class work is boring	*2* (3%)	*6* (7%)	*36* (45%)	*35* (44%)	*1* (1%)	**1.67**
9. The regular class work is challenging	*3* (4%)	*15* (19%)	*33* (41%)	*29* (36%)	*0* (0%)	**1.9**
10. The regular class work is boring	10 (12%)	21 (26%)	*32* (40%)	15 (19%)	*2* (3%)	**2.28**
11. Being in the gifted and talented program helps me try different ways to learn.	51 (63%)	*27* (34%)	2 (3%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.61**
12. Being in the gifted and talented program helps me understand new ideas and concepts.	59 (73%)	18 (23%)	2 (3%)	*0* (0%)	*1* (1%)	**3.68**
13. Being in the TAG Program helps me learn to work with others.	39 (49%)	37 (46%)	*3* (4%)	*0* (0%)	*1* (1%)	**3.41**
14. Being in the TAG Program helps me reflect on my learning	43 (53%)	34 (43%)	*1* (1%)	*0* (0%)	*2* (3%)	**3.45**

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Student Benefit Survey
Student Questions on the Gifted Program
Middle School TAG Means (N=35)

Score &Overall Mean is Bolded; *Number of Respective Replies;* (Frequencies)

Item	**Strongly Agree 4**	**Agree 3**	**Disagree 2**	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**I Don't Know 0**	**Means**
1. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my higher-level thinking skills.	*13* (37%)	*20* (57%)	*2* (6%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.31**
2. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my research skills.	*10* (29%)	*22* (64%)	*3* (7%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.2**
3. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my communication (speaking and writing) skills.	*14* (40%)	*15* (43%)	*5* (14%)	*1* (3%)	*0* (0%)	**3.2**
4. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my creative thinking skills.	*15* (43%)	*16* (47%)	*3* (7%)	*1* (3%)	*0* (0%)	**3.29**
5. Opportunities are given to accelerate (go faster) in my gifted or advanced classes.	*13* (36%)	*10* (29%)	*10* (29%)	*1* (3%)	*1* (3%)	**2.94**
6. Opportunities are given to accelerate (go faster) in my regular classes.	*7* (20%)	*11* (32%)	*15* (42%)	*2* (6%)	*0* (0%)	**2.66**
7. The gifted class work or advanced class work is challenging.	*8* (23%)	*20* (57%)	*6* (17%)	*1* (3%)	*0* (0%)	**3.00**
8. The gifted class work or advanced class work is boring	*2* (6%)	*5* (14%)	*23* (65%)	*4* (12%)	*1* (3%)	**2.09**
9. The regular class work is challenging	*1* (3%)	*9* (26%)	*16* (45%)	*9* (26%)	*0* (0%)	**2.06**
10. The regular class work is boring	*3* (7%)	*11* (34%)	*18* (52%)	3 (7%)	*0* (0%)	**2.4**
11. Being in the gifted and talented program helps me try different ways to learn.	*11* (34%)	*18* (52%)	3 (8%)	*2* (6%)	*0* (0%)	**3.09**
12. Being in the gifted and talented program helps me understand new ideas and concepts.	*13* (36%)	*18* (52%)	*2* (6%)	*2* (6%)	*0* (0%)	**3.2**
13. Being in the TAG Program helps me learn to work with others.	*7* (20%)	*19* (54%)	*8* (23%)	*1* (3%)	*0* (0%)	**2.94**
14. Being in the TAG Program helps me reflect on my learning	*8* (23%)	*17* (49%)	*7* (20%)	*3* (8%)	*0* (0%)	**2.86**

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

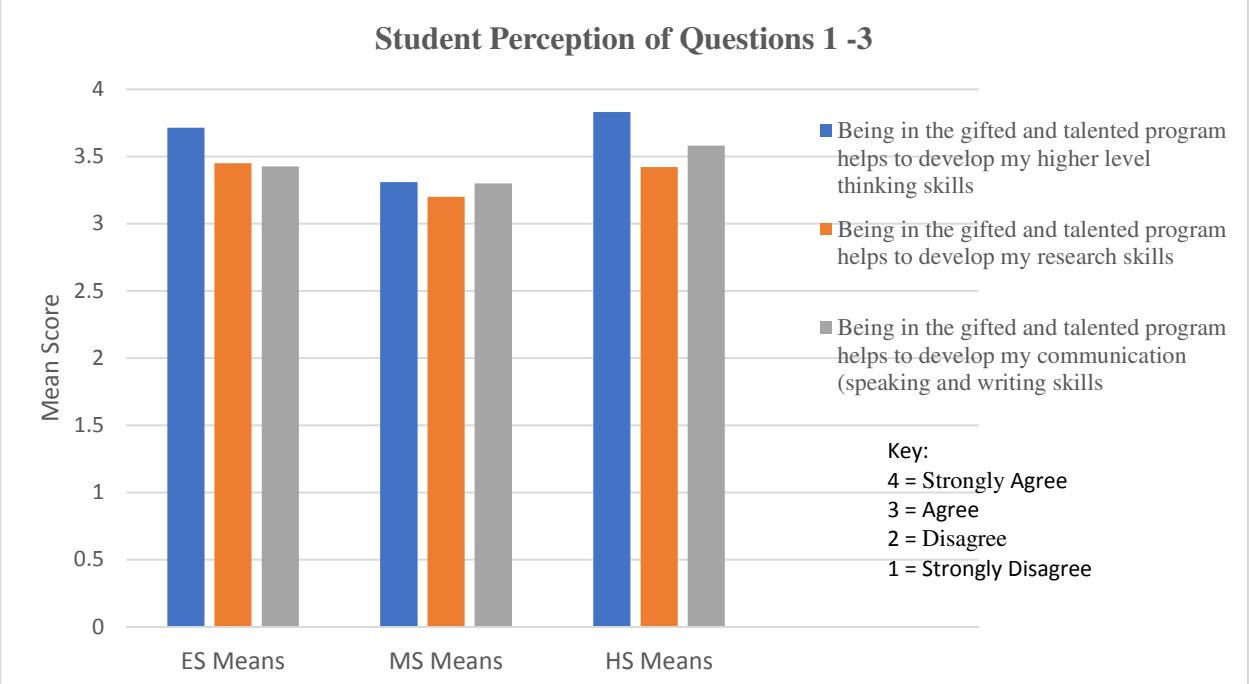
Student Benefit Survey
Student Questions on the Gifted Program
High School TAG Means (N=12)

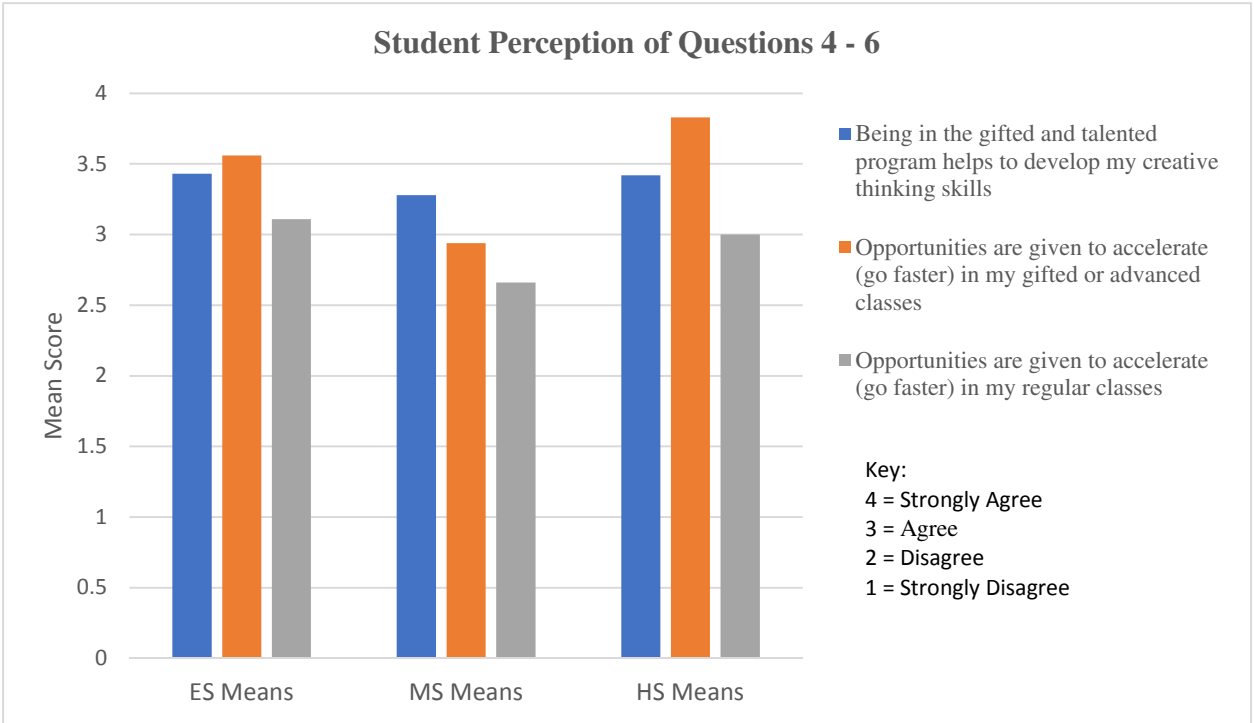
Score &Overall Mean is Bolded; *Number of Respective Replies;* (Frequencies)

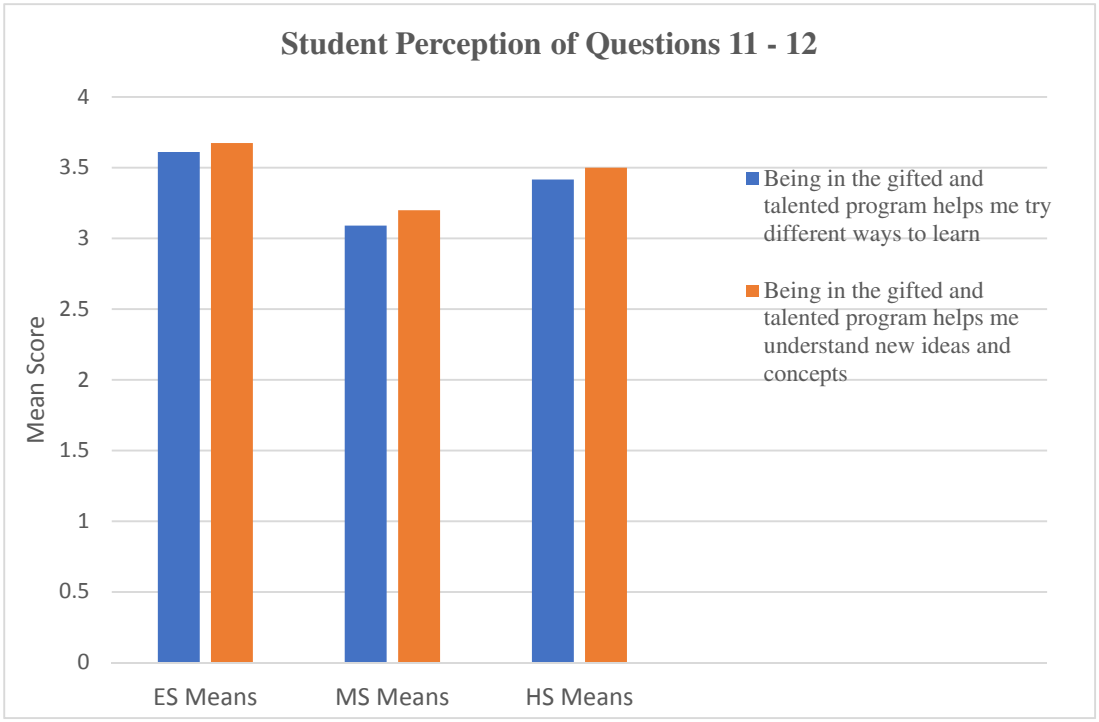
Item	Strongly Agree 4	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	I Don't Know 0	Means
1. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my higher-level thinking skills.	*10* (83%)	*2* (17%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.83**
2. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my research skills.	*6* (50%)	*5* (42%)	*1* (8%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.42**
3. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my communication (speaking and writing) skills.	*7* (58%)	*5* (42%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.58**
4. Being in the gifted and talented program helps to develop my creative thinking skills.	*5* (42%)	*7* (58%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.42**
5. Opportunities are given to accelerate (go faster) in my gifted or advanced classes.	*10* (83%)	*2* (17%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.83**
6. Opportunities are given to accelerate (go faster) in my regular classes.	*4* (33%)	*5* (42%)	*2* (17%)	*1* (8%)	*0* (0%)	**3**
7. The gifted class work or advanced class work is challenging.	*6 (50%)*	*5* (42%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	*1* (8%)	**3.25**
8. The gifted class work or advanced class work is boring	*1* (8%)	*2* (17%)	*6* (50%)	*3* (25%)	*0* (0%)	**2.08**
9. The regular class work is challenging	*1* (8%)	*2* (17%)	*4* (33%)	*5* (42%)	*0* (0%)	**1.92**
10. The regular class work is boring	*4* (33%)	*5* (42%)	*3* (25%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.08**
11. Being in the gifted and talented program helps me try different ways to learn.	*6* (50%)	*5* (42%)	*1* (8%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.42**
12. Being in the gifted and talented program helps me understand new ideas and concepts.	*6* (50%)	*6* (50%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.5**
13. Being in the TAG Program helps me learn to work with others.	*6* (50%)	*6* (50%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.5**
14. Being in the TAG Program helps me reflect on my learning	*6* (50%)	*6* (50%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	*0* (0%)	**3.5**

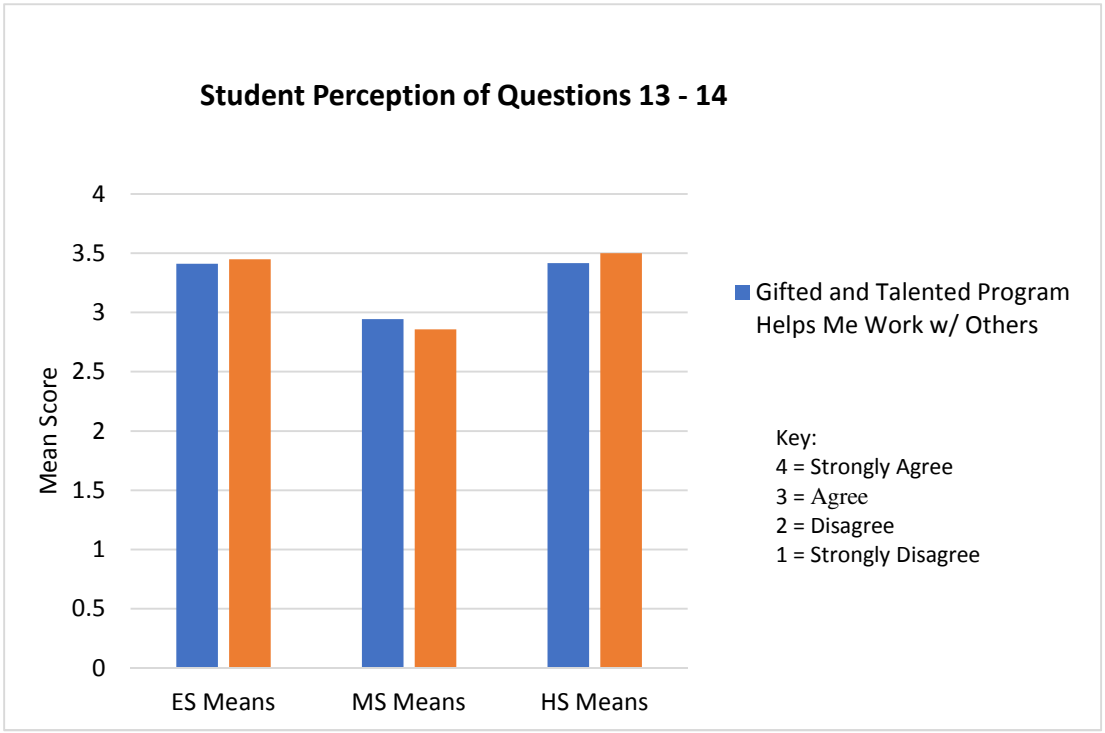
Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Graphs for Student Perceptions of Benefits
(Questions 1-3, 4-6, 11-12, 13-14)






Student Perception of Questions 11 - 12
Mean Score
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
ES Means
MS Means
HS Means
Being in the gifted and talented program helps me try different ways to learn
Being in the gifted and talented program helps me understand new ideas and concepts


Student Perception of Questions 13 - 14
Mean Score
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
ES Means
MS Means
HS Means
Gifted and Talented Program Helps Me Work w/ Others
Key:
4 = Strongly Agree
3 = Agree
2 = Disagree
1 = Strongly Disagree

Appendix G

Staff Survey

Staff Survey Instrument

1. To which school are you currently assigned? (Please select all that apply.)

- ☐ John Adams Elementary School
- ☐ Charles Barrett Elementary School
- ☐ Patrick Henry Elementary School
- ☐ Jefferson-Houston School
- ☐ Cora Kelly School for Math, Science and Technology
- ☐ Lyles-Crouch Traditional Academy
- ☐ Douglas MacArthur Elementary School
- ☐ George Mason Elementary School
- ☐ Matthew Maury Elementary School
- ☐ Mount Vernon Community School
- ☐ James K. Polk Elementary School
- ☐ William Ramsay Elementary School
- ☐ Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School
- ☐ Francis C. Hammond Middle School
- ☐ George Washington Middle School
- ☐ T.C. Williams High School Minnie Howard Campus
- ☐ T.C. Williams High School
- ☐ Central Office
- ☐ Other

2. What is your current position? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Classroom/EL/Special Education teacher
- ☐ TAG/AP/Honors/DE teacher
- ☐ Administrator
- ☐ Student Support Services (i.e. School Counselor, Social Worker, School Psychologist)
- ☐ Other

3. What subject areas do you teach during the current school year? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ English Language Arts (Reading and/or Writing)
- ☐ Math
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Social studies
- ☐ Other

4. How many years experience working in K-12 education do you have?

- ○ less than one year
- ○ 1-3 years
- ○ 4-5 years
- ○ 6-10 years
- ○ 11-15 years

- ○ 16-20 years
- ○ more than 20 years

5. How many years have you taught in ACPS?

- ○ less than one year
- ○ 1-3 years
- ○ 4-5 years
- ○ 6-10 years
- ○ 11-15 years
- ○ 16-20 years
- ○ more than 20 years

6. How many years have you worked with gifted students?

- ○ less than one year
- ○ 1-3 years
- ○ 4-5 years
- ○ 6-10 years
- ○ 11-15 years
- ○ 16-20 years
- ○ more than 20 years

7. What grade level(s) do you currently teach? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ K
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10
- ☐ 11
- ☐ 12

8. What is your background in gifted education? (Check highest level.)

- ○ none
- ○ professional development workshops
- ○ one course in gifted education

- ○ 6 hours of coursework and working towards state endorsement
- ○ 12 hours and state endorsement
- ○ more advanced coursework in gifted education beyond state endorsement
- ○ master's degree or higher with an emphasis in gifted education

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement(s) with regard to the ACPS TAG program identification process.

9. I understand the identification process for the ACPS TAG program.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

10. I believe the process employed for identification is fair in finding students who need differentiated services beyond the norm.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

11. I think the current identification process is effective in identifying historically underrepresented students.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

12. Which of the following groups do you think are underrepresented in the ACPS TAG program? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ twice exceptional students (students who are also identified as having a disability)
- ☐ EL students
- ☐ minority students
- ☐ students from poverty
- ☐ underachieving students
- ☐ none

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements with regard to ACPS TAG program goals and objectives.

13. I am familiar with the goals and objectives of the ACPS TAG program.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

14. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know
(a) ACPS TAG students learn a differentiated curriculum. (Select one option)	○	○	○	○	○
(b) ACPS TAG students are provided accelerative and enrichment opportunities for learning. (Select one option)	○	○	○	○	○
(c) ACPS TAG students are given opportunities to collaborate with intellectual peers. (Select one option)	○	○	○	○	○

15. Teachers at my school address the following goals with TAG students:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know
(a) provide for advanced academic growth in core content areas. (Select one option)	○	○	○	○	○

(b) develop self-understanding. (Select one option)	○	○	○	○	○
(c) encourage self-directed learning. (Select one option)	○	○	○	○	○
(d) promote critical and creative thinking. (Select one option)	○	○	○	○	○
(e) develop conceptual understanding. (Select one option)	○	○	○	○	○
(f) develop research skills. (Select one option)	○	○	○	○	○
(g) foster healthy attitudes toward achievement and learning. (Select one option)	○	○	○	○	○
(h) promote advanced communication skills. (Select one option)	○	○	○	○	○
(i) develop social skills and collaboration with others. (Select one option)	○	○	○	○	○
(j) develop real world problem solving skills and products. (Select one option)	○	○	○	○	○

16. The TAG program is sufficiently challenging for students.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

17. The TAG program provides opportunities for students to advance by content and/or grade level, if needed, through early entrance to advanced grade levels or early graduation.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

18. The grouping model (i.e. how the classroom is organized to allow for children who are advanced to work together) employed by the TAG program is appropriate.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

- ○ I don't know

19. What criteria do you use in judging the effectiveness of the TAG program?

- ☐ Student test scores
- ☐ Use of a challenging differentiated curriculum
- ☐ Individual and collaborative project work and products
- ☐ Program reports
- ☐ Comments of students about the curriculum/program
- ☐ Feedback from parents
- ☐ Feedback from fellow educators (i.e. teachers or administrators)
- ☐ Other (Please specify) _____

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements with regard to ACPS TAG program communication.

20. The communication with parents about the identification process for ACPS TAG services is effective.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

- ○ I don't know

21. Please provide comments on how communication with parents about the identification process for ACPS TAG services may be improved:

22. The communication with parents of students identified for ACPS TAG services is effective.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ I don't know

23. Please provide comments on how communication with parents of students identified for ACPS TAG services may be improved:

24. What are the top three benefits of the TAG program to students?

- ☐ Developing higher level thinking skills.
- ☐ Developing research skills.
- ☐ Developing communication (speaking and writing) skills.

- [ ] Developing creative thinking skills.
- [ ] Having opportunities to accelerate in TAG or advanced classes.
- [ ] Having challenging TAG or advanced class work.
- [ ] Trying different ways to learn.
- [ ] Understanding new ideas and concepts.
- [ ] Learning to work with others.
- [ ] Learning to reflect on their own learning.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements with regard to professional development.

25. How often have you received professional development in gifted education through ACPS in the past year? (Select one option)

- ○ Once
- ○ Twice
- ○ Monthly
- ○ Quarterly
- ○ Not at all

26. How many clock hours of professional development have you received in gifted education through ACPS over the past calendar year (January 2016 - December 2016)?

- ○ None
- ○ 1-3
- ○ 4-6
- ○ 7-12
- ○ 13-24
- ○ 25 or more

27. How would you rate TAG professional development offered through ACPS over the past calendar year (January 2016 - December 2016)?

- ○ Excellent
- ○ Very good
- ○ Good
- ○ Fair
- ○ Poor

28. What other types of professional development in gifted education have you participated in over the past two years? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ None
- ☐ Conferences in state
- ☐ Webinar or other online offering (1-3 hours)
- ☐ Online course(s)

- [ ] Workshops in the state
- [ ] National conference(s)
- [ ] Other (Please specify) _____

29. Please provide comments on how TAG professional development may be improved:

_____
_____

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements with regard to support for the ACPS TAG program.

30. The TAG program receives appropriate administrative support at my school.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

31. The type of administrative support provided in my school includes the following: (Check all that apply.)

- [ ] Additional funding

- [ ] Professional development in areas of need
- [ ] Additional resources for the program (e.g. aides)
- [ ] TAG program processes and procedures (eg. referrals)
- [ ] Other (Please specify) _____

32. The TAG program receives appropriate administrative support at the division level.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

33. The type of administrative support provided at the division level includes the following: (Check all that apply.)

- [ ] Additional funding
- [ ] Professional development in areas of need
- [ ] Additional resources for the program (e.g. aides)
- [ ] Administrative reports for TAG program prcesses and procedures (eg. referrals, DEPs)
- [ ] Other (Please specify) _____

34. If you could change three things about the TAG program, what would they be?

- ☐ The identification process.
- ☐ Goals and beneficial outcomes.
- ☐ Curriculum (what is taught).
- ☐ Instruction (how it is taught).
- ☐ Assessment (how it is evaluated for student learning).
- ☐ Materials and textbooks.
- ☐ Teacher preparation and professional development.
- ☐ Greater opportunities for gifted peer interaction.

35. Please describe the nature of the change (s) you selected in the previous question.

36. Are there any comments you would like to share regarding the TAG program that have not been asked in this survey?

Appendix H

Focus Group Protocols

Parent Focus Group Questions

Non-TAG Parent Focus Group Questions

Student Focus Group Questions

Teacher and Administrator Focus Group Questions

Parent Focus Group Questions

1. What is your overall perception of the Talented and Gifted Program in Alexandria City Public Schools?

2. What is your perception of the identification process? To what extent do you find it equitable to ensure inclusion of underrepresented groups?

3. What is your perception of the use of challenging curriculum in TAG classrooms (or advanced courses)?

4. How effective are the TAG program teachers or teachers of advanced courses in working with gifted learners?

5. What are the ways you learn about how your child is doing in the TAG program?

6. What do you perceive to be areas in which the TAG program might improve?

7. What do you perceive to be the major benefits of the program for identified TAG students?

Non-TAG Parent Focus Group Questions

1. What are your overall perceptions of the TAG program in Alexandria?

2. What specific aspects of the TAG program are you aware of? How effective do you believe they are?

3. How effective do you think the identification process is? Do you believe that it succeeds in identifying underrepresented groups in the division?

4. How effective is the communication process to parents about the TAG program?

5. What do you see as the benefits of the program for students identified for it?

6. What are areas of improvement that you might cite for the district to improve TAG services?

Student Focus Group Questions

1. What is your overall perception of the Talented and Gifted Program in Alexandria City Public Schools?

2. What is your perception of the identification process? To what extent do you think it allows students who would benefit from the services to be in the program?

3. What is your perception of how challenging the curriculum is in TAG classrooms (or advanced courses)?

4. How prepared are TAG program teachers or teachers of advanced courses to work with gifted learners?

5. What are the ways you assess how you are learning in the TAG program?

6. What do you perceive to be areas in which the TAG program might improve?

7. What do you perceive to be the major benefits of the program for identified TAG students?

Teacher and Administrator Focus Group Questions

1. What is your overall perception of the Talented and Gifted Program in Alexandria City Public Schools?

2. What is your perception of the identification process? In what ways does it address concerns about the inclusion of underrepresented groups?

3. What is your perception of the use of challenging curriculum, instruction, and assessment in TAG classrooms or advanced courses?

4. How prepared are TAG program teachers or teachers of advanced courses to work with gifted learners?

5. How does the TAG program assess the learning of advanced students? How is that information communicated to parents?

6. What do you perceive to be areas in which the TAG program might improve?

7. What do you perceive to be the major benefits of the program for identified TAG students?

Appendix I

Common Focus Group Themes

Elementary School Level Focus Group Common Themes

Middle School Level Focus Group Common Themes

High School Level Focus Group Common Themes

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Elementary School Level Focus Group Common Themes

(Parent Groups N=8; Parent Responses N=73) (Student Groups N=7; Student Responses N=80) (Staff Groups N=7; Staff Responses N=68)	
Focus Group Question	**Parent; Student; Staff Responses**
1. What is your overall perception of the Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS)?	• Advanced work/acceleration is the nature of the program. (*parents; students; staff*) • Challenge is the feature most perceived to be indicative of the program. (*parents; students*) • Lack of consistent K-3 Program opportunities was cited. (*parents; staff*) • TAG program responds to level of capability and is personalized with higher level thinking and work. (*parents; students*)
2. What is your perception of the identification process? To what extent do you find it equitable to ensure inclusion of underrepresented groups?	• Issues were cited regarding technical aspects of identification process including timing, training, and communication. (*parents; staff*) • Perceptions were strong that the process is subjective in terms of parent and teacher advocacy. (*parents; staff*) • Process does not consistently identify underrepresented groups. (*parents; students; staff*)
3. What is your perception of the use of challenging curriculum in TAG classrooms (or in advanced courses)?	• K-3 lacks a consistent, division-wide in-depth curriculum base. (*parents; students*) • Communication about curriculum to parents and staff is limited. *(parents; staff*) • There is a very effective curriculum at grades 4 and 5. (*parents; students; staff*)
4. How effective are the TAG program teachers or teachers of advanced courses in working with gifted learners?	• TAG teachers are perceived to be strong at grades 4 and 5, (*parents; students; staff*) although there appears to be perceived unevenness among TAG teachers. *(parents; students*) • TAG teachers foster engagement and support learning; they push kids to think. (*parents; students*)
5. What are the ways you learn about how a student is doing in the TAG program?	• When application of learning is seen at home through discussion, questions, conversations, and monitoring homework. (*parents; students*) • Information from student work indicates level of learning. (*parents; students; staff*)
6. What do you perceive to be areas in which the TAG program might improve?	• Improve the identification process. (*parents; staff*) • Improve communication about identification and curriculum and communicate in multiple languages. (*parents; staff*) • Offer more effective professional development that results in advanced student learning outcomes. (*parents; staff*) • Develop clear and advanced curriculum for K-3 and Young Scholars. (*parents; staff*) • Clarify the implementation of DEPs, especially in terms of project expectations and parent communication. (*parents; staff*) • Add science and social studies and the arts to the TAG program. (*parents; students; staff*)
7. What do you perceive to be the major benefits of the program for identified TAG students?	• Intellectual peer groups are seen as support for learning. (*parents; students; staff*) • Challenge is seen as major benefit of TAG program. (*parents; students; staff*) • TAG program is perceived to increase student self-confidence. (*parents; students; staff*) • Acceleration/advanced work is perceived as an important component for differentiation of services. (*parents; students; staff*)

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Middle School Level Focus Group Common Themes

(Parent Groups N=2; Parent Responses N=19) (Student Groups N=3; Student Responses N=39) (Staff Groups N=3; Staff Responses N=24)	
Focus Group Question	**Parent; Student; Staff Responses**
1. What is your overall perception of the Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS)?	• TAG program does not exist at middle school; there is no differentiation in honors program. (*parents; students; staff*) • Lack of community of TAG learners was felt by students and voiced by parents and staff. (*parents; students; staff*) • Extreme range of readiness levels in honors classes makes teaching impossible at a level of challenge for TAG students. (*parents; students; staff*)
2. What is your perception of the identification process? To what extent do you find it equitable to ensure inclusion of underrepresented groups?	• Students should be reassessed before entering the middle school program. (*parents; students; staff*) • Identification process was not perceived as equitable for underrepresented groups. (*parents; staff*)
3. What is your perception of the use of challenging curriculum in TAG classrooms (or in advanced courses)?	• Curriculum is a general level curriculum rather than a differentiated curriculum except for DEPs. (*parents; students; staff*) • Better grouping practices are needed for TAG students rather than spreading them among classes. (*parents; staff*) • DEPs are perceived as extra work for both students and teachers, with irregularity in implementation. (*parents; students; staff*)
4. How effective are the TAG program teachers or teachers of advanced courses in working with gifted learners?	• Although all core subject teachers have TAG students in their honors classes, many teachers have no or limited training in working with TAG students. (*parents; staff*) • Consensus is that teaching is uneven, with some teachers strong and others not strong. (*parents; students*) • Teaching is focused on preparation for SOL testing. (*parents, students; staff*)
5. What are the ways you learn about how a student is doing in the TAG program?	• Students are able to explain to others and able to apply knowledge in different ways. (*parents; students*) • The reporting of in-class testing and quizzes, along with grades is an indicator of student learning. (*parents; students*) • The use of performance-based assessments such as DEPs. History Day, and Science Fair provide information on TAG student performance (*students; staff*)
6. What do you perceive to be areas in which the TAG program might improve?	• There is a need for more visibility and understanding of the TAG program, including program definition, goals, and anticipated outcomes. (*parents; staff*) • There is a need for increased communication among stakeholders in the division regarding TAG identification and program opportunities. (*parents; staff*) • Dedicated classes for TAG students with trained TAG teachers and rigorous curriculum with opportunities for acceleration are needed for improvement of the TAG program. (*parents; students; staff*)
7. What do you perceive to be the major benefits of the program for identified TAG students?	• Challenging peer group is perceived as a program benefit. (*parents; students; staff*) • Challenge in learning at an appropriate level is perceived as a benefit. (*parents; students; staff*) • Advanced work, meeting college requirements early, and acceleration cited as specific benefits. (*parents; students; staff*)

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

High School Level Focus Group Common Themes

(Parent Groups N=1; Parent Responses N=11) (Student Groups N=1; Student Responses N=12) (Staff Groups N=2; Staff Responses N=29)	
Focus Group Question	**Parent; Student; Staff Responses**
1. What is your overall perception of the Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS)?	• TAG program is perceived as challenging, rigorous, supporting advanced achievement. *(parents; students*) • Honors program is perceived as driven by more work with rigorous expectations in reading and assignments with open enrollment seen as a sign of inclusiveness. (*students; staff*) • Quality of program perceived as heavily dependent on teacher. *(parents; students*)
2. What is your perception of the identification process? To what extent do you find it equitable to ensure inclusion of underrepresented groups?	• Teachers do not know who the identified TAG students in their classrooms are. (*parents; staff*) • There is a need to attract more diverse learners to the program. (*parents; students; staff*) • Open enrollment perceived as a good idea because it leads to greater diversity in classes. (*students; staff*)
3. What is your perception of the use of challenging curriculum in TAG classrooms (or in advanced courses)?	• There is no clearly defined TAG curriculum framework or scope and sequence of opportunities. (*parents; staff*) • There are gaps between the written, taught, and assessed curriculum for TAG. (*parents; staff*) • Rigor and excellent scores are maintained in Advanced Placement (AP) classes with open enrollment model. (*staff*) • Curriculum is generally perceived as effective, especially in AP. (*parents; students; staff*)
4. How effective are the TAG program teachers or teachers of advanced courses in working with gifted learners?	• Teachers feel well prepared and motivated to work with high level students, although more training in AP and in talented and gifted is needed. (*parents; staff*) • The effectiveness of the teacher depends upon the subject. AP teachers appear to be the strongest teachers. (*parents; students*) • Positive experiences with teachers were cited while also citing uneven teacher selection. (*parents; students*)
5. What are the ways you learn about how a student is doing in the TAG program?	• Performance-based assessments including projects and content-specific tools such as Data-Based Questions (DBQ) are effective. (*parents; students; staff*) • Feedback from students appears to be the best way to understand what students are learning. Blackboard and Power School also provide ongoing input into such understanding. (*parents; staff*) • Students understand what they have learned when they are able to explain to others and able to apply knowledge in different ways. (*parents; students*)
6. What do you perceive to be areas in which the TAG program might improve?	• There is a need to ensure ongoing identification of TAG students, especially identification of diverse learners. (*parents; staff*) • There is a need for TAG classes in ELA, science, and social studies at middle school level, not just in math. (*parents*; *students)* • There should be a focus on teacher selection for TAG/Honors/AP classes to maintain teacher quality. (*parents*; *students*) • Professional development, in both honors and AP and in working with TAG students, is needed for teachers. (*parents; staff*)
7. What do you perceive to be the major benefits of the program for identified TAG students?	• There are multiple program options. (*parents; staff*) • The program encourages students to challenge themselves. (*parents; students; staff*) • The program builds college preparation skills. (*parents; students; staff*)

Appendix J

Classroom Observations

Classroom Observations Scales Revised (COS-R)

Frequency and Effectiveness Means for All Observations

Frequency and Effectiveness Means for Elementary School Observations

Frequency and Effectiveness Means for Middle School Observations

Frequency and Effectiveness and Means for High School Observations

The William and Mary Classroom Observation Scales, Revised (COS-R)
Teacher Observation

Joyce VanTassel-Baska, Ed.D. Linda Avery, Ph.D. Jeanne Stuck, Ph.D. Annie Feng, Ed.D.
Bruce Bracken, Ph.D. Dianne Drummond, M.Ed. Tamra Stambaugh, M.Ed.

School _____ Subject _____ Level _____ Number of Students _____

Directions: Please employ the following scale as you rate each of the checklist items. Rate each item according to how well the teacher characteristic or behavior was demonstrated during the observed instructional activity. Each item is judged on an individual, self-contained basis, regardless of its relationship to an overall set of behaviors relevant to the cluster heading.

3 = Effective	2 = Somewhat Effective	1 = Ineffective	N/O = Not Observed
The teacher evidenced careful planning and classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting many appropriate student responses. The teacher was clear and sustained focus on the purposes of learning.	The teacher evidenced some planning and/or classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting some appropriate students responses. The teacher was sometimes clear and focused on the purposes of learning.	The teacher evidenced little or no planning and/or classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting minimal appropriate student responses. The teacher was unclear and unfocused regarding the purpose of learning.	The listed behavior was not demonstrated during the time of the observation. (NOTE There must be an obvious attempt made for the certain behavior to be rated "ineffective" instead of "not observed".)

General Teaching Behaviors

Curriculum Planning and Delivery	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**
The teacher…				
1. set high expectations for student performance.				
2. incorporated activities for students to apply new knowledge.				
3. engaged students in planning, monitoring, or assessing their learning.				
4. encouraged students to express their thoughts.				
5. had students reflect on what they had learned.				

Comments:

Differentiated Teaching Behaviors

Materials and Strategy Utilization	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**
The teacher…				
6. showed evidence of using program-relevant differentiated materials for the gifted in math, science, social studies, or language arts. (circle which subject applied).				
7. used cluster, pull-out, self-contained, or advanced class grouping to target gifted learners for instruction. (circle one or more)				
8. used models of thinking to promote deeper conceptual understanding and advanced content learning.				
9. employed evidence-based instructional strategies, such as graphic organizers, to enhance student higher level thinking.				

Comments:

Accommodations for Individual Differences	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**
The teacher…				
10. provided opportunities for independent or group learning to promote depth in understanding content.				
11. accommodated individual or subgroup differences (eg., through individual conferencing, student or teacher choice in material selection and task assignments.)				
12. encouraged multiple interpretations of events and situations.				
13. allowed students to discover key ideas individually through structured activities and/or questions.				
Comments:				

Critical Thinking Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**
The teacher…				
14. encouraged students to judge or evaluate situations, problems, or issues.				
15. engaged students in comparing and contrasting ideas (eg., analyze generated ideas).				
16. provided opportunities for students to generalize from concrete data or information to the abstract.				
17. encouraged student synthesis or summary of information within or across disciplines.				
Comments:				

Creative Thinking Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**
The teacher…				
18. solicited many diverse thoughts about issues or ideas.				
19. engaged students in the exploration of diverse points of view to reframe ideas.				
20. encouraged students to demonstrate open-mindedness and tolerance of imaginative, sometimes playful solutions to problems.				
21. provided opportunities for students to develop and elaborate on their ideas.				
Comments:				

Analysis and Inquiry Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**
The teacher…				
22. employed the inquiry process to stimulate high level learning.				
23. asked high level questions that encouraged students to think and ask their own questions.				
24. employed activities that required analysis of text, use of models, or other symbolic sources.				
25. employed activities that required students to build argument orally, visually, in written form, or by using models and symbols.				
26. asked students to collect and draw inferences from data and represent findings in a relevant form.				
Comments:				

Additional Comments:

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Mean Scores of COS-R Behaviors Observed in ACPS Schools (N=120); Overall, Elementary, Middle & High School

3 = Effective	2 = Somewhat Effective	1 = Ineffective	N/O = Not Observed
The teacher evidenced careful planning and classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting many appropriate student responses. The teacher was clear and sustained focus on the purposes of learning.	The teacher evidenced some planning and/or classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting some appropriate student responses. The teacher was sometimes clear and focused on the purposes of learning.	The teacher evidenced little or no planning and/or classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting minimal appropriate student responses. The teacher was unclear and unfocused regarding the purpose of learning.	The listed behavior was not demonstrated during the time of the observation. (NOTE There must be an obvious attempt made for the certain behavior to be rated "ineffective" instead of "not observed".)

General Teaching Behaviors						
Curriculum Planning and Delivery	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM***	**EM***
The teacher…						
1. set high expectations for student performance.	58 (48%)	49 (41%)	7 (6%)	6 (5%)	**2.35**	**2.44**
2. incorporated activities for students to apply new knowledge.	64 (53%)	41 (34%)	7 (6%)	8 (7%)	**2.34**	**2.50**
3. engaged students in planning, monitoring, or assessing their learning.	28 (23%)	27 (23%)	1 (1%)	64 (53%)	**1.16**	**2.48**
4. encouraged students to express their thoughts.	49 (41%)	30 (25%)	6 (5%)	35 (29%)	**1.78**	**2.62**
5. had students reflect on what they had learned.	15 (12.5%)	8 (7%)	3 (2.5%)	94 (78%)	**.53**	**2.46**
				Overall Means	**1.63**	**2.5**
Differentiated Teaching Behaviors						
Materials and Strategy Utilization	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
6. showed evidence of using program-relevant differentiated materials for the gifted in math, science, social studies, or language arts. (circle which subject applied).	25 (21%)	13 (11%)	0 (0%)	82 (68%)	**.84**	**2.65**
7. used cluster, pull-out, self-contained, or advanced class grouping to target gifted learners for instruction. (circle one or more)	33 (28%)	23 (19%)	9 (8%)	55 (45%)	**1.29**	**2.36**
8. used models of thinking to promote deeper conceptual understanding and advanced content learning.	3 (2.5%)	3 (2.5%)	0 (0%)	114 (95%)	**.13**	**2.50**
9. employed evidence-based instructional strategies, such as graphic organizers, to enhance student higher level thinking.	27 (22.5%)	39 (32%)	3 (3%)	51 (42.5%)	**1.35**	**2.34**
				Overall Means	**.90**	**2.5**

*FM represents Frequency Means
*EM represents Effectiveness Means

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Mean Scores of COS-R Behaviors Observed in ACPS Schools (N=120); Overall, Elementary, Middle & High School

Accommodations for Individual Differences	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
10. provided opportunities for independent or group learning to promote depth in understanding content.	46 (38%)	45 (38%)	4 (3%)	25 (21%)	**1.93**	**2.44**
11. accommodated individual or subgroup differences (eg., through individual conferencing, student or teacher choice in material selection and task assignments.)	25 (21%)	19 (16%)	2 (2%)	74 (61%)	**.96**	**2.50**
12. encouraged multiple interpretations of events and situations.	33 (27%)	27 (23%)	1 (1%)	59 (49%)	**1.28**	**2.52**
13. allowed students to discover key ideas individually through structured activities and/or questions.	45 (38%)	38 (32%)	4 (3%)	33 (28%)	**1.79**	**2.47**
				Overall Means	**1.49**	**2.5**
Critical Thinking Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
14. encouraged students to judge or evaluate situations, problems, or issues.	40 (33%)	33 (27%)	3 (3%)	44 (37%)	**1.58**	**2.48**
15. engaged students in comparing and contrasting ideas (eg., analyze generated ideas).	29 (24%)	24 (20%)	0 (0%)	67 (56%)	**1.13**	**2.54**
16. provided opportunities for students to generalize from concrete data or information to the abstract.	27 (22.5%)	23 (19%)	1 (1%)	69 (57.5%)	**1.07**	**2.50**
17. encouraged student synthesis or summary of information within or across disciplines.	20 (17%)	15 (12.5%)	2 (2%)	83 (68%)	**.77**	**2.48**
				Overall Means	**1.14**	**2.5**
Creative Thinking Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
18. solicited many diverse thoughts about issues or ideas.	21 (17.5%)	19 (15.5%)	2 (2%)	78 (65%)	**.86**	**2.45**
19. engaged students in the exploration of diverse points of view to reframe ideas.	12 (10%)	13 (11%)	0 (0%)	95 (79%)	**.52**	**2.48**
20. encouraged students to demonstrate open-mindedness and tolerance of imaginative, sometimes playful solutions to problems.	10 (8%)	14 (12%)	1 (1%)	95 (79%)	**.49**	**2.36**
21. provided opportunities for students to develop and elaborate on their ideas.	23 (19%)	21 (17.5%)	3 (2.5%)	73 (61%)	**.95**	**2.42**
				Overall Means	**.70**	**2.4**
Analysis and Inquiry Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
22. employed the inquiry process to stimulate high level learning.	30 (25%)	23 (19%)	3 (3%)	64 (53%)	**1.16**	**2.48**
23. asked high level questions that encouraged students to think and ask their own questions.	39 (32%)	26 (22%)	2 (3%)	53 (43%)	**1.43**	**2.55**
24. employed activities that required analysis of text, use of models, or other symbolic sources.	41 (34%)	26 (22%)	4 (3%)	49 (41%)	**1.49**	**2.52**
25. employed activities that required students to build argument orally, visually, in written form, or by using models and symbols.	29 (24%)	17 (14%)	3 (3%)	71 (59%)	**1.03**	**2.53**
26. asked students to collect and draw inferences from data and represent findings in a relevant form.	25 (21%)	11 (9%)	1 (1%)	83 (69%)	**.82**	**2.68**
				Overall Means	**1.19**	**2.5**

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Mean Scores of COS-R Behaviors Observed in ACPS Elementary Schools (N=57)

3 = Effective	2 = Somewhat Effective	1 = Ineffective	N/O = Not Observed
The teacher evidenced careful planning and classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting many appropriate student responses. The teacher was clear and sustained focus on the purposes of learning.	The teacher evidenced some planning and/or classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting some appropriate student responses. The teacher was sometimes clear and focused on the purposes of learning.	The teacher evidenced little or no planning and/or classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting minimal appropriate student responses. The teacher was unclear and unfocused regarding the purpose of learning.	The listed behavior was not demonstrated during the time of the observation. (NOTE There must be an obvious attempt made for the certain behavior to be rated "ineffective" instead of "not observed".)

General Teaching Behaviors						
Curriculum Planning and Delivery	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM***	**EM***
The teacher…						
1. set high expectations for student performance.	26 (46%)	25 (44%)	1 (2%)	5 (8%)	**2.26**	**2.30**
2. incorporated activities for students to apply new knowledge.	29 (51%)	20 (35%)	5 (9%)	3 (5%)	**2.32**	**2.40**
3. engaged students in planning, monitoring, or assessing their learning.	13 (23%)	13 (23%)	0 (0%)	31 (54%)	**1.14**	**2.50**
4. encouraged students to express their thoughts.	23 (40%)	14 (25%)	3 (5%)	17 (30%)	**1.75**	**2.50**
5. had students reflect on what they had learned.	5 (8%)	4 (7%)	0 (0%)	48 (85%)	**.40**	**2.50**
				Overall Means	**1.57**	**2.40**
Differentiated Teaching Behaviors						
Materials and Strategy Utilization	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
6. showed evidence of using program-relevant differentiated materials for the gifted in math, science, social studies, or language arts. (circle which subject applied).	15 (26%)	10 (18%)	0 (0%)	32 (56%)	**1.14**	**2.10**
7. used cluster, pull-out, self-contained, or advanced class grouping to target gifted learners for instruction. (circle one or more)	22 (39%)	13 (23%)	4 (7%)	18 (31%)	**1.69**	**2.40**
8. used models of thinking to promote deeper conceptual understanding and advanced content learning.	3 (5%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	52 (91%)	**.23**	**2.60**
9. employed evidence-based instructional strategies, such as graphic organizers, to enhance student higher level thinking.	13 (23%)	16 (28%)	2 (4%)	26 (45%)	**1.28**	**2.30**
				Overall Means	**1.08**	**2.25**

*FM represents Frequency Means
*EM represents Effectiveness Means

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Mean Scores of COS-R Behaviors Observed in ACPS Elementary Schools (N=57)

Accommodations for Individual Differences	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
10. provided opportunities for independent or group learning to promote depth in understanding content.	24 (42%)	20 (35%)	3 (5%)	10 (18%)	**2.02**	**2.40**
11. accommodated individual or subgroup differences (eg., through individual conferencing, student or teacher choice in material selection and task assignments.)	16 (28%)	12 (21%)	1 (2%)	28 (49%)	**1.28**	**2.50**
12. encouraged multiple interpretations of events and situations.	14 (25%)	10 (18%)	0 (0%)	33 (57%)	**1.08**	**2.60**
13. allowed students to discover key ideas individually through structured activities and/or questions.	24 (42%)	19 (33%)	2 (4%)	12 (21%)	**1.96**	**2.50**
				Overall Means	**1.83**	**2.50**
Critical Thinking Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
14. encouraged students to judge or evaluate situations, problems, or issues.	17 (30%)	15 (26%)	2 (4%)	23 (40%)	**1.46**	**2.40**
15. engaged students in comparing and contrasting ideas (eg., analyze generated ideas).	10 (18%)	7 (12%)	0 (0%)	40 (70%)	**.77**	**2.60**
16. provided opportunities for students to generalize from concrete data or information to the abstract.	11 (19%)	8 (14%)	1 (2%)	37 (65%)	**.88**	**2.50**
17. encouraged student synthesis or summary of information within or across disciplines.	7 (13%)	3 (5%)	1 (2%)	46 (80%)	**.49**	**2.50**
				Overall Means	**.90**	**2.50**
Creative Thinking Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
18. solicited many diverse thoughts about issues or ideas.	8 (14%)	9 (16%)	2 (4%)	38 (66%)	**.77**	**2.20**
19. engaged students in the exploration of diverse points of view to reframe ideas.	3 (5%)	7 (13%)	0 (0%)	47 (82%)	**.40**	**2.30**
20. encouraged students to demonstrate open-mindedness and tolerance of imaginative, sometimes playful solutions to problems.	6 (10%)	6 (10%)	1 (2%)	44 (78%)	**.54**	**2.40**
21. provided opportunities for students to develop and elaborate on their ideas.	12 (21%)	12 (21%)	2 (4%)	31 (54%)	**1.09**	**2.40**
				Overall Means	**.70**	**2.32**
Analysis and Inquiry Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
22. employed the inquiry process to stimulate high level learning.	12 (21%)	13 (22%)	2 (4%)	30 (53%)	**1.12**	**2.40**
23. asked high level questions that encouraged students to think and ask their own questions.	18 (32%)	11 (19%)	1 (2%)	27 (47%)	**1.35**	**2.60**
24. employed activities that required analysis of text, use of models, or other symbolic sources.	16 (28%)	7 (12%)	2 (4%)	32 (56%)	**1.12**	**2.60**
25. employed activities that required students to build argument orally, visually, in written form, or by using models and symbols.	11 (19%)	4 (7%)	0 (0%)	42 (74%)	**.72**	**2.70**
26. asked students to collect and draw inferences from data and represent findings in a relevant form.	9 (15%)	5 (9%)	1 (2%)	42 (74%)	**.67**	**2.50**
				Overall Means	**1.00**	**2.56**

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Mean Scores of COS-R Behaviors Observed in ACPS Middle Schools (N=35)

3 = Effective	2 = Somewhat Effective	1 = Ineffective	N/O = Not Observed
The teacher evidenced careful planning and classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting many appropriate student responses. The teacher was clear and sustained focus on the purposes of learning.	The teacher evidenced some planning and/or classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting some appropriate student responses. The teacher was sometimes clear and focused on the purposes of learning.	The teacher evidenced little or no planning and/or classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting minimal appropriate student responses. The teacher was unclear and unfocused regarding the purpose of learning.	The listed behavior was not demonstrated during the time of the observation. (NOTE There must be an obvious attempt made for the certain behavior to be rated "ineffective" instead of "not observed".)

General Teaching Behaviors

Curriculum Planning and Delivery	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM***	**EM***
The teacher…						
1. set high expectations for student performance.	15 (42%)	16 (46%)	3 (9%)	1 (3%)	**2.28**	**2.3**
2. incorporated activities for students to apply new knowledge.	18 (51%)	11 (31%)	2 (6%)	4 (11%)	**2.23**	**2.5**
3. engaged students in planning, monitoring, or assessing their learning.	9 (25%)	8 (23%)	1 (3%)	17 (49%)	**1.26**	**2.4**
4. encouraged students to express their thoughts.	13 (37%)	8 (23%)	0 (0%)	14 (30%)	**1.57**	**2.6**
5. had students reflect on what they had learned.	5 (11%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	29 (83%)	**.49**	**2.7**
				Overall Means	**2.50**	**2.50**

Differentiated Teaching Behaviors

Materials and Strategy Utilization	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
6. showed evidence of using program-relevant differentiated materials for the gifted in math, science, social studies, or language arts. (circle which subject applied).	3 (9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	32 (91%)	**.26**	**3.00**
7. used cluster, pull-out, self-contained, or advanced class grouping to target gifted learners for instruction. (circle one or more)	4 (11%)	8 (23%)	3 (9%)	20 (57%)	**.89**	**1.03**
8. used models of thinking to promote deeper conceptual understanding and advanced content learning.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	35 (100%)	**0**	**0**
9. employed evidence-based instructional strategies, such as graphic organizers, to enhance student higher level thinking.	8 (23%)	14 (40%)	1 (3%)	12 (34%)	**1.51**	**1.76**
				Overall Means	**.66**	**1.82**

*FM represents Frequency Means
*EM represents Effectiveness Means

Mean Scores of COS-R Behaviors Observed in ACPS Middle Schools (N=35)

Accommodations for Individual Differences	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
10. provided opportunities for independent or group learning to promote depth in understanding content.	9 (26%)	14 (40%)	1 (3%)	11 (31%)	**1.6**	**2.3**
11. accommodated individual or subgroup differences (eg., through individual conferencing, student or teacher choice in material selection and task assignments.)	6 (17%)	2 (6%)	1 (3%)	26 (74%)	**.66**	**2.5**
12. encouraged multiple interpretations of events and situations.	10 (29%)	9 (26%)	0 (0%)	16 (45%)	**1.37**	**2.5**
13. allowed students to discover key ideas individually through structured activities and/or questions.	12 (34%)	6 (17%)	2 (6%)	15 (43%)	**1.43**	**2.5**
				Overall Means	**1.26**	**2.45**
Critical Thinking Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
14. encouraged students to judge or evaluate situations, problems, or issues.	11 (31%)	10 (29%)	1 (3%)	13 (37%)	**1.54**	**2.4**
15. engaged students in comparing and contrasting ideas (eg., analyze generated ideas).	10 (29%)	7 (20%)	0 (0%)	18 (51%)	**1.26**	**2.6**
16. provided opportunities for students to generalize from concrete data or information to the abstract.	7 (20%)	5 (14%)	0 (0%)	23 (66%)	**.89**	**2.6**
17. encouraged student synthesis or summary of information within or across disciplines.	7 (20%)	5 (14%)	0 (0%)	23 (66%)	**.89**	**2.6**
				Overall Means	**1.14**	**2.55**
Creative Thinking Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
18. solicited many diverse thoughts about issues or ideas.	5 (14%)	6 (17%)	0 (0%)	24 (69%)	**.77**	**2.4**
19. engaged students in the exploration of diverse points of view to reframe ideas.	4 (11%)	3 (9%)	0 (0%)	28 (80)	**.51**	**2.6**
20. encouraged students to demonstrate open-mindedness and tolerance of imaginative, sometimes playful solutions to problems.	3 (9%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	31 (88%)	**.31**	**2.7**
21. provided opportunities for students to develop and elaborate on their ideas.	6 (17%)	3 (9%)	0 (0%)	26 (74%)	**.69**	**2.7**
				Overall Means	**.57**	**2.60**
Analysis and Inquiry Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
22. employed the inquiry process to stimulate high level learning.	9 (26%)	4 (11%)	1 (3%)	21 (60%)	**1.03**	**2.6**
23. asked high level questions that encouraged students to think and ask their own questions.	11 (31%)	9 (26%)	0 (0%)	15 (43%)	**1.46**	**2.5**
24. employed activities that required analysis of text, use of models, or other symbolic sources.	10 (29%)	9 (26%)	1 (3%)	15 (42%)	**1.4**	**2.4**
25. employed activities that required students to build argument orally, visually, in written form, or by using models and symbols.	7 (20%)	6 (17%)	3 (9%)	19 (54%)	**1.03**	**2.2**
26. asked students to collect and draw inferences from data and represent findings in a relevant form.	9 (26%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	25 (71%)	**.83**	**2.9**
				Overall Means	**1.15**	**2.52**

Mean Scores of COS-R Behaviors Observed in ACPS High Schools (N=28)

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Mean Scores of COS-R Behaviors Observed in ACPS High Schools (N=28)

3 = Effective	2 = Somewhat Effective	1 = Ineffective	N/O = Not Observed
The teacher evidenced careful planning and classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting many appropriate student responses. The teacher was clear and sustained focus on the purposes of learning.	The teacher evidenced some planning and/or classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting some appropriate student responses. The teacher was sometimes clear and focused on the purposes of learning.	The teacher evidenced little or no planning and/or classroom flexibility in implementation of the behavior, eliciting minimal appropriate student responses. The teacher was unclear and unfocused regarding the purpose of learning.	The listed behavior was not demonstrated during the time of the observation. (NOTE There must be an obvious attempt made for the certain behavior to be rated "ineffective" instead of "not observed".)

Curriculum Planning and Delivery	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM***	**EM***
General Teaching Behaviors						
The teacher…						
1. set high expectations for student performance.	17 (60%)	8 (29%)	3 (11%)	0 (0%)	**2.5**	**2.50**
2. incorporated activities for students to apply new knowledge.	17 (60%)	10 (36%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	**2.54**	**2.6**
3. engaged students in planning, monitoring, or assessing their learning.	6 (21%)	6 (21%)	0 (0%)	16 (58%)	**1.07**	**2.5**
4. encouraged students to express their thoughts.	13 (46%)	8 (29%)	3 (11%)	4 (14%)	**2.07**	**2.4**
5. had students reflect on what they had learned.	5 (17%)	3 (11%)	3 (11%)	17 (61%)	**.86**	**2.22**
				Overall Means	**1.81**	**2.44**
Differentiated Teaching Behaviors						
Materials and Strategy Utilization	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
6. showed evidence of using program-relevant differentiated materials for the gifted in math, science, social studies, or language arts. (circle which subject applied).	7 (25%)	3 (11%)	0 (0%)	18 (64%)	**.96**	**2.7**
7. used cluster, pull-out, self-contained, or advanced class grouping to target gifted learners for instruction. (circle one or more)	7 (25%)	2 (7%)	2 (7%)	17 (61%)	**.96**	**2.4**
8. used models of thinking to promote deeper conceptual understanding and advanced content learning.	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	27 (96%)	**.07**	**2.0**
9. employed evidence-based instructional strategies, such as graphic organizers, to enhance student higher level thinking.	4 (14%)	9 (32%)	0 (0%)	15 (54%)	**1.29**	**2.3**
				Overall Means	**.82**	**2.36**

*FM represents Frequency Means
*EM represents Effectiveness Means

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Mean Scores of COS-R Behaviors Observed in ACPS High Schools (N=28)

Accommodations for Individual Differences	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
10. provided opportunities for independent or group learning to promote depth in understanding content.	13 (46%)	11 (40%)	0 (0%)	4 (14%)	**2.18**	**2.5**
11. accommodated individual or subgroup differences (eg., through individual conferencing, student or teacher choice in material selection and task assignments.)	3 (11%)	5 (18%)	0 (0%)	20 (71%)	**.68**	**2.4**
12. encouraged multiple interpretations of events and situations.	9 (32%)	8 (28%)	1 (4%)	10 (36%)	**1.58**	**2.4**
13. allowed students to discover key ideas individually through structured activities and/or questions.	9 (32%)	13 (46%)	0 (0%)	6 (22%)	**1.89**	**2.4**
				Overall Means	**1.58**	**2.42**
Critical Thinking Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
14. encouraged students to judge or evaluate situations, problems, or issues.	12 (42%)	8 (29%)	0 (0%)	8 (29%)	**1.86**	**2.6**
15. engaged students in comparing and contrasting ideas (eg., analyze generated ideas).	9 (32%)	10 (36%)	0 (0%)	9 (32%)	**1.68**	**2.5**
16. provided opportunities for students to generalize from concrete data or information to the abstract.	6 (22%)	7 (25%)	1 (4%)	14 (49%)	**1.17**	**2.3**
17. encouraged student synthesis or summary of information within or across disciplines.	9 (32%)	10 (36%)	0 (0%)	9 (32%)	**1.68**	**2.5**
				Overall Means	**1.60**	**2.47**
Creative Thinking Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
18. solicited many diverse thoughts about issues or ideas.	8 (29%)	4 (14%)	0 (0%)	16 (57%)	**1.14**	**2.7**
19. engaged students in the exploration of diverse points of view to reframe ideas.	5 (18%)	3 (11%)	0 (0%)	20 (71%)	**.75**	**2.6**
20. encouraged students to demonstrate open-mindedness and tolerance of imaginative, sometimes playful solutions to problems.	1 (4%)	7 (25%)	0 (0%)	20 (71%)	**.61**	**2.1**
21. provided opportunities for students to develop and elaborate on their ideas.	5 (17%)	6 (22%)	1 (4%)	16 (57%)	**1**	**2.3**
				Overall Means	**.87**	**2.42**
Analysis and Inquiry Strategies	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/O**	**FM**	**EM**
The teacher…						
22. employed the inquiry process to stimulate high level learning.	9 (32%)	6 (22%)	0 (0%)	13 (46%)	**1.39**	**2.6**
23. asked high level questions that encouraged students to think and ask their own questions.	10 (36%)	6 (22%)	1 (4%)	11 (38%)	**1.54**	**2.5**
24. employed activities that required analysis of text, use of models, or other symbolic sources.	15 (54%)	10 (36%)	1 (4%)	2 (6%)	**2.36**	**2.5**
25. employed activities that required students to build argument orally, visually, in written form, or by using models and symbols.	11 (39%)	7 (25%)	0 (0%)	10 (36%)	**1.68**	**2.6**
26. asked students to collect and draw inferences from data and represent findings in a relevant form.	7 (25%)	5 (18%)	0 (0%)	16 (57%)	**1.10**	**2.6**
				Overall Means	**1.61**	**2.56**

Appendix K

National Standards Review

2010 *Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards*
National Association for Gifted Children Evaluation Checklist

Overall Standards Rating of the Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS)

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program
2010 *Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards*
National Association for Gifted Children

1331 H Street, NW, Suite 1001, Washington, DC 20005 202.785.4268 www.nagc.org

Evaluation Checklist

Gifted Education Programming Standard 1: Learning and Development

Introduction

For teachers and other educators in PreK-12 settings to be effective in working with learners with gifts and talents, they must understand the characteristics and needs of the population for whom they are planning curriculum, instruction, assessment, programs, and services. These characteristics provide the rationale for differentiation in programs, grouping, and services for this population and are translated into appropriate differentiation choices made at curricular and program levels in schools and school districts. While cognitive growth is important in such programs, affective development is also necessary. Thus many of the characteristics addressed in this standard emphasize affective development linked to self-understanding and social awareness.

Standard 1: Learning and Development **Description:** Educators, recognizing the learning and developmental differences of students with gifts and talents, promote ongoing self-understanding, awareness of their needs, and cognitive and affective growth of these students in school, home, and community settings to ensure specific student outcomes.		**Indicators**				
		Y	**U**	**N**	**D**	**N/O**
Total Indicators for Standard 1		**3**	**4**	**4**	**1**	**1**
Student Outcomes	**Evidence-Based Practices**					
1.1. Self-Understanding. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate self-knowledge with respect to their interests, strengths, identities, and needs in socio-emotional development and in intellectual, academic, creative, leadership, and artistic domains	1.1.1. Educators engage students with gifts and talents in identifying interests, strengths, and gifts.		**X**			
	1.1.2. Educators assist students with gifts and talents in developing identities supportive of achievement.		**X**			
1.2. *Self-Understanding*. Students with gifts and talents possess a developmentally appropriate understanding of how they learn and grow; they recognize the influences of their beliefs, traditions, and values on their learning and behavior.	1.2.1. Educators develop activities that match each student's developmental level and culture-based learning needs.			**X**		
1.3. Self-Understanding. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate understanding of and respect for similarities and differences between themselves and their peer group and others in the general population.	1.3.1. Educators provide a variety of research-based grouping practices for students with gifts and talents that allow them to interact with individuals of various gifts, talents, abilities, and strengths.		**X**			
	1.3.2. Educators model respect for individuals with diverse abilities, strengths, and goals.	**X**				

1.1.1. Elementary grades 4-5 ELA/Math – Not evident in other aspects of program
1.1.2. Elementary and High School, not Middle School
1.3.1. Elementary ELA/Math grades 4-5: yes; Middle School: no; High School: yes

Key: Y indicates Yes; U indicates Uneven; N indicates No; D indicates Developing; N/O indicates Not Observed

Form completed by gifted education coordinator in collaboration with the evaluator.

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Standard 1: Learning and Development **Description:** Educators, recognizing the learning and developmental differences of students with gifts and talents, promote ongoing self-understanding, awareness of their needs, and cognitive and affective growth of these students in school, home, and community settings to ensure specific student outcomes.		**Indicators**				
		Y	**U**	**N**	**D**	**N/O**
Student Outcomes	**Evidence-Based Practices**					
1.4. Awareness of Needs. Students with gifts and talents access resources from the community to support cognitive and affective needs, including social interactions with others having similar interests and abilities or experiences, including same-age peers and mentors or experts.	1.4.1. Educators provide role models (eg., through mentors, bibliotherapy) for students with gifts and talents that match their abilities and interests.			X		
	1.4.2. Educators identify out-of-school learning opportunities that match students' abilities and interests.	X				
1.5. Awareness of Needs. Students' families and communities understand similarities and differences with respect to the development and characteristics of advanced and typical learners and support students with gifts and talents' needs.	1.5.1. Educators collaborate with families in accessing resources to develop their child's talents.				X	
1.6. Cognitive and Affective Growth. Students with gifts and talents benefit from meaningful and challenging learning activities addressing their unique characteristics and needs.	1.6.1. Educators design interventions for students to develop cognitive and affective growth that is based on research of effective practices*.		X			
	1.6.2. Educators develop specialized intervention services for students with gifts and talents who are underachieving and are now learning and developing their talents.	X				
1.7. Cognitive and Affective Growth. Students with gifts and talents recognize their preferred approaches to learning and expand their repertoire.	1.7.1. Teachers enable students to identify their preferred approaches to learning, accommodate these preferences, and expand them.					X
1.8. Cognitive and Affective Growth. Students with gifts and talents identify future career goals that match their talents and abilities and resources needed to meet those goals (eg., higher education opportunities, mentors, financial support).	1.8.1. Educators provide students with college and career guidance that is consistent with their strengths.			X		
	1.8.2. Teachers and counselors implement a curriculum scope and sequence that contains person/social awareness and adjustment, academic planning, and vocational and career awareness.			X		

1.4.2. Jack Kent Cooke Student Scholarship; Odyssey of the Mind; VA Governor's School; History Fair; Science Fair
1.5.1. Parent counseling by phone (Coordinator) and email
1.6.1. Affective growth not monitored in most TAG settings.
1.6.2. Intervention plans (K-8) - 10 per year
1.8.1. Resources available @ TC Williams AVID/School Counselor

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program
2010 *Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards*

Evaluation Checklist

Gifted Education Programming Standard 2: Assessment

Introduction

Knowledge about all forms of assessment is essential for educators of students with gifts and talents. It is integral to identification, assessing each student's learning progress, and evaluation of programming. Educators need to establish a challenging environment and collect multiple types of assessment information so that all students are able to demonstrate their gifts and talents. Educators' understanding of non-biased, technically adequate, and equitable approaches enables them to identify students who represent diverse backgrounds. They also differentiate their curriculum and instruction by using pre- and post-, performance-based, product-based, and out-of-level assessments. As a result of each educator's use of ongoing assessments, students with gifts and talents demonstrate advanced and complex learning. Using these student progress data, educators then evaluate services and make adjustments to one or more of the school's programming components so that student performance is improved.

Standard 2: Assessment **Description:** Assessments provide information about identification, learning progress and outcomes, and evaluation of programming for students with gifts and talents in all domains.		**Indicators**				
		Y	**U**	**N**	**D**	**N/O**
Total Indicators for Standard 2		**12**	**2**	**3**	**5**	**0**
Student Outcomes	**Evidence-Based Practices**					
2.1. *Identification*. All students in grades PK-12 have equal access to a comprehensive assessment system that allows them to demonstrate diverse characteristics and behaviors that are associated with giftedness.	2.1.1. Educators develop environments and instructional activities that encourage students to express diverse characteristics and behaviors that are associated with giftedness.	**X**				
	2.1.2. Educators provide parents/guardians with information regarding diverse characteristics and behaviors that are associated with giftedness.				**X**	

2.1.2. Staff orientation presentation to parents not consistently provided

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Standard 2: Assessment **Description:** Assessments provide information about identification, learning progress and outcomes, and evaluation of programming for students with gifts and talents in all domains.		**Indicators**				
		Y	**U**	**N**	**D**	**N/O**
Student Outcomes	**Evidence-Based Practices**					
2.2. *Identification*. Each student reveals his or her exceptionalities or potential through assessment evidence so that appropriate instructional accommodations and modifications can be provided.	2.2.1. Educators establish comprehensive, cohesive, and ongoing procedures for identifying and serving students with gifts and talents. These provisions include informed consent, committee review, student retention, student reassessment, student exiting, and appeals procedures for both entry and exit from gifted program services.	X				
	2.2.2. Educators select and use multiple assessments that measure diverse abilities, talents, and strengths that are based on current theories, models, and research.	X				
	2.2.3 Assessments provide qualitative and quantitative information from a variety of sources, including off-level testing, are nonbiased and equitable, and are technically adequate for the purpose.	X				
	2.2.4. Educators have knowledge of student exceptionalities and collect assessment data while adjusting curriculum and instruction to learn about each student's developmental level and aptitude for learning.	X				
	2.2.5. Educators interpret multiple assessments in different domains and understand the uses and limitations of the assessments in identifying the needs of students with gifts and talents.	X				
	2.2.6. Educators inform all parents/guardians about the identification process. Teachers obtain parental/guardian permission for assessments, use culturally sensitive checklists, and elicit evidence regarding the child's interests and potential outside of the classroom setting.	X				
2.3. *Identification*. Students with identified needs represent diverse backgrounds and reflect the total student population of the district.	2.3.1. Educators select and use non-biased and equitable approaches for identifying students with gifts and talents, which may include using locally developed norms or assessment tools in the child's native language or in nonverbal formats.	X				
	2.3.2. Educators understand and implement district and state policies designed to foster equity in gifted programming and services.	X				
	2.3.3. Educators provide parents/guardians with information in their native language regarding diverse behaviors and characteristics that are associated with giftedness and with information that explains the nature and purpose of gifted programming options.	X				

2.2.1. 20-26 appeals referrals per year
2.2.4. IEP negotiated through Specialized Instruction– tutoring as needed 2% ID gifted
2.2.6. Spanish language only
2.3.3. Brochure and forms translated into four languages; Amharic, Arabic, English, Spanish

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Standard 2: Assessment **Description:** Assessments provide information about identification, learning progress and outcomes, and evaluation of programming for students with gifts and talents in all domains.		**Indicators**				
		Y	**U**	**N**	**D**	**N/O**
Student Outcomes	**Evidence-Based Practices**					
2.4. *Learning Progress and Outcomes*. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate advanced and complex learning as a result of using multiple, appropriate, and ongoing assessments.	2.4.1. Educators use differentiated pre- and post- performance-based assessments to measure the progress of students with gifts and talents.			**X**		
	2.4.2. Educators use differentiated product-based assessments to measure the progress of students with gifts and talents.				**X**	
	2.4.3. Educators use off-level standardized assessments to measure the progress of students with gifts and talents.		**X**			
	2.4.4. Educators use and interpret qualitative and quantitative assessment information to develop a profile of the strengths and weaknesses of each student with gifts and talents to plan appropriate intervention.			**X**		
	2.4.5. Educators communicate and interpret assessment information to students with gifts and talents and their parents/guardians.		**X**			

2.4.2. DEP model beginning fall 2016
2.4.3. SRA for ELA (grades 4&5) Think through Math (grades 4&5) AP and DE Assessments.
2.4.5. Discussion of progress on learning is very limited at K-3 and grades 6-10.
Dissemination of learning assessment data other than through parent/teacher conferences and report cards is atypical

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Standard 2: Assessment **Description:** Assessments provide information about identification, learning progress and outcomes, and evaluation of programming for students with gifts and talents in all domains.		**Indicators**				
		Y	**U**	**N**	**D**	**N/O**
Student Outcomes	**Evidence-Based Practices**					
2.5. *Evaluation of Programming*. Students identified with gifts and talents demonstrate important learning progress as a result of programming and services.	2.5.1. Educators ensure that the assessments used in the identification and evaluation processes are reliable and valid for each instrument's purpose, allow for above-grade-level performance, and allow for diverse perspectives.	X				
	2.5.2. Educators ensure that the assessment of the progress of students with gifts and talents uses multiple indicators that measure mastery of content, higher level thinking skills, achievement in specific program areas, and affective growth.			X		
	2.5.3. Educators assess the quantity, quality, and appropriateness of the programming and services provided for students with gifts and talents by disaggregating assessment data and yearly progress data and making the results public.	X				
2.6. *Evaluation of Programming*. Students identified with gifts and talents have increased access and they show significant learning progress as a result of improving components of gifted education programming.	2.6.1. Administrators provide the necessary time and resources to implement an annual evaluation plan developed by persons with expertise in program evaluation and gifted education.				X	
	2.6.2. The evaluation plan is purposeful and evaluates how student-level outcomes are influenced by one or more of the following components of gifted education programming: (a) identification, (b) curriculum, (c) instructional programming and services, (d) ongoing assessment of student learning, (e) counseling and guidance programs, (f) teacher qualifications and professional development, (g) parent/guardian and community involvement, (h) programming resources, and (i) programming design, management, and delivery.				X	
	2.6.3. Educators disseminate the results of the evaluation, orally and in written form, and explain how they will use the results.				X	

2.5.2. Measurement of content and achievement, not higher order skills or affective domain
2.5.3. Available from Department of Accountability; Results provided to TAG Advisory Committee
2.6.1. Current evaluation in place – Recommendations are ongoing
2.6.2. (See comment (2.6.1.)

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program
2010 *Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards*

Evaluation Checklist

Gifted Education Programming Standard 3: Curriculum Planning and Instruction

Introduction

Assessment is an integral component of the curriculum planning process. The information obtained from multiple types of assessments informs decisions about curriculum content, instructional strategies, and resources that will support the growth of students with gifts and talents. Educators develop and use a comprehensive and sequenced core curriculum that is aligned with local, state, and national standards, then differentiate and expand it. In order to meet the unique needs of students with gifts and talents, this curriculum must emphasize advanced, conceptually challenging, in-depth, distinctive, and complex content within cognitive, affective, aesthetic, social, and leadership domains. Educators must possess a repertoire of evidence-based instructional strategies in delivering the curriculum (a) to develop talent, enhance learning, and provide students with the knowledge and skills to become independent self-aware learners, and (b) to give students the tools to contribute to a multicultural, diverse society. The curriculum, instructional strategies, and materials and resources must engage a variety of learners using culturally responsive practices.

Standard 3: Curriculum Planning and Instruction **Description:** Educators apply the theory and research-based models of curriculum and instruction related to students with gifts and talents and respond to their needs by planning, selecting, adapting, and creating culturally relevant curriculum and by using a repertoire of evidence-based instructional strategies to ensure specific student outcomes.		**Indicators**				
		Y	**U**	**N**	**D**	**N/O**
Total Indicators for Standard 3		**2**	**13**	**1**	**2**	**2**
Student Outcomes	**Evidence-Based Practices**					
3.1. *Curriculum Planning*. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate growth commensurate with aptitude during the school year.	3.1.1. Educators use local, state, and national standards to align and expand curriculum and instructional plans.				X	
	3.1.2. Educators design and use a comprehensive and continuous scope and sequence to develop differentiated plans for PK-12 students with gifts and talents.			X		
	3.1.3. Educators adapt, modify, or replace the core or standard curriculum to meet the needs of students with gifts and talents and those with special needs such as twice-exceptional, highly gifted, and English language learners.		X			
	3.1.4. Educators design differentiated curricula that incorporate advanced, conceptually challenging, in-depth, distinctive, and complex content for students with gifts and talents.		X			
	3.1.5. Educators use a balanced assessment system, including pre-assessment and formative assessment, to identify students' needs, develop differentiated education plans, and adjust plans based on continual progress monitoring		X			
	3.1.6. Educators use pre-assessments and pace instruction based on the learning rates of students with gifts and talents and accelerate and compact learning as appropriate		X			
	3.1.7. Educators use information and technologies, including assistive technologies, to individualize for students with gifts and talents, including those who are twice-exceptional.	X				

3.1.1. Aligned to SOLs but not to NAGC Gifted Standards
3.1.2. Limited @ K-3; Strong @ grades 4-5; Limited @ grades 6-8; Uneven @ grades 9-12
3.1.3 Only at grades 4&5 in ELA; grades 4-12 in math
3.1.4. See 3.1.3.
3.1.5. DEP process in place unevenly
3.1.6. Math only

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Standard 3: Curriculum Planning and Instruction **Description:** Educators apply the theory and research-based models of curriculum and instruction related to students with gifts and talents and respond to their needs by planning, selecting, adapting, and creating culturally relevant curriculum and by using a repertoire of evidence-based instructional strategies to ensure specific student outcomes.		**Indictors**				
		Y	**U**	**N**	**D**	**N/O**
Student Outcomes	**Evidence-Based Practices**					
3.2. *Talent Development*. Students with gifts and talents become more competent in multiple talent areas and across dimensions of learning.	3.2.1. Educators design curricula in cognitive, affective, aesthetic, social, and leadership domains that are challenging and effective for students with gifts and talents.				X	
	3.2.2. Educators use metacognitive models to meet the needs of students with gifts and talents.	X				
3.3. *Talent Development*. Students with gifts and talents develop their abilities in their domain of talent and/or area of interest.	3.3.1. Educators select, adapt, and use a repertoire of instructional strategies and materials that differentiate for students with gifts and talents and that respond to diversity.		X			
	3.3.2. Educators use school and community resources that support differentiation.					X
	3.3.3. Educators provide opportunities for students with gifts and talents to explore, develop, or research their areas of interest and/or talent.		X			
3.4. *Instructional Strategies*. Students with gifts and talents become independent investigators..	3.4.1. Educators use critical-thinking strategies to meet the needs of students with gifts and talents.		X			
	3.4.2. Educators use creative-thinking strategies to meet the needs of students with gifts and talents.		X			
	3.4.3. Educators use problem-solving model strategies to meet the needs of students with gifts and talents.		X			
	3.4.4. Educators use inquiry models to meet the needs of students with gifts and talents.		X			
3.5. *Culturally Relevant Curriculum*. Students with gifts and talents develop knowledge and skills for living and being productive in a multicultural, diverse, and global society.	3.5.1. Educators develop and use challenging, culturally responsive curriculum to engage all students with gifts and talents.		X			
	3.5.2. Educators integrate career exploration experiences into learning opportunities for students with gifts and talents, eg. biography study or speakers.					X
	3.5.3. Educators use curriculum for deep explorations of cultures, languages, and social issues related to diversity.		X			
3.6. *Resources*. Students with gifts and talents benefit from gifted education programming that provides a variety of high quality resources and materials.	3.6.1. Teachers and administrators demonstrate familiarity with sources for high quality resources and materials that are appropriate for learners with gifts and talents.		X			

3.2.1 Limited differentiation in K-3 – grades 6-8 honors classes
3.3.1. Limited differentiation in K-3 – grades 6-8 honors classes
3.3.3. SOL-based research (ELA); I-Search; Chromebooks, DEP
3.4.1.; 3.4.2.; 3.4.3.; 3.4.4. Limited @ K-3; Strong @ grades 4-5; Limited @ grades 6-8; Uneven @ grades 9-12
3.5.3. No deliberate effort in program
3.6.1. Resource teachers are building relationships. Administrators do not support sharing of materials in all instances.

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program
2010 *Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards*

Evaluation Checklist

Gifted Education Programming Standard 4: Learning Environments

Introduction

Effective educators of students with gifts and talents create safe learning environments that foster emotional well-being, positive social interaction, leadership for social change, and cultural understanding for success in a diverse society. Knowledge of the impact of giftedness and diversity on social-emotional development enables educators of students with gifts and talents to design environments that encourage independence, motivation, and self-efficacy of individuals from all backgrounds. They understand the role of language and communication in talent development and the ways in which culture affects communication and behavior. They use relevant strategies and technologies to enhance oral, written, and artistic communication of learners whose needs vary based on exceptionality, language proficiency, and cultural and linguistic differences. They recognize the value of multilingualism in today's global community.

Standard 4: Learning Environments **Description:** Learning environments foster personal and social responsibility, multicultural competence, and interpersonal and technical communication skills for leadership in the 21st century to ensure specific student outcomes.		**Indicators**				
		Y	**U**	**N**	**D**	**N/O**
Total Indicators for Standard 4		**5**	**4**	**4**	**0**	**4**
Student Outcomes	**Evidence-Based Practices**					
4.1. *Personal Competence*. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate growth in personal competence and dispositions for exceptional academic and creative productivity. These include self-awareness, self-advocacy, self-efficacy, confidence, motivation, resilience, independence, curiosity, and risk taking.	4.1.1. Educators maintain high expectations for all students with gifts and talents as evidenced in meaningful and challenging activities.		X			
	4.1.2. Educators provide opportunities for self-exploration, development and pursuit of interests, and development of identities supportive of achievement, eg., through mentors and role models.		X			
	4.1.3. Educators create environments that support trust among diverse learners.					X
	4.1.4. Educators provide feedback that focuses on effort, on evidence of potential to meet high standards, and on mistakes as learning opportunities.		X			
	4.1.5. Educators provide examples of positive coping skills and opportunities to apply them.			X		
4.2. *Social Competence*. Students with gifts and talents develop social competence manifested in positive peer relationships and social interactions.	4.2.1. Educators understand the needs of students with gifts and talents for both solitude and social interaction.		X			
	4.2.2. Educators provide opportunities for interaction with intellectual and artistic/creative peers as well as with chronological-age peers.	X				
	4.2.3. Educators assess and provide instruction on social skills needed for school, community, and the world of work.			X		

4.1.1. Consistent lack of differentiation @ K-3 and grades 6-8
4.1.2. Research emphasis @ grades 4-8
4.1.4. Lack of consistent feedback on differentiated activities @t K-3 and grades 6-10 with limited opportunities for using error analysis techniques
4.2.1. Apparent in classrooms of trained teachers, especially TAG resource teachers

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Standard 4: Learning Environments **Description:** Learning environments foster personal and social responsibility, multicultural competence, and interpersonal and technical communication skills for leadership in the 21st century to ensure specific student outcomes.		**Indicators**				
		Y	**U**	**N**	**D**	**N/O**
Student Outcomes	**Evidence-Based Practices**					
4.3. *Leadership*. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate personal and social responsibility and leadership skills.	4.3.1 Educators establish a safe and welcoming climate for addressing social issues and developing personal responsibility.	X				
	4.3.2. Educators provide environments for developing many forms of leadership and leadership skills.			X		
	4.3.3. Educators promote opportunities for leadership in community settings to effect positive change.			X		
4.4. *Cultural Competence*. Students with gifts and talents value their own and others' language, heritage, and circumstance. They possess skills in communicating, teaming, and collaborating with diverse individuals and across diverse groups.[1] They use positive strategies to address social issues, including discrimination and stereotyping.	4.4.1. Educators model appreciation for and sensitivity to students' diverse backgrounds and languages.	X				
	4.4.2. Educators censure discriminatory language and behavior and model appropriate strategies.					X
	4.4.3. Educators provide structured opportunities to collaborate with diverse peers on a common goal.	X				
4.5. *Communication Competence*. Students with gifts and talents develop competence in interpersonal and technical communication skills. They demonstrate advanced oral and written skills, balanced biliteracy or multiliteracy, and creative expression. They display fluency with technologies that support effective communication	4.5.1. Educators provide opportunities for advanced development and maintenance of first and second language(s).					X
	4.5.2. Educators provide resources to enhance oral, written, and artistic forms of communication, recognizing students' cultural context.					X
	4.5.3. Educators ensure access to advanced communication tools, including assistive technologies, and use of these tools for expressing higher-level thinking and creative productivity.	X				

[1] Differences among groups of people and individuals based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area.

4.4.1. Cultural competence workshops planned
4.5.2. Chromebooks available grades 4-12

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program
2010 *Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards*

Evaluation Checklist

Gifted Education Programming Standard 5: Programming

Introduction

The term programming refers to a continuum of services that address students with gifts and talents' needs in all settings. Educators develop policies and procedures to guide and sustain all components of comprehensive and aligned programming and services for PreK-12 students with gifts and talents. Educators use a variety of programming options such as acceleration and enrichment in varied grouping arrangements (cluster grouping, resource rooms, special classes, special schools) and within individualized learning options (independent study, mentorships, online courses, internships) to enhance students' performance in cognitive and affective areas and to assist them in identifying future career goals. They augment and integrate current technologies within these learning opportunities to increase access to high level programming such as distance learning courses and to increase connections to resources outside of the school walls. In implementing services, educators in gifted, general, special education programs, and related professional services collaborate with one another and parents/guardians and community members to ensure that students' diverse learning needs are met. Administrators demonstrate their support of these programming options by allocating sufficient resources so that all students within gifts and talents receive appropriate educational services

Standard 5: Programming **Description:** Educators are aware of empirical evidence regarding (a) the cognitive, creative, and affective development of learners with gifts and talents, and (b) programming that meets their concomitant needs. Educators use this expertise systematically and collaboratively to develop, implement, and effectively manage comprehensive services for students with a variety of gifts and talents to ensure specific student outcomes.		**Indicators**				
		Y	**U**	**N**	**D**	**N/O**
Total Indicators for Standard 5		**2**	**6**	**2**	**2**	**1**
Student Outcomes	**Evidence-Based Practices**					
5.1. *Variety of Programming*. Students with gifts and talents participate in a variety of evidence- based programming options that enhance performance in cognitive and affective areas.	5.1.1. Educators regularly use multiple alternative approaches to accelerate learning.				X	
	5.1.2. Educators regularly use enrichment options to extend and deepen learning opportunities within and outside of the school setting.		X			
	5.1.3. Educators regularly use multiple forms of grouping, including clusters, resource rooms, special classes, or special schools.		X			
	5.1.4. Educators regularly use individualized learning options such as mentorships, internships, online courses, and independent study.		X			
	5.1.5. Educators regularly use current technologies, including online learning options and assistive technologies to enhance access to high-level programming.	X				
	5.1.6. Administrators demonstrate support for gifted programs through equitable allocation of resources and demonstrated willingness to ensure that learners with gifts and talents receive appropriate educational services.		X			

5.1.1. Acceleration policy in process; Content acceleration beginning @ grade 4; AP and DE acceleration
5.1.2. Unevenness apparent @ K-3 and grades 6-8
5.1.3. Middle school and high school classes need to use appropriate grouping for differentiated instruction
5.1.4. Online options in math; Online high school courses
5.1.6. Administrators do not ensure appropriate services in all buildings

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Standard 5: Programming **Description:** Educators are aware of empirical evidence regarding (a) the cognitive, creative, and affective development of learners with gifts and talents, and (b) programming that meets their concomitant needs. Educators use this expertise systematically and collaboratively to develop, implement, and effectively manage comprehensive services for students with a variety of gifts and talents to ensure specific student outcomes.		**Indicators**				
		Y	**U**	**N**	**D**	**N/O**
Student Outcomes	**Evidence-Based Practices**					
5.2. *Coordinated Services*. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate progress as a result of the shared commitment and coordinated services of gifted education, general education, special education, and related professional services, such as school counselors, school psychologists, and social workers.	5.2.1. Educators in gifted, general, and special education programs, as well as those in specialized areas, collaboratively plan, develop, and implement services for learners with gifts and talents.		**X**			
5.3. *Collaboration*. Students with gifts and talents' learning is enhanced by regular collaboration among families, community, and the school.	5.3.1. Educators regularly engage families and community members for planning, programming, evaluating, and advocating.				**X**	
5.4. *Resources*. Students with gifts and talents participate in gifted education programming that is adequately funded to meet student needs and program goals..	5.4.1. Administrators track expenditures at the school level to verify appropriate and sufficient funding for gifted programming and services.					**X**
5.5. *Comprehensiveness.* Students with gifts and talents develop their potential through comprehensive, aligned programming and services.	5.5.1. Educators develop thoughtful, multi-year program plans in relevant student talent areas, PK-12.		**X**			
5.6. *Policies and Procedures*. Students with gifts and talents participate in regular and gifted education programs that are guided by clear policies and procedures that provide for their advanced learning needs (eg., early entrance, acceleration, credit in lieu of enrollment).	5.6.1. Educators create policies and procedures to guide and sustain all components of the program, including assessment, identification, acceleration practices, and grouping practices, that is built on an evidence-based foundation in gifted education.	**X**				
5.7. *Career Pathways*. Students with gifts and talents identify future career goals and the talent development pathways to reach those goals	5.7.1. Educators provide professional guidance and counseling for individual student strengths, interests, and values.			**X**		
	5.7.2. Educators facilitate mentorships, internships, and vocational programming experiences that match student interests and aptitudes.			**X**		

5.2.1. Collaboration with general curriculum specialists; EL, & Specialized Instruction only for Appeals Committee
5.3.1. Young Scholars; Twitter account; Parent advocacy for Identification (parent meetings) The formation of local parent groups is not encouraged.
5.5.1. Multi-year program plans for Young Scholars, grades 4-5 in ELA, and grades 4-12 in mathematics; no evidence of plans in other talent areas

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program
2010 *Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards*

Evaluation Checklist

Gifted Education Programming Standard 6: Professional Development

Introduction

Professional development is essential for all educators involved in the development and implementation of gifted programs and services. Professional development is the intentional development of professional expertise as outlined by the NAGC-CEC teacher preparation standards and is an ongoing part of gifted educators' professional and ethical practice. Professional development may take many forms ranging from district-sponsored workshops and courses, university courses, professional conferences, independent studies, and presentations by external consultants and should be based on systematic needs assessments and professional reflection. Students participating in gifted education programs and services are taught by teachers with developed expertise in gifted education. Gifted education program services are developed and supported by administrators, coordinators, curriculum specialists, general education, special education, and gifted education teachers who have developed expertise in gifted education. Since students with gifts and talents spend much of their time within general education classrooms, general education teachers need to receive professional development in gifted education that enables them to recognize the characteristics of giftedness in diverse populations, understand the school or district referral and identification process, and possess an array of high quality, research-based differentiation strategies that challenge students. Services for students with gifts and talents are enhanced by guidance and counseling professionals with expertise in gifted education.

Standard 6: Professional Development **Description:** All educators (administrators, teachers, counselors, and other instructional support staff) build their knowledge and skills using the NAGC-CEC Teacher Standards for Gifted and Talented Education and the National Staff Development Standards. They formally assess professional development needs related to the standards, develop and monitor plans, systematically engage in training to meet the identified needs, and demonstrate mastery of standard. They access resources to provide for release time, funding for continuing education, and substitute support. These practices are judged through the assessment of relevant student outcomes.		**Indicators**				
		Y	**U**	**N**	**D**	**N/O**
Total Indicators for Standard 6		**8**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**2**
Student Outcomes	**Evidence-Based Practices**					
6.1. *Talent Development*. Students develop their talents and gifts as a result of interacting with educators who meet the national teacher preparation standards in gifted education.	6.1.1. Educators systematically participate in ongoing, research-supported professional development that addresses the foundations of gifted education, characteristics of students with gifts and talents, assessment, curriculum planning and instruction, learning environments, and programming.	**X**				
	6.1.2. The school district provides professional development for teachers that models how to develop environments and instructional activities that encourage students to express diverse characteristics and behaviors that are associated with giftedness.	**X**				
	6.1.3. Educators participate in ongoing professional development addressing key issues such as anti-intellectualism and trends in gifted education such as equity and access.					**X**
	6.1.4. Administrators provide human and material resources needed for professional development in gifted education (eg. release time, funding for continuing education, substitute support, webinars, or mentors).	**X**				
	6.1.5. Educators use their awareness of organizations and publications relevant to gifted education to promote learning for students with gifts and talents.	**X**				

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Standard 6: Professional Development **Description:** All educators (administrators, teachers, counselors, and other instructional support staff) build their knowledge and skills using the NAGC-CEC Teacher Standards for Gifted and Talented Education and the National Staff Development Standards. They formally assess professional development needs related to the standards, develop and monitor plans, systematically engage in training to meet the identified needs, and demonstrate mastery of standard. They access resources to provide for release time, funding for continuing education, and substitute support. These practices are judged through the assessment of relevant student outcomes.		**Indicators**				
		Y	**U**	**N**	**D**	**N/O**
Student Outcomes	**Evidence-Based Practices**					
6.2. *Socio-emotional Development*. Students with gifts and talents develop socially and emotionally as a result of educators who have participated in professional development aligned with national standards in gifted education and National Staff Development Standards.	6.2.1. Educators participate in ongoing professional development to support the social and emotional needs of students with gifts and talents.		**X**			
6.3. *Lifelong Learners*. Students develop their gifts and talents as a result of educators who are life-long learners, participating in ongoing professional development and continuing education opportunities	6.3.1. Educators assess their instructional practices and continue their education in school district staff development, professional organizations, and higher education settings based on these assessments.	**X**				
	6.3.2. Educators participate in professional development that is sustained over time, that includes regular follow-up, and that seeks evidence of impact on teacher practice and on student learning.		**X**			
	6.3.3. Educators use multiple modes of professional development delivery including online courses, online and electronic communities, face-to-face workshops, professional learning communities, and book talks.	**X**				
	6.3.4. Educators identify and address areas for personal growth for teaching students with gifts and talents in their professional development plans.	**X**				
6.4. *Ethics*. Students develop their gifts and talents as a result of educators who are ethical in their practices.	6.4.1. Educators respond to cultural and personal frames of reference when teaching students with gifts and talents.					**X**
	6.4.2. Educators comply with rules, policies, and standards of ethical practice.	**X**				

See Previous Page: 6.1.5 Division pays for NAGC and VAG memberships; Pays for travel to conferences :

6.2.1. Through William and Mary course work; Resource distribution includes relevant articles in social-emotional development.
6:3.2. Endorsement program: 2 cohorts (K-12) of 20 teachers per year
Elementary: monthly meetings with professional development
Middle: in-school professional development workshop series
All honors teachers receive professional development
Positive change in interest in GT professional development

Appendix L

Consultant Responses to Identification Procedures

Dr. Joy Lawson Davis (Consultant 1) Report

Dr. Rosina Gallagher (Consultant 2) Report

ALEXANDRIA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

EVALUATION OF GIFTED EDUCATION SERVICES PROGRAM

BY EXTERNAL CONSULTANT- DR. JOY LAWSON DAVIS

May 15, 2017

A complete review of a report forwarded by Dr. Joyce VanTassel-Baska, Evaluator, revealed the following:

While Alexandria City Public Schools has made a number of targeted revisions to improve efforts to identify and serve a wider range of students from low income and culturally diverse populations in recent years, a number of concerns remain. These concerns have resulted in an underrepresentation of students from these population groups in their gifted education programs. The issues of concern include, but are not limited to:

- *the ability of classroom teachers to consistently recognize and identify gifted behaviors as demonstrated by diverse population children and youth;*
- *the ability of teachers to address the unique academic, intellectual and psycho-social needs of diverse gifted students once identified;*
- *no evidence is provided confirming that the district has created specific publications and distribution sites throughout the city of Alexandria with the goal of reaching a broader audience and targeting communities where significant numbers of Black, Hispanic and low SES students live;*
- *consideration of the use of local norms for use with standardized assessments; and*
- *the role and capacity of the selection committee (as composed) at the district level to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student and community population and the inclusion of all key stakeholders in the selection process in making eligibility decisions.*

The level of support by central office administration, school based administration, community leaders, and other key stakeholders for identifying and serving the needs of all gifted students will be critical as the district moves forward to address these varied and complex issues.

Questions for consultants-

1. In your experience, what research-based approaches to identification have resulted in finding more underrepresented populations, especially minority and low income students?
    a. ***Universal Screening***
    b. ***Use of Teacher Observation checklists (UStars TOPS)***
    c. ***Use of local norms***
    d. ***Broader engagement of diverse community members, leaders, and parents***

2. Given that the Naglieri Nonverbal Test which assesses general ability in a nonverbal format and the Cognitive Abilities Test (CoGAT), which assesses verbal, nonverbal, and mathematical aptitudes, have been found to be helpful in finding underrepresented populations, are there ways to use those tests that have proven to be most effective?
    a. ***Use of subtest scores on CoGAT***
    b. ***Districts often overlook verbally gifted diverse students and use NNAT as the only tool suggesting that all low income and diverse learners do not have high level verbal skills-be careful***
    c. ***Use of cut-off scores beginning at 85%ile and above for targeted groups***

d. Using the CoGAT as a universal screening tool

3. What are the pitfalls in using teacher nominations? Parent nominations?
    - ***a. Recent research suggests that unless school districts are using teacher nominations that originate with Black and Hispanic teachers, Black & Hispanic students are unlikely to be referred to gifted programs***
    - ***b. Overuse and over reliance on White teachers to refer students of diverse groups (particularly without cultural sensitivity training) will not result in higher levels of diverse students being referred to gifted programs***
    - ***c. Use of parent (and those of community/faith based leaders) nominations of diverse students may help the district once those parents are more fully informed about the benefits of gifted programs and the existence of these services. Without a broader publication/marketing/community workshop campaign and one that is more culturally sensitive, parents of Black and Hispanic students and those from low SES communities are not likely to nominate students. Direct, targeted efforts must be made by the district to increase awareness and engagement of diverse communities in gifted education nomination.***

4. What mix of criteria work best in ensuring a better representation of poor children in the selection of gifted learners?
    - a. ***Performance based tasks, subtest scores, universal screening, parent/community referrals, student work sample review, 85%ile score cutoff***

5. What instruments have you found to be most effective for use in an identification system* to help ensure representation for African American students? For Hispanic learners, many of whom are EL?
    - ***a. CoGAT subtest scores***
    - ***b. NNAT***
    - ***c. Individual psychological tests administered by Black and /or Hispanic psychologists***
    - ***d. InView assessment***
    - ***e. Raven Matrices***
    - ***f. Universal Nonverbal Intelligence Test (UNIT)***
    - ***g. Assessments translated into first language***
    - ***h. Allowing/encouraging EL teachers to initiate referrals***
    - ***i. Parent/community leader referrals (to note student leadership, specific gifted behaviors as demonstrated in home and community settings)***
    - ***j. Cultural competency training to teach all classroom teachers how to recognize gifted traits in diverse learners***
    - ***k. Targeting Title I Schools for gifted education training***
    - l. ***Work Sample review***

6. If you were the coordinator in this division, what changes would you effect to improve the existing identification system? Please indicate what the identification system* would look like.
    - ***a. Targeted information sessions on Saturday mornings, Evenings held at community or church sites co-hosted by community/faith leaders***
    - ***b. Distribution of literature in atypical community locations (grocery stores, beauty/barber shops, churches, community centers)***
    - ***c. Parent/Community Referrals***
    - ***d. Teacher Referrals after Sensitivity/cultural competency training***
    - ***e. CoGAT and NNAT at 85%ile and above in targeted schools***
    - ***f. Central office eligibility meetings over a pre-established period of time***
    - ***g. Appeals process to be initiated 15 days after date of decision letter***

h. Universal Screening at two grade levels annually grade 2 and grade 4 or 5
i. Student work review using standard rubric (Writing, Drawing, Technology)
j. Use of advocacy points for under-represented populations

7. Please provide feedback on Table 2 provided above. Are the solutions appropriate? What would you add or delete from consideration?

Table 2

Analysis of identification issues by data source and proposed solution

1: strongly agree
2: agree
3: agree somewhat
4: do not agree

Issue/Problem	Data Source	Proposed solution	1-4 Rating
Lack of representation of minority and low-income children in TAG	**Focus groups, survey, classroom observation, interviews**	**Change the process for screening and identification to target more students in these groups for identification for TAG.**	**1**
Lack of teacher knowledge in identifying underrepresented groups; the role of teacher advocacy	**Focus groups, interviews**	**Provide teacher training on the identification system, with an emphasis on 'look-fors' in identifying underrepresented groups**	**1**
Lack of analyzing data to assess intake of underrepresented groups at the screening level	**Scores on Naglieri and teacher recommendation form**	**Change cutoff scores, as needed, to ensure inclusion of target groups; use a teacher recommendation form that includes characteristics of minority groups**	**1**
Uneven distribution of TAG-identified students by school, leading to perceptions of over- and under-representation	**Focus groups, classroom observations, interviews**	**Develop school-based norms as well as district norms for the program.**	**4 (may be problematic with transfers or transient students)**

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Issue/Problem	Data Source	Proposed solution	1-4 Rating
Communication of the identification process to parents, teachers, et al.	**Focus groups, surveys**	**Multiple modes, including face-to-face meetings**	**1 (Special focus should be on scheduling information sessions at churches, community centers and distributing literature more broadly in diverse communities)**
The over involvement of parents in the process; parental advocacy	**Focus groups, interviews**	**Design a process that involves parents as nominators at the screening level only.**	**2 (Does this concern reflect all demographic groups or only the over-represented groups?)**
The role of student samples	**Focus groups, interviews**	**Design a process to ensure comparable products being judged (eg. performance-based assessment with standardized rubric)**	**2**
The use of school-based committees for selection that are comparable in process and execution	**Research in gifted education; State regulation**	**Develop a process for holding selection committee meetings on one day at a central location with resources to check and confer.**	**4- This solution is probably not doable, given the size of the district. Perhaps setting up Central office meetings over a period of time may work better**

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Issue/Problem	Data Source	Proposed solution	1-4 Rating
The use of multiple criteria that are balanced in perspective (tests and other sources receiving consideration)	Research in gifted education; State regulation	Develop a system that uses at least three criteria that weigh equally in the final selection.	2 Equal weight? How does the matrices process look in the district? Consider use of advocacy points for low SES and culturally diverse learners
The need for reassessment at middle school level	Research in gifted education; focus groups	Use a content-based aptitude measure for all core areas to ensure identification for advanced coursework at grades 6-8 (eg. DAT) for universal screening	2
Lack of an effective identification process for science and social studies at elementary level	Focus groups, survey data, division data	Modify teacher checklists to include science and social studies behaviors; use performance-based assessments in each area (Fowler test, DBQ's); and examine relevant CoGAT data	1
Young Scholars Program limited in scope; limited impact beyond summer program experience (14% identified for gifted program by grade 3)	Focus groups, interviews	Expand the Young Scholars Program to eligible elementary schools by grade 1; provide support for in-school follow-up during the academic year.	2 Key question: Do Young Scholars students directly transition to regular services? Or is re-evaluation required?

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Issue/Problem	Data Source	Proposed solution	1-4 Rating
Lack of high school acknowledgment of TAG students	**Focus groups, interviews, classroom observation**	**Teachers provided with list of identified TAG students to address differentiation in the classroom; appoint a TAG coordinator for each high school complex to provide guidance, coordination of extracurricular experiences, and assistance in honors, AP, and DE issues.**	**1 Excellent idea: Appoint High School TAG coordinators to be assigned to provide guidance, coordination of extracurricular experiences, and assistance in honors, AP, and DE issues.**
Lack of the arts as an area of TAG programming that would attract more underrepresented students	**Focus groups, surveys, interviews**	**Consider the arts as an important program expansion area within two years.**	**1 Agreed. Ensure however, that arts is not the only option for diverse learners. Arts gifted students come from all demographic groups as will all categories of giftedness.**

Alexandria City Public Schools Gifted Program Evaluation
Q/A by Rosina Gallagher, PhD. NCSP

Alexandria City Public Schools Gifted Program Evaluation – Q/A
by Rosina M. Gallagher, PhD, NCSP

1.
The DISCOVER Model developed by C. June Maker and associates at the University of Arizona has been found effective in identifying and developing high potential in students that have been traditionally underrepresented in gifted programs.

The model utilizes performance-based assessment that is linked to curricular interventions. Conducted in regular classrooms, teams of 4/5 students are engaged in challenging tasks interacting with trained observers that speak the students' native language/s. Student performance across domains is rated on rubrics.

After the assessments, parents, students and school staff are informed of group and individual strengths and weaknesses in skills observed. Teachers then develop curriculum using interdisciplinary content. The goal is to help students a) build new knowledge from experience and prior knowledge, b) develop basic skills while undertaking 'real-world' self-selected projects, and become c) active producers rather than passive consumers of knowledge. Teachers are facilitators rather than dispensers of knowledge.

The DISCOVER Project: Improving Assessment and Curriculum for Diverse Gifted Learners
C. J. Maker, U of Arizona @ Tucson
National Center on the Gifted & Talented
Newsletter - Fall 2005

2. I am not aware of other ways of using the NNAT and the CogAT.

3. Pitfalls of teacher nominations.

Most researchers today reject the use of teacher nominations as the sole means to identify students for gifted programs.

Investigators have found that teachers tend to consider only school performance or attained school achievement rather than potential or competence for high achievement. Thus, children with speech or language differences, beginning English proficiency, and limited school or cultural experiences are overlooked.

Another pitfall is holistic diagnoses. Teachers tend to overgeneralize above average achievement of students to other cognitive and motivational characteristics. A student with above average skills in one domain is expected to perform likewise in other fields. Or, those who perform high on achievement are presumed motivated to excel in the classroom.

To improve the validity of teacher diagnoses for gifted programs, teacher rating scales and teacher checklists for diverse student attributes have been developed. Still, these instruments cannot prevent the tendency of teachers to confound ratings of quite diverse characteristics.

Neber, H. 2004. Teacher identification of students for gifted programs: Nominations to a summer school for highly-gifted students. *Psychology Science*, V. 46, 2004 (3), p. 348-362.

ACPS uses the Gifted Rating Scales. While recognized for strong reliability and validity data, "the GRS has not been subjected to measurement invariance testing, making its validity for use with underrepresented groups unclear."

Scott J. Peters & Marcia Gentry
Gifted Child Quarterly 2010 54: 298

3. Pitfalls of parent nominations

It is generally acknowledged that parents are excellent identifiers of precocity in young children. However, like teachers, they must be trained in what behaviors to observe and what behaviors to encourage. Immigrant parents with limited English proficiency, or those from low-income backgrounds, may not value early school readiness or appreciate the importance of early intervention. They may also not be aware of asynchronous development and overgeneralize their children's abilities.

These parents may also not understand the educational system and be equipped to advocate for their children in low performing schools. Also, immigrant parents who may be undocumented, are reluctant to call attention to their status and risk deportation, even when their child was born in the United States.

It is thus essential that communication about gifted programming be transmitted, face-to-face, by individuals familiar with the culture and in the language of the parents. Information in print should be free of educational jargon, in appropriate language, and interpreted at a meeting where parents feel free to ask questions and voice concerns.

4. In general, personal experience confirms the criteria that the literature supports should be considered to increase representation of poor children in gifted programs, mainly:

- Strong verbal and quantitative reasoning ability
- Learns to communicate socially in a second language quickly
- Willing to participate in advanced programming
- Responsible family member
- Has strong sense of social justice
- Has intense area of interest
- Persistent in adversity
- Has leadership skills but low self-image about academic performance
- Has clever ideas or solutions to problems
- Navigates the community effectively
- Questions authoritarian directives

The Slocumb-Payne Teacher Perception Inventory (SP-TPI) is a rating scale that forces raters to consider manifestations of giftedness in middle-class and lower-socioeconomic environments. A gifted attribute, say, understanding the subtleties of language, may be perceived positive in the literature class, but negative if displayed as mastery of put-downs among peers in an inner-city playground.

On the SP-TPI, the fact that teachers rate students on 19 pairs of positive and negative descriptors increases the probability that poor and minority students will have a better chance at being identified for gifted programming and services.

Slocumb-Payne Teacher Perception Inventory:
A Scale for Rating Superior Students from Diverse Backgrounds by Paul Slocumb and Ruby K. Payne
©aha! Process Incorporated, 2000

HOPE Scale

Another instrument being revised and renormed is the HOPE Scale, designed to help teachers more equitably identify the potential of elementary (K-5) children from low-income families for gifted and talented programs.

Multigroup Construct Validity Evidence of the HOPE Scale: Instrumentation to Identify Low-Income Elementary Students for Gifted Programs
Scott J. Peters & Marcia Gentry
Gifted Child Quarterly 2010 54: 298
DOI: 10.1177/0016986210378332

5 & 6. In general, this consultant would endorse the identification system of the ACPS as it seems in keeping with national best practice guidelines. Given the principle that identification should be aligned with program goals and services, the following suggestions are respectfully submitted.

First, increase recognition that parent involvement in the program is valued. While parents may nominate students for screening, they can become partners in their children's education. As members of the multicultural community, families can contribute immeasurably to promoting multicultural awareness and understanding.

From professional experience, as administrator of gifted programs for more than two decades in a large public school district, parents benefited personally from long-term partnerships with the school community. Inspired by their children's growth, immigrant parents, for example, gained confidence to develop English language proficiency and leadership skills. Through support groups they helped to establish, mothers, in particular, learned to access school and community resources, acquired driving licenses, became entrepreneurs, bilingual teachers or community leaders.

Teachers and school staff were also inspired to acquire practical communication skills in the target language. The curriculum increasingly reflected multicultural appreciation. Family and community members were active in school projects such as experimenting with plants and gardens, helping students to play musical instruments, organize sports and chess teams, and conduct international fairs.

At ACPS, TAG could collaborate with the comprehensive English Learning (EL) and the Adult Learning (AL) programs to enrich the curriculum and enhance parent participation. The multicultural community is largely Hispanic, African American, White, Ethiopian and Arabic. Of the 36% Hispanic, 29.3% African American, and 4.6% Asian, which countries are represented? While print material is available about TAG in Spanish, Amharic and Arabic, a TAG parent group could facilitate needed interaction to build personal relationships.

Second, to acknowledge the district values multicultural education, could TAG students be encouraged to develop their heritage language? Working in collaboration with EL, TAG students could be offered opportunities to become bilingual, biliterate, bilcultural.

In this respect, is there an acceleration policy in the district? Such a policy, for example, could afford TAG junior or high school students opportunity for dual enrollment in high school or college target language and literature classes.

Third, professional development in gifted education for the entire faculty and auxiliary personnel is paramount. It is apparent that ACPS TAG teachers are qualified to work with advanced learners. However, some researchers have found that poor and minority students that show potential for high school achievement in the early grades fall behind by the 5th grade. Thus, it is increasingly evident that to increase minority representation in gifted programs, regular, special and bilingual teaching and professional support staff need training to identify and serve this population.

Working in partnership with a university gifted education training program, a Gifted 101 course could be offered to staff across the district. In Illinois, for example, the Illinois State Board of Education developed the Gifted Education Seminar (GES). It is an introductory 45-hour computerized seminar that can be completed face-to-face, individually online, or in a blended fashion. The GES consists of four modules that explore perspectives on giftedness, knowing and understanding the "whole" gifted child, differentiating the curriculum, and introduction to gifted program models. The GES is adapted to four different groups: administrators, gifted coordinators, counselors and parents.

Finally, a greater participation of the school psychologist in TAG might be considered. In addition to serving as a psychometrist to assist in identification, with interest and appropriate training, this professional could be helpful in various ways: to monitor the effectiveness of the identification process, particularly with the goal of increasing diversity; to promote inclusion of higher order reasoning skills within the curriculum; and to design components that support students in their psychosocial development and assist families in understanding the social and emotional needs of gifted students. The latter two components may currently be missing in TAG.

Gallagher, R. M. (2002). A parent-family involvement model to serve gifted Hispanic English learners in urban public schools. In: Castellano J. and Diaz, E. (2002). *Reaching New Horizons: Gifted and Talented Education for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. Boston, Ma: Allyn & Bacon.

Gifted Education Seminar. Contact Marci Johnson by email marjohns@isbe.net or by phone 217-524-4832.

Pfeiffer, S. I. (2013). *Serving the Gifted: Evidence-based clinical and psychoeducational practice.* New York: Routledge.

Xiang, Y., Dahlin, M., Cronin, J., Theaker, R. & Durant, S. (2011). *Do high flyers maintain their altitude? Performance trends of top students.* T. Fordham Institute.

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program
Alexandria City Public Schools Gifted Program Evaluation-Table - -R. M. Gallagher Comments

Proposed Solution	Comment on Proposed Solution	Rating of Solution 1-4
Increase representation of minority groups	Identify coordinator, position description, responsibilities & support system	1
Professional development for teachers	Know your Community. General knowledge about a national group is valuable, (e.g, Hispanics, poor, LGBTQ, 2e), but it is essential to identify the groups represented in school/district (e.g, Mexicans, migrants, Lebanese, Somali, 2nd generation immigrants, homeless, military families, etc)	1
Cutoff scores & teacher recommendation		1
Develop school-based norms and district norms	The school psychologist might be included as TAG team member	1
Include face/face meetings to communicate identification process	Partner with family/community bilingual reps who can build rapport with target population to describe the program and value of early identification	1
Design process that involves parents as nominators at screening level only	Design a parent/family survey to determine needs/strengths and promote reciprocal partnerships	1
Performance-based assessment with standardized rubrics		1
Hold selection committee meetings on one day at central location with resources to check & confer		1
Use at least 3 criteria of equal weight in final selection	Design profile form to document student strength in support of nomination, e.g, strong communication skills in primary language may offset emerging English vocabulary among ELs	1
Use content-based aptitude measure for grades 6-8 (DAT) for universal screening	Include measure of personality/psychosocial characteristics to promote self-knowledge & affective & civic development	1
Teacher checklist to include science/social studies behaviors & examine CogAT data	Promote attention to STEM interests in girls and creative interest in males; increase opportunities to explore development of these aptitudes within content areas	1
Expand Young Scholars program to eligible elementary schools by grade 1; provide support for in-school follow-up during school year.	Design a parent/community involvement component to help meet mutual needs	1
H.S. teachers are provided list of TAG students to address differentiation in classrooms. Appoint TAG coordinator for each h.s. complex to provide assistance in honors, AP and DE issues	Include student identified real-world projects facilitated by content teacher to complement/supplant general survey course	1
Consider the arts as an important program expansion area within 2 years.	Include optional heritage language development component for EL group	1

Appendix M

Triangulation of Data

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program
Data sources and concomitant findings related to research questions

Data Sources	Findings
1. Materials review (State plan review Curriculum course guides, texts, DEPs, McREL report)	--Development of clear objectives for TAG and Honors courses and specificity in ways those objectives are translated into learning plans is needed. --Guidance on managing instruction of TAG learners, with particular attention to effective group and independent work for advanced learners, is needed. --All courses should incorporate strategies for inquiry, creative thinking, and problem solving, directly teaching them as learning strategies within the context of the disciplines. --Curriculum texts in ELA are too low level for TAG students at grades 5-8 and should be replaced. Math texts should be supplemented with other research-based materials for TAG learners. --DEPs are an inappropriate substitute for differentiated classroom practices and, in their current form, offer little information to parents and other stakeholders about the TAG curriculum. Improve the plan format, the process of implementation, and the planning for communication to enhance effectiveness.
2. Surveys (Parents, Students, & Staff)	--Communication to TAG parents about their child's program, its goals and outcomes, and how it is structured was found lacking. More than a third of parents indicated lack of knowledge on key aspects of the program. --Parents of middle school students were dissatisfied with most aspects of the program: the grouping, the challenge level, and the communication. Parents at other levels were more satisfied with these same program elements. --Secondary parents and students indicated dissatisfaction with academic counseling and support services for social-emotional development. --Student survey data revealed the perception of strong benefits from the program in key goal areas. --The challenge level of the TAG program was rated significantly higher than the regular education program by students. --Staff perceptions of TAG were colored by the nature of the identification system that under-identifies underrepresented groups. --Staff was also critical of aspects of the instructional program although the majority felt that it was challenging for TAG learners.

Data Sources	Findings
3. Focus groups (Parents, Students, Staff, & Administrators)	--Parents at the elementary level expressed concerns for the use of differentiation in the curriculum and instruction at K-3, the opportunity for peer interaction at K-3 levels, and the challenge provided at those levels. --Parents expressed satisfaction with the grades 4 and 5 pullout program, noting that it provided needed challenge for their children --Findings suggested that advanced classes which provide strong emphasis on the goals of the TAG program in critical and creative thinking, in accelerative opportunities, and in collaborative intellectual grouping are held in high regard by all stakeholder groups. --Findings at middle school from all stakeholder focus groups indicated that services are inappropriate and ineffective. There is a need for more options at this level in addition to improvement in existing honors course delivery. --Targeted professional development opportunities need to be matched to any teacher working with TAG learners at any level.
4. Classroom observations	--Teachers are under-utilizing differentiation strategies at all levels of the program, especially in the application of higher level thinking. --In classrooms where differentiated practices are being used, teachers are in the "effective" range in their use of these strategies. --High school AP teachers and some TAG elementary teachers were most effective in the use of best practices in the classroom.
5. National standards review	--A strong consonance was found between ACPS practices in identification and professional development and best practices nationally. --Ratings suggested that counseling and guidance were missing components in the program. --An assessment of learning, appropriate for TAG learners, prior to AP is lacking. --The TAG curriculum at all levels needs to be further integrated with the division curriculum while remaining differentiated at the level of learning plans. --Instructional practices and resources need to be differentiated. --Acceleration practices need to be consistently used across levels of the program and subject areas.

Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Study Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Data Sources	Findings
Analysis of program components **Identification data** (**State plan and its review, local documents, consultant reviews**)	--Consultant reviews of identification practices suggest recommendations for improvement, mostly on issues of underrepresentation and the process of communication to parents and others about student results and the overall process (see Appendix L for detailed recommendations) --Consultant reviews and evaluator perspectives were found to be consonant. --Findings across multiple data sources support the need for changes in aspects of the identification process.
Program design/curriculum data (**Program description data;** ***Young Scholars Report,*** **Standards Review**)	-Findings suggested the need for a person to focus fulltime on the K-3 program, including identification practices, community outreach, and implementation of program changes, including the design of DEPs and expansion of YS Program. -A K-3 program/curriculum that is comprehensive and does not rely on the DEP approach at these levels is needed. --The middle school program needs to include more options in addition to responding to concerns about changing the existing model. -- A person in the high school context needs to oversee various aspects of program implementation.
Professional development (Division Report, National Standards Review)	--Building administrators were found to be lacking in knowledge of TAG identification, differentiation and acceleration practices. --Provide differentiated professional development to teachers, based on their level of expertise in delivery of services to date. --Mandate professional development for any teacher working with TAG learners in a set of differentiation tools for use daily.
Learning assessments (**Indicators Report, National Standards Review**)	--Provide pre-post performance-based assessments annually on TAG student growth in the program beyond SOL performance at K-10 levels. --Continue to disaggregate TAG student participation and performance in AP annually.