

Jessica Hughes

Public Comments

June 6, 2016

School Board Meeting

ACPS Board Members, Dr. Hutchings –

Thank you for your time this evening and thank you for all that you are doing for children of Alexandria. I am here this evening to advocate for the adoption of the TAGAC's recommendations as detailed in the TAGAC's Elementary and Middle School position papers.

My name is Jessica Hughes and I am a parent of 2 ACPS students, both of whom have been TAG identified. One is a 5th grader at Douglas MacArthur Elementary School and the other is a 9th grader at Minnie Howard. In my day job, I am a civil rights attorney at the US Patent and Trademark Office, where I oversee the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaint program and manage diversity and inclusion initiatives to recruit and retain a highly-educated workforce. Thus, I feel I am particularly well suited to understand both the needs of our TAG students as well as pressing need to properly identify and serve a diverse community of TAG children.

Importantly, I firmly believe that ACPS can do more than one thing at a time.

1. The District can maintain the excellent part of its TAG program by keeping the current delivery method of pulling out students for TAG ELA and Math in Grades 4 and 5. The TAG ELA program at MacArthur has been the single most important and transformative formal education experience for my children, at least up to the Advanced Placement level. This class moved at the correct pace and truly pushed my children to think and to write and to work. The TAG ELA and Math classes were commended in the 2016 Audit – if it's not broke, please don't try to fix it.
2. The District can improve its delivery of TAG services in grades K-3 and in Middle School. For years, I – along with the TAGAC many other TAG parents – have been pushing for the Middle Schools to have an accelerated ELA program, as they do with Math. Too often, the TAG students coast by in the Middle School language arts classes.
3. The District can continue its progress towards identifying TAG students from diverse and under-served backgrounds. I commend the District on using non-verbal tests like the Naglieri and to look at non-test based methods for finding talented students, such as the Young Scholars Program. Indeed, I think the Young Scholars Program shows such excellent promise that it should be incorporated into the TAG program.
4. The District can improve the rigor of its curriculum for all students. There should be no false dichotomy that the only way to receive a “good” education at ACPS is through the TAG program. All students are entitled to an education that challenges and prepares them for their future.

At the Superintendent's Chat on TAG, my unfortunate takeaway was that the TAG students were perceived as consuming precious resources that needed to be redeployed to other students. This is a terribly divisive and counter-factual narrative. ACPS' motto is "Every Student Succeeds," and Dr. Hutchings has emphasized the need for equity – meeting our students where they are at, not where we wish they are. That applies equally to all children in ACPS, including those who have been identified as Talented and Gifted. Our TAG community needs to be met where they are. All of our students need certain academic services to succeed and meet their potential – for our TAG learners those needs are different, but no less important, than others.

I am confident that the ACPS has the expertise and resources to deliver on its promise that "Every Student Succeeds" and believe that implementing the TAGAC's recommendations is the best way forward.

Again, thank you for your time this evening.