

Date: November 10 2023

**BOARD INFORMATION:**   X  

**MEETING PREPARATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

**FROM:** D. Ohlandt, Ph.D., Chair, Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC)  
Evan Smith, Vice-Chair, Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC)  
Megan Tempel-Milner, Ph.D., Director of Gifted and Advanced Academic Programs

**THROUGH:** Carmen Sanders, Executive Director of Instructional Support  
Pierrette Finney, Ed.D., Chief Academic Officer  
Melanie Kay-Wyatt, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

**TO:** The Honorable Michelle Rief, Chair, and  
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

**TOPIC:** 2022–2023 Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC) Year-End Report

**ACPS 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL:**

- Goal 1: Systemic Alignment
- Goal 2: Instructional Excellence
- Goal 3: Student Accessibility and Support
- Goal 4: Strategic Resource Allocation
- Goal 5: Family and Community Engagement

**SY 2023-2024 PRIORITY AREA:**

- Academic Achievement
- Staff Supports
- Recruitment and Retention

**FY 2024 BUDGET PRIORITY:**

- Increase Support for Social and Emotional Learning

**SUMMARY:**

During the 2022–2023 school year, the Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC) continued its work to improve the response to academic and social-emotional needs of Talented and Gifted (TAG) students in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) and focused the committee’s efforts on the following topics:

1. ACPS’s Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted
2. Middle School TAG curriculum and delivery of TAG services
3. Differentiated instruction K–12 and delivery of TAG services

This 2022–2023 TAGAC Year-End Report covers these topics, as well as notes on the overall execution of the committee over the year. We encourage you to read the report in its entirety.

#### **DETAILS:**

Throughout the year, TAGAC held eight in-person meetings with the full committee. A significant number of TAGAC members from 2021–2022 either resigned or chose not to renew their terms over the summer of 2022, which left TAGAC with limited ability to conduct business in our first meetings of 2022–2023. With recruitment efforts, several new members joined the committee, but we would prefer more of an even representation of parents and community members across Alexandria, especially from West End schools. Transportation, child care, providing meals, and general family time needs—such as helping with homework—are limiting factors to attendance for the many people and communities with whom we would like to be involved in TAGAC’s work. The change in state policies limiting meetings over Zoom did impact attendance and membership on TAGAC, and the committee encourages the School Board to investigate ways to make all meetings, including School Board and Advisory Council meetings, available in a hybrid format so that in-person and virtual attendance is possible.

TAGAC’s focus areas for 2022–2023 were developed in conversation with Dr. Megan Tempel-Milner and returning members of TAGAC, as well as in consultation with recent and current ACPS and School Board priorities, as approved at the September 8, 2022, School Board meeting.

#### **1. *ACPS’s Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted***

ACPS’s last Local Plan for TAG students was approved in 2011 and covered from 2012–2017. The school system has been operating under the approved plan for the previous 11 years, but it needs to be updated to comply with current law, as well as to incorporate the current best practices of delivery of services with a focus on equity. This work has been underway for some time, and there is a Local Plan Steering Committee separate from TAGAC providing direct support to the Office of Gifted and Advanced Academic Programs.

TAGAC has been monitoring the development of the updated Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted with regular reports from Dr. Megan Tempel-Milner, director of Gifted and Advanced Academic Programs, and additional input from other members of the steering committee. This is in alignment with the School Board’s Area of Focus for the 2022–2023 school year “Talented and Gifted” subtopic, “Update Local Plan for the Gifted.”

From 2017–2021, TAGAC has made several recommendations to improve the equity and quality of TAG identification and delivery of services. Many of these recommendations have been implemented or will be incorporated into the Local Plan going forward. The past three years (2019–2020, 2020–2021, 2021–2022) have seen not only general upheaval across the school division from COVID-19 closures but also changes in the leadership and administration of the TAG and Young Scholars programs specifically. These disruptions make it challenging to track the impact of various changes that TAGAC has recommended and the Office of Gifted and Advanced

Academic Studies has begun to put into place. TAGAC expects that it may be several years before we can evaluate from the Accountability Office data whether the ongoing adjustments and improvements to ACPS's TAG eligibility guidelines and identification procedures, as well as communication and advocacy about TAG services generally, are having a positive impact on equity and student experience that we desire.

More broadly, the updated Local Plan submitted to the School Board for review and approval outlines a transition to a Talent Development Model for Advanced Academic Services. Of particular note will be prioritizing ACPS resources to support delivering differentiated, rigorous, creative, and critical thinking instruction to all students in the early grades (particularly K–3), which may reduce the ACPS resources available to spend on determining TAG eligibility for K–3 students. Importantly, K–3 students in need of TAG intervention will still receive services. Eligibility determinations for TAG Specific Academic Aptitude (SAA) will be given priority over those for General Intellectual Aptitude (GIA), and SAA eligibility decisions will be informed by a robust portfolio of creative and critical thinking projects from students' work K–3. TAGAC believes this change in K–3 delivery of services and concentrating eligibility decisions for students entering grades 4–12 will result in more equity in both the identification and delivery of services to TAG students in all grades.

#### **TAGAC Recommendations:**

1. Support the shift in the Local Plan to a Talent Development Model for gifted services.
2. Fund the hiring and professional certification of more TAG teachers to support the updates to the Local Plan.
3. Formalize accountability at the classroom, school, and division levels for differentiated instruction, tier II and tier III interventions, and equity in TAG identification and delivery of TAG services.

#### **2. Middle School TAG Curriculum and delivery of TAG services**

TAGAC has reviewed staff and teacher concerns relevant to the Honors curriculum at the middle school level and the ways that the academic and social-emotional needs of TAG-eligible students can be met in middle school. This aligns with the School Board's Area of Focus for the 2022–2023 school year, "Middle School Educational Experience," as well as the Area of Focus "Talented and Gifted" subtopic, "Service Model."

At the beginning of the 2022–2023 school year, Dr. Megan Tempel-Milner specifically requested feedback from TAGAC on the delivery of TAG services in middle school and its intersection with the Honors curriculum overall. Although much of the committee's discussion and study for 2022–2023 has been focused on middle school, TAGAC recognizes that several important concerns are not addressed in our recommendations below. These include:

- How does the establishment of TAG SAA services in Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) and Career and Technical Education (CTE), as recommended in the proposed new Local Plan, impact the course offerings and the services delivered in grades 6–8?

- What procedures should be in place in grades 6–8 for the identification of TAG-eligible students in any subject area or additional subject areas? How are students new to the division identified and services provided to them?
- How effective is the existing middle school Honors curriculum in language arts, and how might it be improved?
- How are Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs) used in grades 6–8? Can this tool be improved, or should it be eliminated?

The 2022–2023 TAGAC recommends that next year’s TAGAC continue its studies in these areas and include middle school as an area of focus in the 2023–2024 Scope of Work.

### **TAGAC Recommendations:**

1. Improve the rigor of the curriculum in middle school through the adoption and implementation of a high-quality, pre-differentiated Tier 1 curriculum.  
*TAGAC recommends that ACPS prioritize standardizing curriculum and support services for students in grades 6–8 across the school district. This standardized curriculum should provide rigorous Tier I instruction, and teachers should be equipped with support for differentiation, as well as Tier II and Tier III interventions for TAG students. TAG students should be clustered in middle school classes whenever possible.*
2. Hire additional TAG teachers at the middle school level (grades 6–8) and an additional division-level TAG specialist to support middle school TAG curriculum alignment.  
*TAG services at the two ACPS middle schools and for grades 6–8 at two ACPS K–8 schools cannot be supported without additional TAG-certified staff in place. TAGAC recommends that additional TAG teachers be assigned to grades 6–8 with a focus on implementing differentiation through training and co-teaching. Additionally, TAGAC recommends a middle school TAG specialist be hired to support the development of differentiated curricula at the middle school level and the alignment of grades 6–8 curriculum across ACPS.*
3. Increase options for TAG math students beyond full-grade acceleration.  
*After considering recent data from PSAT scores, Standards of Learning (SOL) math trends, and national data on college students who took accelerated math in high school, TAGAC recommends the termination of the ACPS TAG math strategy to compact grades 4 and 5 math into one year at grade 4 and keep all TAG math students accelerated by one year through middle school. For most TAG math students, acceleration should be replaced with extension and enrichment, to include:*
  - *Differentiated materials that deepen understanding of math concepts for TAG-eligible students*
  - *Lessons that incorporate Virginia’s 5 C’s—citizenship, creative thinking, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking—into math instruction*

- *Instructional strategies and curricula that utilize multimodal learning (such as manipulatives), problem-solving, and collaboration*

*As in other subjects, TAG math students should be clustered whenever possible. Grade-level acceleration in math should remain as a Tier III intervention for select students, but it should be de-emphasized as a “default” option. TAG math students who require the Tier III intervention of grade-level acceleration have access to an appropriate curriculum.*

4. Provide additional professional development training for middle school teachers and staff.

*TAGAC recommends that grades 6–8 teachers and staff be given additional training in TAG-relevant areas, including:*

- *Differentiating instruction*
- *Differentiated instruction in the teacher’s specific content area (for example, math teachers should receive professional development in differentiating using manipulatives and problem-solving; social studies teachers should receive training in using document-based questions [DBQs]; etc.)*
- *Understanding social and emotional needs specific to TAG students and differentiating social-emotional support*
- *Offering additional incentives to grades 6–8 teachers who complete professional development in gifted education generally*

5. Develop programs to support TAG students **and families** as they transition from elementary to middle school.

*Confusion about TAG services in middle school and variation in the delivery of TAG services among ACPS elementary schools can add unnecessary anxiety for students as they transition from grade 5 to grade 6 in ACPS. TAGAC recommends the introduction of a district-wide middle school information session for TAG grade 5 students (both elementary and K–8 schools) each spring. This should be hosted by the Office for Gifted and Advanced Academic Programs, with assistance from key stakeholders such as TAG, Honors, and Advanced Placement (AP) teachers. This meeting should include both general information on scheduling classes and the pathways that middle school choices will extend into high school, as well as specific information on the delivery of TAG services in middle school.*

6. Consider creating a district-wide middle school TAG elective period for TAG-eligible students to pursue independent projects.

*In the absence of significant student-directed independent projects for enrichment and extension in ACPS middle schools, TAGAC recommends further study of creating an elective option for TAG-eligible students. Facilitated by a TAG teacher, students could choose and pursue independent projects around a common theme for the semester. The class would encourage students to consider multiple perspectives and for the TAG*

*teacher to intertwine math, science, history, and reading. For example, a first-quarter topic could be the Appalachian Mountains. Students could select to research culture and history, geography, music, flora and fauna, preservation efforts, literature, etc., and could present their research through a method of their selection such as a play, music, a report, a movie, etc. This type of class should hold appropriate weighted credit. TAGAC has some concerns, however, that middle school elective slots are already severely limited, and using one in this way would reduce opportunities for VPA and CTE, all of which courses are considered electives at the middle school.*

### **3. Differentiated instruction K–12 and delivery of TAG services**

TAGAC has spent the school year studying and engaging with stakeholders about the provision of differentiated instruction in all K–12 classrooms across ACPS. This aligns with the School Board’s Area of Focus for the 2022–2023 school year “Talented and Gifted” subtopic, “Service Model.”

The capacity of teachers to provide differentiated instruction for all students, especially those who are TAG eligible, will be critical to the success or failure of the Talent Development Model for Gifted Services set forth in the updated Local Plan. TAGAC strongly advocates for differentiation to be incorporated into all ACPS instruction.

Currently, ACPS provides a combination of “pull-out” and in-classroom GIA services for TAG-eligible K–12 students—services that vary from school to school. In addition, ACPS operates “pull-out” classes for grades 4 and 5 students who are TAG-SAA eligible in language arts and math.

Differentiated instruction is key to student success in a “pull-out” context, where TAG-eligible students exhibit a range of strengths and interests. It is even more critical to student success in a “push-in” context, such as the kind that the transition to a Talent Development Model would support and require. The potential benefits of providing rigorous, differentiated instruction in every classroom go well beyond TAG-eligible students, and a “Differentiation for All” approach that equips and prepares teachers to be differentiators by default has the potential to address some of the racial/ethnic inequalities that persist across the division in both TAG identification and service delivery.

TAGAC acknowledges that moving to such an approach will have many challenges, including:

- The potential for disparities in the delivery of services across schools
- The need for additional resources
- The significance of cultural competency in recognizing and nurturing giftedness

TAGAC has, therefore, developed recommendations aimed at ensuring that ACPS teachers are equipped, supported, and empowered to offer effective and equitable differentiated instruction in all classrooms.

## **TAGAC Recommendations:**

1. Adopt a rigorous and inclusive program of service delivery with differentiation at its core.  
*Specifically, TAGAC recommends that ACPS adopt the Talent Development Model highlighted in the proposed new Local Plan or a similar approach. This will help ensure that teachers have access to resources and guidelines to adapt instruction for diverse student populations, including the social-emotional needs of TAG students. Consider adopting elements from the successful Young Scholars program and highlight best practices across the division.*
2. Hire at least two TAG teachers for each elementary and middle school, as well as an additional division-level TAG specialist to support curriculum alignment across schools.  
*ACPS must allocate human resources strategically to serve the TAG students it has, not just those it has identified. Too few TAG-certified teachers have contributed to the inequities in both TAG identification and delivery of services.*
3. Enhance professional development for teachers.  
*TAGAC recommends further increasing professional development opportunities for classroom teachers with an emphasis on cultural competencies, identification of giftedness in diverse populations, and best practices for differentiation in the classroom.*
4. Recognize and showcase best practices in differentiation.  
*Establish a merit award or professional development opportunity to highlight successful examples of differentiation within ACPS, thus helping teachers and stakeholders better understand how differentiation can be effectively implemented.*
5. Develop and expand a library of pre-differentiated resources.  
*TAGAC encourages the continuation of building a comprehensive resource library for teachers, with an emphasis on developing research-based curricula for gifted students at both primary and secondary levels.*
6. Incentivize curriculum writing and resource development.  
*Leverage available funding to encourage teachers to create and expand TAG-focused curricula and resources. Feedback from current staff suggests that existing incentives for curriculum writing and development are not enough to result in quality materials.*
7. Focus more attention on the social-emotional needs of TAG students.  
*Instruction for TAG students does not begin and end with academics. All students struggle with social-emotional issues as they grow and mature, but TAG students and families report additional challenges such as managing asymmetry in their academic growth, perfectionism, and performance anxiety, as well as other struggles uncommon in their peers. Providing differentiated social-emotional support and other extra academic supports should be part of ACPS services for students navigating their self-identity and coping with academic and social pressures.*

8. Promote cooperative learning and problem-solving skills.  
*TAGAC recommends integrating collaboration and cooperation into K–12 classroom instruction to better equip TAG (and non-TAG) students for real-world situations and challenges. This includes activities that foster a culture of group work and team problem-solving, which is beneficial not only for academic growth, but also for social development.*
9. Bolster TAG-related cultural competency.  
*Recognizing and confronting misconceptions about what giftedness looks like through a cultural lens can lead to more equitable TAG identification and services. TAGAC recommends training teachers on cultural competency in relation to TAG students.*

**STAFF RESPONSE:**

ACPS recognizes and appreciates TAGAC’s efforts during the 2022–2023 school year as the school system and committee navigated membership changes on the advisory committee and in school leadership. In addition, this year’s TAGAC report provides foundational knowledge that will be the impetus for the future scope of work for TAGAC during the 2023–2024 school year.

Points made in TAGAC’s full end-of-year report and additional discussions with stakeholders provide the catalyst and support of a revised Local Plan for TAG. Our top priority for the 2022–2023 school year was to revise the Local Plan for the Gifted, which was last revised in 2012. The updated Local Plan was approved by the School Board on June 1, 2023, which incorporated recommendations made from TAGAC’s work over the years, as well as staff and community members in formal feedback steering committee sessions, team meetings, and individual conversations with families when discussing needs for their children. ACPS will continue to review our new plan and make adjustments if needed.

As a division and committee that needs to keep equity as a top priority, we are taking courageous steps to ensure we use identification procedures that are culturally, linguistically, and economically unbiased. Immediate steps have been taken due to the work and support from TAGAC during this year’s committee work. From 2021 through 2023, the TAG office expanded the automatic referral criteria. For 2022–2023, the automatic referrals data will continue using ability and achievement tests and automatically referring students receiving Young Scholars services. The TAG office also used a new gifted observation scale to identify students, which research has shown has led to identifying more students from low-income and culturally diverse families. In addition, we created a continuum of advanced and rigorous services for all students, including students identified for TAG services. During our work, ACPS involved input from parents and staff to develop and check in for feedback as we revise, approve, and implement the Local Plan.

In keeping with the agreement with TAGAC, we believe that clear communication is a key mitigating factor to reduce identification and program placement inequities in our system. Therefore, our office has worked and will continue to work with ACPS’s Communications and English Learner (EL) offices to update forms for clarity and translation purposes, as well as to



develop a communication plan. All our screening documents were translated into English, Spanish, Amharic, Arabic, and Dari. In addition, we updated our website and newsletters and will continue to do so as new information is presented.

Finally, ACPS continues to value the dedication and service the members of TAGAC and its leadership provide. We look forward to our continued work to provide rigorous and equitable services to all students in ACPS.

**BACKGROUND:**

This is TAGAC's end-of-year report which is submitted annually.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The Superintendent recommends that the School Board review the 2022–2023 TAGAC End-of-Year Report.

**IMPACT:**

The work of TAGAC provides feedback and guidance to ACPS to support students receiving talented and gifted services.

**REFERENCES:**

N/A

**ATTACHMENTS:**

N/A

**CONTACT:**

D. Ohlandt, Ph.D., Chair, Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC),  
[profohlandt@gmail.com](mailto:profohlandt@gmail.com)

Megan Tempel-Milner, Ph.D., Director of Gifted and Advanced Academic Programs,  
[megan.tempel-milner@acps.k12.va.us](mailto:megan.tempel-milner@acps.k12.va.us)