

Jenny Hansen Ware
Public Comments
June 6, 2019
School Board Meeting

Hello. My name is Jenny Hansen Ware. School board members and ACPS staff, thank you for your service. We greatly appreciate you all.

My twin daughters, Julia and Charlotte, are 4th graders at George Mason Elementary School. They are both in TAG Language Arts and recently were accepted for Social Studies Specific Academic Aptitude. In 1st through 3rd grade they were General Intellectual Aptitude.

The 1st-3rd grade GIA service road was bumpy. Teachers did some unique work with the kids, but it was not weekly and lasted a short 20 minutes. Julia made a great math board game and Charlotte wrote a report on Abraham Lincoln but that was about all they had to show for 3 years of GIA.

In contrast, the 4th grade TAG Language Arts journey has been a freshly paved highway. Charlotte and Julia have thrived in the class. Almost immediately they were writing summaries of the first book, discussing character traits and predicting future actions based on those traits. Complete sentences are required at all times. Vocabulary words are tough and the quizzes are tricky. My daughters have been challenged every day and they deeply love the class.

The Elementary Principals' Gifted Program Recommendations dated 6-20-2018 cause me great concern. Their recommendation to end 4th and 5th grade TAG Language Arts pull out classes is head-slapping bad. Parents, TAG program evaluators, and students all agree the 4th and 5th grade TAG Language Arts and Math pull out classes are the jewel in ACPS's TAG program. You don't throw out the jewel!

Recently there has been more discussion regarding the TAG identification process and I truly hope efforts stay focused on improving that area. Our family's experience with the TAG identification process caused me to meet with George Mason's TAG coordinator and offer suggestions to improve the screening process for parents who are not as comfortable with the system.

When our children's identification process grew bumpy, I had already attended a TAG Advisory Committee meeting and heard Donna Brearley, the ACPS TAG Coordinator, speak. I summoned my courage and called Ms. Brearley to ask about our issue and she was incredibly helpful. There are hundreds of ACPS parents with 3rd graders who have not attended a TAGAC meeting and do not call Donna to ask questions. And I am sure some of those 3rd graders would qualify for 4th grade TAG if the identification process was improved and made more transparent.

We are not there yet, but from what I hear, the middle school TAG program needs improvement too. School board members, please focus your efforts on areas that need help.

TAG identification – needs help. Middle school TAG – needs help. GIA – needs help. 4th and 5th grade TAG – does not need help.

Thank you.