

TAGAC K12 COMMUNICATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

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TO: Laura Rose, Chair, Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee

SUMMARY:

The Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC) recommends that Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) adopt an expanded communication strategy to share information regarding the school system's K-12 Talented and Gifted (TAG) program with students and families. We believe that the communication strategy should mirror that of the full breadth of the K-12 TAG program. ACPS should start communication about the TAG program at the point of first contact whenever, wherever, and however the student enters the school system.

TAGAC is also aware that there are potential changes under consideration by the state of Virginia that would significantly impact the TAG curriculum in the near future. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to communication will be especially critical to ensure equity so that all families understand the TAG curriculum and can benefit from the TAG program - not only the families that know how to find the necessary information and advocate for their own children. We have included several recommendations for realizing this communications vision; several components were gleaned thru conversations with Ms. Krishna Levya, ACPS Family and Community Engagement Center (FACE).

BACKGROUND:

TAGAC recommends that ACPS expand their communication strategy regarding what information it shares with ACPS students and families about the K-12 TAG program and offerings. The K-12 TAG program includes the following components:

- General Intellectual Ability, or GIA, Program (Available to students K-5)
- Subject Academic Aptitude, or SSA, Program: Math, Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies (Availability to students in Elementary School, Grades 4 and 5)
- Young Scholars (Available to students K-5)
- Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment Courses (Grades 9-12)
- Governor's School Programs (Grade 10 for Summer Program)

There are other components not formally included in the TAG program that are relevant to include in the communication strategy as well:

- Whole-Grade Acceleration
- Single-Subject Acceleration
- Advancement Via Individual Determination, or AVID, Program (Available to Grades 6-12)

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Information regarding referrals and the identification process for each of these components should be communicated to all students and families as early as Kindergarten registration with special emphasis during the universal screening years of First and Third Grade. All families should have a strong understanding of the resources available to them through the program. This is the most equitable approach.

Second, ACPS established many new channels for communication as a result of Virtual Plus. TAGAC strongly recommends using this foundation and these methods to communicate information about the K-12 TAG program. All communication and videos must be translated into all four languages used in official ACPS communication. Specific examples of new communication opportunities include:

- Providing families with information about the K-12 TAG program and the ACPS program of studies during the Kindergarten and school registration process
- Creating a “How to Create a Self- Referral” video for families in multiple languages detailing identification, referral, and review process
- Creating “Day in the Life” videos to highlight the 16 career clusters available as a part of the High School Project and map them to specific courses
- Hosting webinars about the K-12 TAG program that mirror the current process of the TAG informational meeting often presented during Back to School Night
- Creating informational videos about the characteristics of gifted children, how to identify these characteristics, and how to support the social and emotional needs of gifted children. These videos should use language and frameworks consistent with the recommendations from the Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) organization
- Creating informational videos about the value proposition of participating in the different TAG offerings (GIA, SSA, Young Scholars, Governor’s School, AP, and DE classes). According to Dr. Jonathan Plucker during a presentation at the December 8, 2020 TAGAC meeting, we must communicate both the opportunities and the value proposition to have an equitable advanced program. The AVID program does an excellent job of communicating the value proposition for their program participants. The TAG program should have similar videos and presentations to communicate this to all families.
- Incorporate advice from Ms. Leyva including her assertion that both the form and accessibility of the communication is critical. For example, her experience indicates that mobile phone friendly outreach often improves communication effectiveness with multilingual families. Text messaging and simple messages detailing the benefits of the program, followed up by contact with a trusted staff member were more effective than newsletters. TAG website materials (including the Parent Referral forms) should be available in mobile-friendly formats.

While the message can be tailored to fit the audience, TAGAC would like to emphasize that ACPS consider shifting all messaging to include information about the overall K-12 TAG program. This would increase the exposure for families to the benefits of the comprehensive

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TAG experience. For example, a presentation for an elementary school Back to School Night should emphasize the components of the TAG program for Grades K-5 and should also mention how those experiences will translate to middle and high school. Upper grade presentations, such as those at the middle school level should emphasize how the career tracks support TAG differentiation. Communication should always have a forward looking focus. For example, the communication at the middle and high school level no longer needs to include elementary school resources and offerings.

Third, focusing on specific topics of interest that have been highlighted during the TAGAC's monthly meetings:

- For families that previously attended Mount Vernon Elementary School, middle school students must choose between continuing their dual language studies and grouping for Social Studies
- Students that remain in the GIA program, but who are not identified for the SAA program, should receive additional communication about how the GIA program and the SAA program differ in 4th and 5th grade

Fourth, if the changes to the TAG curriculum currently under consideration by the state of Virginia are implemented, TAGAC recommends the following channels to communicate those changes to families:

- Community meetings for the overall program changes with a specific sub-topic on impacts to groups that receive push in or separate services.
- Creating a video to walk through the specific changes to the curriculum to the entire community and sub-topics impacts to groups that receive push in or separate services. Additional separate videos on impacts to these groups may also be suggested. All of these outreach curriculum presentation should be presented in multiple languages
- Address the impact heterogeneous grouping in the math program may have on clustering and how ACPS will support the social and emotional needs of gifted students
- Sharing the link to the video on all of ACPS's social media accounts
- Including changes to the program, as well as the link to the video, in the weekly ACPS Express email and weekly email updates from individual school principals

Lastly, content posted to the ACPS TAG website must be kept current. As the program changes, outreach efforts must be kept current and old and outdated information should be removed in a timely manner.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Superintendent recommends that the School Board review the TAGAC K12 Communications Subcommittee Report.

IMPACT:

TAGAC feels that ACPS must implement a comprehensive communications strategy to ensure an equitable gifted and advanced academic program.

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