Evaluation Report on the TAG Program

Alexandria City Public Schools

Board Presentation, October 12, 2017

Consultant team: Joyce VanTassel-Baska. Gail Hubbard, Janice Robbins

Key Assumptions from Evaluation Research

- The role of evaluation and review is to improve and advance gifted programs.

- Evaluation and review is a collaborative process.

- The use of multiple data sources helps to illuminate the complexity and salience of program issues.

- Rational decision-making is mediated by values.

October 12, 2017

Consultants

- Gail Hubbard—expertise in gifted education teaching and administration

- Janice Robbins—expertise in curriculum design and development, teaching and administration of gifted programs

- Joyce VanTassel-Baska—expertise in gifted education program and curriculum design, development, and evaluation

October 12, 2017

Evaluation Design

October 12, 2017

Research Questions

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?

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

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

October 12, 2017

Research Questions (continued)

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

6. To the 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?

October 12, 2017

Research Methods

- Samples selected by random and purposive methods
- Instrumentation designed/adapted for surveys, focus groups, classroom observations, and best practices
- Data collection – online, on-site, and off-site
- Data analysis – descriptive, using statistics and content analysis
- Findings derived from triangulation of data sources
- Commendations, recommendations, and conclusions formulated

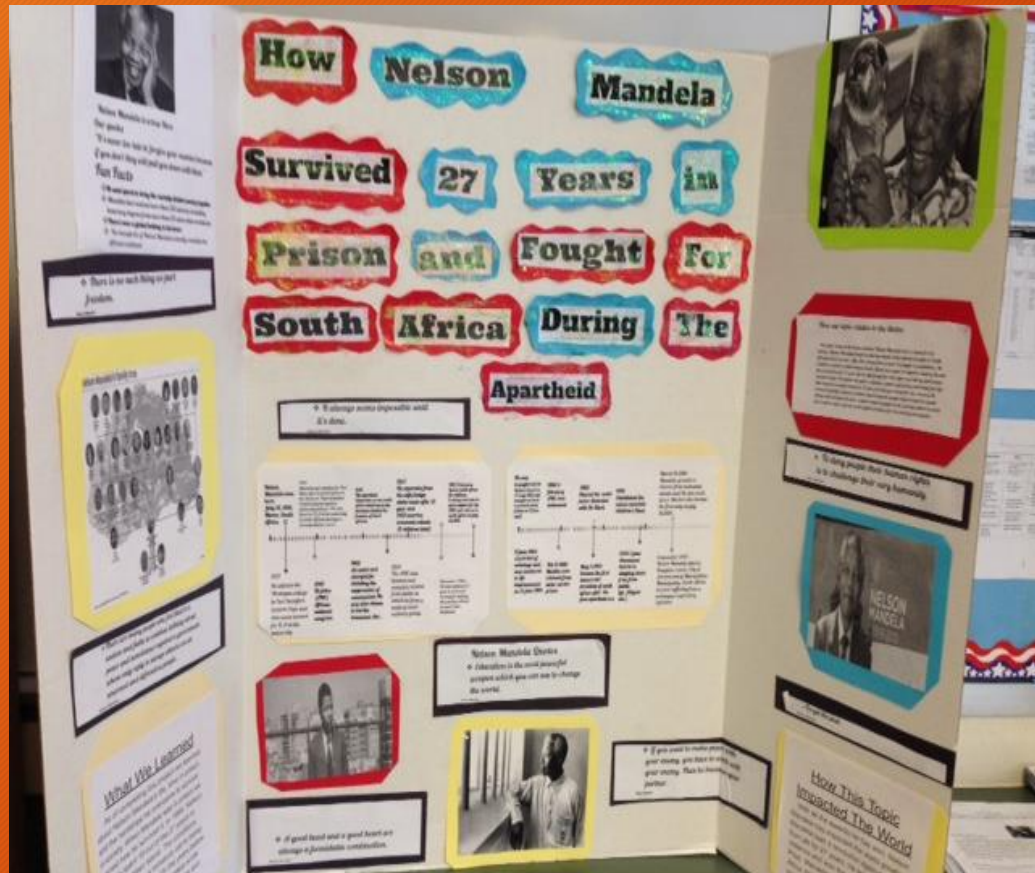October 12, 2017

Data Sources

- Curriculum materials, texts, and resources used in the TAG Program (N=142)
- Reports documenting program status and progress over the past three years, including curriculum and identification data (N=8)
- Surveys of parents (N=569), students (N=127), and staff (N=368)
- 38 Focus groups of parents (N=108), students (N=131), and staff (N=138)
- Selected interviews with ACPS and program leadership (N=5) and with the TAG Advisory Committee
- Classroom observations at K-12 levels at 12 school sites (N=120)
- NAGC National Programming Standards

October 12, 2017

Commendations, Findings, and Recommendations

October 12, 2017

Commendations

- Comprehensive Advanced Placement (AP) Program available from 9th grade
- Dual Enrollment (DE) opportunities for linkage to community college (NOVA)
- Grades 4-5 language arts and math advanced programs for TAG learners
- Young Scholars Program (YS) for underrepresented populations at grades K-5
- Revised acceleration policy and regulation

October 12, 2017

Research Question #1
Implementation of Stated Goals and Outcomes

Findings

- Limited attention to TAG curriculum development, including a lack of scope and sequence K-12 within subject areas for TAG learners

- TAG program uneven, based upon level, program type, and location

- Limited use of differentiation practices

Recommendations

- Develop a comprehensive K-3 Program
- Extend the Young Scholars Program
- Revamp the middle school TAG program
- Assess TAG student growth annually
- Appoint coordinators for K-3 and high school
- Target professional development on key differentiation strategies, including flexible grouping

October 12, 2017

Research Question #2
Addressing Underrepresented Groups

Findings

- Several appropriate approaches used in current identification system for identifying students from underrepresented groups

- A disproportionality of students from underrepresented groups receiving TAG services

- Additional features needed for the identification system

Recommendations

- Improve strategies and modify processes for the identification of students from underrepresented groups

- Incorporate research-based checklist items that focus on learning characteristics of students from underrepresented groups

- Train teachers and building administrators annually on the general and specific aptitude characteristics of gifted learners

- Develop tailored program emphases for identified students from underrepresented groups

October 12, 2017

Research Question #3
Rigor of the Curriculum for TAG Students

Findings

- Materials limited in differentiation and specificity for use with TAG learners

- Use of lower level materials with advanced learners at K-3 and 6-8

- Need for improvement of Differentiated Education Plan (DEP) format, implementation, and monitoring at K-8

- Stakeholder concerns about the written curriculum and its implementation

- Low frequency classroom use of differentiated curriculum and instruction

Recommendations

- Revise TAG and honors course curricula

- Select advanced text materials and/or resources

- Design revised DEP format and guidelines for use

- Ensure that teachers of gifted learners possess a skill set of best practices in differentiation.

- Monitor curriculum implementation

October 12, 2017

Research Question #4
Benefits to Participating Students

Findings

- TAG Program perceived as highly beneficial for students; limited evidence except for AP data
- Need for the development of the TAG Program at K-3 and grades 6-8
- Strong support for the language arts and math TAG programs at grades 4-5 and the challenge of AP
- Effective teacher behaviors for TAG learners focused on higher level thinking
- Program successes and gaps in service delivery.

Recommendations

- Continue to monitor the performance of TAG students
- Collect off-level performance data on TAG student performance at all levels prior to AP.
- Develop/revise curriculum guides in all grades and content areas for TAG learners.
- Provide professional development on strategies and learning assessments for the gifted
- Design K-12 scope and sequence guides for program articulations

October 12, 2017

Research Question #5
Stakeholder Perceptions of Program Effectiveness

Use of Stakeholder Data

- Survey and focus group data are perceptual in orientation and require supporting documentation from other sources

- Low rate of online survey response (less than 30%)

- Focus group data used to corroborate survey results and other data sources

- Recommendations from these sources triangulated and noted in the recommendations for Research Questions #1, 2, 3, 4, & 6

Findings

- Overall satisfaction with the program varied, based on stakeholder group and program type

- Majority of parents across levels found TAG Program challenging; teachers/administrators perceived it as less challenging

- Elementary parents were positive about the TAG 4-5 program; secondary parents perceived limited opportunities in counseling; middle school parents perceived a lack of TAG programming

- Students had strong positive reactions to program benefits, citing critical thinking and challenging work as strongest benefits

- Changing the identification process to include more students from underrepresented groups and improving the middle school program were universal perceptions

Research Question #6
Alignment with National Best Practice Standards

Findings

- Met most indicators for identification and professional development standards

- Need for improvement in programming, assessment for learning, counseling, and differentiation practices

- Differentiation strategies used effectively by a limited number of teachers observed

- Revised acceleration policy and regulations consonant with national standards.

Recommendations

- Offer ongoing professional development for building administrators

- Tailor professional development for central program leadership and curriculum specialists

- Refine a counseling program for TAG students at secondary levels

- Personalize TAG student services through improved DEP implementation

October 12, 2017

Other Findings and Recommendations

Findings

- About a quarter of parents and staff lacked information about identification and curriculum in the program
- Focus group data corroborated this lack of understanding by both stakeholder groups.
- Lack of program cohesion due to gaps and fragmentation

Recommendations

- Design strategies to gain building administrative support
- Institute community outreach procedures
- Develop parent education programs.
- Design a curriculum scope and sequence framework K-12
- Expand the website

October 12, 2017

Conclusion

- Findings and recommendations demonstrate TAG program strengths and areas for improvement.

- These findings and recommendations also document gaps in service delivery and suggest further program development.

- A three year plan of action converts the recommendations into program design, development, and implementation outcomes.

October 12, 2017

*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

October 12, 2017