

Mary Beth Walker
Public Comments
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School Board Meeting

Good evening. My name is Mary Beth Walker. I am a parent of a TAG GIA identified second-grader and a non-identified kindergartener at George Mason Elementary. I am also a member of the TAG Advisory Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight.

I am a strong supporter of TAG education and believe it is a critical part of a successful school system. I have no way of knowing whether either of my children will eventually participate in subject specific TAG. I nonetheless support the current pull-out model for the 4th and 5th ELA and Math subject specific TAG program. The 2017 TAG Evaluation Study Report specifically commended the 4th and 5th pullout program:

The pullout program at grades 4 and 5 (replacement curriculum) in both language arts and math provides the opportunity for advanced curriculum challenge in these two key areas of the curriculum. It is perceived by parents, students, and staff to be an effective intervention at those levels of learning. Classroom observation data also confirm its effectiveness.

The Report recognized a comprehensive support for the benefits of the pull-out model for TAG identified students. With specific reference to the ELA pull-out, I have heard from parents with children in the program that their children have benefitted from the pull-out model through deeper engagement in the educational materials and greater comfort in participating as compared to their experiences in earlier grades where pull-out was not offered.

I understand that there is a concerted push to eliminate the TAG ELA pull-out model in favor of a push in model. To the extent the School Board is committed to this effort, I urge the School Board to adopt comprehensive guidelines with measurable goals and required benchmarks for any pull-out replacement. Although flexibility may seem attractive in theory, the reality in practice is that implementation and delivery is likely to be inconsistent across the district without a standardized program. My own experience with the K-3 delivery model raises significant concerns for me in the ability to replicate the success of the 4th and 5th ELA pull-out through a push-in model. The push to shift to the 4th and 5th delivery model is also particularly surprising given the following recommendation in the 2017 Report, which suggested the opposite—that K-3 should move toward the 4th and 5th model:

Design and develop a General Intellectual Aptitude program around advanced content at K-3 level, consistent with the 4-5 curriculum structure and delivered to clusters of students in the classroom.

As a proponent of TAG education, and more generally as a parent of two ACPS students, I am concerned and frustrated that the first structural effort to address TAG delivery after the 2017 Report is being directed to what has been widely regarded as one of the successes of existing program. At a minimum, I urge the School Board to address the concerns identified in the K-3 and middle school TAG instructional models first.

Thank you.