

Alexandria City Public Schools

Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee

February 8, 2021 Minutes

Meeting: February 8, 2021, @ Zoom Webinar

Current TAGAC Members Present: Zion Bezu, Daphney Denerville-Davis, Leigh Dugan, Reese du Pont, Mark Lacy, D Ohlandt, Laura Rose, Kathleen Sheehy, Lindsay Clarke, Julia Egy, Asha Mede, Asmerom Yakob, Dr. Gerald Mann, Mary Beth Walker, Melissa Kuhn (guest), Krishna Leyva (speaker)

Old Business:

The committee approved the January 11th Meeting Minutes.

New Business:

Dr. Mann provided the staff update:

- ACPS is in the final stages of hiring a new Director of Gifted Programs. The new director should be hired within the next week.
- Ms. Dominick and her team have conducted training for the teachers that will be evaluating the TAG portfolios for GIA referrals.
- Listening Sessions were held today at all schools where teachers were given the opportunity to ask questions related to the reopening process. Upwards of 800 questions have already been raised and forwarded to Central Office.
- Committee members wondered what 4/5th grade Math/LA will look like in the return to school
 - Specialized instruction with a TAG teacher will still happen, but following the CDC regarding minimizing student movement in the buildings, it is likely that those students will still Zoom with their teachers for Math/LA if they are in different classroom 'pods'.
- Committee members questioned the quantity of Classroom Monitors needed to support teachers unable to return
 - ACPS is still collecting data from teachers regarding numbers of classroom monitors and which classes (Advanced Placement/Dual Enrollment/TAG)

Guest Speaker - Krishna Levya, Director of the FACE (Family and Community Engagement) Center

- Ms. Levya spoke with the committee about outreach and events that FACE coordinates and runs. The goal of the FACE Center is to ensure families are linked to resources to help their children succeed. The FACE Center is now part of the ACPS Communications Department and their team provides robust outreach with their small staff supplemented by @10 parent liaisons based at schools (when schools are in-person). FACE also offers English Classes and Parent Support Groups.

- Committee members explained our concern with identifying a more diverse group of students for the TAG and YS programs, wondering who we can get the word out about Parent Referrals to more communities
 - Text messaging works best for English Learner families
 - Simple messaging language detailing the benefits of the program work best, followed up by contact with a trusted staff member
 - Least effective = newsletters
 - Concern that we need to have the TAG links and website materials (including the Parent Referral forms) available in mobile-friendly formats
- Committee members expressed concern about the lack of 2-way communication during recent city-wide efforts (including the Identity Project). Webinars simply push information, not allowing for exchange of ideas and for people to be heard.
 - Challenges have included “Zoom Bombers” and other nefarious postings
 - The reason for the Webinars has been to try to ensure the safety of participants; it’s proven necessary when open links are communicated with upwards of 16,000 families.
- Committee members requested additional translation services, especially in Amharic.
 - The FACE Center currently has one 20 hour/week employee who speaks Amharic. A full-time staff position was in last year’s school budget, but was cut in the last revision. The request is back in the budget this year.
 - FACE struggles to find qualified vendors for translation services when ACPS doesn’t offer the most competitive pay.
- Committee members asked about whether the FACE Center has communicated about previous TAG events.
 - A few years ago, there was a well-attended (@150 families) event held at Minnie Howard. FACE is open to helping hold another event.
- The question was raised about the proper timeline for communicating with families
 - Material sent home in September gets lost
 - October is a better time for outreach that can still meet the November cut-off for referrals. FACE can help coordinate with the principals’ coffees that are currently held at 10 schools.
 - 2-minute videos on what the TAG program is and what some benefits are that could be translated and streamed at these meetings might be helpful.

Virtual Learning Community Update

- K-2nd grade GIA students at George Mason Elementary are now being seen 1x/week by at TAG teacher and are working on long-term projects
- Some TAG students at Hammond Middle School are participating in Socio-emotional Support Groups
- The lack of a Director of Gifted Programming has caused a lack of communication with some in the Mount Vernon Community School community

Subcommittee Assignments

- Ms. Rose handed out subcommittee assignments for the four action item areas for the committee.
- One goal of each of the subcommittees is that they prepare a report summarizing the speakers/activities of their area, what we learned from the speaker as it relates to the TAG program in ACPS, what the subcommittee recommends based on the speaker/activities, and what problem that recommendation is intended to address.

Thinking Ahead:

The Next Meeting is March 8, 2021, where we'll hear about the Annual Indicators and do the deep dive into data on the TAG program provided by the Department of Accountability.