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District B

Question 1. For several years the TAGAC has been making recommendations to improve equity in the testing, evaluation and screening methods used to identify students for TAG services. Please give an explanation of a specific testing, evaluation or screening method that you feel would improve equity in identifying students for TAG services.

Traditional methods of parent, teacher or counselor referrals for Talented and Gifted students is not equitable. Often students who lack social and economic resources or are students of color are not referred or referred but do not enroll in TAG. If I was on the school board, I would advocate for universal screening of all students and to utilize measures for evaluating students that are evidenced based and from a measures library, where they have been used in large, urban public schools with diverse student populations similar to Alexandria City Public Schools. The cost of testing all students might be prohibitive, but it aligns with the ACPS Strategic Plan of Equity 2025 and the cost would be worth it if more students from Black, Latinx or low income background, language learners or New Americans were identified. Right now, there is an issue with the access and quality of gifted education in our district. Universal screening at the kindergarten through ninth grade levels would help with access for all students, many of whom face barriers. From talking to parents who have served on the TAGAC, I am concerned that parents, particularly parents who are first generation or New Americans, are unfamiliar with gifted education and when their students are identified, do not opt in or enroll in TAG. I would like to see more outreach on the ACPS level to explain the TAG identification process. The PTAC does a good job of connecting parents to TAGAC representatives at each school. However, some parents are not engaged in PTA and may not have a lot of information to advocate for their child or make an informed decision. It would be helpful if ACPS had more information available on their website and each school newsletter and ACPS express included information or spotlights on TAG.

Question 2. Specific to the delivery of TAG services to students in ACPS, what do you see as the next biggest challenge ACPS needs to address?

Gifted students are a special education needs population who are at-risk if academically bored or not engaged. I see the needs of gifted students as a special education population who must have appropriate services in public education and a public education that meets their academic, social and emotional needs. Advanced or accelerated academic courses foster a love of learning and set up academically gifted students for success. Without these courses, families of students who are academically gifted may leave ACPS or their educational needs will not be met and they are at risk for delinquent behaviors, social and emotional challenges and dropping out of high school due to lack of engagement and meeting their education needs. I am concerned that ACPS like NYC Public Schools will proposed to eliminate gifted education. I think we

could use language that is more neutral such as “advanced” or “accelerated” rather than “talented and gifted” or “gifted”. I also think we need to improve access to TAG at the elementary levels. But we cannot eliminate advanced courses or courses for academically gifted students; this move would not align with the purpose of public education to provide an education for all students. Public education used to place priority on standardization and equality. These policies that make public education be a leveling force fail to address the needs of students who are excelling academically and may require more academic rigor.

Question 3. What is the single biggest impact you feel you will bring to the TAG program by sitting on the school board?

The biggest impact I feel I will bring to the TAG program by sitting on the school board is my personal experience as a student who was academically gifted but struggling with anxiety, perfectionism and social skills. Because I was doing well academically, I was not diagnosed with these issues until a college student, when I was an academic tutor, proctor and reader to students with disabilities. I had severe anxiety due to perfectionism and unhealthy expectations, which almost caused me to drop out of school and struggled to advocate for myself since I tested high and did well academically. Too often students who are academically gifted are not seen as capable of having social-emotional issues or learning disabilities. As an advocate, I worked at the Children’s Legal Alliance where I worked with parents and students to make sure their educational needs were being met by their public school district or that their school district pay for equivalent education at another public school district or private school. I was also a deputy juvenile officer, a social worker representing the juvenile court in pre-K-12 public schools in St. Louis County, MO with the Family Court. I found that many of the students on my caseload with delinquency issues were often academically gifted who were bored or using their strengths towards negative attention or choices. In my job at the Administration for Children and Families, I have extensive experience with community engagement, needs assessments, program evaluation and implementing evidence based practices which would be beneficial to TAG and have worked on the Senate education and health committees and at the U.S. Department of Education.