

Date: December 14, 2017

For ACTION

For INFORMATION

Board Agenda: Yes

No

FROM: Gregory L Murphy, Chair, Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC)

THROUGH: Lois F. Berlin, Ed.D., Interim Superintendent
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TO: The Honorable Ramee A. Gentry, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: 2016-2017 Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee Annual Report

SUMMARY: This report provides a summary of activities, subcommittee reports and recommendations of the Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee during the 2016-2017 school year. Staff response is included in the document.

BACKGROUND:

Over the past year, the Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC) continued its focus on the metrics used to measure the success of Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) Talented and Gifted (TAG) program, following up on our previous collaboration in 2014-2016 with ACPS Chief Accountability Officer Clinton Page and his staff as well as with the recent evaluators retained to analyze and assess the efficacy of ACPS's TAG programs. This process was combined with a thorough review of the state of the TAG program across elementary, middle and high school levels, along with giving renewed attention and emphasis on communications internally throughout the system and externally to the school community. Additionally, an initiative was begun to create an historical compendium for TAGAC to inform the Committee presently and in the future as to setting and achieving goals designed to improve ACPS's success in its Talented and Gifted achievements and student demographic participation.

These metrics, encompassing our focus on the state of the TAG programs across all school Levels within ACPS and TAGAC's engagement with the ACPS TAG program staff, have led to the recommendations detailed in this Report after positioning the Committee to be fully engaged in the 2016-2017 TAG evaluation and for incorporating revisions into the Local Plan.

Below is a brief synopsis of TAGAC meetings, organized and presented chronologically. These summaries of the issues addressed on the specific meeting dates are more fully described in the Minutes for those meetings attached here as Appendix A, along with the materials presented at each meeting which are separately referenced as Appendix items also attached hereto.

TIMELINE

September 12, 2016:

A general review of the past year's scope of work was undertaken for preparation and inclusion in *TAGAC's Annual Report* for 2015-2016. The Committee also engaged in a cursory evaluation of the various TAG programs for consideration as to the Committee's undertakings for the coming year. Finally, the Committee completed a process of internal restructuring and transition of officers.

October 17, 2016:

The primary focus of this meeting was to begin organizing how the Committee would function for the remaining school year in a way (i) to operate most efficiently in serving the School Board's and its Staff's needs and (ii) to provide effective communication of the Committee's recommendations on issues raised by the School Board and Staff as well as for those generated as important internally by TAGAC. Additionally, a review of the Committee's By-Laws was undertaken to ensure that they are consistent with School Board policy. Finally, the School Board's Clerk reported on the timing for complying with data requests and an upcoming Leadership Meeting. This process was followed by ACPS's Staff representative updating the Committee on the plans for an external evaluation of the TAG program and underrepresentation in it, as well as reporting on several other undertakings on specific program reviews.

November 21, 2016:

Attention was given to introducing new Committee Members and informing as to the background of all Members in order to better appreciate the experiences each brings to TAGAC. A structural format for conducting TAGAC business through subcommittees was then established in order to involve everyone in the process and to enable the Committee to be better informed of all school Levels and initiatives over which it is to provide oversight and recommendations for improvement. A major focus was upon strategies for coordinating more effectively with ACPS as to how best TAGAC can serve the School Board's interests and vice-versa, while streamlining the contact with ACPS staff so as not to over-burden it with repetitive or unfocused demands.

An update on the Annual Report, Program Evaluation and Local Plan processes were discussed, with further input by TAGAC on their focus. Specific attention was given to attrition in TAG programs as an ongoing concern in light of comparisons with general school attrition rates. Moreover, the Committee emphasized the need to promote better communication with students and parents about special program needs. Focus areas should include student involvement in extracurricular activities (e.g. Governor's School) as well as in TAG classes in particular. The group recommended surveying those who are no longer enrolled or who have abandoned TAG. The Committee also agreed about the need for better outreach to all those affected for input.

Furthermore, amending the By-Laws (Appendix B) in order to bring them into conformance with the School Board's requisites was accomplished. The Committee also discussed ideas for better TAGAC recruitment to attain broad representation among all ACPS schools and to establish a timeline for reporting to the School Board when setting the strategic goals for each year.

January 23, 2017:

ACPS submitted to the Committee a report on *Talent and Gifted Program Indicators* (Appendix C) and a *Talented and Gifted Program Accountability Indicator Proposal* (Appendix D), with Staff elaborating on how these indicators, based upon the *2020 Strategic Plan* and goals of the National Association of Gifted Children, can be used to provide a more comprehensive data set for comparison purposes with results in neighboring jurisdictions. These indicators, referenced in each of the submissions' tables, will provide data on November 30, 2017, annually, with the Department of Accountability considering and reporting on adjustments made as appropriate. A Subcommittee Report on *TAG at the High School Level* (Appendix E) within ACPS was also presented for eventual incorporation into a *TAGAC Manual* to be used in setting goals and evaluating progress in TAG programs going forward.

March 20, 2017:

The Primary Investigator for ACPS's *Evaluation of the Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program* (Appendix F) gave an interactive presentation of the analysis being conducted of ACPS's TAG Program. The attached Report provides a comprehensive informational summary of the assessment being conducted that is designed to determine the efficacy of identification of TAG qualified students within the ACPS system.

April 17, 2017:

The second of the Subcommittee *Reports* was presented on Middle Schools as more fully detailed in the attached *TAGAC: Middle School Overview* (Appendix G). A further discussion ensued on the purpose and focus for developing a *TAGAC Manual* for historical informational use and as a teaching tool for setting goals and measuring progress on TAG program recommendations to best serve the student population of ACPS.

May 24, 2017:

A review was conducted of the *Acceleration Regulations* and *Acceleration Policy* (Appendix H). Additionally, the attached *Elementary School Level Report* (Appendix I) and the *Communication's Subcommittee Report* (Appendix J) were presented, with the purpose for incorporating these into a *TAGAC Manual* being restated as follow:

A uniform formatting of the respective Subcommittees' *Reports* will be undertaken in order to ensure that the collective presentations will serve as a coherent and coordinated living, working, consistent and evolving treatise that informs historically the purpose and mission of TAGAC. The *TAGAC Manual* is intended to provide a vehicle for conducting a linear analysis on an annual basis in order to make recommendations to the School Board which set goals for improvement and measure progress in achieving the success desired for students through TAG programs across the school system. This assessment will ultimately involve a review of each and every school and the bridge between the three-tiered Levels of grades in elementary, middle and high school, with an emphasis on coordinated communication amongst administrators, teachers, other educators, students and parents throughout ACPS. Upon completion of the final Subcommittee *Reports* for inclusion in the *TAGAC Manual* providing historically based assessments of TAG at each school Level, there will be a further discussion of the *Reports* in the whole and a decision made as to initial recommendations for goal setting and a synthesizing of them into more limited objectives

for the coming years. These will then be to be communicated annually to the School Board, after review by the ACPS Staff for its comments. The results of this endeavor will be included as part of the *TAGAC Annual Report* each year to inform the School Board as to these initiatives and for any input it desires to recommend.

June 19, 2017:

A new TAGAC applicant was recommended to the School Board for approval and election of officers for 2017-2018 was deferred to the September 2017 meeting. It was further approved that the location for the monthly meetings be rotated amongst schools within ACPS. A general discussion, designed to inform as to the objectives and goal setting for the next year, was held as to the curriculum and services offered through TAG to students, including electives, resources and language support.

Staff was then requested to (i) create a transition packet of information for dissemination to rising 9th graders and their families describing TAG opportunities available at the High School Level; (ii) email a notice in the Fall to all TAG parents as to the application process for Governor's School; (iii) advertise and extend in ACPS's electronic newsletter, the *ACPS EXPRESS*, an invitation to parents to attend any of TAGAC's meetings; and (iv) advise the elementary schools of TAGAC members availability to attend their TAG Information Night programs in order to answer any questions a parent may have, and provide TAGAC the schedule for those meetings in the event a Committee Member desired to attend any for informational gathering purposes.

The Committee then took under consideration the development of a list-serve for advising students and parents of TAG opportunities, while asking ACPS if it has available an outside platform for supporting the list-serve. There was a further Report by the Subcommittee on Communications directed at the necessity to improve the objectives of the TAG programs through better dissemination of information to the community generally as to what TAG offers and what students qualify and who would benefit. Additionally, extracurricular TAG opportunities were addressed and the importance of better communication on these with parents. Finally, emphasis was again placed on better screening and identification of TAG capable students at all levels.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

Scope of Work

TAGAC began the year by reviewing its scope of work and identifying key activities it could undertake to fulfill its mission. These activities embraced embarking upon an effort to create an historically relevant TAGAC Manual to inform the Committee as to the past, the present and prospectively so that it can set feasible and needed goals and thereby also provide a manner for it to analyze and assess ACPS's progress for improving its TAG programs and meet its objectives for the future.

TAG Local Plan review

If ACPS were to follow its typical timeline, the process of reviewing and adopting a revised Local Plan would have occurred in the SY 2016-17. However, as reported last year, TAGAC is supportive of ACPS's delaying revisions to the Local Plan until SY 2017-18 so that the results of

the evaluation taking place and the state's technical review can inform the process.

Identification of TAG Students

The support from the ACPS staff and the Office of Accountability has been key this year again in aiding the Committee to dive into areas of interest surrounding identification of TAG students. These reports continue to show critical discrepancies in identification of students, specifically along social, language, economic and academic lines. TAGAC remains stout in its belief that ACPS needs to address these discrepancies by a thorough review of existing test data, with an eye towards language bias; identification of students specifically in Science and Social Studies at the elementary level; and, importantly, improved communication to the students and their parents, as well as teachers of under-represented groups to provide them training and the tools to enhance TAG students' experience.

Communication

While overall communication to parents about the TAG program has improved, TAGAC members still have concern over continuing gaps in communication at all levels of the TAG program. TAGAC applauds, though, the development of the Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs), which have helped to define specific expectations for TAG students at all levels. TAGAC will work with ACPS in its ongoing efforts to enhance communications to ACPS families by reviewing current outreach efforts and considering either adding additional outreach, or refining current communications regarding TAG identification, appeals, delivery of services and additional opportunities for TAG students. Specific recommendations for 2017-2018 are provided below.

TAGAC notes that the 2017-2018 school year will be one of development for several foundational TAG documents for ACPS and therefore the Committee cannot overstate the importance of constant and detailed communication with the community during this process.

Delivery of Services / State of TAG in ACPS

TAGAC formed five Subcommittees in the 2016-2017 year to conduct its own assessment of TAG, in an ongoing basis, across all areas in ACPS to re-baseline our expectations and prepare for the TAG Local Plan revisions. Overall, we believe the state of the program to be relatively strong; however, several areas warrant further attention. Specifically, the Honors program at the Middle School Level appears to be fundamentally flawed due to a lack of rigor in identifying students for placement into Honors classes and the failure to remove students who consistently fail to perform at an Honors pace. Moreover, the ability and effort of some of the teachers fail to meet the standards expected for teaching TAG students and the curriculum designed for them. As these classes are the identified method for addressing TAG students in Middle School, we strongly urge a comprehensive review of the Middle School Honors program for academic rigor and the ability of teachers' performance in accomplishing TAG objectives. Enhanced opportunities for additional electives such as STEM-based activities and a focus on extracurricular activities to provide an increase in opportunities for students should be considered.

RECOMMENDATION

TAGAC is appreciative of being able to participate in the evaluation efforts being conducted at ACPS. Further collaboration and refinement may involve implementing the following

recommendations:

- Improve TAG curriculum and review existing testing data and classroom experiences to enhance process for identification of Science and Social Studies across the ACPS student population, with a specific emphasis on elementary aged students;
- Review testing bias, communication limitations in the language of the home, and lack of social support structures for under-represented sub-groups to increase representation in the TAG cohort;
- Review Delivery of TAG services, with emphasis on program effectiveness, rigor and course offerings to support the TAG cohort in Middle Schools;
- Stress the expectations for and implementation of frequent communication between TAG staff and parents; for example, communication could be enhanced by:
 - o Improving TAG resource discoverability in multiple languages;
 - o Level-appropriate TAG “Welcome” packets for newly identified students, as well as for 3rd Grade, 6th Grade and 9th Grade cohorts;
 - o Regular communication via grade-level appropriate newsletters from TAG staff to parents in multiple languages;
 - o Improved TAG Information/Family Nights; and
 - o A centralized system for TAG coordination to communicate electronically with all TAG families, accomplished for instance through development of a list-serve or some other similar means of contact.

STAFF RESPONSE

ACPS is committed to improving and strengthening all aspects of the TAG program. These recommendations align well with those found in the Oct. 2017 Evaluation Report and will be reviewed with other departments as appropriate and included in the upcoming Plan revision.

IMPACT

TAGAC’s goals remain to continue with participation in the evaluation of the TAG Local Plan, while recommending: (i) better communications of TAG programs community-wide, (ii) strengthening identification of TAG qualified and under-represented student groups, and (iii) improvements in the rigor of the TAG curriculum and the effectiveness of the teaching and management of class offerings.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. 171214_TAG_High_School_Subcommittee_Report
2. 171214_TAG_Middle_School_Subcommittee_Report
3. 171214_TAG_Elementary_School_Subcommittee_Report
4. 171214_TAG_Communication_Subcommittee_Report

RECOMMENDATION: The Superintendent recommends that the School Board approve the TAGAC Annual Report.

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