ACPS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TALENTED AND GIFTED (TAG) REVIEW

Presented to TAGAC

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Summary of Findings

- Identification of under-represented[1] TAG students is a multi-level problem in elementary school.
- Identification for Science and Social Studies represents a separate underserved community in ACPS as well as a missed opportunity for subgroup identification.
- The hand off of Elementary TAG students to the Middle School Honors Program is troubled and possibly regressive in some cases.
- Parents show an interest in getting the Differentiated Educational Plans (DEPs) evolved and also having a progress report aspect.
- Breadth of program across the Elementary grades in ACPS is astounding.
- Elementry School TAG and Young Scholars (YS) are the start of the pipeline for advanced studies, and need additional focus and effort to overcome some deficiencies.

Identification for Subgroups

Elementary School Recap – Students by Grade

Table 5: Number and Percentage of TAG-Identified Students[1] by Grade

Grade	2013-2014			2014-2015			2015-2016		
	# TAG Identified	# of Students Enrolled	% TAG	# TAG Identified	# of Students Enrolled	% TAG	# TAG Identified	# of Students Enrolled	% TAG
KG	16	1408	1%	9	1433	1%	9	1480	1%
1	59	1473	4%	63	1394	5%	92	1411	7%
2	87	1248	7%	94	1409	7%	87	1341	6%
3	119	1158	10%	133	1221	11%	202	1369	15%
4	242	1067	23%	245	1142	21%	252	1203	21%
5	229	1007	23%	281	1050	27%	256	1098	23%
Elementary School	752	7361	10%	825	7649	11%	898	7902	11%

Elementary School Recap – Aptitude by Grade

Table 6: Number and Percentage of TAG Students[1] by TAG Aptitude[2] Area and Grade Level SY 2013-14

Grade Level	# of Students Enrolled	TAG ID Students	% TAG	SAA Math	SAA Language Arts	SAA Science	SAA Social Studies	SAA Visual & Performing Arts[3]	GIA
KG	1408	16	1%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%
1	1473	59	4%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%
2	1248	87	7%	76%	69%	N/A	N/A	N/A	30%
3	1158	119	10%	84%	69%	16%	10%	N/A	9%
4	1067	242	23%	89%	66%	7%	8%	N/A	*
5	1007	229	23%	87%	66%	15%	9%	*	*

Elementary School Recap – TAG by School

Table 1: Number and Percentage of TAG-Identified Students[1] by School

School Name	2013-2014			2014-2015			2015-2016		
	# TAG Identified	# of Students Enrolled	% TAG	# TAG Identified[1]	# of Students Enrolled	% TAG	# TAG Identified[1]	# of Students Enrolled	% TAG
John Adams	39	776	5%	86	864	10%	78	884	9%
Charles Barrett	51	420	12%	58	438	13%	87	460	19%
Patrick Henry	31	488	6%	35	505	7%	54	528	10%
Jefferson-Houston	14	279	5%	29	381	8%	37	458	8%
Cora Kelly	14	368	4%	13	351	4%	11	358	3%
Lyles-Crouch	74	421	18%	60	387	16%	64	408	16%
Douglas MacArthur	121	701	17%	115	708	16%	124	708	18%
George Mason	106	507	21%	110	549	20%	108	544	20%
Matthew Maury	81	429	19%	87	433	20%	110	438	25%
Mount Vernon	101	765	13%	79	815	10%	78	854	9%
James K. Polk	54	692	8%	76	732	10%	72	762	9%
William Ramsay	27	831	3%	32	839	4%	32	874	4%
Samuel Tucker	39	719	5%	50	728	7%	58	756	8%
Francis C. Hammond	111	1399	8%	120	1449	8%	141	1434	10%
George Washington	257	1172	22%	304	1229	25%	386	1292	30%
T.C. Williams	359	3233	11%	341	3393	10%	330	3545	9%
Division Total[2]	**1480**	**13298**	**11%**	**1597**	**13896**	**11%**	**1772**	**14392**	**12%**

[1] Data from the EOY Student Record Collection (SRC) file and includes students in grades K-12.

[2] Division total includes special situation students.

Identification

- Testing anecdotally appears to show that the "non-verbal" testing that is geared to be language agnostic, still has EL students ~1 standard deviation below native speakers. So, while they are the best available, they are still "biased."

- Language specific testing (aka testing in Spanish for Spanish speakers) is nice but other factors, such as a lack of familiarity with computers and test taking tools (such as puzzles, pattern blocks etc.), makes this unreliable in a large number of cases.

    - No solution is readily apparent and the appeals process could address this; however, the students in need of the appeal often lack an advocated knowledgeable in the program or willing or able able to push the appeals process.

TAG vs. Young Scholars

- Young Scholars is attempting to fill this role, however, it seems in many cases to be executed by simply aggregating YS and General Intellectual Aptitude (GIA) TAG students due to time/schedule constraints.

  - In some cases there are concerns that it could be viewed as segregationist if YS deviates from the TAG track due to the high subgroup density in YS.

  - No one was sure/could tell me if YS did/could address needs of TAG students outside of the traditional GIA/Specific Academic Aptitude (SAA) delivery.

  - Overall, at the execution/parent level, there seems to be a lack of understanding about the differences between YS and TAG and the goals of YS.

Identification ≠ Success

- For "gifted" students learning English or recent immigrants, a new culture and stress at home means the needs of these gifted students may be significantly different than "traditional" TAG students.

- "Traditional" TAG services may actually be detrimental (learn math faster, with more challenges isn't the right answer for these kids). In many cases these gifted students are more aware of stresses in their household than "normal" kids their age; appropriate services may need to be more culturally and psychologically based around social studies and cultural adaptations than math/language arts.

- Several teachers also commented that there were students they thought to be gifted or YS candidates, however, the TAG program wouldn't have benefited and might have made life harder on that student so they chose individual attention in lieu of a TAG nomination.

- We believe that this recommendation is in line with the ACPS TAG Local Plan that states "*Talented and Gifted learners in the Alexandria City Public Schools receive educational services that provide opportunities directed to their unique needs.*"

Beyond Identification

Beyond identification of EL TAG/YS students, even when academic services are appropriate, there is a need for:

- EL materials for TAG/YS students once identified

- TAG instruction is specified to be in Language Arts; NOT English. Is below grade level English a reason not to teach higher level Spanish?

- Teachers that are capable/prepared/willing to teach EL TAG/YS

- Is this an opportunity for a TAG resource teacher, with an EL focus, to address?

Whole Student

TAG Goal #1. TAG students learn a differentiated curriculum that addresses the **particular learning characteristics and competency levels of the individual student.** The curriculum includes **opportunities** for students to work at an accelerated pace, be exposed to higher level **critical thinking strategies** and **sophisticated levels of content,** and participate in creative activities that promote and **develop originality** and **complex problem solving skills.**

- ACPS Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted 2012-2016
(emphasis TAGAC ES Subcommittee)

We should challenge the assumption: this means harder coursework and work towards a whole student approach especially in the K-3 years for GIA and YS which, I think, will benefit subgroup identification and conversion of YS student to TAG students.

Identification for Science/ History & Social Science

Underserved STEM/Humanities Areas

- Overall (2015-16) TAG students represented 12% with 1772 students.
  - 1116 - SAA-Math
  - 124 - SAA-Science

- This order of magnitude disparity alone should be a cause for alarm in identification for related subjects.

- To further prove the point when looking at AP tests attempted by TAG students:
  - 124 AP exams in Science
  - 93 AP exams in Math/Computer Science

- More TAG students are choosing to take Science based exams in 10th, 11th and 12th grade than Math and have a higher pass rate than Math exams.

Underserved STEM/Humanities Areas

- A similar story could be told for History & Social Science Identification mapping to History/Social Science AP exams, however only 4% of ACPS TAG students (71) were formally identified as gifted and in High School the numbers for each year were <5 students.

- Generously that is 16 TAG students against the 240 AP exams taken. While not every TAG student takes an AP and not all who take and AP should be in TAG, a rough correlation may be assumed and we can be assured we are grossly under identifying and under serving gifted students in these areas.

Underserved STEM/Humanities Areas

- Science/Social Studies TAG programing is essentially non-existent in Elementary School with no pull out; there is limited push-in and mainly classroom teacher-led enrichment that is developed case by case by the teacher (so, if your teacher is gifted in science/social studies it may be awesome... if they are not; it may not be either).

- We are not actively identifying 2 of the 4 available subject areas where subgroup identified students could also be identified; and in subject areas that are often more likely to draw attention for identification.

- Bottom Line: Students in these areas are not being identified early enough, or being offered enough resources, even though High School testing data implies a large pool of potential participants.

Elementary ≠ Middle School

Elementary ⇏ Middle School

Hand off of Elementary TAG students to Middle School is troubled because of the diluted Honors program.

- TAG students are automatically enrolled in Honors for their SAA identified subjects

- Lack of a language handoff for dual language students

"Honors" program at Middle School is considered "weak" and "a joke" by some TAG students talking to Elementary School teachers.

Elementary ⇏ Middle School

Need to enforce "Honors" standards - acceptance to Honors class; 6 weeks to remove a student may be the right timeline, however, it was anecdotally reported that there is no administrative support for teachers vs parents in most cases where an improvement plan is attempted.

- Overall, it appears that the standards in programs of studies are not followed to maintain the quality of Honors classes.

- Honors classes, as currently stand, do not appear to be meeting the needs of students or the intent of the TAG local plan.

Overreach (by students or parents) to get/stay in the TAG program was also commented on in some much more isolated cases in elementary school.

Differentiated Education Plan and Communication

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- Parents' interest in getting DEPs evolved also have a progress report aspect

    - Forcing function for additional communication which is universally considered weak (acknowledging this parent group is typically wanting to be more involved)

- Additional communication, especially at GIA levels on goals/progress of YS and GIA students in the home language, is key to parental support especially in subgroups where parents may not have an understanding of what needs YS/GIA serves.

- Communication in the language in which the parents are most comfortable in is key!

Breadth of Program and Freedom to Execute

Breadth of Program and Freedom to Execute

Over 50% of ACPS students are in grades K-5 spread across 13 schools serving very diverse communities. TAG is implemented differently at every school I talked to with unique programs and limited common practice at K-3 levels. More common practices at Grades 4 & 5 due to SAA focused classes.

- Passions run deep about push-in and pull-out approaches for TAG education. It is highly driven by student schedules and teacher personalities.

- Teachers need (and appear to have) the freedom to implement a program that works for their school (push-in/pull out, EL, etc) as it supports the needs of the students balanced with personalities of the teacher and scheduling constraints.

Breadth of Program and Freedom to Execute

- Need the direction/freedom from individual principals to continue this flexibility and TAG Local Plan direction for innovation in instruction for TAG/YS students

- Need a method of measuring success for students/program that works across the ACPS system and supports this flexibility (Progress Report DEPs?)

- Communication with parents of Elementary School TAG students is key

- Feedback by Middle School parents/students and TAG teachers is essential to keep the Elementary School program working in the right direction!

- Diversity of program delivery makes sharing of best practices complicated and tailoring/rework of lesson plans more common. Resource teachers should be aware of this diversity and be hub of trying to push best practices and base resources

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) Comparisons

Part-Time Advanced Academic Program (AAP), Grades 3-6 (Level III)

- The part-time Advanced Academic Program (Level III) extends and enriches the FCPS Program of Studies in the four core content areas.

- Eligibility for part-time AAP (Level III) is determined by a school-based screening committee.

- Students are required to be taught by the AAP teacher for a minimum of 1 hour/week, but there are now many models for how these services are delivered.

FCPS Comparisons

Full-Time Advanced Academic Program, Grades 3-8 (Level IV)

- Full-time Advanced Academic Program (Level IV) focuses on academic depth and complexity in the four core content areas.

- Eligibility for Level IV services is determined through a central selection committee.

- Some schools are "center" schools which pull students for full-time AAP services from several schools in the surrounding area. Many more schools are trying to "keep their own kids" at their local schools now, so FCPS is encouraging Local Level IV programs at schools.

- Since some of those schools would not have an entire class of students who would be Level IV eligible, often students like Young Scholars or other Level III or II students are included in those classrooms for at least part of their day.

- This has been a great way to raise the bar for those students who might need a little push.

FCPS Comparisons

- Young Scholars (K-12) - The YS model identifies and nurtures advanced academic potential in students from historically underrepresented populations. All schools in FCPS are on the lookout for YS and most on this end of the county have large numbers of students that qualify.

- These students are serviced in various ways at each school, much depends on numbers. Almost all schools offer YS summer school for 3 weeks. However, during the school year most of these schools offer services to these students on a weekly or at least monthly basis. Sometimes, as stated above YS students are included in Level IV or Level III pullout classes.

- Through early identification and intervention, we have seen numerous YS students meet their potential and eventually flourish as full-time AAP students - moving on to AP classes and then to IVY league schools...I've got some inspiring stories to tell!

Recommendations

Recommendations

- Prove/Disprove "bias" in non-verbal testing results to drive new/additional testing methods.

- Increase support for GIA/SAA EL and under identified subgroup program development.

- Explore options in TAG enrichment for GIA/YS that supports community/emotional based needs to compliment academics where appropriate.

- Establish new identification methods for identification of Science and Social Studies SAA students to provide support in line with Math/English instruction.

- Address Middle School hand off to sub-standard honors program.

- Evolve DEPs to show progress or "as executed," not just a plan.

- Improve TAG Teacher to TAG parent communication.

Identification and preparation of Talented and Gifted Students in elementary school is a key to success in AP/IB and other advanced studies throughout a student's ACPS career.

Sources/Assumptions

- TAGAC meeting discussions and discussions with self identified ACPS TAG parents/students were used. There was no scientific sampling attempted nor should it be implied.

- Meetings with ACPS staff such as elementary school TAG educators, Mount Vernon Community School (MVCS) Data Coach, school counselor, and TAG coordinators were conducted/attended.

- Primarily the subgroup focused on was Spanish speaking EL, however, parallels can easily be drawn with some validity to testing difficulties with other EL students for cultural/access bias. Not addressed (really due to time) was child advocacy for underrepresented subgroups and community engagement.

- FCPS Data comes from publicly available sources and information volunteered by a FCPS educator.