

Date: September 12, 2019
For ACTION
For INFORMATION
Board Agenda: Yes
No

FROM: K. Nicholas Miller, Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC) Chair

THROUGH: Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Ed.D, Superintendent of Schools
Terri H. Mozingo, Ed.D, Chief Academic Officer
Gerald R. Mann, Jr., Ed.D, Executive Director of Secondary Instruction
Frances Donna Brearley, Talented and Gifted (TAG) Coordinator

TO: The Honorable Cindy M. Anderson, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: SY 2018-2019 Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC) Annual Report

BACKGROUND

The Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC) for Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) is focused on assuring that the needs of all Talented and Gifted (TAG) students are met in ACPS. The Scope of Work for the 2018-2019 school year had the TAGAC specifically focused on what we felt were the key areas of Communications, Delivery of Services at the Elementary and Middle School levels as well as some system-wide issues in identification of TAG students at all levels and all identification areas. Additionally, TAGAC was keenly interested in the TAG Local Plan for the Gifted due to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) in the spring of 2019, and the implementation of findings from the 2016 Audit.

SUMMARY

This report represents a high-level overview of our activities for the 2018-2019 school year. Per the ACPS subcommittee operating guidelines, TAGAC has approved minutes for all of our meetings in the ACPS archives.

The ACPS school year and the TAGAC year started strong in September with a sizable number of the ACPS School Board candidates in attendance to learn more about TAG and the role of TAGAC in ACPS. TAGAC also reviewed the Scope of Work for the 2018-2019 TAGAC year and heard a report from the TAG Coordinator, Donna Brearley, on ACPS' efforts to survey other comparable TAG programs around Virginia.

In October, the ACPS School Board candidates participated in TAGAC along with a presentation by Mr. Jesse Mazur, George Washington Middle School Principal, on his vision for how to provide services to TAG students via a clustering model at the middle school level.

In November, TAGAC hosted Dr. Hutchings and listened to his views on TAG. There was also a live question and answer session with the TAGAC committee and members of the public who were present.

The December meeting was attended by the Office of Accountability who presented the annual metrics that the TAGAC requested to build a baseline data set for tracking TAG effectiveness/availability in ACPS.

In January, due to teacher changes at James K. Polk Elementary School, the discussion was dominated by the public comment session on the mid-year implementation of an in-class differentiation for TAG students, and how it was failing to address the needs of TAG students. This interaction prompted the TAGAC to vote to issue a position paper on the subject.

The February meeting was focused on writing a position paper in opposition to a proposal written by the elementary school principals that promoted removing the TAG different and gifted specific service model for English/Language Arts to a universal curriculum delivered through a push-in model. Additionally, a paper on the inadequacies of the middle school curriculum was also under development.

In March, ACPS had the honor of hosting Dr. Richard Cash who was selected to provide differentiation training to ACPS elementary school staff with a focus on TAG. Dr. Cash also spoke at a public forum which was widely attended with over 75 parents signing into the session. When the next TAGAC meeting was held, we had an all-time high attendance of ~45 non-committee people attending. Further development of the Elementary and Middle School position papers was conducted with this larger audience.

April saw the finalization of the position papers as well as preparation for Dr. Hutchings' TAG Chat at T.C. Williams High School. There were initial discussions on the TAG focus for SY 2019-2020.

The May meeting was spent discussing the TAG Chat from T.C. Williams as well as discussing TAG goals for SY 2019-2020.

Position Papers/Major Works

TAGAC was involved in writing the 2019 revision to the TAG Master Plan.

TAGAC approved and sent to the School Board the following position papers:

1. TAGAC Elementary School Response to Proposed Local Plan
2. TAGAC Middle School Response to Proposed Local Plan

RECOMMENDATIONS/STAFF RESPONSE

Based on the TAGAC Scope of Work, over 20 hours of TAGAC meetings, and two public forum sessions dedicated to TAG including countless hours by TAGAC and community members conducting research on their own time, TAGAC has the following recommendations for ACPS concerning the Talented and Gifted services:

1. Execute on the recommendation from the TAG Evaluation Report, “Design and develop a General Intellectual Aptitude (GIA) program around advanced content at the K-3 level, consistent with the grades 4-5 curriculum structure and delivered to clusters of students in the classroom.”

Staff response: This recommendation is currently under development. The first stage, an English/Language Arts (ELA) research-based curriculum supplement (Jacob’s Ladder), has been aligned to the Standards of Learning (SOL) and provided to all schools. Training is available through the Professional Learning Management System (PLMS) on request by individual school and offered division-wide at various times throughout the year. A similar math curriculum supplement (M^2/M^3) will be aligned and available in School Year 2020. Additional supplemental integrated curriculum units and problem-based units will be added this year. All materials will be available in Canvas as well as physical copies at each school through the TAG teacher.

2. Execute on the recommendation from the TAG Evaluation Report, “Revamp the middle school TAG Program so that it includes opportunities for an accelerated English/Language Arts (ELA), Science, and Social Studies program beyond honors which currently fails to provide differentiated curriculum or instruction. Develop an interdisciplinary option in the humanities and STEM areas for students who have aptitudes and interests in the underlying areas of learning.”

Staff response: The 2019-2020 school year will be spent exploring how to best align and design new middle school courses with the Connected High School Project and the emerging 2025 Strategic Plan. These courses will include accelerated options wherever possible.

3. Commit to continuing an exemplar from the TAG Evaluation Report by maintaining the current delivery method of gifted specific curriculum/self-contained services for 4th and 5th grade TAG ELA.

Staff response: No decisions have been made at this time to change any existing service. The Division will be reviewing and analyzing all available data in order to make suggestions for the future during this school year. The Division recognizes this type of change would require long term efforts including building new curricula and capacity for teachers and students to be successful.

4. Complete roll-out of the Young Scholars program to all ACPS elementary schools. Move the Young Scholars program fully under the ACPS TAG program so that Young Scholars can be considered for TAG grouping in class structures.

Staff response: The timeline for the expansion of the Young Scholars program has been accelerated so that all schools will have the program in place by the 2021-2022 school year. The process for moving the program fully under the TAG umbrella of services is in place for this school year. Young Scholars students are to be clustered with specific teachers to facilitate the grouping of TAG students to include Young Scholars whenever possible. There will be a Young Scholars/GIA curriculum aligned for these students and their cluster teachers to use throughout the school year. The curriculum will be posted on Canvas and professional

development scheduled through PLMS. This new pathway will prepare and support students to fully participate in TAG curriculum in future years.

5. Improve training for general education teachers in the areas of identifying and working with TAG and Young Scholars. Increase training in differentiating classroom instruction for all students.

Staff response: A Division-wide initiative in differentiation is underway. All elementary schools have formed cross-functional teams of teachers and administrators to be the catalysts of this effort on their campus. A differentiation consultant is working with these teams and will continue to support their efforts throughout the school year. A middle school consultant is being sought to provide similar support through the development of middle school professional development and courses. The Division is also seeking a university partner to guide the development of a local endorsement process for general education teachers working with TAG and Young Scholars students. In addition, the gifted endorsement cohorts are provided for any teacher seeking full licensure.

6. Implement a universal test/screening in the 5th grade in the areas of Math, Language Arts, Science and Social Studies to solidify identification for TAG students as they graduate to Middle School.

Staff response: This recommendation will be considered during the redesign of middle school services and offerings to assure alignment to the Virginia Profile of a Graduate and the ACPS High School Project.

7. Address a gap in TAG services by implementing push in ACPS Counseling to address the unique needs of TAG students from a social and emotional perspective, paying specific attention to twice exceptional students, as well as provide academic advising.

Staff response: The Student Services Department will begin to work with the TAG office to discuss and determine the best way to ensure the social/emotional and academic advising needs are met. Collaboration with school psychologists and counselors is critical to the implementation success of these efforts.

8. Devise a rigorous assessment plan to measure the effectiveness of gifted instruction. The current model of “provide” does not address if the gifted services are being delivered and if so are services truly meeting the needs of students both academically and socially. This should be distinctly separate from test score monitoring.

Staff response: A variety of assessment data to measure the achievement of students identified for TAG services is currently collected and analyzed annually by the Office of Accountability. In addition to these metrics, both formative and summative measures are developed by the classroom teacher to monitor and measure growth. The development of a specific program effectiveness measure could be a future project and developed from the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) Standards for Programming.

IMPACT

With the delay of the TAG Master Plan, we feel the need to make robust recommendations that are specific and executable with a long term vision that will improve the delivery and quality of TAG services in ACPS.

We recognize that these are no-cost recommendations. However, we still feel they are the necessary drivers to tackle the tough areas of identification, equity, and social issues that all students experience, and TAG students experience in a unique manner.

These recommendations address overall program quality issues in the areas of curriculum, service delivery, and accountability. These recommendations identify places our curriculum needs to evolve, specifies needed teacher training, incorporates needed counseling support, and stresses the need to create a baseline from which success can be qualitatively measured.

ATTACHMENTS

1. 190912_Elementary_School_Position_Paper
2. 190912_Middle_School_Position_Paper

Note – All referenced documents can be found in the ACPS public archives.

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