

BOARD BRIEF

Date: June 7, 2024

BOARD INFORMATION: X

MEETING PREPARATION:

FROM: Megan Tempel-Milner, Ph.D., Director of Gifted and Advanced Academic Services
Carmen Sanders, M.S., Executive Director of Instructional Support

THROUGH: Pierrette Finney, Ed.D., Chief Academic Officer
Melanie Kay-Wyatt, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Michelle Rief, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Advanced Academic Services (AAS) Updates

ACPS 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL:

- Goal 1: Systemic Alignment
- Goal 2: Instructional Excellence
- Goal 3: Student Accessibility and Support
- Goal 4: Strategic Resource Allocation
- Goal 5: Family and Community Engagement

SY 2023-2024 FOCUS AREA:

Increase Support for Social and Emotional Learning

FY 2024 BUDGET PRIORITY:

N/A

SUMMARY:

In June 2023, the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) School Board approved the Local Plan for the Gifted. The Local Plan for the Gifted focuses on six overarching growth goals: identification, delivery of services, curriculum and instruction, professional development, equitable representation of students, and parent/guardian and community involvement.

DETAILS:

The Local Plan for the Gifted focuses on six overarching growth goals, which are highlighted and italicized below. Over the next five years of the plan, ACPS will work towards 45 sub-goals associated with the Local Plan. This brief provides a high-level update on the goal progress ACPS has made over the 2023-2024 school year.

Identification: *ACPS will ensure all students have equitable access to and engagement with programs and support that reduce barriers to learning.*

BOARD BRIEF

- ACPS implemented a screening and identification process using a holistic review of data to match the needs of students to service options.
- ACPS expanded its universal screening data to include nationally normed ability tests, nationally normed achievement tests, and observation scales for all third graders.
- All Young Scholars in grades 3-5 were screened for Tier III language arts and mathematics services.
- ACPS will need to adapt its screening timeline to move the referral deadline earlier in the year, which will better align with division-wide data collection windows. It will also provide earlier parent notification and student placement and allow for the appeals process to occur before the end of the school year. The AAS office will update the School Board and families on the 2024-2025 screening window during the summer of 2024.

Delivery of Services: *ACPS will provide Advanced Academic Services (AAS) to students among all ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups, which will enable students to achieve excellence and develop their abilities to the fullest.*

- ACPS implemented an Early Childhood Talent Development Model co-teaching approach in grades K-3 for schools currently staffed with two AAS staff members. For schools with less than two staff members, schools focused on co-teaching in third grade.
- ACPS expanded the Young Scholars Model to include more students at the elementary level.
- ACPS requested positions to have two Advanced Academic Support Teachers (AASs) at every elementary school to serve students at the Tier I-Tier III levels. We await the final School Board approval of two additional itinerant teacher positions, which will be shared across schools.
- ACPS staffed and hired a secondary instructional specialist at the Central Office level.
- Tier I and Tier II instruction was delivered within the homeroom classes with the primary support of the classroom teacher and supplemental support of the AAS.
- At the elementary level, AASs co-taught and modeled Critical and Creative Thinking Strategies, as well as a gifted curriculum and lessons, once a week or once every two weeks, depending on the school size and school staffing.

Curriculum and Instruction: *ACPS will ensure that all students can access and engage with high-quality instruction.*

- ACPS updated language arts and math curriculum guides in grades 4-5 to align research-based gifted resources with the division's standards pacing.
- ACPS created differentiated toolkits for grades K-2 in language arts, math, social studies, and science to align research-based gifted resources with the division's standards pacing.
- ACPS incorporated social and emotional development lessons in language arts for grades 4-5.

BOARD BRIEF

Professional Development: *ACPS will continue to develop, lead, and provide ongoing professional learning using multiple modalities on various topics related to current best practices in gifted education.*

- ACPS conducted a needs assessment to determine professional learning areas.
- ACPS provided professional learning opportunities for staff that support student-centric learning models, innovative instructional practices, and professional growth through technology. Staff learned about co-teaching, grammar and vocabulary development, the math workshop model, the William and Mary Language Arts curriculum units, equity within gifted education, screening, social-emotional learning, and JASON learning in science.
- ACPS provided ongoing professional development on cultural competency and updated research in advanced academic and gifted research.
- ACPS sponsored a teacher endorsement in gifted education by partnering with the University of Virginia.

Equitable Representation of Students: *ACPS will ensure that all students have equitable access to and engagement with programs and support that reduce barriers to learning.*

- ACPS expanded universal screening measures to include non-standardized-based testing measures.
- ACPS expanded the use of student portfolios to document gifted behaviors and to show growth over time when given opportunities to think critically and problem-solve.
- ACPS is committed to eliminating opportunity and achievement gaps by monitoring progress through Equity for All data. The referral gaps for elementary Black/African American, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, and current English Language students have decreased since 2021.
- ACPS expanded the participation of diverse students in Young Scholars and AAS programs in grades K-12. The access gaps for elementary Black/African American, economically disadvantaged, current English Language students, and students with disabilities have decreased since 2021.
- ACPS consulted with and received input on the best practices for the equitable representation of students in gifted programming from Dr. Donna Y. Ford, a leading expert and researcher in gifted education and equity.

Parent/Guardian and Community Involvement: *ACPS will ensure that all families and community members feel welcomed, respected, and valued.*

- ACPS has begun to streamline and align technology tools for improved communications with families and other stakeholders.
- All formal AAS communication was provided in English, Spanish, Dari, Amharic, and Arabic.

BOARD BRIEF

- The AAS website was updated to include information regarding screening timelines and processes, the Local Plan for the Gifted, screening forms, access to School Board briefs, and connection to the Advanced Academic Services Advisory Committee.

The updates to the Alexandria City Public Schools Local Plan for the Gifted reflect ACPS' dedication to excellence, equity, and innovation in serving the unique needs of advanced learners. By expanding programs, enhancing access, promoting differentiated instruction, fostering collaboration, and prioritizing continuous improvement, ACPS aims to create a supportive environment where advanced students can thrive and reach their full potential.

BACKGROUND:

The updates to the Alexandria City Public Schools Local Plan for the Gifted reflect our dedication to excellence, equity, and innovation in serving the unique needs of advanced learners.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Superintendent recommends that the School Board review the information in this board brief.

IMPACT:

The points in this brief provide information about the progression of goals within the current Local Plan for the Gifted.

REFERENCES:

1. May 18, 2024: Local Plan for the Gifted 2023-2028, Board Presentation: 23_05_18 Updated Local Plan

CONTACT:

- Megan Tempel-Milner, megan.tempel-milner@acps.k12.va.us
- Mashari Whitfield, mashari.whitfield@acps.k12.va.us
- Christie Goodman, christie.goodman@acps.k12.va.us