

**Alexandria City Public Schools  
Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee**

**November Minutes**

**Meeting: November 16th, 2015**

**TAGAC Members Present:** Donna Brearley, Alex Griffin, Amanda Eisenhour, Steve Lally, Stacy Hayden, Steven Gordon, Nicholas Miller, Pam Jones, Renee Reynolds, Ashley Chappell, Gregg Murphy

**Guests:** None

**Approval of Minutes:**

Changes to October minutes:

- Page 2, paragraph 3: Gordon should be changed to Lally.
- Change of September to October on page 1.

Minutes approved pending changes. Updated minutes will be sent out.

**Public Comments:**

None

**ACPS Updates:**

DEPs

Mrs. Brearley is hoping to give an update on the middle school progress in writing by next meeting. She also provided some samples of the DEPs from the middle school level to give an idea of what they look like.

We discussed that a well written DEP should include student choice and something that grabs the student's interest. Additionally, the DEPs that are integrated (such as the US History and Language Arts one that was provided) are very good.

DEPs can be either individualized or created for a group. Currently this is different in every case. They hope it will be more individualized in the future as the teachers become more comfortable with this process.

Concern was raised over a DEP that was sent home for History and was not well done. We discussed that this may be happening because the student was the only identified history

student in the class. Mrs. Brearley responded that this may be related to lack of referrals/identification in science/social studies at the elementary level.

In order to help with DEP quality it was discussed that it might be beneficial to provide teachers with a list of extensions for different subject areas. This would make it easier on the teachers when it came time to write these each quarter.

TAGAC will revisit the DEPs in the spring. It will be put on the February agenda for discussion since that will be when the DEPs are finished. We will start with anecdotal data and be able to discuss how they are working and if they are making a difference.

### Middle School Identification

Through conversation around the DEPs we discussed middle school identification. Concerns were raised that if we are improving instruction, we should also be identifying at the middle school level. Although currently students are rarely identified at the middle school level, it is laid out in the plan as to how this process takes place.

It was also brought up that it seems that some teachers at the middle school level did not know about the identification process. These teachers did not know which children were identified as TAG. It was also mentioned that teachers felt that another student who should be identified was not even though he had received a high test score.

Mrs. Brearley responded that all teachers at the middle school level had been provided with lists of TAG identified students. Training about identification had been provided during the first session of the differentiation workshop at the middle school level. If a teacher did not attend this, they may have missed that information.

When thinking about Young Scholars, this may also support the need for increased middle school identification. In Fairfax about 25% of students identified as Young Scholars eventually get into a program such as our GIA program. Another 20% of these students identified as Young Scholars get into score based programming (such as our SAA). Although some students become identified, the main goal (in Alexandria and Fairfax) is really to help support them in middle school and beyond so they are successful in upper level classes. This is also where Fairfax has had the most success with the Young Scholars model and where we hope to see a lot of success as well.

### Screening Process for Students New to ACPS

We also discussed student screening for when students move into the district. We want to ensure that all students who need TAG services are receiving the differentiated curriculum that it provides. In different situations this is done differently depending on the school level. However, we could streamline this process.

One way to do this could be having all entering students take the NNAT when they enter the school system. This would have a financial cost that is currently ten dollars per student. The test is a computer based test that takes 30 minutes. This could potentially be done at Central Office when students enroll or at the school based level.

The process and criteria needed to be identified for TAG is the same for all students. Testing is also done in the same way as necessary. The only exception is that the Military Compact provides immediate placement. The student is placed and begins to receive services while the process takes place to determine if the student is eligible for services.

### Changes to TAG Over the Years

TAGAC discussed that it would be interesting to see the changes to the ACPS TAG program over the past few decades. Some members have had students in the system for some time and feel that the process has gone downhill in their experience. This includes a lack of courses at the high school level during different time frames. They are curious as to what the cause may be. We would like to see if there is anyone with the knowledge of the changes that could share this information with us.

The changes may have been because No Child Left Behind happened and gifted children were not included as a sub group. At one point before the IDEA laws for special education there was a law that included the gifted. Afterwards, it became a local decision over whether to mandate gifted education. Additionally, our population has changed a great deal over the past decade. These could all be reasons for some of the changes that members of TAGAC have seen.

### Other Updates

Three teachers just came back from the National Association of Gifted Children conference. Mrs. Brearley did not go because she wanted to ensure that the teachers could. It was a great experience and the teachers are excited to share what they learned at the conference and start implementing things at their schools.

During our meeting, the data from the report last year was also briefly reviewed with our comparisons to other districts and their secondary services. The main differences were that some districts have an elective course and others do a DEP but it is once yearly.

In the future, we would like to know if the increased cluster sizes and DEPs in middle school are actually working and adding value. It was suggested that after the midpoint of the year we find out if families are getting the DEPs and if differences are being noticed because of the DEPs. We may also need to ask Clint about surveys. Ideally, any survey would be done through the Office of Accountability, however this poses its own set of challenges.

### **Annual Report:**

The decision was made to modify the memorandum from last year to include conclusions from Central Office regarding our recommendations. This will become the report for the 2014-2015 school year. Like other committees, we will continue to wait until the Fall to write the report each year since it will allow us to look at data. We will submit the reports in September so that the school board can use the information and data that we provide in any decisions.

### **Data Discussion:**

At the November meeting, we also had a discussion regarding data. Our goal was to have a clear set of data questions and an understanding of what we wish to find out through data. Mrs. Griffin will use the questions from the last meeting and any questions added during this meeting to come up with a finalized list of questions that will be sent to Clint Page.

TAGAC decided to add a question to the list in order to collect data on Young Scholars identification. This will enable us to see if the Young Scholars model is helping to fix the disproportionality seen in ACPS identification. We would like to see this data broken down not only by ethnicity, but also ELL (English as a Second Language) and FRL (Free and Reduced Lunch).

With all data that we receive in the future we discussed the importance of not only having it broken down by ethnicity but into other categories such as ELL and FRL as well. TAGAC also recognizes that if there was any way to get information including parent education level and length of time students have been enrolled in U.S. school systems that this would be very helpful. We would like to be able to see the full story behind the data we are provided and this would help us to do so. When data is only listed by race/ethnicity it does not make it easy for us to discuss root causes.

Additionally, we would like to see if we can get any longitudinal data over the past five years. We would really like to see students identified by race/ethnicity in a similar format as to the chart that Mr. Gordon created. TAGAC recognizes that this may be difficult since the student information system has changed but we will still ask Clint Page to see if it is a possibility.

### Past Data

At the November meeting, TAGAC was also able to see data from Spring 2014. It had been placed on the Board Briefs location on the website rather than with the annual report directly. In addition to the data that was compiled from Central Office we were also able to see data that Mr. Gordon had compiled.

In the document that includes the data presented by the Department of Accountability, TAGAC discussed that Table 3 includes misleading information. It shows a breakdown of race/ethnicity amongst the TAG population but does not show the racial/ethnic breakdown of ACPS for

comparison. Mr. Gordon created a similar table that provides this information and is helpful for us to see the TAG population.

### SAT Research

TAGAC discussed the SAT research that Mr. Gordon has completed recently. He was able to share some of the charts that show how ACPS is a low performer compared to other nearby districts. Additionally, from his research it shows that many of our subgroups are low performing on SATs. He will compile a briefing to be presented at the next meeting.

### **Wrap-Up:**

Memorandum will be modified and then brought to the next meeting for approval.

Questions will be finalized and sent to Clint. He will be attending our next meeting.

Meeting adjourned.