

MEMORANDUM

Date: June 15, 2011

To: Honorable Members of the Alexandria School Board
Superintendent Dr. Morton Sherman

From: Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee
Anne Marie Ardura, Chairman

Subject: Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee Report for 2010-2011

This report from the Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC) covers topics from our scope of work for the 2010-2011 year including: implementation and review of the 2006-2011 ACPS Local Plan for Gifted Education; TAG diversity; co/extra curricular activities; mentoring resources; open enrollment honors; twice exceptional; potential adoption of the International Baccalaureate program; and, revisions to ACPS Local Plan.

TAG LOCAL PLAN

Issue: The majority of goals outlined in the 2006-2011 TAG Local Plan have been successfully implemented. Work to improve identification and services for twice exceptional students is ongoing.

Analysis: TAGAC notes that the coordinator has completed the majority of goals outlined by the Local Plan. TAGAC members continue to hear concerns regarding less rigor and challenge in some open enrollment honors sections.

Parent Outreach: Ms. Gully worked with TAGAC to offer a parent workshop on March 26, 2011, at Minnie Howard campus. The program had sessions addressing choosing quality books, time management, depression/anxiety in the gifted and talented, and strategies for resilience. The workshop was a success; TAGAC plans to continue to offer a workshop each year.

CoGAT Screening: CoGAT screening of all second graders was successfully implemented in the 2009-'10 school year. Ms. Gully estimated that approximately 131 students, who may not have been referred, have been identified for TAG assessment as a result of the screening. While the large increase in referrals is positive, it has increased the number of hours necessary for testing, leaving much less time available for direct classroom monitoring. Ms. Gully was able to hire one contractor part-time to help with some of the testing.

Twice Exceptional: Improved identification and services remain a major unresolved

goal for ACPS. A formal policy for identification of and service delivery to twice exceptional students has not been completed by ACPS, as recommended in the May 2009 TAGAC Annual Report. A joint subcommittee of TAGAC and the Special Education Advisory Committee had completed a policy proposal which continues to be deferred for additional input from child study chairs.

Open Enrollment Honors: Parents, students, and teachers have raised concerns including increased inconsistency among sections of the same class, less rigorous standards in some classes, insufficient differentiation for TAG students, large honors classes, and the perception that students who are not keeping up are not being exited in a timely manner. The TAGAC submitted a memo in March 2010 which addressed these concerns and made recommendations. Mr. Gregory Hutchings, the new ACPS Director of Middle Schools noted several possible measures to ensure a challenging curriculum. He and Ms. Gully noted increased professional development classes on differentiation for teachers, routine visits to classes to observe instruction, and the importance of communication to students and parents the policies for open enrollment honors.

Recommendations:

The TAGAC recommends that the School Board:

- ◆ Monitor staff progress on the timely implementation of a twice exceptional policy for the 2011-2012 academic year.
- ◆ Monitor staff progress in conveying expectations to families concerning open enrollment honors, professional development classes on differentiation, and routine visits to classrooms to observe instruction.
- ◆ Consider the addition of staff (either full or part-time) to help Ms. Gully with the additional hours of testing resulting from the successful implementation of the CoGAT. This will free her to direct her expertise at teacher and classroom monitoring.

CO/EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Issue: The committee discussed additional support that TAGAC might provide to students interested in participating in extra curricular programs such as Odyssey of the Mind, Math Counts, and others. There were multiple teams entered in the OM competition from ACPS this year, with a high school team moving on to the state competition, which was hosted by TC Williams.

Analysis: Opportunities to significantly expand co/extra curricular activities are limited by budget constraints. Ms. Gully supported a team from Hammond MS; parents supported teams from elementary schools and TC Williams. No other outside activities were offered to TAG students.

Recommendations: TAGAC recommends further expansion of the Odyssey of the Mind program, Math Counts, and others via outreach and information sharing with parents.

MENTORING RESOURCES

Issue: All ACPS students could benefit greatly from an organized solicitation directly to ACPS parents, and Alexandria and DC Metro area businesses to cultivate mentoring, workplace shadowing, and internship opportunities.

Analysis: ACPS students live in an area with abundant workplace opportunities. Two TC Williams students have successfully completed a research lab experience. Improved access to information and opportunities will enable TAG students to benefit, as well as additional ACPS students.

Recommendation: The creation of a mentoring resources list/data base, which would be for the use of all ACPS students, could be made available through school counselors and on the ACPS website. Additional information on preparing applications, resume presentation, application deadlines, etc., could also be included.

TAG DIVERSITY

Issue: TAGAC continued to monitor the identification of underrepresented minorities for participation in the TAG pullout program as well as honors and Advanced Placement courses in middle and high school. This is an ongoing goal of TAGAC.

Analysis: The diversity of TAG identified students remains an area of serious concern. The implementation of universal CoGAT testing appears to be helping. Almost 40 students with characteristics of currently underrepresented populations were referred for additional testing after the February 2010 administration of the CoGAT.

Recommendations:

- ◆ Continue universal screening of 2nd graders with CoGAT and monitor progress in the area of TAG diversity.
- ◆ Support data driven models of success in raising minority participation in advanced classes and the TAG program.
- ◆ TAGAC strongly endorses the implementation of the Young Scholars Program.
- ◆ Low SES and poor preschool preparation have been identified in the literature as

primary components of the minority achievement gap in urban populations. TAGAC endorses increased ACPS participation in early years education and ACPS collaboration with the City of Alexandria to give every child access to a quality pre-K experience.

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM

Issue: ACPS plans to implement the IB Program, beginning at the elementary school level, then moving to middle and high school. Implementation of IB should meet goals outlined in the ACPS Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted and Talented.

Analysis: John Brown, PhD, the ACPS Supervisor of Curriculum Design, referred to many of the curriculum documents available on the ACPS website at: <http://www.acps.k12.va.us/curriculum/design/>. He discussed International Baccalaureate certification and the IB emphasis on rigor, individualized pacing, and hands-on application of course content. Commenting on his professional background in TAG education, Dr. Brown endorsed IB as more challenging and engaging for advanced learners.

Recommendation: TAGAC recommends that staff monitor the implementation of the IB Program for compliance with the ACPS Local Plan.

REVISION OF THE ACPS LOCAL PLAN

Issue: The current ACPS Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted expires June 30, 2011. Revisions to the current plan require drafting a plan, sharing it with the public, and obtaining School Board approval.

Analysis: Ms. Gully drafted a memo explaining the pros and cons of an extension of the current plan, to expire June 30, 2011. As the 2010-2011 school year is closing, this extension was approved by the School Board on June 9, 2011, and will delay approval of a new Local Plan by one year.

Recommendation: A draft revision of the 2006-2011 Local Plan should be completed early in 2012. This will allow adequate time for the TAGAC and the public to review the document, discuss potential changes, and seek School Board approval.