

Date: June 17, 2013

For ACTION

For INFORMATION

Board Agenda: Yes   
No

**FROM:** Adele Morris, Chair, Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee

**THROUGH:** GwenCarol Holmes, Ed.D., Chief Academic Officer  
Frances Donna Brearley, Talented and Gifted Coordinator

**THROUGH:** Morton Sherman, Ed.D, Superintendent of Schools

**TO:** The Honorable Karen Graf, Chairman, and Members of the Alexandria  
City School Board

**TOPIC:** 2012-2013 Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee Annual Report

**BACKGROUND:**

Virginia Regulations, 8VAC20, Chapter 40-60B, *Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted Students* require us to send you an annual report. This is our report for the 2012-13 school year.

This year the Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC) monitored the delivery of the Talented and Gifted (TAG) Local Plan (the Plan) that was adopted by the board in June 2012. We also served as a conduit for input from stakeholders in the parent and teacher community and within the committee itself. Our findings and recommendations below reflect that input.

Last year upon the adoption of the new Plan, the TAGAC expressed its view that the plan is a living document and recommended that it be reviewed and updated as needed throughout the five year cycle. Accordingly, we bring you two recommendations (numbers 1 and 8) that require amendments to the Plan, and one that requires a vote (number 7, participation in Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology). Most of our recommendations involve more consistent adherence to the existing Plan or adjustments in how ACPS deploys the Plan.

We commend ACPS for its recent investments in data systems. We hope to use this data to analyze the performance of the TAG program, including the identification process, student achievement, and professional development. This report includes an appendix that describes our plans to analyze some of this data to support of your TAG-related decisions.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Screening and Identification**

The TAGAC commends ACPS on the timely implementation of the new procedures to screen, refer, and identify TAG students. It is too soon to ascertain the effects of these new procedures,

so we aren't recommending any changes at this time. As data emerge, we will work with ACPS to see how the new procedures affect the identification of under-represented populations and students generally, the burden of the referral process on students and staff, and how the new assessment tools are working.

## **Delivery of Services**

### *Elementary School*

1. As we noted in a memo dated May 21, 2013, we understand from frustrated parents that Success for All (SFA) has not served TAG students well. Based on this input we believe that SFA schools should deliver TAG English services in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade the same way other schools do, in separate classes taught by TAG-endorsed teachers.

*We recommend that you amend the TAG Local Plan by striking the paragraph on p. 7 of the 2012-16 TAG Local Plan that makes an exception to this approach for SFA schools.*

2. We understand that a number of schools are not delivering both reading and writing instruction in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade TAG pull-out classes. Some schools deliver writing instruction in the home room, and some do not offer daily pull-out English instruction. This is inconsistent with the Plan.

*We recommend that ACPS administrators ensure that elementary school principals appropriately schedule and staff 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes such that TAG students receive both reading and writing in their daily separate classes with TAG endorsed teachers, per the Plan. We also recommend sufficient TAG staffing such that principals can comply with the Plan.*

3. Per the memo we sent to on February 27, 2013:

*We recommend that the Board staff TAG services in a formulaic manner, similar to the approach ACPS uses for ELL and special education students. ACPS should ensure the formula adequately staffs TAG services at all schools.*

### *Middle School*

At the middle school level, we commend ACPS for developing the new Honors curricula and for effectively clustering TAG-identified students in Honors classes in groups no smaller than about six students. The effort to schedule TAG students in groups appears successful.

However, we remain concerned about whether middle schools effectively serve TAG students. With your concurrence, we intend to take up the issue of TAG service delivery in middle school more fully in our scope of work for next year. In the interim, we have these specific recommendations for the coming year:

4. We understand that in at least some middle schools, despite the proper clustering of TAG students, teachers were not informed which students were TAG-identified. The Plan refers to these clusters extensively as a primary means by which TAG services are delivered in middle schools. We strongly believe teachers should be made aware of them.

*We recommend that ACPS administrators ensure that middle school principals inform teachers of the TAG-identified status of students and express their expectation for appropriate differentiation for TAG students.*

5. We have heard positive feedback on the Honors curricula as written, but we have heard from middle school parents that its deployment in the classroom is uneven. Some TAG students are still not receiving appropriate differentiation within the Honors classrooms.

*We recommend that ACPS amplify its efforts to deploy the Honors curriculum effectively in the classroom. We recommend that ACPS adopt quantified goals for expanded professional development to Honors teachers and monitor progress towards the goals. We also recommend that ACPS adopt strong prerequisites for admissions to Honors and more vigorous enforcement of existing policy for support and exit of under-performing students.*

6. Some advanced students, particularly rising TAG 7<sup>th</sup> graders who completed 7<sup>th</sup> grade Advanced Math Concepts in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, are prepared for more complex algebra applications and problem solving in Algebra 1. However, currently ACPS does not offer Honors Algebra 1 nor does the TAG Local Plan require clustering of TAG students outside Honors courses. Thus, there is no guarantee that TAG-identified Algebra 1 students have learning time with their TAG peers per state gifted education guidelines.

*We recommend that middle schools cluster students identified as TAG in math who are enrolled in Algebra 1 in groups no smaller than 6 (just as they do for Honors math classes). We also recommend that principals express their expectation that teachers will appropriately differentiate for those TAG students in Algebra 1 by offering enriched problem solving approaches.*

### *High School*

7. As you know, ACPS has the option to participate in Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology. We believe this outstanding resource should be available to students in the City of Alexandria, just as it is to students in all the surrounding jurisdictions. The unparalleled science, technology, engineering, and math curriculum, along with the opportunities for research in advanced laboratories with professional mentors, cannot be duplicated at a typical high school.

*We recommend that you approve full ACPS participation in TJHSST starting in the 2014-15 academic year.*

### **Community Outreach**

We drafted a brochure for parents about the TAG program, and we understand it is currently with the ACPS Communications team.

8. We recommend that ACPS complete the brochure as soon as possible, translate it into Spanish (and other languages as appropriate), and distribute it widely.

### **Recommended Technical Amendment to the TAG Local Plan**

9. The Plan is inconsistent in its references to the specific academic area of English. In several places, the Plan refers instead to “language arts” and “reading.” This can lead to confusion over whether TAG services include both reading and writing instruction.

We recommend that all references in the Plan to “language arts” and “reading” as areas of identification and instruction be changed to “English.” This change will avoid confusion and make the Plan consistent with terminology in Virginia Regulations, 8VAC20, Chapter 40-60B, *Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted Student*.

**IMPACT:**

Adopting these recommendations will strengthen the delivery of services to highly able students, promote adherence to the Board’s policy as expressed in the Plan, and make the Plan more consistent with Virginia regulations.

**CONTACT PERSON:** Adele Morris, 703-461-8292

## **Appendix: Proposed Data Collection for TAGAC Annual Report**

The TAG Advisory Committee spent much of this year exploring how we can collect and analyze data that will provide the School Board with the information it needs to make informed policy decisions. In addition to the narratives and recommendations in the annual report above, the TAGAC intends to collect and report the information described below.

In the coming weeks, we will gather the data from the 2012-13 year which will serve as our baseline and help inform our work as a committee for the 2013-14 year. Our plan is for each Annual Report going forward to provide this same data to show year-to-year changes. This will help us effectively report on the achievements and ongoing challenges in ACPS TAG education and directly tie in with our recommendations to the School Board.

### **1. IDENTIFICATION OF TAG STUDENTS**

Data group is First graders, and we plan a comparison of this year and previous years' identification rates.

#### **Table 1**

##### **Number of children referred by teachers**

Show total number and also demographic breakdown. Show as number and also as percentage of total overall ACPS population.

Percentage change from previous year to this year.

#### **Table 2**

##### **Number of children referred by parents**

Show total number and also demographic breakdown. Show as number and also as percentage of total overall ACPS population.

Percentage change from previous year to this year.

#### **Table 3**

##### **Number of children ultimately identified**

Show total number and also demographic breakdown. Show as number and also as percentage of total overall ACPS population.

Percentage change from year to year.

#### ***What are we looking for?***

We hope to see an increase in referrals overall, and specifically an increase in teacher referrals. (The idea of teachers being "talent scouts" rather than having mostly parent referrals.) We also hope to see an increase in under-represented subgroups.

### **2. DELIVERY OF SERVICES**

Data group is 4th graders and 7th graders. We will assess academic growth in English and Math.

**Table 1**

**4th Grade TAG-Identified: 1st Quarter English to 3rd Quarter English**

Using SRI results

**Table 2**

**4th Grade TAG-Identified: 1st Quarter Math to 3rd Quarter Math**

Using SMI results

**Table 3**

**7th Grade: 1st Quarter English to 3rd Quarter English**

Using SRI results

**Table 4**

**7th Grade: 1st Quarter Math to 3rd Quarter Math**

Using SMI results

***What are we looking for?***

We are hoping to see that individual students make academic progress. Because they are functioning at a variety of above-grade levels, we need to determine that students are sufficiently challenged.

**3. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

REPORT FROM EACH SCHOOL (to be submitted by TAG-designee at each school).

- Overall Population of School
- Number of TAG-identified students
- Number of TAG certified teachers
- Number of teachers who have received some form of TAG training

***What are we looking for?***

Want to make sure that each school has adequate staffing for TAG

**4. PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SURVEYS**

*To be rolled out next year...*

**Survey 1: Identification Process**

To be made available online and also sent home to all families of 2nd graders, in different languages.

***What are we looking for?***

1. Were parents aware of the identification process
  2. How they received information
  3. For those that went through the process, what was their satisfaction with the communication and schedule of the process?
  4. Need demographic information, and also school location, to determine if there are certain groups or certain schools where we need to improve the parent-school communication related to TAG.
- Need to get a survey we think we work over multiple years, so we can compare results over a number of years going forward.

**Survey 2: Satisfaction Survey for currently identified TAG families**

Sent home with all TAG families, in all grades.

***What are we looking for?***

Consider a parent version and a student version?

Will use satisfaction survey from previous years, with minor revisions.

Need to collect demographic information, and also school location, to determine if there are certain demographic groups or certain locations with noticeably different results.