

Date: June 12, 2014

For ACTION _____

For INFORMATION X

Board Agenda: Yes _____
No _____

FROM: Ramee Gentry, Chair, Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC)

THROUGH: Frances Donna Brearley, Talented and Gifted Coordinator

THROUGH: Alvin Crawley, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

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

TOPIC: 2013-2014 Talented and Gifted Advisory 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 2013-14 school year.

The Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC) continues to monitor the delivery of the Talented and Gifted (TAG) Local Plan (the Plan) that was adopted by the Board in June 2012. We also serve 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.

TAGAC views the Plan as a living document and recommends that it be reviewed and updated as needed. In addition to changes to the Plan itself, TAGAC also examines the implementation of ACPS policy, both division-wide and school level, to insure that current practices align with and support the Plan. Our recommendations for this year do not require any amendments or revisions to the Local Plan, but rather suggest best practices that will insure more consistent adherence to the existing Plan.

We commend ACPS for its recent investments in data systems. We hope this data can be used to analyze the performance of the TAG program, including the identification process, student achievement, professional development, and community outreach. Similar to the 2012-13 Annual report, this report includes an analytical appendix. TAGAC will continue to advocate for regular reporting of metrics for TAG as data becomes available.

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Professional Development

TAGAC congratulates the teachers who recently completed their certification for Gifted Endorsement. We commend ACPS for providing this opportunity for professional development, and are pleased that a second cohort is now undergoing training.

We recommend that the School Board continue to support this and other types of professional development for gifted education in ACPS.

Screening and Identification

This marks the second full year of the new identification process as adopted in the 2012 TAG Local Plan. The Plan requires universal testing of all students in 1st and 3rd grade, with the goal of increasing teacher referral and also increasing the identification of underrepresented groups in the TAG program. We are pleased to note that the Board has received some reports that indicate a slight increase in TAG identification of underrepresented subgroups. As further data emerges, we will work with ACPS to see how the new procedures: affect the identification of underrepresented populations and students generally, the burden of the referral process on students and staff, and how the new assessment tools are working.

On an anecdotal level, the members of TAGAC have solicited feedback from families that have recently completed the identification process. Reports indicate that there is sometimes confusion over the appropriate staff contact for parents regarding identification and/or appeals, and also some confusion regarding the differences between General Intellectual Ability vs. Subject-Specific Academic Ability. As the current identification process is only completing its second year, such confusion is not unexpected. Fortunately ACPS staff and TAGAC have identified simple measures that should alleviate these issues. Going forward, TAGAC will continue to monitor the process and help identify achievements and areas for improvement.

Delivery of Services

Elementary School

Young Scholars

TAGAC supports the rollout of the Young Scholars program at Polk and Patrick Henry elementary schools. We believe it is an excellent opportunity to increase TAG identification and participation at schools with lower overall TAG identification, as well as to increase the participation of underrepresented subgroups in the TAG program.

Reading and Writing Instruction for 4th and 5th grade pull-out classes

We understand that a number of schools are not delivering both reading and writing instruction in the 4th and 5th grade TAG pull-out classes. Separate from SFA schools, some schools deliver writing instruction in the general education classroom, and some do not offer daily pull-out Language Arts instruction. This is inconsistent with the Plan.

We recommend that ACPS administrators ensure that elementary school principals schedule and staff 4th and 5th 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.

Staffing levels

One outcome of increased identification of students for TAG services is the need for additional TAG instructors. A staffing formula has recently been developed to appropriately allocate TAG instructors at each elementary school, but unfortunately cuts have been made between the proposed and final budget. As a result, ACPS is not expected to fully fund the anticipated need (based on formula).

We recommend that the Board fully staff TAG services reflected by the staffing formula developed this past year. Utilizing this method, the anticipated TAG need would be to add 2 additional FTEs beginning in 2014-15. This is the result of expanded services designed to address disproportionality. Expanded services include: more K-3 students in the General Intellectual Aptitude category, Young Scholars, and general increase in enrollment for Specific Subject Aptitude services.

Middle School

We appreciate ACPS's commitment to clustering of TAG-identified students in classes consistent with the Local Plan.

TAGAC thanks the School Board for adopting a plan for middle school transformation that specifically addresses the needs of TAG-identified students. The addition of a TAG resource teacher at each campus is a welcome expansion of services for our TAG-identified students in grades 6-8.

We recommend that the School Board instruct ACPS to provide regular progress reports on the rollout of the new middle school structure, and that these reports include information on the delivery of TAG services to identified students. We recommend that the School Board request feedback from all stakeholders in this process, including teachers, TAG-identified students, and their parents/guardians.

TAGAC also endorses the decision of ACPS to convene a committee in the fall to review student eligibility and supports in honors classes, and to recommend changes as needed to the Program of Studies.

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 prerequisites for admissions to honors courses and more vigorous enforcement of existing policy for support and (when appropriate) exit of under-performing students.

High School

The recent Board decision to decline participation in the Governor's School the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology makes it all the more vital that staffing and resources are provided at and/or through TC Williams to support our most academically advanced students.

TC Williams boast an impressive array of high level coursework, including numerous AP classes and unique electives that are often unavailable at smaller schools. In addition, a commitment to supporting

alternatives such as Dual Enrollment and online learning further increases our students' access to advanced courses.

We are pleased to report that staffs at both the Minnie Howard campus and TC Williams King Street campus have developed an effective implementation of the Acceleration Policy that provides an opportunity for academically advanced 9th graders to enroll in AP World History.

One barrier to offering advanced coursework to TAG students is the logistical challenge of having two high school campuses. Increasing transportation between the two campuses for both staff and students will alleviate this barrier. Another barrier is the challenge of scheduling classes. It can be difficult to create a section for a smaller group of students interested in a high-level specialized course, especially when those students are juggling more basic diploma requirements. Increasing alternative methods of fulfilling diploma requirements, such as summer school (both in-person and online) and the 25th Hour Health and Physical Education course, could help alleviate some of these barriers.

We recommend that the School Board allocate funds to ensure that sufficient staff and resources are available at the high school level to provide maximum flexibility and opportunity for high-achieving students seeking challenging coursework.

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: Ramee Gentry 703.899.2637

Appendix: Data Collection for ACPS Talented and Gifted Program

TAGAC applauds the School Board for its commitment to data-driven decision making for ACPS. TAGAC believes accurate and consistent collection of data on our students allows ACPS to determine areas of success and areas for improvement in our TAG program. Similar to last year we requested this type of data.

Attached to this report is data recently supplied by ACPS.

TAG Data Tables Updated w Table 5_05062014.pdf

TAGAC received this information on May 12, 2014, and as such is unable to include any commentary on the data in this year's Annual Report. We understand this type of data is typically "pulled" in late June of each year in order to prepare the required annual report to the state of Virginia on our division's gifted education services.

TAGAC would like to receive this type of data annually, with the understanding that the numbers will reflect TAG data as of June of each year. Going forward, our annual reports will include the data from the previous June. Thus our 2014-15 Annual Report will include information from June 2014. Annual Report for 2015-16 will include the numbers from June 2015, and so on.

In reviewing the TAG Data Tables provided by ACPS, the members of TAGAC expressed some concern that the format for Table 3 "TAG Identified Students by Race/Ethnicity" was potentially confusing or misleading.

TAGAC has attached a proposed revision to the format for Table 3 Alexandria City Public Schools: Spring 2014 TAG Identified Students by Race/Ethnicity Current version has three columns:

Race/Ethnicity	#TAG Identified	%TAG Students by Race/Ethnicity
----------------	-----------------	---------------------------------

TAGAC recommends a revised table with five columns:

Race/Ethnicity

of Enrolled Students

% of Enrolled Students

Identified TAG

% Identified TAG

Please see the draft table attached

Proposed revision to Table re TAG students by Race&Ethnicity.pdf

to see how this table would look at the results it shows. (Results compiled by TAGAC member and would need to be verified by Office of Accountability.)

In addition to this information, TAGAC recommends that ACPS insure it has the systems and record-keeping in place to collect the additional data outlined below. The Office of Accountability is scheduled to provide a formal report on TAG in the 2016-17 school year. In order for this report to be substantive, it must provide several years of data. While TAGAC recognizes that the Office of Accountability cannot currently provide a full report each year on all of the data

points listed below, we urge the Office of Accountability to insure that the data points identified (or similar ones) are being collected and can be accessed when the time comes to make their formal evaluation in 2016-17.

1. IDENTIFICATION OF TAG STUDENTS

Categories

Number of children referred by teachers

Number of children referred by parents

Number of children referred by testing

Number of children ultimately identified

For each category listed above:

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. If the results can also be broken down by schools, it will help ACPS identify schools that need additional supports to improve identification of TAG students.

2. DELIVERY OF SERVICES

One of the greatest challenges in evaluating a TAG program’s effectiveness is identifying measurable outcomes that will provide information on student academic growth. State assessment tests such as the SOLs are not an effective metric. SOLs are designed to evaluate if a student has achieved the minimum level of proficiency for their grade level. TAG-identified students are typically working far above that level, in many cases more than a full grade level above. The goal of any quality educational program should be to provide sufficient challenge for the student at whatever level they are at, and thereby promote academic growth. One potential metric could be SRIs and SMIs, though these instruments are designed to track progress of an individual rather than a group. There are perhaps alternative measurements outside of traditional standardized testing, such as transfer tasks, AP test scores, etc. TAGAC believes the formal TAG evaluation scheduled for 2016-17 should include information on student achievement, so we urge the Office of Accountability to consider what measurements could be used.

What are we looking for?

We are hoping to see that TAG 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

- Overall Population of School
- Number of TAG-identified students
- Number of teachers with Gifted Endorsement
- 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, and that schools are encouraging professional development of all teachers in the area of gifted education.

4. PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SURVEYS

Survey 1: Identification Process

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

What are we looking for?

1. Parent/guardian knowledge and understanding 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 will 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?

Could use satisfaction surveys 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.

CONTACT: Ramee Gentry 703.899.2637