

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Arlington School Board  
**FROM:** Gifted Services Advisory Committee (GSAC)  
**DATE:** October 26, 2016  
**SUBJECT:** 2016-17 Recommending Year Report

### Introduction

GSAC is pleased to present our 2016-2017 report. Our focus is on strengthening the Gifted Services program throughout all levels of Arlington Public Schools by improving differentiated instruction and the educational environment for all high-potential learners in APS. This year, we make three recommendations to improve the Gifted Services program and its consistent implementation throughout APS:

1. We recommend that APS middle schools provide intensified course offerings, open to all students, in all core subjects.
2. We recommend that APS add a Teacher Specialist staff position to the Office of Gifted Services.
3. We recommend that APS improve and increase consistency and uniformity of gifted services implementation across the county.

These three recommendations address the most pressing needs of gifted and high-potential students in APS, by ensuring that the pathways to appropriate instruction and differentiation exist from elementary school onward.

In middle school, many students need and want intensified courses in English Language Arts, Science and Social Studies, comparable to existing options in Math and World Languages. Providing these course options will allow students to access challenging instruction and better prepare them for advanced and accelerated offerings in high school.

By adding a Teacher Specialist, Gifted Services staff will be better able to serve the ever-increasing numbers of students in APS, and to integrate with and coordinate across other APS departments and individual schools.

Consistency and uniformity of gifted services, both in terms of identification and service delivery, will improve the overall experience and impact all students in APS. Our discussions with the parent community reflect the APS data that the identification and provision of gifted services is inconsistent from school to school and is heavily dependent on voluntary compliance with policy and practices by individual Principals. We recommend more rigor and accountability at the individual school level to ensure that all students in APS receive equal opportunity and access to gifted services.

Gifted Services impacts many students in every school in the county. The APS Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted (the "Local Plan"), page 6, states,

*“Gifted students are considered to be those with abilities and instructional needs that differ from their peers to a degree that differentiated educational opportunities and experiences must be provided to further develop their potential.”*

An increase in class offerings, more staff collaborating to offer challenging curriculum and innovative programming, and greater consistency of implementation of services benefits all students in the school system, regardless of gifted identification.

**I. Recommendation #1: Reinstate intensified class options in all core subjects in all middle schools.**

**2011 – 2017 Strategic Plan Alignment:**

**Goal One: Ensure that Every Student is Challenged and Engaged**

This recommendation ensures that every student has the opportunity to improve his or her level of challenge and engagement by selecting more intensified course instruction.

**Goal Two: Eliminate Achievement Gaps**

This recommendation allows students, with the help of their families, teachers and school counselors, to select more challenging instruction in middle school. Similar to APS's goal to have all students take at least one AP class in high school to prepare for college, having intensified classes available to all middle school students will help better prepare them for the challenge of high school.

**Goal Three: Recruit, Retain and Develop High-Quality Staff**

Teaching intensified courses challenges staff as well as students. It provides new opportunities for professional development.

**Goal Five: Meet the Needs of the Whole Child**

Challenging work provides social and emotional growth, as well as academic growth. Advanced learners thrive in peer groups. Their love of learning is reinforced when the material is appropriately customized and paced in an environment with like-minded peers. Their self-confidence and self-acceptance are enhanced by mastering challenging material.

***Rationale: APS Is Not Meeting the Needs of Gifted, High Ability, or High Potential Middle School Learners***

We continue to promote and advocate for more rigorous course work that prepares all students for college and career, especially in middle schools. Reinstating intensified class options in all core subjects in middle school is critical to ensure that all students have access and opportunity to engage in challenging and rigorous work.

It is important to understand what GSAC is envisioning for middle school intensified classes:

<u>What they are</u>	<u>What they are not</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Available to all</li><li>• Flexible, Open Enrollment</li><li>• Deeper dive/critical thinking</li><li>• Language Arts, Science, Social Studies</li><li>• A way to meet Whole Child needs of advanced learners</li><li>• A way to address equity issues<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– give more kids from under-represented populations an advanced academic experience</li><li>– improve consistency of service delivery across MS</li></ul></li><li>• A way to build capacity for and a smooth transition to HS</li><li>• A way for kids to explore interests in greater depth</li><li>• Delivered in the classroom during the school day</li><li>• A way to reduce teaching complexity</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Only for gifted kids</li><li>• Tons of homework</li><li>• Fixed track</li><li>• Sequential</li><li>• More stressful</li><li>• After-school enrichment</li></ul>

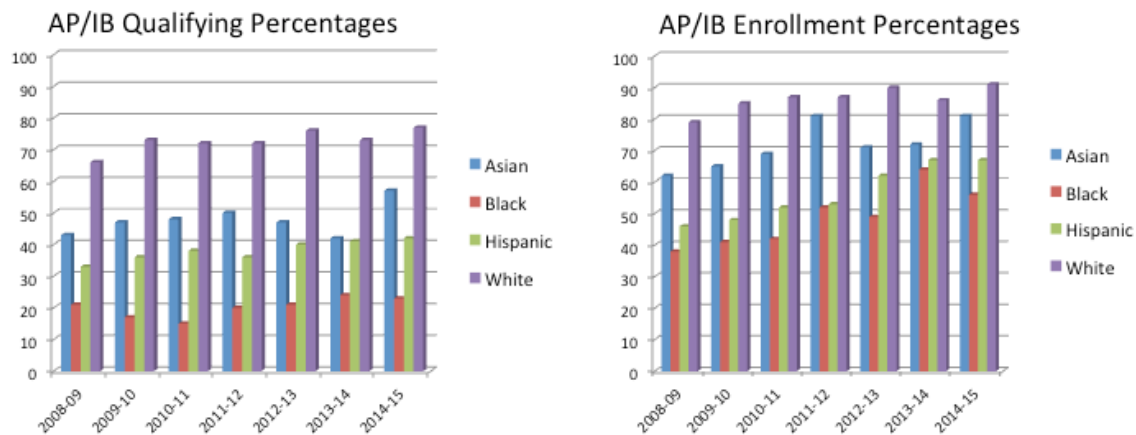
Unfortunately, for numerous reporting cycles, we have highlighted that our middle schools are not meeting the needs of a large swath of students, because APS does not offer intensified class options to our middle school students in subjects other than Math and World Languages. The lack of intensified courses in other core subjects in middle school has created an access and opportunity gap that leads to continued achievement gaps in high school.

The connection between the middle school access and opportunity gap having a detrimental impact on high school achievement is most notable in the AP/IB enrollment and qualifying exam rates over the past seven years. Our research includes staff, parent and student interviews, materials from APS, and a detailed study of the course offerings at the middle school level. Based on this research, we have observed that the middle schools eliminated advanced content classes (such as Honors and Intensified) a number of years ago. The removal of these intensified classes has had detrimental effects on our students' academic growth and morale.

Across seven years of data, we see a surprisingly consistent pattern of AP/IB enrollment and qualifying exams. Figure 1 shows that regardless of school year or student ethnicity/race, the pattern remains the same: Even though students are taking AP/IB courses in high school, not all students are achieving in those classes as shown by the AP/IB qualifying exam percentages. This pattern is especially marked for our Black and Hispanic students. For example, in the school year 2013-2014, Figure 1

shows that the enrollment rates for Black, Hispanic, and Asian students were about 60 - 65%. The qualifying exam rates for Black students were the lowest at 20%, while for Hispanic and Asian students, the rates hovered at around 40%. This is in comparison to white students in the same year, with enrollment rates at about 85% and qualifying exam rates at about 75%. While the patterns are the same (e.g. higher enrollment rates, lower qualifying exam rates), the difference is markedly lower for our students of color.

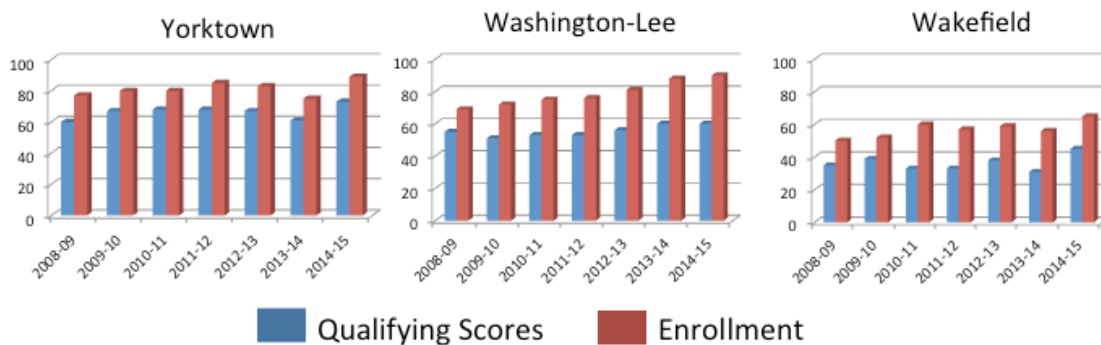
**Figure 1: AP/IB Enrollment Versus Qualifying Exam Rates by Race/Ethnicity**



Source: APS iDashboard

Figure 2 shows a similar pattern by high school. Across all three comprehensive high schools in Arlington, we see higher enrollment rates in AP/IB than qualifying exam rates. This discrepancy is most marked at Washington-Lee and Wakefield, where Washington-Lee serves a diverse student body of 31% economically disadvantaged, 10% Black, and 34% Hispanic, and Wakefield serves a diverse student body of 46% economically disadvantaged, 22% Black, and 44% Hispanic. (2015-16. Sources: <https://www.apsva.us/statistics/free-and-reduced-price-meals/>, <https://www.apsva.us/statistics/student-race/>).

**Figure 2: AP/IB Enrollment and Qualifying Exam Rates by High School**



Source: APS iDashboard

The discrepancy in AP/IB enrollment versus qualifying exam scores is a consistent trend across student race/ethnicity, across high schools, and across school years. Yet, this discrepancy is intensified among our students of color, and in our high schools with more diverse student bodies. Most importantly, with the removal of honors or intensified courses in the middle school years, we are seeing greater discrepancies in the AP/IB enrollment versus qualifying exams since 2009, especially at Washington-Lee and Wakefield. More students are enrolling in those programs, but a smaller percentage are passing each year. (See Figure 2). Clearly, offering intensified classes to 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students to prepare them for AP and IB courses is not enough to help students prepare for—and succeed in—AP and IB courses. This preparation must start earlier in middle school.

Middle school is a critical time to ameliorate the achievement gaps seen consistently in high school. Yet, with the elimination of intensified classes in middle school, we see an access and opportunity gap where middle school students are not being prepared for the rigors of high school classes. Interviews with parents across multiple years are consistent with the school performance data, where middle school and high school parents agree that students are not getting the rigorous course work and high expectations needed for success in high school.

Moreover, intensified classes can and should be open, flexible and respectful of the important developmental role of the middle school years. GSAC believes that middle school intensified classes must be open to ALL students, regardless of gifted identification, without restriction other than parent guidance and student interest. Courses should be flexible and not tracked, so that students can choose an intensified level one year, and return to the regular class the next year, as their interests shift over time. Students should be encouraged to follow their passions and explore different curricular areas. Intensified classes should include a greater depth of material and move at a faster pace, but should not be “more” work and especially not more homework. The idea is to offer a qualitatively different experience to any interested student to help them broaden their academic horizons and prepare for high school. GSAC is open to identifying these classes as something other than “intensified” if APS feels that another name would better capture the spirit of the classes.

But, regardless of what they are called, intensified classes must be made available in order to meet the needs of those students for whom the base level of instruction is inadequate. The benefits of intensified classes go well beyond those students who are already advanced academically. For the same reasons we offer intensified classes to 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students to prepare them for AP and IB courses, our middle school students should be encouraged to take intensified courses. The APS goal to have all high school students take at least one advanced-level class should extend to middle school, where all students should be encouraged to try at least one intensified class (and not just in Math or World Languages, but where ever their interests and talents lie). Re-instating intensified class options for all core subjects in middle school has the following benefits: 1) Low to no-cost, 2) Alignment with developmental growth, and 3) Consistent offerings with other school divisions.

**Benefit 1: Low to No-Cost.** In a time of increasing student enrollment and budget pressures to do more with less, offering intensified classes in middle school is a fiscally responsible solution to providing more options for more students. All of the resources for these classes already exist within our middle schools. The addition of the option of intensified classes does not change the number of teachers needed or increase the amount of seats needed in a building, because all those students are already taking English, Social Studies and Science. It is just a matter of allowing students to make the choice to opt-in to an intensified class, and then configuring the schedule to create those classes, reassigning teachers and students to those classes, exactly the way that schools already schedule the many middle school Math and World Language options.

**Benefit 2: Alignment with Developmental Growth.** Arlington’s middle school philosophy of general education for all is out of step with the recommendations of national leaders in education. For example, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), in its Position Statement “Meeting the Needs of High Ability and High Potential Learners in the Middle Grades”, finds that the age span of “10-15 is a time of exceptional intellectual ability growth for many students.”<sup>i</sup> Changes can be “rapid and uneven” in students who may be awakening to their intellectual potential.<sup>ii</sup> This sensitive time in such students’ education should not be one during which they are continually taught SOL basics until their mastery is beyond certain; these students should be allowed to reach beyond to achieve far greater intellectual challenges. This concern applies to many academically-inclined APS students and is not confined to the gifted population. To take advantage of this time of “intellectual potential”, we need engaging and challenging curriculum and differentiated instruction. NAGC explains the reasoning for a rich and deep middle school curriculum: “Equity in the middle grades requires that all learners have an opportunity to participate in curriculum that is rich in meaning and focused on thought and application. Excellence requires support necessary to show continual growth in knowledge, understanding and skill.”<sup>iii</sup> In the best educational environment, middle school learners do not learn below their level, or at their level, but should consistently be challenged a level *beyond* their particular “readiness level.”<sup>iv</sup> In NAGC’s “Call to Action” bullet point 6, NAGC directs district and school leaders to “ensure a continuum of services including options such as differentiation, advanced classes, acceleration, short term seminars, independent seminars, mentorships and other learning opportunities.”<sup>v</sup>

**Benefit 3: Consistent Offerings with Other School Divisions.** Further, Arlington’s middle school offerings are limited and inadequate when compared to other Virginia jurisdictions. Even counties that spend less than half of Arlington’s per-pupil costs are able to provide intensified or honors Science, Social Studies and English Language Arts classes for their middle school students. See the Appendix for details on middle school offerings in other jurisdictions.

It is evident that Arlington’s middle school format does not fit the current needs of the Arlington student population. Middle school is the bridge to high school, and it is difficult for many parents, students, and this committee to understand why APS has

implemented a system that provides so few educational choices to our middle school students. It is unclear why APS refuses to implement a low-cost solution for middle school which would benefit many students, increase equity in our system, and help reduce the achievement gap.

**Budgetary Implications: None**

This recommendation creates middle school course pathways for core subjects, and adjusts existing schedules to offer open-enrollment intensified classes.

**Committee vote: Unanimous**

**Recommendation #2: Add a full-time Teacher Specialist in the Gifted Services Office.**

**2011 – 2017 Strategic Plan Alignment:**

**Goal One: Ensure that Every Student is Challenged and Engaged**

This recommendation ensures that each student has the opportunity to improve his or her level of challenge and engagement by having better access to the programming and support provided by the Gifted Services Office.

**Goal Two: Eliminate Achievement Gaps**

One of the most important functions of the Gifted Services Office is to integrate with other APS offices to reach some of the most culturally diverse and economically disadvantaged students in the county. Increasing staffing in the Gifted Services Office will facilitate an increase in that targeted and collaborative work.

**Goal Three: Recruit, Retain and Develop High-Quality Staff**

Gifted Services works to train and mentor RTGs and classroom teachers across the county. Additional staff will allow an increase in the professional development offered through Festival of the Mind and other programs to teaching staff.

**Goal Five: Meet the Needs of the Whole Child**

Challenging work provides social and emotional growth, as well as academic growth. Self-confidence and self-acceptance are enhanced by mastering challenging material. Additional support from the Gifted Services Office will enhance and expand the opportunities for students to engage with challenging material and to experience the social and emotional benefits of appropriately-challenging academic work.

***Rationale: APS' increasing student population has increased the demand for Gifted Services support beyond the capacity of current staffing levels.***

The number of identified students in APS has increased and continues to increase due to Arlington's overall student growth. The Gifted Services Office currently supports approximately 4885 students. Last year, 28% of all APS students grades 5-12 were identified as gifted. Currently, only one staff member, the Supervisor of Gifted Services, Cheryl McCullough, supports this entire population. As such, GSAC recommends that APS add a full-time Teacher Specialist position in the Gifted Services Office to support the work of the office and enable the office to maximize its support for Resource

Teachers for the Gifted in APS schools across the county and integrate with other programmatic services, such as ESOL/HILT, Title I, and Special Education.

Though Gifted Services operates with only one staff member, nearly all of the APS programs, except for one, Library Services, operate with two or more staff members to provide programmatic support. APS programs with two or more staff include, for example, English Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, ESOL/HILT, Special Education, Mental Health, Arlington Tiered System of Support, Minority Achievement and STEM.

GSAC understands that the estimated cost of the proposed FTE is approximately \$91,000. However, we believe that this additional position to the Gifted Services Office is integral to maximizing the services offered to APS students. In the long-run, this a small cost compared to the expected increased efficiency and maximization of the programmatic goals achieved by the additional staff member. Adding a full-time Teacher Specialist in GSO has the following benefits: 1) Increase collaboration and efficiency across APS, and 2) Reflect the growing student population and needs.

**Benefit 1: Increase Collaboration and Efficiency across APS.** One of the many tasks currently undertaken by Ms. McCullough is collaborative work with other APS departments to increase the numbers of students from under-represented populations identified as gifted and reach all APS students with innovative programming and quality curriculum. GSAC envisions that the added Teacher Specialist position would be critical to expanding the collaborative role of the Gifted Services Office throughout APS. For example, Gifted Services and Title 1 successfully introduced the Young Scholars program at Drew Model School, and expanded it to Randolph this year, as well as Barcroft during intercession. We would like to see this program expanded to additional elementary and middle schools next year. This summer, Gifted Services worked with Social Studies to offer new Middle School Summer School enrichment options, which were very well received. Gifted Services also totally revamped the Summer Laureate program last year, with an exciting emphasis on STEM and project-based learning. With additional manpower, Gifted Services could engage in more collaborative projects like these, reaching more students across the county. Further, an added Teacher Specialist position would allow increased collaboration between Gifted Services and the Office of Special Education. This increased integration would further APS's stated mission to meet the unique needs of twice exceptional (2e) students by ensuring appropriate services and access to rigorous coursework.

**Benefit 2: Reflect the Growing Student Population and Needs.** In addition, the sheer number of responsibilities of the Gifted Services office requires additional staffing. Ms. McCullough is responsible for, among other things: serving as an advocate for gifted students through collaborative work with other APS departments; working with curriculum and program supervisors to develop and select materials for gifted learners; create and manage adherence to the Local Plan for the Gifted; working with administration and teachers in all schools in a variety of ways to include presentations about curriculum for gifted learners, characteristics of gifted learners from diverse



populations, eligibility processes and classroom observations; ongoing training and professional development for RTGs and classroom teachers across the county; and many more. A full listing of current responsibilities is provided in the Appendix. Needless to say, this is a huge expectation for one person to engage in all of these tasks on behalf of almost 30% of the student population. Given the broad reach and depth of Gifted Services' involvement in so many aspects of APS, the office should add at least one additional staff position to facilitate this work.

**Budgetary Implications: \$91,130**

This recommendation adds one FTE position at an approximate salary and benefits cost of \$91,130.

**Committee vote: Unanimous**

**III. Recommendation #3: Improve and increase consistency and uniformity of gifted services implementation across the county.**

**2011 – 2017 Strategic Plan Alignment:**

**Goal One: Ensure that Every Student is Challenged and Engaged**

This recommendation ensures that every student has access to a challenging and engaging experience through gifted services, regardless of the school attended.

**Goal Two: Eliminate Achievement Gaps**

This recommendation calls for consistent implementation of identification of and service delivery to gifted students regardless of school, thus providing for an equitable experience for all racial and socio-economic groups.

**Goal Five: Meet the Needs of the Whole Child**

Challenging work provides social and emotional growth, as well as academic growth. Advanced learners thrive in peer groups. A standard implementation of gifted identification and services will better support the advanced learners who are currently under-identified or under-served due to inconsistencies in the current system.

**Rationale: *All Gifted Students Deserve the Same Opportunities to Access Gifted Services, Regardless of Which School They Attend.***

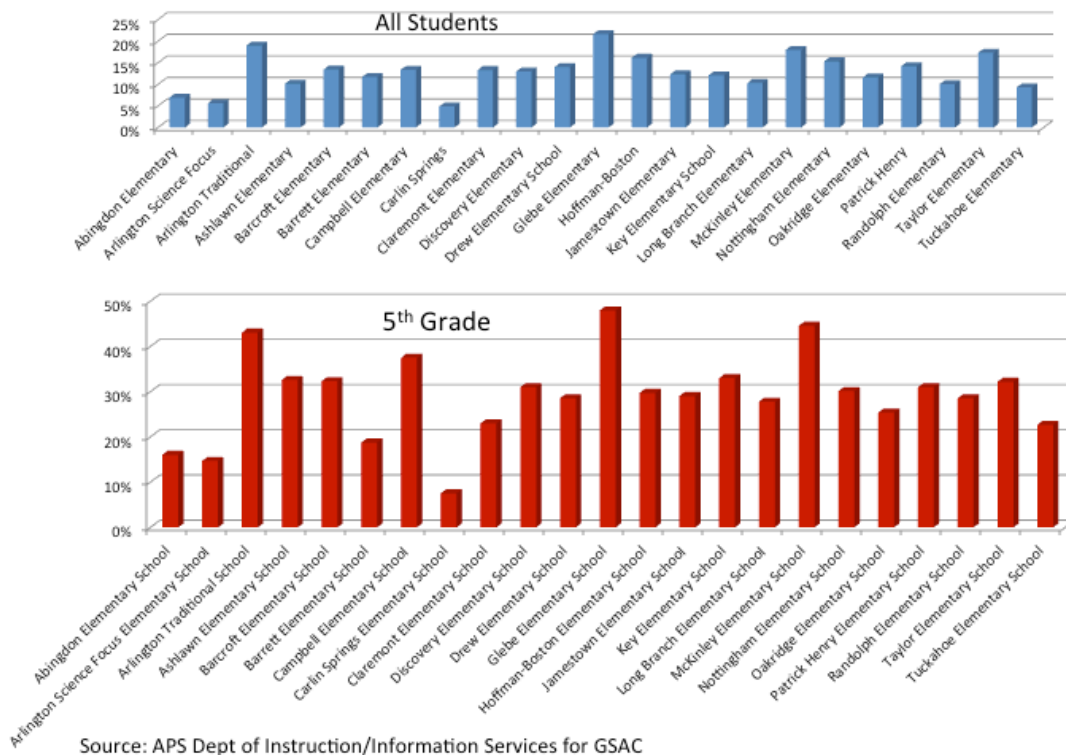
Consistent feedback to GSAC from parents across the county is that gifted identification and delivery of services is inconsistent and an individual student's experience is highly dependent on the school he or she attends.

On average, one in three students are identified as gifted in APS, yet this ranges widely by school. Examining closely the elementary schools (See Figure 3), there is a discrepancy among APS elementary schools in the number of students identified as gifted. For example, across all grades, gifted identification ranges from a low of one out of 20 students (5 percent) to a high of one out of five (20 percent). This disparity stems

from the widely unequal implementation of gifted identification in the elementary schools.

The same types of inequities are apparent on a grade level breakdown at the elementary level. Identification of second graders ranges from zero at two schools to over a quarter of the class at one school. By fifth grade, identification ranges from 7.5 percent to over 43 percent of the class at three schools.

**Figure 3: Discrepancy of Gifted Services Identification by Elementary School**



Source: APS Dept of Instruction/Information Services for GSAC

In addition to the great variability in identification among schools, over the past two years, APS has changed from a “pull-out” model for service delivery (students who are identified as gifted are pulled out from the regular classroom for once-weekly sessions with the RTG in their area(s) of identification), to a “push-in” model ( the RTG works with the classroom teacher to provide differentiated instruction and increased depth and complexity to students during regular classroom instruction). There are several advantages to this change when implemented correctly and with fidelity. First, gifted students receive appropriate instruction all the time, across all subjects, rather than in one or two short weekly sessions. Second, the push-in model eliminates additional transitions from the school day, which create disruptions for all students. Finally, all students in the class benefit from the enriched environment created by the additional depth and complexity introduced into the curriculum by the RTG.

For our twice-exceptional students – those with a learning disability and a gifted

identification, the push-in model works extremely well. The transitions associated with the pull-out model can be particularly challenging for twice-exceptional students, as the student can require several minutes up to the entire pull-out session to regulate him/herself enough to attend to instruction. Then s/he must transition back to the general classroom and the process starts all over again. In addition, push-in is also easier on 2E students as their services and accommodations are available, where the pull-out model often causes the 2E students to endure that time without their accommodations.

The great variability in gifted services identification, coupled with changes to the service delivery model, has highlighted several interrelated concerns. The first concern is the fidelity of implementation of the push-in model. The push-in model highlights additional concerns, enumerated below.

First, in our interviews with parents, we find that the push-in policy is not complete across the county, and, even where it has been implemented, students are still not receiving adequate gifted services. RTGs in a number of elementary schools continue to provide services by pulling students out, rather than pushing in to the classroom and supporting the classroom teachers in providing depth and complexity for all students. Parents also report occasional pull-out instruction in middle schools, a practice which reduces the time available for the RTG to support and collaborate with classroom teachers, and which further perpetuates the perception by parents and students and classroom teachers that gifted services are only delivered in a pull-out model.

The push-in model has three key elements for proper and full implementation and delivery of the model:

- Students identified as gifted should be clustered in groups of at least 5-8.
- The classroom teacher must have current training in working with the gifted.
- The classroom teacher must provide differentiated instruction for gifted students.

Second, we find that students are not appropriately clustered for differentiated instruction within the general education classroom. Even in schools that have primarily transitioned to the push-in model, clustering with trained teachers is not consistently happening across the county. RTGs in many elementary and middle schools report that students are, at best, only partially clustered, and are not necessarily with a classroom teacher who is trained and capable of providing differentiated instruction for advanced learners.

Differentiated instruction through clustering only works when the students' ability groupings are few and closely aligned. Teachers continue to report that too many ability groupings in the same classroom make effective differentiation impossible. This is especially true in middle school. Ability groupings need to be flexible and varied by academic subject so that they do not become de facto tracking. But if APS does not manage clustering by the appropriate use of ability grouping, effective differentiation is difficult or impossible.

Furthermore, students cannot access the proven benefits of interacting with academic peers if they are not clustered appropriately. Interaction with intellectual peers is essential for both the academic growth and the social and emotional health of gifted students. If gifted students are not properly clustered, they cannot form those connections and peer groups.

Third, in situations where a classroom teacher is not trained in gifted curriculum or does not provide differentiated instruction, students do not receive gifted services. Given that there is only one RTG teacher per school, the push-in model requires much coordination, co-planning, and supports to teachers. The classroom teacher is responsible for instruction in the classroom, even though they are often not trained in gifted education. For proper implementation of the push-in model, teachers must have current and on-going training in working with diverse and advanced learners.

Fourth, classroom teachers must provide differentiation, including to gifted students. Even when the push-in model is executed correctly, it has been more difficult for parents and students to know whether students are receiving gifted services as neither school work nor homework are identified as differentiated. While we understand why daily class work may not be flagged as such, many parents have expressed a concern that when pull-outs stopped, gifted services were no longer offered, or that the child had been removed from gifted services. These concerns highlight the need for robust, detailed communication about differentiated instruction from the classroom teachers and RTGs to parents. There is currently only one mechanism, the Differentiated Progress Report Form, which is supposed to go home with each report card in elementary school. The adoption of this form has been slow and inconsistent, and parents typically do not understand it.

GSAC commends APS for changes to the gifted service identification, such as the use of universal assessments in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and service delivery, through the provision of a full-time RTG at each school. The natural next-step is to focus on consistency of service delivery. Improving and increasing consistency and uniformity of implementation across APS has the following benefits: 1) Improved communication, 2) accountability of Principals, 3) Differentiated instruction to enrich the classroom environment for all students, and 4) Equity in identification that leads to equity in access and opportunity.

**Benefit 1: Improved Communication.** The push-in model of delivery offers an opportunity for all teachers with gifted students to provide detailed, frequent communications to parents about differentiated instruction. These mechanisms of communication already exist at APS, such as through the Differentiated Progress Report Form. While the form needs to be reworked based on parent feedback, the use of the form will greatly improve communication between teachers, RTGs, and parents. Best practices for teacher communication already exists. For example, many elementary school teachers send a daily or weekly email or update a classroom blog regarding the week's activities. All instances of differentiated instruction should be

highlighted in this communication. Schools must be proactive both in providing gifted services and communicating those services and results to parents.

**Benefit 2: Accountability of Principals.** Principals play a critical role in the implementation of the push-in model. RTGs report directly to their school's Principal, and lack of support and accountability at the Principal level has resulted in the incomplete adoption of the push-in model. Also, each school's Principal is responsible for ensuring that proper clustering exists, but a number of elementary and middle school Principals are not demonstrating a commitment to doing so. Principals must be held accountable for ensuring that their schools are providing gifted services in accordance with current APS policies.

**Benefit 3: Differentiated Instruction to Enrich All Students.** Consistently implementing the push-in model greatly helps classrooms to differentiate instruction, which enriches all students. High-quality curriculum with opportunities for accessing material with increased depth and complexity is good for all students. "Gifted" curriculum such as the William and Mary Literature units or Document Based Questions in Social Studies are outstanding materials widely used across APS. Curriculum that allows students to engage on many levels meets students where they are and can help all students to enhance their critical thinking and analysis skills.

**Benefit 4: Equity in identification that leads to equity in access and opportunity.** We recommend that APS improve efforts to uniformly identify gifted students by more consistently following APS policies and implementing them uniformly across the county. This could improve access to gifted identification for students in historically low-identifying schools. Since most identification happens at the elementary school level, students missed early on in the process may be at a disadvantage for accessing services in middle or high school

We know that adequate service delivery can be achieved with the current model, because there are a handful of schools doing it well. However, most are not. The resulting inequity in service delivery exacerbates the achievement gap. Privileged parents often provide enrichment outside of school but that is no substitute for in-classroom learning. Less fortunate gifted children continue to be at a disadvantage. Given that as many as thirty percent of students are identified gifted -- not including other high-achieving advanced learners who are not identified -- the lack of priority in serving these children is astonishing. Although it starts in elementary school, this problem is most acute in middle school. In high school, advanced class variety improves and gifted students finally begin to be challenged.

#### **Budgetary Implications: None**

This recommendation requires accountability from Principals to ensure consistency in identification and gifted services delivery. APS should improve upon current practices by consistently clustering gifted students per policy and by assigned these clusters to qualified teachers. The Superintendent should require accountability from Principals

through mandatory reporting on gifted clustering, teacher training and adherence to identification processes. None of these recommendations require any monetary expenditures. There are possible budgetary implications if more training is provided or required in order to place gifted clusters with trained and qualified teachers.

**Committee vote: Unanimous**

**Past Recommendation #1: APS will provide intensified class options in all core subjects at the middle and high school levels.**

**Status: Current (2016-17) Recommendation #1**  
**2011 – 2017 Strategic Plan Alignment: see Recommendation #1 above**  
**Budgetary Implications: none**  
**ACI Vote: 18 yes, 1 no, 4 abstentions**

Despite detailed follow up conversations with all school board members and the Superintendent, there has been no movement on this recommendation. In May, the Superintendent assured many frustrated parents via email that a committee with parent representation would be formed to review the middle school program of studies to discuss the inclusion of intensified courses in all core subjects. To date, this has not occurred. We understand delays were due in part to staff turnover in the Department of Instruction. We look forward to continuing joint efforts to move this issue forward.

**Past Recommendation #2: Provide Full-time RTGs in all Elementary Schools.**

**Status: Implemented Fall 2016**

GSAC is extremely pleased that the 2016-2017 budget recognized the need for full-time RTGs at all elementary schools, regardless of size, and funded full-time positions at all APS elementary schools. We are gratified to note that the budget recognized that adding full-time RTGs serves at least two critical functions. First, it is an integral part of ensuring that APS is providing adequate differentiation in instruction, and thus meeting the needs of all APS students. Second, as we explained last year, it is an important part of closing the achievement gap. We congratulate the School Board for taking this important action for APS students.

**Past Recommendation #3: Augment and Improve Scheduling of Advanced Class Options in High School.**

**Status: No action taken.**

**2011 – 2017 Strategic Plan Alignment:**

**Goal One: Ensure that Every Student is Challenged and Engaged**

This recommendation ensures that each student has the opportunity to increase his or her level of challenge and engagement by selecting more intensified course instruction.

**Goal Three: Recruit, Retain and Develop High-Quality Staff**

Teaching advanced courses challenges staff as well as students. It provides new opportunities for professional development.

**Goal Five: Meet the Needs of the Whole Child**

Challenging work provides social and emotional growth, as well as academic growth. Advanced learners thrive in peer groups. Students' love of learning is reinforced when the material is appropriately customized and paced. Students' self-confidence and self-acceptance are enhanced by mastering challenging material.

**Budgetary Implications: None**

**ACI Vote:** 19 yes, 0 no, 4 abstentions

There has been no movement on this recommendation. This recommendation reflects two problems with the quantity of advanced or intensified classes at the high school level. First, there are a number of students who are unable to take the advanced classes they want due to scheduling difficulties. If more advanced classes were offered, those scheduling difficulties would be mitigated. Second, a number of students would like the option to take intensified courses instead of general education or AP or IB classes. For example, a student might choose an intensified class in an area that is not a student's strongest subject, but they still want more challenge than is offered in the general education class. Or, a student might be trying to balance their schedule and not take more than 2 or 3 AP or IB classes in a semester but still want the challenge offered by something beyond general education. Given the growing concern in our community about the stress levels of our students, providing more course options that students could take instead of AP/IB seems like a logical step forward.

**Past Recommendation #4: Accurately Measure Gifted Student Progress.**

**Status: No action taken.**

**2011 – 2017 Strategic Plan Alignment:****Goal One: Ensure that Every Student is Challenged and Engaged**

To understand the extent of student progress, it is essential to accurately assess student knowledge at the beginning and end of the school year. We cannot challenge and engage students if we are teaching them what they already know.

**Goal Five: Meet the Needs of the Whole Child**

Challenging work provides social and emotional growth, as well as academic growth. Self-confidence and self-acceptance are enhanced by mastering challenging material

There has been no movement on this recommendation. For many years, GSAC has reported on the failure of APS to accurately and objectively measure student progress. Because the Standards of Learning and similar tests are often capped far below the level at which gifted and highly able students are functioning, they are not useful for assessing the progress of those students. The key to success is to develop a set of measures for different subjects and grades that together allow teachers to quickly determine students' starting points and also help teachers develop strategies for consistently challenging each student. If we can't effectively measure student progress,

we simply have no way to determine whether the strategic plan's goal of challenging all students is being met. Today there is no way to show a year's worth of academic progress for advanced learners.

As the Council of Exceptional Children-The Association for the Gifted (CEC-TAG) stated in its position paper on "Growth in Achievement of Advanced Students": "Schools need to measure above grade-level achievement in order to document advanced student growth." <sup>vi</sup>

**Budgetary Implications: None**

**ACI Vote:** 19 yes, 1 no, 3 abstentions

**Committee members:**

Beth Dowd, Co-Chair  
Meredith Purple, Co-Chair

Dedra Curteman  
Dan Corcoran  
Karen Freeman  
Yun Kang  
Whytni Kernodle  
Wesley Joe  
Elaine Maag  
Wendy Pizer  
Ryoko Reed  
Cynthia Torg  
Nick Walkosak  
Samara Goodman Weilenmann

We remain grateful to Cheryl McCullough, APS Supervisor of Gifted Services and the Committee's staff liaison, for her assistance with our efforts in support of APS Gifted Services.



## Appendix

GSAC reviewed offerings from other Virginia counties and find the data instructive because out of eight randomly chosen counties only one – the City of Roanoke – offered fewer intensive options than Arlington. Not only do the obvious districts – such as Fairfax – offer greater variety, but other districts with *dramatically lower levels of resources* have more varied offerings. Lee County, for example, which has a median household income of 30 percent below the poverty level and half the spending of Arlington per student, manages to offer intensified Science, English and Language Arts classes in middle school.

School System	Advanced English	Advanced Math	Advanced Science	Advanced LA	2011 Spending Per Student (FEBP)[1]
Virginia Beach[2]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$10,813
Fairfax	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$13,593
Lee County[3]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$8,290
City of Norfolk[4]	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	\$11,176
Fauquier County[5]	No	Yes	No	Yes	\$10,657
Stafford County[6]	No	Yes	No	No	\$8,467
Orange County[7]	No	Yes	No	No	\$7,544
Arlington[8]	No	Yes	No	No	\$20,162
City of Roanoke[9]	No	No	No	No	\$11,504

\*via magnet school

[1] Spending data from <http://febp.newamerica.net/>

[2] <http://www.vbschools.com/curriculum/middle/>

[3] <http://curriculum.leeschools.net/Academic%20Plans/ap.htm>

[4] <http://departments.nps.k12.va.us/oar/services/young-scholars/>

[5] <http://www.fcps1.org/education/page/download.php?fileinfo=TVNfUE9TXzlwMTQzM>

[6] <http://stafford.schoolfusion.us/modules/cms/pages.phtml?pageid=59627>

[7] <http://ocps-internet.ocss-va.org/curriculum/SitePages/Home.aspx>

[8] <http://www.apsva.us/Page/25020>

[9] <http://rcps.schoolfusion.us/>

## Current Responsibilities: Supervisor, Gifted Services

- Serve as an advocate for identified gifted students through collaborative work within the Department of Instruction in areas of county-wide focus such as Professional Learning Communities, Arlington Tiered System of Support, Personalized Learning Initiatives, Festival of the Mind, etc.
- Work collaboratively and manage the creation and adherence to the Local Plan for the Gifted every five years
- Work collaboratively with core curriculum and program supervisors in the development and selection of research based materials written for gifted learners
- Work collaboratively with administration and teachers in all schools in a variety of ways to include presentations about curriculum for gifted learners, characteristics of gifted learners from diverse populations; eligibility process, classroom observations, etc.
- Work collaboratively with the Office of Human Resources and principals to recruit, screen and interview candidates for RTG positions;
- Work collaboratively with the Title 1 Office to start Young Scholars Model in 2015-2016 and expand to more schools each year beginning in 2016-2017
- Work collaboratively with the Office of Minority Achievement to advocate for students from underrepresented groups who have been historically underrepresented in gifted services
- Work collaboratively with the Office of ESOL/HILT to advocate for gifted ELs
- Work collaboratively with the Office of Special Education to advocate for the needs of 2e learners; serve as co-chair of the APS 2e (twice exceptional) committee to raise awareness and expand services for 2e learners; develop and present to various groups about 2e and appropriate accommodations
- Work collaboratively with the Office of Planning and Evaluation on the mass screening of Naglieri (NNAT-2) and Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) in the development of training materials for school teams to use the data effectively and presentations to ITCs
- Work collaboratively with the Office of Planning and Evaluation (OPE) on Gifted Services Program Evaluation
- Work collaboratively with the OPE to strengthen Synergy as a source of needed data for the Gifted Service office and RTGs at each school
- Manage identification and cluster data from Synergy for schools
- Work collaboratively with the Office of Human Resources to support the gifted cohort to include cohort interviews, supporting teachers taking the graduate courses, working with UVA on appropriate classes for each member, etc.
- Work collaboratively with the Fine Arts office on the identification of gifted students in art and music and differentiation strategies for fine arts teachers
- Work collaboratively with the Gifted Services Advisory Committee

- Ongoing facilitation and training of K-12 RTGS and classroom teachers in curriculum written for gifted learners
- Provide ongoing support and training to RTGs as they implement the collaborative model and ongoing support for the RTG in working with teachers on the daily delivery of differentiated curriculum written for gifted learners
- Facilitate and train RTGs in the identification of gifted students, including underserved populations and all other aspects of their supportive role to teachers and students
- Provide ongoing support for the new RTGs
- Facilitate and/or support in-school and countywide staff development options on gifted education topics
- Support mastery and extensions for ATSS that add depth and complexity to the program of students in all curriculum areas at a pace and depth appropriate for gifted learners
- Conduct training and provide leadership to staff of RTGs in best practices in instructional coaching to facilitate support with teachers on ways to differentiate curriculum, support instructional needs of classroom teachers, and meet individual needs of gifted students and their families
- Lead, support and manage creation of Collaborative Books and/or Resources Studies to support school-based professional development at each school site based on staff needs
- Present to various parent advisory groups as an advocate for gifted learners (current Supervisor has presented to the following ACI committees: Early Childhood, Minority Achievement, Fine Arts, ESOL/HILT, Mathematics)
- Communicate to the school community about gifted services at the schools through the Gifted Services webpage, Cluster Teacher webpage, opportunities throughout the year and summer opportunities, emails and/or phone calls to parents
- Write, manage, and update Gifted Services Web pages and APS staff Gifted Services Blackboard and Google site
- Coordinate, monitor, assess, and evaluate summer programs related to gifted services including Summer Laureate, Superintendent's Seminar, and Young Scholars Summer School; Work collaboratively with Social Studies Office to pilot two middle school summer enrichment programs in 2016
- Coordinate, monitor, and support applications for Summer Residential Governor's School programs for Visual and Performing Arts and plan local adjudications to include recruiting judges in visual arts, theatre/dance, vocal and instrumental music
- Coordinate, monitor, and support applications for Summer Residential Governor's School programs for Academics and plan local committee meeting for selection and then submission of candidates
- Monitor and support programs related to gifted students including High School Independent Study and PRIME upon request
- Monitor and lead all school-based grade-level accelerations as per PIP 20-3 Program Differentiation

- Support and coach administrative assistant
- Manage all accounts delineated for Gifted Services
- Participate in Gifted Educational Groups, including the Virginia Association of the Gifted (current Supervisor is president elect and previously served as Vice President and as a member); the Virginia Committee for the Education of the Gifted (current Supervisor is serving on the board as VP); Virginia Consortium of Gifted Education Administrators; the Northern Virginia Council for Gifted/Talented Education (NVCG/TE; the current Supervisor is a member); and the National Association of the Gifted (as a member).

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End Notes

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Position%20Statement/NAGC-NMSA%20Joint%20Position%20Statement.pdf>, p.1.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Position%20Statement/NAGC-NMSA%20Joint%20Position%20Statement.pdf>, p.1.

<sup>iii</sup> NAGC Position Statement on Middle School, Curriculum and Instruction section, p.2.

<sup>iv</sup> Id.

<sup>v</sup> NAGC Position Statement on Middle School, p. 3.

<sup>vi</sup>

<http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Position%20Statement/Growth%20in%20Achievement%20of%20Advanced%20Students.pdf>