

Gifted Services Advisory Committee – Executive Summary – January 2020

The Gifted Services Advisory Committee (GSAC) focuses on strengthening gifted services throughout all levels of Arlington Public Schools by suggesting improvements for the educational environment of all high-potential learners in APS.

The current key challenges identified by GSAC:

- 1) Consistency
 - a. APS is inconsistent in identification of high potential learners across the elementary and middle school levels. This inconsistency drives the variation of gifted numbers seen in APS high schools.
 - b. APS is inconsistent in providing gifted services, particularly in middle and high school. Survey results show teachers are as likely to plan for their gifted cohort daily as they are to plan 4 times per year or less.
 - c. APS is inconsistent in teacher training for gifted clusters. Two years ago, only 38% of cluster teachers had their training. We are working with our liaison on several data requests and do not have updated numbers, but we understand it will take a few years for teachers to obtain the professional development necessary.
 - d. APS is inconsistent in the utilization of the Resource Teacher for the Gifted (RTG). Survey results show over 35% of APS staff don't know what the RTGs do, and the remaining survey respondents had varying answers as well.
- 2) Rigor at the middle and high school level is not sufficient, and support is not established for when students encounter difficulties
 - a. Students strongly qualify intensified/AP/IB classes challenging at 7-10x the rate they qualify regular classes as challenging.
 - b. Regular classes are too easy; there's no middle ground. Over half the students enrolled in intensified/AP/IB classes are not identified. Anecdotal discussion at the ACI meeting 1/8/2020 confirmed the sentiment.
 - c. Students are encouraged to take the challenging classes, but we do not have a strong structure in place to support them.
 - d. Students with Disabilities are discouraged from taking advanced classes due to lack of supports in those classes.

Recommendations for addressing these challenges:

- 1) Consistency - Add a Teacher Specialist to the Gifted Services office.
 - a. The Gifted Services office supports math, science, social studies, English, arts, the Equity and Excellence office, Special Education and the English Learner office. With the structure of gifted services in APS, and the work done with these offices, Gifted Services effectively supports all students in APS with one Supervisor and one Administrative Assistant.
 - b. A second person in the Gifted Services office would allow a better focus on consistency, with more time available to devote to making identification of high potential learners more uniform across the county. Likewise, a second resource would double the time available for supporting teachers and staff, helping to increase the consistency of gifted services seen by advanced learners across the county.
 - c. The Gifted Services office provides training to teachers to help them meet their gifted points. Teachers have choices in which professional development classes to attend, and the sessions driven by Gifted Services are always well-attended due to the effort of the office to produce quality, useable training. Adding a

Teacher Specialist to the Gifted Services office would allow for more and better professional development for teachers and staff in APS.

- d. A Teacher Specialist would greatly strengthen the impact of the Gifted Services office on Resource Teachers for the Gifted (RTGs), increasing the effectiveness of the RTGs to train and assist teachers in differentiating for their classes.
- 2) Rigor – Implement intensified classes in middle school
- a. GSAC’s recommendation last year was to pilot intensified English 7. GSAC stipulated this class should be open to all students. Likewise, GSAC requested that students receiving support services (e.g. students with IEPs and 504s) should receive their appropriate supports in this class.
 - b. With over half the enrollees in high school intensified/AP/IB classes not identified as gifted, GSAC expects similar enrollment in middle school. If services/accommodations are provided with this pilot, GSAC expects a critical mass that can drive the model to be used in rolling out additional intensified classes in middle school for science and social studies.