Gifted Services Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
October 19, 2015; 6:30 pm

Attendees:
Cheryl McCullough, APS Supervisor, Gifted Services
Connie Skelton, APS Asst. Superintendent for Instruction
Sarah Minervo, APS Math Supervisor
Michael Frickel, APS Secondary Math Specialist
Christine Hufnagel, APS Elementary Math Specialist
Beth Dowd, GSAC Co-Chair
Joshua Turner, GSAC Co-Chair
Katherine Carey
Dan Corcoran
Natalie Goldring
Yun Kang
Selene Ko
Elaine Maag
Candace Meyer
Jennifer Morris
Meredith Purple
Penka Trimble
Cynthia Torg
Nick Walkosak
Samara Weilenmann

Ms. Dowd opened the meeting with introductions.

There was a math presentation by APS Math Office staff:
Ms. Minervo: the APS Math Office philosophy is that all children should be making continuous progress, all students should be challenged and engaged, should experience a year or more of academic growth. The Math Office support allowing acceleration as students are ready for it, keeping in mind the needs of the whole child.

Ms. Minervo showed and discussed the APS math progression/course pathway, showing opportunities through middle school and high school.
In response to a question, Ms. Minervo stated that college classes are available through dual enrolled courses with NOVA, for example, multivariable calculus, and others listed in the program of studies. Content in dual enrolled courses is taught by an APS teacher with at least 18 hours of advanced math course work, under the supervision and direction of a NOVA professor.

Continuing the discussion of the math progression, Ms. Minervo stated that the math pathways are fluid and that students may take work for credit over the summer and accelerate further.

Ms. Minervo stated that she believes there are approximately 8 students in the county taking algebra in 6th grade, although she did not research that number for the meeting and does not have a definite number.
On the math progression, the math office tries to be strategic about mapping skills back into lower level courses so that students are prepared for advanced intensified courses like algebra 2/trig and precalculus. In response to a question about the progression from algebra to geometry and then algebra 2, and resulting loss of algebra skills during the geometry year, Mr. Frickel stated that teachers include algebra skills and review in the geometry course work, and that some of the geometry content is necessary for algebra 2/trig.

Ms. Minervo discussed how the APS teachers challenge and engage advanced learners and prep them for advanced work:

1. Instruction—how
   -Cluster grouping
   -Differentiated model in classroom
   -Problem based learning
   -Emphasize depth and complexity

2. Resources -- what
   -Grade 5 extended curriculum. APS has a new curriculum to bridge the gap between 5th grade and Math 7 for 6th graders. It is a formalized curriculum, all 5th grade teachers have access, all teachers can use it, even if they don't have gifted clusters in their classes, based on pre-assessing.
   -Project M2 and M3—These resources used to be just for gifted extensions, but now all teachers have access to them for the whole class.
   -Open ended problem solving (k-5)

An example given was a math problem with multiple entry points, students can approach it on their own level.

Ms. Minervo explained that APS elementary school and middle school math coaches wrote the 5th grade extended curriculum, and the intent was to marry content across grades. The curriculum is not linked to a specific math textbook. She stated that in 2nd-4th grade, teachers attempt to enrich content without moving to the next grade level and that there is no equivalent "extended" curriculum developed for those grades. If a student completes the 5th grade extended curriculum, they will be assessed and placed in either Math 6 or Math 7 for 6th graders, generally, or higher as their individual results require. APS is using a new math screening assessment the Scholastic Math Inventory (SMI) in all middle schools this year, and as a pilot at Oakridge, Hoffman Boston and Barrett elementary schools in grades 2-5, with plans to use it in all elementary schools next year. The SMI gives a quantile math score, essentially a readiness for abstract reasoning. The test will be given at the beginning, middle and end of the school year. The SMI is adaptive and can test up to the precalculus level.

Ms. Minervo and Mr. Frickel discussed middle school math instruction:
Intensified courses are offered at a faster pace, with additional content. The setting is a separate class, 42-45 minutes long, with more abstract content in a shorter period of time each day. A sample of student work was shown, which demonstrated that the same problem could be given to students at different levels and provide differentiation depending on how they approach the problem and which strategies they learn and use to solve it. At the middle school level, often teachers are giving a problem to start the unit, to show different ways to solve it, different ways to approach, it and they can come back to the problem as they cover new methods/content. Differentiation can be provided with task selection.

Ms. Minervo stated that the math office is focused on meeting math needs at the elementary school level, instead of requiring students to travel to the middle school. Ms. Minervo's view is that providing the content locally "front loads" the content for Math 7 for 6th graders and keeps students challenged, and is better for the "whole child."

There was a group discussion around the idea that, for very advanced students, we that when they are not challenged, it is worse socially and emotionally. The social and emotional needs of the gifted are different from the average student, and the "whole child" model is not calibrated to gifted children. Further, a number of parents commented that there is a perception that APS does not challenge children at the lower elementary levels and does not have a plan to accommodate more advanced students, such as a child ready to take algebra in 5th grade.
Ms. Skelton and Ms. Hufnagel responded that these children are true outliers, and when staff becomes aware of one, staff will further assess the child to determine their strengths, abilities and needs.

Ms. Skelton commented that the difficulty in providing differentiation isn't limited to math, but in all content areas. For example, in world languages, there is a question of how to provide differentiation for different levels of language learners. APS is growing into a larger school system and it is increasingly complex to meet every student's individual needs, but the system is attempting to do that in all content areas.

There was a group discussion of how to handle "outliers" (students 2 years ahead, or taking algebra in 6th grade). Ms. Minervo stated that Fairfax County Public Schools has 35 out of 13k students taking algebra as 6th graders. Dr. Goldring stated that Thomas Jefferson High School typically has about 50 incoming freshman who have taken algebra 2/trig in 8th grade, and 80% of the incoming class typically will have taken algebra in 7th grade and geometry in 8th grade.

Ms. Skelton and Ms. Minervo commented that they are aware that APS's current distance learning model for algebra 2/trig in 8th grade was problematic, and that, pending budget considerations, they are looking into other solutions such as a part-

time (.2) teacher to teach the class in person, or configuring schedules in such a way as to allow students to attend the class at their high school.

Dr. Goldring commented that APS has a systemic problem of artificially holding students kids back at the younger grades. In K-5, they may test at a high proficiency on a beginning of year test, but they are not provided with higher level content, and they are forced to sit through content they already know for a whole year. Then, in Dr. Goldring's view, APS makes it difficult for students to accelerate in the one class where APS makes it possible (by not providing advanced content earlier and by not facilitating the instruction at proper levels). Students should be recognized and accelerated as needed as early as Kindergarten. There would probably be dozens of students ready to take algebra in 6th grade if they were not artificially held back all throughout elementary school.

Ms. Skelton responded that APS is working on a systemic shift to do a better at moving kids forward as they are ready. APS is introducing the concept of a "tiered system of support" which will help staff identify individual students needs and how to meet them. Ms. Skelton also believes the SMI will assist with this screening and identification.

Ms. Torg commented that if math 7 is not taught in 5th grade, APS is effectively holding students back, and that the enhanced 5th grade math is not the same. She believes that there is an institutional framework in place that blocks students from being ready for algebra in 6th grade because they are not given the necessary instruction in 5th grade.
Ms. Minervo responded that she believes the assessment process in place will identify and move the eligible students into algebra in 6th grade.

Ms. Dowd noted that the time allotted for the math discussion had ended, and asked that Ms. Minervo let GSAC know how best to follow up with her to continue the discussion. Ms. Dowd offered that a GSAC subcommittee could be formed to continue to work with the Math Office on these issues. Ms. Skelton emphasized that APS is interested in parent views, is concerned about these same issues and wants to look at various approaches and find the most effective ways to solve the issues discussed.

End of the math presentation and discussion. Ms. Skelton, Ms. Minervo, Mr. Frickel and Ms. Hufnagel left the meeting.

Ms. Dowd continued the meeting with a FOIA update from ACI. The county attorney has determined that whenever 3 or more members of any ACI subcommittee (such as GSAC) are together and discussing committee business, that interaction is technically a committee meeting, must have minutes and it technically FOIA-able. Also, all emails of 3 or more members of GSAC discussing GSAC business are FOIA-able. The reason is that members of GSAC are appointed by the school board to act

in this capacity. Ms. Dowd gave a reminder that all members should be aware of the FOIA issue and sensitive to it in our communications.

Ms. McCullough gave an update on activities this summer and fall in Gifted Services. Ten new RTGs were hired for APS, including 8 in elementary schools and 2 in middle schools. Ms. McCullough is meeting regularly with all the new RTGs, and they are tasked with getting to know their schools and students to begin the year. Ms. McCullough rewrote the Gifted Services Information night presentation this year to try to better explain services to parents, and is also attending Gifted Services Information presentations at all schools with new RTGs.

Ms. McCullough discussed professional development trainings that she offered over the summer at Festival of the Mind. Because classroom teachers are responsible for providing differentiation, training is a key to changing the quality of instruction. Sessions were offered in M2, M3, School Wide Enrichment Model (reading), Jacobs Ladder and Navigations. Ms. McCullough stated that dozens of teachers attended the trainings, and that they filled up so fast she has offered additional sessions this fall to interested teachers, which also have been widely attended. Ms. McCullough and the RTGs keep track of which teachers at each school have attended specific trainings in order to follow up with them and provide additional support for using the new resources they learn about in training.

Also, over the summer Ms. McCullough aligned all materials and units used for gifted instruction to the state standards and SOLs, so that teachers can easily find the units they need for differentiation and know what standard each unit aligns to. RTGs are attending team and PLC meetings to assist teachers with finding resources for students who need additional content.

There was a general discussion of issues with parent communication. Parents need better communication of what to expect from gifted services, significantly better input from teachers on what differentiation is being done for their child. There was also a discussion of the possibility of adding a Q&A or FAQ section to the Gifted Services website.

Ms. Dowd and Ms. McCullough gave an update on GSAC's data request re: the results and effectiveness of using the NNAT and CoGAT to assist in the identification process. APS staff is still attempting to retrieve the date requested.

There was a discussion of issues for future meetings. Ms. Dowd and Mr. Turner discussed GSAC's required report for this year (due in March) and possible topics. One topic for members to consider is whether the committee is interested in suggesting that APS develop a gifted center. Another important data point is whether clustering is actually happening in middle schools, as a follow up to our recommendation for intensified classes. Mr. Turner also suggested that changes in staffing due to one-time or short term headcount changes (such as Nottingham's

drop to a .5 RTG this year due to Discovery opening) is an important follow up to our recommendation that all schools, regardless of headcount, have a full-time RTG.

Ms. Ko suggested that we discuss and recommend additional staff for Gifted Services at the county-level, as Ms. McCullough could more effectively carry out her mandate with the assistance of a program assistant or other additional staff person. Members of the committee agreed with this suggestion and it will be discussed further at future meetings. Ms. Purple requested that we discuss the social and emotional needs of the gifted and whether our current pre-assessment model is working well for providing differentiated instruction. These items will be added to a future meeting.

Ms. Dowd adjourned the meeting at 9:15 pm.