Progress Memo

To: Advisory Council on Teaching and Learning & APS Department of Teaching and Learning

From: Gifted Services Advisory Committee

cc: Cheryl McCullough

Date: 12/4/2020

Re: Progress memo on Gifted Services

What is working well for teaching and learning?

Topic:	Information Source:
Communication	Committee Members, Gifted Services Supervisor, RTGs
Description	

Communication was seen working well in some situations and not well in others.

The Differentiated Instruction Progress Form is to be filled out and given to parents of identified gifted students in elementary and middle school each reporting period. Some parents on the committee found the information very insightful. In other cases, parents said they'd never seen the form, and in others, that the information was so generic that it was obviously boilerplate and did not demonstrate differentiated instruction, merely tasking.

The Gifted Services office is publishing information in the bi-monthly messaging that goes to all families. Additionally, the FAQ page on the APS Gifted Services web page has been significantly updated with information about Gifted Services, as well as external resources for parents on topics of interest, resources to support online learning at home and the Twitter handles of the RTGs. The Gifted Services office also created the Parent Academy video to provide another avenue explaining the APS model for service delivery.

In some schools, the RTGs have implemented weekly emails to parent listservs, Twitter posts highlighting services, updating school web pages and information sessions. This outreach has been positive but is not being administered consistently across the county.

Understanding of the APS Collaborative Cluster model for delivery of services still seems to be an issue with the parent community. The Gifted Services page on the APS website contains a thorough

explanation of the model and the communications from Gifted Services through information sessions and the bi-monthly messaging have covered the information. However, there is still misunderstanding in the community. Outreach will continue.

Topic: Technology Issues	Information Source:
	Committee Members, Supervisor of Gifted Services, RTGs

Description

Connectivity issues seem to be getting better and teachers are getting more comfortable with breakout groups which will allow for small group instruction. This could be good news for advanced learners if cluster teachers differentiate lessons based on readiness and need.

After years of RTGs trying to get teachers to use Seesaw and Canvas to implement digital portfolios to show growth over time for students, the virtual teaching situation has necessitated the use of these platforms. Not only are students receiving more timely feedback, these ongoing portfolios will support our holistic identification process.

Cluster teachers and RTGs in many schools are learning and utilizing multiple platforms (i.e., Seesaw, Canvas, Nearpod, Flipgrid, Microsoft Teams) to keep student engagement high.

What is not working well for teaching and learning?

Topic:	Information Source:
Clustering of Gifted Students	Committee Members, ArlingtonGifted and Arlington2e listservs, neighbors, Supervisor of Gifted Services, RTGs

Description

APS' collaborative cluster model calls for identified students to be grouped (min 5 students per area of identification). Clustering was "ok" this year:
In elementary schools,
- 2 schools are clustering at 100%
- 5 schools are clustering at 90 – 99%
- 8 schools are clustering between 80 – 89%
- 3 schools are clustering between 70 – 79%

In middle schools,
- 4 schools are clustering between 85-89%
- 2 schools are clustering between 70-79%
- 1 school is clustering at 69%

In high schools,
- 2 schools are clustering at 80-89%
- 3 schools are clustering at 70-79%

It is extremely difficult (some teachers feel it is impossible) to meet the needs of all students in the heterogeneous classrooms of APS. When school administrators do not ensure that clustering happens

to the maximum extent possible they are working against APS policy, making it harder for their staff to reach students appropriately and negatively impacting students' ability to achieve a year of growth.

Resources are available for meeting the needs of gifted learners alongside the APS Critical Thinking Framework of Strategies. However, unless clustering is done with fidelity, teachers do not have critical mass in their classes to make full use of these tools.

Topic:	Information Source:
Consistency of Service Delivery	Committee Members, ArlingtonGifted and Arlington2e listservs, neighbors, Supervisor of Gifted Services, RTGs

Description
Parents have noted that their child's needs being met is very teacher dependent. There seems to be a lack of understanding by administrators about the role of RTGs which leads to a lack of consistency of expectations and service delivery. When administrators, cluster teachers and RTG are not working well together, services are negatively impacted. APS continues to have significant issues with consistency. The engagement of a student who needs more challenge is effectively dependent upon the teacher(s) that student is assigned. Teachers have a wide range of learners within their classrooms; most teachers know how to differentiate instruction; however, they do not have the time to meet the needs of all of their learners on a daily basis in our heterogenous classrooms. In many schools, it seems that classroom cluster teachers are not working collaboratively with their RTG on a regular basis to prepare lessons that incorporate the tools/resources that Gifted Services has purchased and planned. This is leading to students not being engaged on a daily or weekly basis unless the teacher is a master at differentiation. Parents report that their children are not being challenged on a daily basis and are dealing with disengagement and a lack of interest in school. This seems to be pronounced with online school as the interaction with their peers is significantly reduced. NOTE: The Gifted Services office added over 30 on-demand webinars focusing on multiple topics in gifted education (e.g. equity and underrepresentation, differentiation resources, virtual learning, social and emotional needs of gifted learners, etc.). As of December, over 680 webinars had been viewed and subsequent reflections done by APS staff.

Topic:	Information Source:
Extension work, also known as optional or may-do assignments are not handled well.	Committee Members, ArlingtonGifted and

	Arlington2e listservs, neighbors, students, Supervisor of Gifted Services, RTGs
Description	
Because teachers have a range of students in their classrooms, the needs of gifted learners are not being met on a daily basis. This is most evident in the middle school courses. GSAC continues to see the need for self-selected open enrollment intensified courses in middle school to give students more options to explore their interest areas with more depth and complexity. Parents report that while they appreciate choice board activities, if a rigorous activity is not assigned to their child based on their academic needs and/or is seen as optional, many students will not choose to do these activities. This is especially true when this work is in addition to doing the regular assignments. Quality not quantity! Independently, three gifted high school students who are children of committee members argued that the amount of work they are assigned is too much. The students feel that they should be given less work to allow them more time to work on subjects/items/ideas that they want to, and not be so tied down with the work they have to do.	

What are implications and/or solutions for teaching & learning for the longer term?

APS needs to continue efforts to establish and enhance consistency across schools, grades and classrooms. This issue has been raised by many ACTL subcommittees for many years. Part of that includes adding a Teacher Specialist to the Gifted Services office.

Increasing rigor across the board is a topic previously raised by the Department of Teaching and Learning, and was also suggested by a member of GSAC. Raising our expectations for our students will result in the students achieving more. This also includes the option of self-selected, open enrollment options for intensified classes in middle school.

More for parents, but: Classes are online, with students working from home every day. This is a great opportunity for parents (with availability) to listen in and experience what the students and teachers are going through with remote learning. This can provide parents with insight into what teachers need to be more successful.

Administrators need to embrace and support the collaborative cluster model and instructional coaching to build capacity for all teachers to be able to meet the needs of all their students, including gifted learners.
- Clustering (min 5 students per cluster per area of identification) needs to be a commitment for all schools for fidelity of this model to even have a chance of working
- Select cluster teachers who have a passion for working with gifted learners and who have earned 40 gifted points and are staying current and/or are actively working on their 40 gifted points
- Hold teachers accountable for not working on their 40 gifted points and do not select them as cluster teachers
- Support RTGs in their job responsibilities as outlined in the expectations document and minimize extra tasks such as test coordination (there is only 1 RTG per building)

Cluster teachers and RTGs need to work together on messaging how gifted services is being delivered so that parents understand that the RTG is not the primary deliverer of gifted services. If we want comprehensive services for gifted learners, one person cannot be seen as the only one who can do this.

Instructional leadership teams at schools need to stress using preassessment data before teaching a lesson and/or unit and adjust teaching based on the data and student needs. The virtual model resulted in separation between the classroom and the learning experience. This provides an opportunity via increased flexibility in delivering differentiated content that has not been realized.

Differentiation forms should be sent to all elementary and middle school families with each quarterly report card communication.

Virtual learning could provide flexible options for all learners to have more targeted instruction and provide alternatives to the delivery of general education.

Data Requests

GSAC has made the following data requests. These are requests that we generally make on an annual basis. Thus far, we have received some cluster data which is summarized in the memo above.

1) Identification data - We've received this data pretty much every year. Since identification has kind of been on hold due to testing delays, I realize it will be a bit close to last year's data. What we'd like is a breakdown by school and grade of the number of students identified. Further breakdowns by subject area, race, SWD, EL, and economically disadvantaged status should also be included.

2) Cluster data - Traditionally we've received this data at the middle school level, but it would be nice to get it for all school levels to see how we're doing across the board. A breakdown by school, grade and subject area showing the number of students clustered in groups of <5, 5-8 and >8. This is more detail than we've previously received. If we can get the breakdown by race, SWD, EL and economic disadvantage, that would be helpful as well. It would be nice to see if we're clustering with equity!

3) Teacher training - A simple count of the number of teachers with gifted clusters who have/have not achieved the requisite 40 points. In the past I think this has been only at the middle school level, but please make the request for all of APS.

4) RI and MI - I assume that we do not have MI or RI data for the Spring of 2020, but please request RI and MI data to match the attached from 2017 forward. The attached is the breakdown that we want, but I would like to request an additional break by school. If this additional bit causes a delay, we'll happily take data as in the attached and wait for the school breakdown.