Alexandria City Public Schools Evaluation Report
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program

Executive Summary

October 2, 2017

The purpose of this evaluation of the Alexandria City Public Schools' Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program was to render recommendations based on the current status of the program and expectations for the program that may move it forward to the next level of excellence.

The evaluation team was comprised of three consultants: Joyce VanTassel-Baska, Professor Emerita, College of William and Mary and Founding Director, Center for Gifted Education, Janice Robbins, former principal and director of the Fairfax County Gifted Program, and Gail Hubbard, former supervisor of gifted education and special programs, Prince William County Public Schools. This consultant team has had considerable experience in evaluating gifted programs and designing plans for program improvements, its members having conducted over 80 such evaluations over the past 25 years.

Four key beliefs drove the evaluation study: 1) the fundamental role of evaluation and review is to provide information that can be used to improve and advance gifted programs, 2) evaluation and review is a collaborative enterprise among various stakeholders in the division and the consultants, 3) the use of multiple data sources helps to illuminate the complexity and salience of program issues that need to be considered, and 4) rational decision-making is mediated by values. Therefore, the nature and degree of change to be made in a program are influenced by the social and political variables at work in a given context.

Research Questions

The following research questions have driven the study design:

1. To what extent is the gifted program being implemented according to its stated goals and objectives?

2. To what extent is the program progressing in its attempt to identify underrepresented groups for the program?

3. To what extent is the written, taught, and assessed curriculum sufficiently rigorous and differentiated for TAG-identified students?

4. To what extent is the program beneficial to students participating in it?

5. To what extent is the program perceived to be effective by relevant stakeholders?

6. To what extent is the program aligned with best practices in the field of gifted education?

7. What are the strengths and areas for improvement in the program? What are the recommendations for improvement in this area?

Strengths of the program are noted in the commendation section. Areas for improvement are noted by recommendations following each research question and relevant findings.

A table on data sources and concomitant findings related to research questions synthesizes the relationship of the data sources used in the study to the findings and recommendations described. This table may be found in Appendix M.

Study Methods

Data collected to investigate the seven research questions listed above involved both empirical and perceptual sources. Onsite visits to a sample of eight elementary schools, both middle schools and both high school campuses, designated as providing services to TAG-identified students, were conducted at grade levels K-12. Moreover, survey and focus group data were collected from relevant stakeholder groups in the program to assess perceptions of program operation. Program-relevant materials were reviewed, including 44 course guides, 24 texts and resources, and 74 Differentiated Educational Plans (DEPs). Other documents also were reviewed, including the Local Gifted Plan, the Technical Review of the Plan, and the McRel Curriculum Audit Report. Best practices were assessed using both classroom observation and the 2010 National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Gifted Programming Standards. In order to make valid inferences about the nature and scope of program strengths and areas for improvement, triangulation of data sources was effected. An action plan was then developed to recommend key improvements to be made to the program over the next three years and to be incorporated into the next iteration of the state plan.

Purposive sampling of schools (N=12) and classrooms (N=120) was done for onsite visits. The selection of elementary schools was stratified to include Title I and non-Title I buildings, schools that had implemented the Young Scholars Program, schools that had a good distribution of underrepresented minority populations, and those where full implementation of the TAG Program had occurred at the K-5 levels. Classroom scheduling was done by the evaluators, based on lists of available classes for observation on the days selected for visitation. Every attempt was made to examine all grade levels and subject areas where TAG students were being served. Typically, five classrooms were visited at each elementary school site and 14 classrooms at middle and high school sites for 30-60 minutes. Every attempt was made to keep observations relatively equal across schools and levels in respect to time and application of the observation protocol.

Surveys were distributed to all professional staff members including administrators and parents of TAG students. Student surveys were distributed to students participating in focus groups at each school site (N=127). Focus groups (N=38) were convened by school site and level of learners, comprised of 377 teachers, parents, administrators, and students at grades 5, 8 and 12. Interviews were conducted with the Superintendent, with Executive Directors, and with the TAG Gifted Advisory Committee.

The study employed appropriate instrumentation to answer the questions of interest. Instrumentation included the following: 1) a review checklist for curriculum; 2) a document for review of other program materials; 3) online surveys for parents and staff; 4) a student benefit survey; 5) a focus group and interview protocol; 6) a classroom observation scale; and 7) the NAGC gifted programming standards checklist for assessing the optimal match of the program to best practice. Instruments used for data collection were developed and/or tailored in collaboration with the ACPS team from the Department of Accountability and the TAG Coordinator. Sample instruments are included in the appropriate appendix of this report.

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in the analysis of the data collected. Descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and percentages were used to present the survey and classroom observation data. Focus group data were content-analyzed, with identification of emergent themes. Content analysis was also used for materials reviews. Interpretation of findings from all data was made by the evaluation team. Additional multicultural consultants reviewed and responded to the data analysis and the findings developed for identification of underrepresented populations. Results from each data source were analyzed and interpreted as findings for each evaluation question. Triangulation of data sources was used to ensure strength in the findings for each question. Only when two data sources converged was a finding reported through the triangulation process. Conclusions drawn regarding the research questions were based on the data available across sources. Commendations and recommendations were developed for the school division to use for program improvement. Finally, a plan of action was developed to convert recommendations into feasible, efficient, and effective program operation across three years.

More specific information on the methods employed in the study may be found in the relevant section of the report by data source. Instruments used may be found in the appropriate appendix.

Findings, Commendations, and Recommendations

Commendations

This section of the report focuses on the best aspects of the program observed. Commendations tend to display aspects of the TAG Program that are already on a path to excellence where data sources converge (ie. review of ACPS reports, surveys, focus groups, classroom observations) to suggest that the following aspects of the program are excelling.

1. ACPS has in place a comprehensive Advanced Placement program that produces strong results longitudinally in participation and performance of TAG students. The school division is to be commended for its long-term commitment to these learners through offering such opportunities and ensuring positive learning outcomes for TAG students across multiple years.

2. The option of dual enrollment courses provides multiple opportunities for receiving credits for community college (NOVA) for TAG learners. It is a particularly strong option for underrepresented groups who may be first generation college students.

3. The pullout program at grades 4 and 5 (replacement curriculum) in both language arts and math provides the opportunity for advanced curriculum challenge in these two key areas of the curriculum. It is perceived by students, staff, and parents to be an effective intervention at those levels of learning as revealed in survey and focus group findings. Classroom observation data also confirm its effectiveness, with TAG teachers showing high frequency and effectiveness ratings in most observed settings.

4. The Young Scholars' program at grades K-5 in four schools provides a welcome addition to efforts to find and nurture promising learners from underrepresented populations who may be identified for the TAG Program by fourth grade. It represents a promising start to the effort of identification by already identifying 14% of these students for TAG services

and providing summer program experiences to strengthen their math and science conceptual learning.

5. The development of a revised division acceleration policy and accompanying regulations has been effected. The revised documents were approved by the school board on June 22, 2017 and represent a progressive stance on the role of acceleration in working effectively with gifted learners at all stages of development and in all content areas of the curriculum.

Findings and Recommendations

Each of the data sources analyzed provided a window into understanding aspects of the TAG Program in ACPS and provided insights into the changes that need to be considered in moving the program forward. The findings from these multiple data sources are reported below along with the resultant recommendations by research question.

1. To what extent is the gifted program being implemented according to stated goals and outcomes?

Evidence from both focus groups and surveys suggest that the goals of the TAG Program are being carried out to some degree, depending on the level of the program. TAG Program outcomes are being tracked, specifically in the Young Scholars Program and Advanced Placement, although in no other aspects of the program. Although SOL data are disaggregated for TAG students, these data do not reflect the level of performance at which TAG students are capable of performing when provided special programs and services. Professional development process data are being tracked.

Lack of differentiation in the division curriculum materials further suggest that there has been limited attention to TAG curriculum development. Classroom observation data suggest that differentiation is not frequently employed beyond the grades 4-5 pullout program and AP courses. The preponderance of evidence suggests that the program is being implemented unevenly, depending on the program type, level of services, and school site.

The findings related to program/curriculum reviews resulted in making recommendations for program development needed to respond to gaps in the program at primary and middle school levels primarily. Findings also identified the lack of an overarching curriculum framework for the program that identified goals and outcomes K-12 and a scope and sequence for each content area program, both recommended aspects of the state requirement for local plans.

Recommendations, based on these findings, are the following:

1) Design and develop a General Intellectual Aptitude (GIA) program around advanced content at K-3 level, consistent with the 4-5 curriculum structure and delivered to clusters of students in the classroom. Independent projects, seen as the predominant mode of delivery for work documented through the DEP in classroom observations and focus group discussions, should be done sparingly, given the developmental considerations of the age group.

2) Extend the Young Scholars' Program to other Title I schools; revise curriculum guides to include pre-post assessments and in-school follow-up activities for the YS Program.

3) Revamp the middle school TAG Program so that it includes opportunities for an accelerated ELA, science, and social studies program beyond honors which currently fails to provide differentiated curriculum or instruction. Develop an interdisciplinary option in the humanities and STEM areas for students who have aptitudes and interests in the underlying areas of learning.

4) Use flexible grouping at all levels of the program to support the need for intellectual peer interaction of gifted learners. Cluster grouping, special class pullouts, and advanced course clusters all support these needs from elementary through secondary levels.

5) Track TAG student performance annually for those who are in a designated advanced program at any level. Use of performance-based pre-post measures or products may be the most efficacious way to do that. With modification, the DEP model and transfer tasks would also yield such data systematically.

6) Appoint a full-time K-3 program coordinator a) to support the development of the K-3 program and curriculum options; b) to oversee the implementation of the K-3 identification process; c) to coordinate and develop the Young Scholars program at additional Title I sites and monitor implementation at all sites; and d) provide communication and outreach to minority communities about the TAG Program.

7) Appoint a part-time high school coordinator for the TAG Program to offer guidance and counseling assistance that extends beyond the typical services provided to all learners, to provide information to honors, AP and DE teachers on the profiles of TAG learners, to facilitate the process of identifying new TAG learners, and to coordinate professional training opportunities for high school teachers in gifted education.

2. To what extent is the program progressing in its attempt to identify underrepresented groups for the program?

There is some evidence of attention to the identification of students from underrepresented groups including low income, minority, EL, and twice-exceptional students for the gifted program through key features of the current identification process, including the use of a nonverbal measure and the use of multiple criteria that examine both ability and achievement data. No evidence suggests that attention is given to program alteration as a result of these students being selected, except for the value-added summer experience of the Young Scholars Program at K-5. Limited evidence of an academic year differentiated curriculum in use for YS was provided.

Observations and assessment reports suggest there is a discrepancy between the number of minority and low-income students in the current program and their presence in the ACPS population. Focus group and survey data support the fact that stakeholders are concerned about this issue. Consultation with TAG multicultural specialists produced a similar viewpoint, with suggestions for changes rendered.

Consultant reviews of identification practices, both the evaluators and outside consultants who specialize in TAG multicultural issues, also have yielded a set of recommendations for improvement, mostly on these issues of underrepresentation and the process of communication to parents and others about student results and the overall identification process (see Section VII for detailed recommendations).

The most critical of those recommendations are the following:

1) Improve strategies and techniques for the identification of students from underrepresented groups (ie. African American, Hispanic, low income, and twice exceptional), recommended by the evaluation consultants and validated by two multicultural specialists in gifted education. (See Appendix L for outside consultant reports).

2) Continue the use of existing screening tools as they constitute the best tests available for the purposes intended, based on research data on finding students from underrepresented groups and as noted by all five consultants who reviewed them. We do recommend modifying the cutoff scores on the two standardized ability instruments employed by two percentile points as it may decrease the underrepresentation of African Americans by as much as 5 percentage points, based on a three-year historical analysis of the NNAT data from 2014-16. On a 2014-15 analysis of one year of CogAT data, identification of Hispanic students would have increased by 2 percentage points. Based on these analyses of historical results on both tests (Department of Accountability, 2017), we think it is prudent to lower the score cutoffs in this way as it assists in the goal of reducing disparity among minority groups in the program. As a result, however, more students from all groups will be identified for TAG services.

3) Incorporate use of research-based checklist items, that focus on characteristics of underserved groups, into the current gifted rating scale (GRS) used by teachers. Disseminate through materials and community outreach activities.

4) Train teachers and principals annually on the general and specific aptitude characteristics of gifted learners and those from underrepresented groups.

5) Develop program emphases that tailor curriculum for students from underrepresented groups, including choice of reading material, highlighting accomplishments of minority groups and individuals within them in the context of teaching language arts and social studies, and including practice with higher level thinking through the use of scaffolded materials.

3. **To what extent is the written, taught, and assessed curriculum sufficiently rigorous and differentiated for TAG-identified students?**

Findings from the analyses of the core curriculum, TAG-labelled course guides, and text materials suggest that curriculum resources are limited in their capacity to address the needs of TAG learners, due to lack of providing specificity in objectives, strategies and materials for use in learning plans at the classroom level. Transfer tasks, an aspect of the general curriculum course guides intended for gifted learners, were reviewed and judged insufficient and often

lacking in the focus needed to serve as agents of differentiation. Lack of direction for the use of small group and independent work was also missing from most of these guides. These comments are especially relevant for all subjects except science where inquiry-based approaches were central to the guides provided for review. Text reviews support the findings on the curriculum guides and suggest more areas of concern. In addition to the ELA material providing limited support for TAG learners in respect to advanced reading, the math material is not carefully organized through using consistent compacting approaches for accelerating the learning. Finally, findings from the analysis of DEPs suggest that the format, implementation, and monitoring of this curricular device requires improvement at the levels and in the subjects addressed.

Survey and focus group data also corroborate these findings. The majority of stakeholders voiced concerns about key curriculum and instructional components through surveys and focus groups. Concerns were voiced about the lack of a defined curriculum at K-3 and middle school, and about how the elementary program fits with middle school opportunities. While support is relatively strong for the existence of an instructional program for the gifted, there are several areas that need attention and improvement. The use of DEPs was seen as ineffective and inadequate as a curriculum replacement for K-3 students. The middle school honors curriculum was not seen as tailored to the needs of TAG students at middle school levels and was perceived to be problematic. Instructional capacity of teachers to deliver a differentiated curriculum to TAG students was questioned by parents who had children in the K-3 GIA and grades 6-8 honors programs.

The written TAG curriculum materials for use at K-3 levels were also viewed as limited in respect to differentiated strategies and resources being identified for classroom use. They were in evidence in a limited number of primary classrooms and pullout groups. Middle school trade books were found to be below grade level in Lexile level and often inappropriate for use with gifted students. Supplemental math materials, designed for use with gifted learners, were not being employed at any level in the math program, based on classroom observation.

Classroom observation data also corroborate these concerns in respect to the limited use of differentiated instruction found in the majority of classrooms. This was especially true in the areas of higher level thinking and conceptual development. While the use of differentiation was limited, when it was employed, it was done so effectively.

Based on these multiple data findings, the following recommendations are offered for consideration:

1) Revise Honors course curricula to document clear objectives and expected outcomes for gifted learners. Take advantage of using research-based curricula, matched to course objectives, in order to ensure consistent levels of rigor. A list of these materials may be found in the reference section.

2) Select advanced text materials for all courses at K-12. While math materials are used in an advanced way, often the choices could be more appropriate and include multiple materials for use with TAG learners. Select advanced reading texts for all TAG ELA classes.

3) Design formats and examples for use by classroom teachers to respond to the recommendations provided on changes needed in the format, design, and implementation of DEPs.

4) Monitor data on level and extent of gifted teaching preparation and assign teachers who are well trained to teaching assignments with gifted learners at all levels.

5) Ensure that all teachers with responsibility for teaching gifted learners meet the NAGC knowledge and skill standards in gifted education, including models of thinking and other differentiation strategies relevant to gifted learners.

4. To what extent is the program beneficial to students participating in it?

Evidence of program impact on students is anecdotal and relies on subjective self-report by students, parents, and teachers. There is no consistent system in place for measuring gifted student growth quantitatively over time in the TAG program. Nevertheless, stakeholder group members perceive the program as highly beneficial to students. Gifted students who have been in the program for four years or more also hold positive views of program benefits. Based on the overall AP data provided across the last three years related to participation and performance, it is clear that the multiple options provided by the division attract large numbers of TAG students who perform at advanced levels (passing rates of 3, 4, or 5). While there is a listing of program options at each level, there is not connection among them in respect to assessing student growth and other benefits.

Findings from the focus groups paralleled many of the same revelations found from the surveys on many issues, including the need for the development of TAG Programs at K-3 and grades 6-8 beyond the program currently operating, and the need for TAG students to be placed with trained teachers who have the skills to instruct them in a differentiated way in a curriculum base that is advanced (see Appendix I).

Positive parental responses from both surveys and focus groups were almost universal for the pullout program at grades 4 and 5 in language arts and math, commenting that the programs were challenging and rigorous for their children while the DEP approach was not fully understood or appreciated as a way to serve TAG students at K-3 or grades 4-5 in science or social studies. While the challenge level of Honors classes from grades 6-12 was seen as uneven, Advanced Placement classes received universal positive recognition for having sufficient challenge for TAG learners.

Findings from both surveys and focus groups suggested that effective TAG Programs emphasized higher-level thinking and provided advanced work opportunities in each subject area, regardless of level. The findings on this point were also corroborated by classroom observation data that documented the teacher behaviors seen in top-rated classrooms.

Division reporting on current assessment, curriculum, and professional development data further corroborate findings related to program successes and gaps in service delivery. Process data on professional development were not always supported by classroom observations. Observations indicated a lack of transfer of training skills on the part of some teachers who were assigned TAG classes in language arts at the middle school level.

These findings then led to the following recommendations that cut across learning assessment, curriculum development, and professional development:

1) Recognizing that the Department of Accountability already provides the disaggregation of TAG data on SOL performance and AP performance, we commend this practice and only recommend that it continue as a helpful way to monitor the performance of TAG students within the general program in ACPS.

2) ACPS has begun the systematic collection of data from performance-based transfer tasks. We recommend that such pre-post performance-based assessments be collected annually on TAG students in order to assess growth in the TAG Program beyond SOL performance and to provide instructional gauges for teachers in crafting advanced work. Both the choice of assessments and the system for managing the data collection and analysis may be overseen by the Department of Curriculum and Instruction but vested with the TAG Coordinator. As a part of that process, it may be advisable also to collect student products, either resulting from work documented through the DEP or from transfer tasks that exemplify off-level performance. These products may be used as training tools in working with teachers assigned to teach TAG students.

3) Develop/revise curriculum guides in all grades and content areas to incorporate best practices in each content area for gifted learners. Revisions in the general education curriculum guides should ensure that differentiation is specific to include models and strategies, content depth, and pre-post assessments that can document real growth. Recognize that transfer tasks and charts with generic critical thinking processes are insufficient to drive appropriate differentiated curriculum and assessment.

4) Provide professional development sessions on learning assessments for the gifted, using product samples from student work, the AP program samples of performance-based assessments, and the Young Scholars pre-post curriculum measures already being used. Augment such training with materials-based training that demonstrates how to differentiate effectively for these learners.

5. To what extent is the program perceived to be effective by relevant stakeholders?

Focus group data revealed that the overall satisfaction with the program varied, depending on the stakeholder group and the aspect of program design being addressed in the query. Perception of the challenge level of the program varied among focus groups, with the majority of students and parents seeing it as sufficiently challenging while staff was divided on this issue. All stakeholder focus groups saw the need for changing the identification process to make it more responsive to the inclusion of underrepresented groups. Both parents and staff also saw the need for improvement in the middle school program. At the elementary level, parents expressed concerns about identification and parent interaction opportunities. At the secondary level, parents were most concerned about instruction and professional development. Students were satisfied with the TAG Program except for the middle school level where they found services lacking.

Survey data revealed that the majority of parents across levels found the TAG Program challenging overall although felt the need for more attention to revising the identification process to include underrepresented groups and more peer interaction in the classroom.

Sub analysis of parent surveys by level of their child's schooling, elementary, middle school, and high school, yielded interesting differences, suggesting that elementary parents were more positive about the program in respect to curriculum and instruction while secondary parents found it wanting in respect to opportunities for social and emotional development and guidance, along with concerns for targeted academic opportunities in all areas of the curriculum for which their child qualified. The sub analysis further showed the greatest dissatisfaction with the middle school program on most aspects of program development.

Student surveys revealed a strong positive reaction to the program benefits overall, citing the emphasis on critical thinking and advanced work at their challenge level to be the most beneficial, a finding similar to the other groups surveyed as well. Findings also revealed that students found the TAG work more significantly challenging than regular class work which they found "boring".

Teachers and administrators, along with other support personnel who responded to the survey, found the program less challenging than parents and were most concerned about the identification process employed that failed to find underrepresented groups. While parents were most concerned about the process of identification, staff members were clearly concerned about the lack of children of color in the program with other underrepresented groups less often mentioned. A plurality of parents also was concerned about the grouping, the curriculum, instruction, and assessment used in the program although the majority rated its challenge level as high.

Recommendations related to perceptual data alone have not been made. The use of focus groups in addition to surveys allowed us to sample more deeply issues and concerns about the program. However, no inferences could be made to the larger group of stakeholders due to a low rate of return for both staff and parent instruments (<30%). Relevant recommendations that have emerged from these data that could be corroborated through other data sources have been triangulated and noted in the recommendations for Questions #1, 2, 3, 4, and 6.

6. **To what extent is the program aligned with best practices in the field of gifted education?**

In the areas of identification and professional development, the ACPS TAG Program met most of the standards reviewed using the NAGC Gifted Programming Standards Evaluation Checklist. There is room for growth, however, in respect to the standards relating to programming, assessment for learning, counseling, and differentiation practices. Several of the program recommendations flow from the areas of improvement noted through analyzing this data source.

Classroom observation data on frequency suggest that teachers are under-utilizing differentiation strategies at all levels of the program, especially in the application of higher level thinking. In classrooms where differentiated practices are being used, teachers are generally effective in their use of these strategies. High school AP teachers and some TAG elementary teachers were most effective in the use of best practices in the classroom.

In a comparison of teachers by the level of schooling at which they teach, frequency of strategy use favored elementary teachers while effectiveness favored high school teachers (This was computed by examining only teachers who were observed using the relevant strategies delineated on the observation form). In a comparison of subject areas, math teachers were most effective,

followed by language arts, and then science and social studies teachers. In a comparison of TAG and non-TAG teachers at the elementary level, strengths were perceived in both groups on the form, with slight differences noted between them. In a comparison of AP and non-AP teachers (ie. honors and Dual Enrollment instructors) at the high school level, AP teachers outperformed non-AP teachers in content-based differentiated strategies at that level.

Acceleration practices recommended in the national standards appeared to be consonant with the 2017 policies and regulations developed in ACPS which will focus on grade level acceleration practices across the years including early entrance and exit from curriculum content mastered.

There were areas where the standards were not consonant with practice in ACPS, however. A system of counseling and guidance was missing. An assessment of learning approach for TAG learners prior to AP was lacking. The TAG curriculum at all levels needs to be further integrated with the division curriculum while remaining distinctive and specific in its use of instructional approaches that emphasize inquiry, higher level thinking, problem solving, and concomitant research-based resource materials that are organized around such strategies.

Recommendations for follow-up in this area of best practice cut across all areas of the program, with specific concerns for program development in the area of guidance and counseling, individualized practices with the gifted, use of acceleration techniques, and a system of monitoring of both identification and professional development processes. Survey and focus group data from secondary parents also strongly support the need for more counseling services.

Recommendations for best practice include the following:

1) Provide professional development for principals to ensure clear understanding and expectations for gifted identification and programming, aligned with Virginia and national standards. Delineate the role of the building administrator in program oversight.

2) Provide tailored professional development for curriculum specialists, Title I, EL, and Specialized Instruction leadership to ensure their understanding of differentiation curriculum features for TAG learners.

3) Develop a counseling component for TAG students at middle and high school levels. This would be a major aspect of the job description of the proposed part-time high school TAG coordinator and the existing middle school coordinators.

4) Monitor products resulting from the DEP process and facilitate the use of individual conferencing as a tool to personalize TAG student program services.

Other Findings

In addition to the findings and recommendations that emerged by research question, it was also apparent that several findings coalesced around mechanisms and systems not formally probed in the study. One of these was the system for communication about the program that is currently used and the extent to which it is ineffective in addressing the concerns raised by various stakeholders about the program.

Survey findings suggested that parents lack important information about the program in respect to identification (19%) and goals and objectives (34%). This lack of knowledge permeated the responses across the parent survey. A plurality of staff also indicated a lack of knowledge about identification (36%) and goals and objectives of the TAG Program (35%). Focus group data further corroborated the lack of understanding about the program by both parents and staff in these areas.

Materials review and classroom observation data suggested that there is limited connection of the program from one level to the next, especially at K-3 and 6-8. This creates fragmentation of the scope and sequence of the curriculum itself within subject areas. Furthermore, implementation of the taught curriculum varies considerably from school to school. Both issues cause a lack of coherence, leading to parental confusion and concern.

Recommendations, based on concerns for communication, are the following:

1) Design strategies for gaining principal support and advocacy for the program in each building through provision of materials, professional development, and new initiatives such as Young Scholars.

2) Institute community outreach procedures to tap into underrepresented groups within the community, including minority, low income, and EL groups.

3) Develop parent education programs at each school, focused on the TAG Program.

4) Design a scope and sequence of program offerings at each grade level and in each content area, linked to the overall philosophy, goals, outcomes, and assessments used in the gifted program. Disseminate to all stakeholder groups.

5) Expand the website to include additional information and resources on program and curriculum features for each level and option offered.

Conclusion

This evaluation study of the Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program in Alexandria City Public Schools has examined a wide range of data sources to answer the research questions of interest to the community. Areas of the program probed included identification, curriculum, evidence of student learning, and all phases of program implementation. The findings document program strengths but also elucidate areas for improvement in the existing program and document gaps in service delivery where further program development needs to occur. The report concludes with a three-year plan of action that converts recommendations into goals and outcomes for program design, development, and implementation.