

Alexandria City Public Schools
Advanced Academic Services Advisory Committee
October 17, 2023
ACHS 3330 King St, Room A-114

Minutes

Meeting: October 17, 2023, from 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm at Alexandria City High School, 3330 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22305.

Current AASAC Members Present: D. Ohlandt (Chair), Evan Smith (Vice Chair), Catherine (Katie) Baker, Mike Dukes, Penny Hairston (Principal Rep)

Guests: Dr. Megan Tempel-Milner (ACPS), Pierrette Finney (ACPS), Carmen Sanders (ACPS), Julia Stenpeck, Julie Anne Watko, Emmett Watko (ACPS student), Jessica Wintfeld, Shirley Boampung, Anna Garloch, Willow Darsie, Michelle Sandilands, Kelley Organek, Jeremy Miller, Laura Rose

Chair's Report:

Dr. D. Ohlandt opened the meeting with a summary of the Scope of Work that would be voted on later in the meeting. The updates to the Local Plan were approved by the school board in June and, moving forward, AASAC will spend its efforts on making policy and budget recommendations to support the Local Plan and not on considering a wholesale revocation of the Local Plan, which was already approved.

Business:

After reviewing the September 2023 meeting minutes, one amendment was proposed, adding "Budget Impact" to the Scope of Work section. Dr. Ohlandt moved to approve the amendment and Katie Baker seconded. The amendment was approved.

At this point, Dr. Ohlandt moved to approve the minutes. Mike Dukes seconded, and the minutes were approved.

Staff Report:

Dr. Megan Tempel-Milner presented updates on the accomplishments and ongoing efforts of the AAS office, the key points of which are included below.

Screening

CogAT testing- recently, there has been a nationwide issue with the Riverside testing platform.

- Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) has been advised by Riverside Insights (the publisher of CogAT) to postpone the start of CogAT testing until later this week for students in grade three and extend the end of the testing window to November 10, 2023.
- Testing will only begin once Riverside provides confirmation to ACPS that their technical issues have been resolved and other localities have successfully administered the online assessment.

- Yesterday, a letter was sent home to all third-grade families informing them of this issue. This delay will not impact the automatic referral process and screening timeline for Advanced Academic Services (AAS).
- It may impact the current Grades 5-8 screening. However, it would only be for a few students who must take the CogAT. We will keep impacted grades 5-8 families informed, if the deadline needs to be updated.

The Grades K-8 referral window is open until January 31, 2023.

- Communication will continue to go out regarding the screening window and process.
- An overview presentation will be posted on our website by 11/1/23. This will allow our families to review the information at their own pace. It will also ensure the message about screening is consistent across the division.
- Schools will hold Q&A sessions from November to mid-January.
- The holistic portfolio process will begin for rising 4th grade (current 3rd grades this year). We will expand the portfolio process to other grade levels in future years.
- Grades K-8 (non-rising 4th-grade screening) will continue to use the matrix form from previous years.

Fidelity of Instruction

- We are two months into implementing the updates to the local plan.
 - We are seeing positive movements in the work. Change is hard, and there is a lot of new.
 - All 4th and 5th-grade LA guides and 4th-grade math guides have been fully updated and aligned with division pacing and gifted resources.
 - We have a K-3 talent development framework that is aligned with division pacing and gifted resources.
- Ms. Whitfield and I have done class visits for almost every elementary and middle school, either through AAS walkthroughs or division walkthroughs.
 - We meet with teachers to answer questions, provide support, and assess the fidelity of implementation.
 - Teachers have our phone numbers, we respond to emails promptly, and we go into schools upon requests from teachers- above and beyond our walk-throughs.
 - Ms. Whitfield meets more often with the new AASTs at each school.
 - 1st Quarter resources include William and Mary Language Arts units, Mentoring Mathematical Minds- Digging for Data, William and Mary Base 10
 - 2nd Quarter- Mentoring Mathematical Minds, Document-Based Questions (DBQS), vocabulary and grammar development.
 - We purchased all materials that are considered essential to the FOI.
 - We purchase supplemental resources based on the needs of the school and students.
- Training and Professional Learning Meeting for AASTs: Topics covered so far this year
 - JASON Project Training
 - Math Workshop Model 2 training
 - Grammar and Vocabulary development using Michael Clay Thompson units
 - William and Mary Language Arts units
 - Co-teaching model

- Time for planning: Teachers work together to plan units, pace out instruction, office hours
- Continuous Feedback from Teachers
 - We seek feedback from teachers on a regular basis and are making notes for next year's updates.
- Pull-out vs. Push-in
 - Even though the 2017 external review encouraged us to move to a push-in model for LA and math, we, as a division and steering committee determined that the shift was not ready to be made. Under the Local Plan for the Gifted, SAA services in Grades 4-5 in LA and math are pull-out services.
 - We held conversations with staff to discuss the need to implement the curriculum with fidelity. If we are doing a pull-out service, the expectation is that we use gifted resources and gifted instructional strategies on an everyday basis.

Public Comments:

There was 10 minutes on the agenda for public comment; however, five guests had comments, so the Committee Chair allowed comments to be heard for over 20 minutes so all present could voice their thoughts.

Jeremy Miller:

- Has a 2nd grader in the ACPS school system that is GIA identified.
- I tried to attend meetings last year, begging the committee to include parents in these decisions.
- The meeting dates and locations were hard to find; the website was out of date.
- Would like to see more communication to parents of currently identified students.
- The committee ignored my advice and actively maneuvered to hide the changes included in the local plan from all the parents.
- The local plan eliminates K-3 services in violation of state law. *[Chair's note: The plan is not in violation of state law, and K-3 services are not eliminated.]*
- This committee needs to dump the Scope of Work and rescind the updated local plan.
- The committee should refocus efforts to fixing the local plan.

Julie Anne Watko:

- ACPS parent of elementary school child.
- Differentiation includes both remediation and enrichment.
- Alexandria City has the lowest percentage of English-language-literate parents in the area.
- Parents who are not English-language-literate think the differentiation their kids are getting is gifted services, when it is actually remediation.
- The inclusion of credibility in the committee's Scope of Work is an attempt to trick everyone, but the highly literate parents in the District are not fooled by this trick.

- All TAG students must be put in separate classrooms, if they are not full, put YS students in them.
- Admit the new Local Plan is a mistake and replace it.

Kelley Organek:

- Parent of high school student.
- The local plan updates were pushed through without parent input and parents were unaware of changes.
- My own kids (now in HS and college) got opportunities that you are taking away from kids now (math acceleration and GIA).
- You claim the changes are rooted in equity but how is taking away opportunities equitable? It seems like gifted kids are no longer being served.
- Twenty years ago, when I started teaching here, every student was screened for TAG services, and ACPS services were better than what was available at private schools.
- COVID set everyone back, so is it fair to make decisions (about math) based on testing during COVID closures?

Willow Darsie:

- The local plan was pushed through so fast that someone must have benefitted from it, so I am determined to figure out what the wins of the updates were and why they are really losses for the rest of us:
 - “Win” 1: family and community involvement is emphasized BUT this plan was all developed behind closed doors, with no input, and limited review time.
 - “Win” 2: national trends are away from tracking, trying to do away with the gifted label altogether and our school board and administration have been trying to eliminate gifted services for years BUT research shows that gifted students have better outcomes when they receive gifted services. This creates narrower student choices in courses and damages city reputation.
 - “Win” 3: ending emphasis on K-5 identification gives our AAS central office staff less work, as identification is a lot of paperwork and not sexy. Our AAS central office staff only want to do flashy things that will help advance their careers. BUT eliminating K-5 identification is in violation of state law.
 - *[Chair’s note: The local plan does not eliminate K-5 identification. It is not in violation of state law.]*
 - “Win” 4: public relations are improved by changing the name from TAG to AAS, eliminating the idea of giftedness altogether BUT as a parent I feel talked down to and misled, because gifted students now are receiving fewer services than they were last year.
- In summary, our local plan must be revoked immediately.
 - Services have dwindled.
 - Local Plan is non-compliant. *[Chair’s note: The local plan is not in violation of state law.]*
 - The lead has been buried with math being gutted.

Anna Garlock:

- Has 5th and 2nd grade students.
- Concerns about the new Local Plan being best for AAS students.
- There was no communication to parents about the Local Plan.
- Seconded other comments heard throughout the evening that the Local Plan seems harmful to AAS students and needs to be rethought.

Jeremy Miller asked for permission to play an audio recording of comments by another parent who could not attend the meeting. The request was declined.

Committee Work Session:

The committee focused on approving the Scope of Work for the year:

- There was a question if CASEL and SEL were the same thing. Dr. Finney explained that CASEL was an organization and SEL is the concept, so they are not the same thing.
- Mike Dukes motioned to approve the SOW; Katie Baker seconded. Approved.

After approving the SOW, the Committee discussed how to research these topics and what speakers to invite. Some of the ideas were:

- Dr. Pamela Gilchrist at the Innovation Campus at VT & Trish Jacobs at CTE. Good to find intersections with visual arts.
- Dr. Cross from W&M on DEL
- Indicators with Dr. Clinton Page. We'd like to discuss potential indicators at the November meeting to request from his team for the presentation in 2024.
- Staff Overview from middle and/or high school.
- AAS student feedback
- AAST teachers or students to get first-hand perspectives.
- Loudoun & VAGC – Wendy King – talk about how they handle middle school.
- The committee could read a book on different models of gifted education at the secondary level.

Katie Baker motioned to adjourn; Mike Dukes seconded. Approved.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Next TAGAC Meeting:

Tuesday, November 28, 2023; 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm

Alexandria City High School, 3330 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22302

Room A-114