

Meeting Minutes
York County School Division
Gifted Education Advisory Committee
Tuesday, October 19, 2021
Yorktown Elementary School Library
6:30 p.m.

Welcome and call to order

Vanna Upchurch

The in-person meeting began with a call to order: 6:34pm by Vanna Upchurch.

Sarah Haywood thanked GEAC members for attending this evening and brought the committee's attention to the documentation provided to the committee.

Committee and Consulting Members in Attendance:

Simna John, Bethel Manor Elementary
Dr. Francis Ereholo, Grafton Bethel Elementary
Nikki Koszewski, Magruder Elementary
Vanna Upchurch, Mt. Vernon Elementary, Chair
Peter Spaeth, Tabb Elementary, Vice Chair
Christina Parrott, Waller Mill Elementary
Laine Briddell, Yorktown Elementary
Lindsey Cook, Grafton Middle
Monica Hyjek, Queens Lake Middle
Colleen Petrie, Yorktown Middle
Janine Felsman, Bruton High
Liz Hass, Grafton High
Deanne Thorson, Tabb High
Louise Casini Hollis, Community Member, Secretary
Lin Chen, Community Member
Sarah Haywood, Coordinator of Gifted Education
Christina Head, Associate Director of K-12 Academic Services
Brett Higginbotham, YCSD School Board Liaison

Guest:

Stacie Lohr, Bruton High school parent

Gifted Education Update

Sarah Haywood

In August, the gifted education staff returned and participated in trainings in preparation for the shift to updated testing. Some of the student testing for gifted referrals will be given online, using the YCSD-provided Chromebooks or tablets. Gifted resource teachers also revised and updated units of study that were implemented as elementary students returned to the EXTEND Center or Waller Mill Elementary School for in-person instruction. In addition, one of our newest gifted resource teachers spent a half-day with Mrs. Barbara Kennedy prior to the start of the year. Mrs. Kennedy is a retired gifted coordinator with Virginia Beach City Public Schools and over the past few years, she has provided feedback to strengthen the units of study, particularly

incorporating Kaplan's depth and complexity prompts. Middle school students also returned to in-person classes provided at their schools for a block each week. Identified gifted students whose families selected Virtual Virginia instruction are provided with online activities and a weekly "check in" time with a gifted resource teacher.

Also in August, Sarah Haywood, gifted coordinator, held an annual update for both elementary and middle school gifted contacts. Prior to this, more in-depth orientations were held individually with new gifted contacts at MVES, WMES, and TMS.

At the start of the school year, the staff processed almost 50 referrals and tested those students before the start of school. This number is "in line" with previous years. Another cycle for placement is currently in progress with about 80 students referred, which is a little more than last year. Staff members will meet for eligibility in the next few weeks to determine student placement for the 2nd trimester/unit of study.

Each gifted resource teacher held an online parent orientation meeting that was shared with parents during the week of September 14. The timing was selected in order to avoid conflicts with the home school orientations.

The talent development program pilots have started in all first grade classes at MES and YES. This is a program that provides support for academically diverse students who show potential for higher levels of accomplishment compared to others/peers. Exposure to activities and lessons specifically designed to elicit critical and creative thinking is the foundation of this program. As a part of this program, students will be exposed to tasks that showcase talent, strengthen their problem-solving skills, and prepares them for challenging coursework in the future. After whole-class lessons and the first grade screening test are both complete, students will be selected for small-group follow up during the second semester. The goal is to provide support so that they will be prepared to engage in challenging subject matter and rigorous courses in upper elementary school and beyond. These students may or may not move on to identification in gifted education. That is not typically the primary purpose of talent development programs.

The gifted program's monthly newsletter was sent to families at the start of October. This newsletter is sent to all families of identified gifted students in grades K-12. This newsletter is just one part of communication that is shared with families. Parents of students who participate in the EXTEND Program receive weekly emails from the gifted resource teachers. The elementary gifted cluster teachers at the schools receive weekly updates as well. In addition, the gifted coordinator emails elementary gifted contacts and principals several times each month and also maintains periodic contact with middle school contacts and principals.

Part of communication efforts also includes a monthly collaboration session that was recently held by the gifted resource team to provide a time for elementary cluster teachers to share and discuss ways to provide instruction that is more targeted to student needs. Each month this will be held online, after school.

A "ready to share presentation" for elementary and middle school teachers was prepared and sent to schools to provide an overview related to referral procedures, identification of students, and services provided.

A whole-grade screening for ability is taking place during the month of November with all first graders. The gifted resource staff will administer this test at each elementary school throughout the month. Students who perform well on this assessment will then be referred for full gifted evaluation during the next referral cycle.

Sarah Haywood continues working in several state groups related to gifted education. An update was provided to gifted coordinators last month related to the draft of the gifted regulations that is in progress at the state level. The document is still "on hold" as it's being reviewed by an outside organization for potential additions related to Governor's Schools. This review is supposed to be completed later this spring. A timeline for returning to the legislative process has not been determined, but currently there is no reason to believe that any changes will be

made to the proposed updates. Because of her involvement with state and regional groups, Sarah shares this information with supervisors and gifted resource teachers to help plan “next steps” in our gifted program K-12.

Other upcoming events:

A virtual evening presentation with Dr. Ellen Fithian will be held on October 26th at 7:00 to address planning for college with the academically gifted student in mind. Dr. Ellen Fithian, an independent educational consultant with Hampton Roads Educational Consulting, has earned an M.D. from Columbia University and a Ph.D. in Education from the College of William and Mary (emphasis in gifted education with cognate in higher education.) She is also the mother of four grown children and the College Planning Coordinator at The Governor's School for Science and Technology in Hampton, VA. She's helped numerous families successfully navigate the challenges of succeeding in high school and gaining admission to an affordable college that is a good match for the student. Parents of gifted students in grades 8-11 received an email with the meeting link, and please feel free to email Sarah Haywood or Kristin Spires for the link if you wish to attend.

Also be aware that a free parent workshop is being offered by the Virginia Association for the Gifted on October 28th, at 7:00. Dr. Susan Baum will talk about ways to enhance gifted children's executive functioning skills. This refers to what some people call “the management system of the brain”, or skills related to setting goals, planning and getting things finished. This set of skills is related to working memory, flexibility, and self-control. (Wording taken from <https://www.understood.org/articles/en/what-is-executive-function> .) You can register at <https://www.vagifted.org/> .

This is also the time of year when 10th and 11th grade students should consider applying for Summer Residential Governor's School or a summer Governor's World Language Academy. Information about these opportunities is now available from the school counselors and it is posted on the VDOE website, and one of the programs has created a new marketing video designed for interested students: <https://www.radford.edu/content/gov-school/home.html> . Our secondary gifted resource teacher, Kristin Spires, is setting up meetings over the next few weeks to talk with interested students and assist them with their planning and application process. Applications and information about each program can be found here:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/governors_school_programs/summer_residential/ and here http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/foreign_language/language_academies/ . One possible change for this year is a potentially new program in Integrated Applied Sciences. If the student selects this box on one of the mentorship applications, they will only be considered for the new program if they are not accepted to their originally selected program and if the IAS is operational. If the IAS program becomes an option, the VDOE will work with the applications to determine who is interested in being considered for IAS.

Odyssey of the Mind: It appears that like last year, there will not be regional competitions this year (only State, then World Finals) for Odyssey of the Mind teams. So far, TMS, THS, and QLMS are sponsoring teams. If you want more information about Odyssey of the Mind, please let us know and Sarah will put you in touch with Keith Wright, our OM coordinator.

“Focusing on the Future” an annual event for secondary students and their families that's offered by the Center for Gifted Education staff at the College of William and Mary is not taking place this winter, but will take place later next year.

William and Mary's Center for Gifted Education is also sponsoring a “2E-Twice Exceptional Conference” online, Friday and Saturday, February 25-26, 2022. This is designed for both parents and educators. More information can be found at <https://education.wm.edu/centers/cfge/profdev/conferences/2e/index.php>

Gifted Steering Committee Update

Christina Head

Mrs. Head provided an update from the committee which is composed of parents, GEAC, teachers, and administrators. The committee broke into sub-groups last year to examine: Identification, Gifted Services and

the 5 year plan. Currently, we are in the last year of the current 5 year plan, and are looking at what to include in the next cycle.

Mrs. Head shared that currently they are reconvening the Steering Committee and getting feedback on the current 5 year plan. They will develop drafts and provide information to committee members so that the goals and objectives may be updated. Mrs. Head stressed that it is a fluid document, and is updated as needed throughout the 5 years.

Old Business

Vanna Upchurch

Annual review letter: The annual letter was delivered to the school board. Sarah Haywood thanked Lindsey Cook for chairing the letter. Vanna Upchurch shared the note from Dr. Shandor thanking the committee for their hard work to better the gifted education of York County students.

Lindsey Cook observed that while the continual bullet updates on the five year plan were helpful, she found herself going back to the minutes to create a more thorough picture of the past year when writing the letter. Lindsey Cook observed that a paragraph rather than bullets may be more valuable to the letter writing committee in the future.

Revision of bylaws:

A robust discussion was had in regard to the revised bylaws delivered to the committee by the County's attorney, Ms. Melanie Berry. Fall 2021 draft is the most up to date version from Ms. Berry. Ms. Upchurch observed that there were quite a few changes from the draft approved in June, and opened the floor to questions regarding the current draft put forth by Ms. Berry .

Lindsey Cook brought the committee's attention to the section on membership and asked about the inclusion of York River Academy, the charter school. It was shared that there are 4 identified students from York River Academy who participate in the gifted program.(Correction: there are two non participating gifted students in the program) Vanna Upchurch asked for clarification in the difference between York River Academy and the other high school programs such as the IB program, SOA, and Governor's school housed within other school buildings. Christina Head clarified that it is a functioning charter school within the York County school system, whereas the IB program is part of York High School's curriculum. Brett Higginbotham added that York River has its own graduation, is housed within York Middle School, and that it operates similarly to an Achievable Dream school within the Newport News school system. Therefore, YCSD is in charge of the administration of York River Academy, but it has its own charter.

Stacie Lohr asked how gifted students are defined at York River Academy and Christina Head clarified that students that are identified at some point in their school career similar to how other students are.

Lindsey Cook then asked if the verbiage regarding the number of community members (currently at 2) should state "up to 2" so that the committee is not required to find additional members if those slots are not filled. Laine Briddell asked if it could be phrased in a manner that allowed for more community members to serve, if they have people who show an interest.

Liz Hass pointed out that the organizational meeting is to be in June, and that our current meeting dates go through May. She questioned if the organizational meeting is different from the regular GEAC meeting. Vanna Upchurch suggested that we amend the language to state that the organizational meeting be concurrent with the final meeting of the academic year which complemented Kristin Spires' observation that flexibility is needed as the school calendar shifts.

Lindsey Cook then asked why the high school student liaisons cannot vote. Vanna Upchurch referenced Kristin Spires' observation that past gifted students who have come back and shared their experiences with present

gifted students, have provided great insights to current gifted students and that having the feedback from students who have been through the program is the goal of the positions. Kristin Spires added that serving on GEAC will give these students the valuable experience of performing community service through a program they are familiar with, and they may include their experience on their college applications. It was agreed that being a voting member was not required for the students to reap these benefits.

The issue of parent representatives not being specified as parents of identified gifted students was raised. Christina Head shared that the Virginia code does not stipulate that it be limited to parents of identified gifted students. Brett Higginbotham clarified that the statement included on the application would be a deciding factor when appointing committee members.

Lindsey Cook inquired about how the length of term is determined. Brett Higginbotham clarified that the school board's current policy only allows for one year terms, but is in the process of being amended to allow for longer terms, but the school board has the final say in the length of someone's term. Sarah Haywood offered further clarification stating that historically the committee members' names have been sent to the school board every year for approval. It was agreed that there is utility for the school board to have the flexibility to appoint for 1-3 year terms.

Lindsey Cook asked for clarification on the bylaws specification that the school division personnel serve concurrently with the assignment to their positions was included. Colleen Petrie observed that it makes it clear whose position committee membership tasks fall to.

Lindsey Cook asked why the provision requiring a committee member to find a substitute should they be unable to attend a GEAC meeting was removed. Brett Higginbotham pointed out that only members may vote and that it may be why that provision was taken out. He suggested we ask Ms. Berry for clarification on why this provision was removed.

Lin Chen asked for clarification about confusing language outlining the duties of the committee chair and sub-committee chairs. The committee chair shall appoint the sub-committee members. The bylaws will be updated to specify which chair is being referred to.

Lindsey Cook asked about the process for the meeting minutes' approval. Vanna Upchurch clarified that committee members may distribute a draft to the gifted parents, but the minutes cannot be approved until the next meeting. Vanna Upchurch also pointed out that a provision had been in an earlier draft that after every 5 year plan is made, a bylaws sub-committee must be formed to review the current by laws, and that provision would be requested to be reinstated.

Lindsey Cook then asked for clarification as to what would happen if no one wants to serve as an officer after their maximum of 2 years is completed. Stacie Lohr pointed out that ultimately it falls to the school board to approve and appoint people as they see fit.

Lindsey Cook then pointed out that the new draft states new officers are elected in May but don't take office until August and inquired who the committee members report to in July as the annual letter is being written. It was a consensus that the old officers are still in place until July 31st, and should be the points of contact.

Lindsey Cook then addressed the provision that public comment was limited to three minutes in Ms. Berry's draft. Brett Higginbotham has spoken to Ms. Berry believes that she was looking at GEAC meetings like school board meetings, and he has clarified that GEAC does not operate in the same manner as the school board.

Lindsey Cook pointed out that the timeline on the meeting agenda (provided to the committee 5 days before the meeting) and proposed agenda timelines (13 days before) aren't congruent. The consensus was that the sentences should be inverted.

Lindsey Cook questioned the provision stating that if the committee veers into a tangent, that the committee must stop and have a quorum vote to decide if they will continue the discussion. Brett Higginbotham pointed out that it may be a nod to Robert's Rules of Order.

Vanna Upchurch clarified that we can only vote electronically on minutes in the current by-laws which were amended for virtual meetings . Under the proposed bylaws we may only vote on the minutes in person.

Stacie Lohr asked how the lawyer's involvement came to be in the bylaws revision, as the bylaws had not historically been subject to legal review. Brett Higginbotham said that it is a new recommendation from the state, and that it just came down to congruent timing.

New Business

Vanna Upchurch and Sarah Haywood

Sarah Haywood asked committee members to review the brochure to understand the obligations of GEAC members and clarified that the chair and vice chair work on the annual letter that goes to the parents of gifted students and the school board. She reminded new members to use their parent email lists to distribute reminders of GEAC meetings and the meeting notes to gifted parents once the minutes are approved.

Parent and community comments

Liz Hass asked about the dates on the calendar for the upcoming seminars and Christina Head assured her that the dates were included in the newsletter she distributed. Janine Felsman asked who received these emails, and Sarah Haywood clarified that families of all gifted students receive the monthly newsletter, and that families who signed up for email communication from GEAC are included in receiving emails from their school GEAC representatives.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:25

Future meeting dates:

January 18, 2022

March 15, 2022

May 17, 2022