Analysis of TAG Center Enrollment and its Impact on Readiness for Middle School

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of this study was to examine the factors that contribute to under-enrollment of TAG Centers in Grade 2 and to examine the achievement of TAG students at the end of Grade 5. There are eight elementary TAG centers across the district. Two of the eight TAG centers (Heather Hills and Glenarden Woods) are school-wide TAG centers, that is, all students in the schools are TAG-identified students. The remaining six TAG centers are modeled after the school-in-school structure in which TAG-identified students attend school with non-TAG-identified students; however, the TAG-identified students are taught in separate classes.

The following research questions guided this study: 1) Which factors are associated with whether or not parents apply to enroll their TAG-identified students into a TAG center in Grade 2?; 2) Are TAG center-based TAG students better prepared for middle school relative to non-center-based TAG students?; 3) Are students identified as TAG in Grade 1 who enter in TAG centers in Grade 2 better prepared for middle school relative to TAG-identified students who enter TAG centers in either Grade 3 or Grade 4? To address the research questions, data were gathered from the TAG enrollment report from APEX Reports in SchoolMax, The Department of Pupil Accounting and School Boundaries, The Office of Talented and Gifted Education and the Department of Testing, Research, and Evaluation. A survey was also administered in November 2016 to parents of TAG students by Research and Evaluation.

Lottery Applications and TAG Center Under-Enrollment

ES-Table 1 displays the number of first grade students tested for TAG, the number of first grade students identified as TAG, the number of applicants to enroll in TAG centers, and the number of parents who were offered placement and who accepted placement in a TAG center from SY09 through SY16. The analyses conducted indicate that the main source of under-enrollment in the TAG centers seems to be a result of the declining number of the TAG lottery applicant pool (i.e., TAG-identified students) especially in SY16. The data indicates that the number of TAG-identified students has been trending downwards in recent years with SY16 having the lowest number. On average, around 40 percent of parents of first grade TAG-identified students applied for the lottery in the last eight school years. The trend data shows that that the placement rate to join a center have dramatically increased over the eight school years investigated. In SY09, a little over half of applicants were offered a placement in a TAG center during the first round of selection. Since SY13, the odds of winning placement in a TAG

center have become almost a certainty, resulting in the fact that those who apply to the lottery are practically guaranteed a seat in the TAG centers. The data also demonstrates that the proportion of parents who accepted the placement offer to enroll their students in a TAG center increased from 53 percent in SY09 to 82 percent in SY16. See ES-Table 1. Overall, the eight year aggregate acceptance rate is 73 percent with SY16 having the highest acceptance rate.

ES-Table 1: TAG Identification, Center Application and Placement, SY09-SY16

		SY09	SY10	SY11	SY12	SY13	SY14	SY15	SY16
All Tested Grade 1 Students		8701	8773	9024	8940	9356	10273	10114	9747
TAG Identified	#	775	798	934	908	778	772	811	694
	% of Tested Grade 1 Students	8.9	9.1	10.4	10.2	8.3	7.5	8.0	7.1
Applicants to TAG Centers	#	263	314	345	323	307	350	375	294
	% of TAG-Identified Students	33.9	39.3	36.9	35.6	39.5	45.3	46.2	42.4
Offered Slot in a TAG Center	#	131	209	237	299	305	346	340	292
	% of Applicants	49.8	66.6	68.7	92.6	99.3	99.1	90.7	99.3
Accepted Placement Offer	#	69	145	151	221	227	251	263	240
	% of Offered Slots	52.7	69.4	63.7	73.9	74.4	72.5	77.4	82.2

The data also shows that as the enrollment capacity of TAG centers increased over the years, the number of applications into TAG centers declined. For the SY15 and SY16 lotteries, all TAG centers were undersubscribed: the enrollment capacity exceeded the number of applications. For example, the number of applications for SY16 was 22 percent fewer than the number of available spaces at the TAG centers. Without taking the feeder pattern into TAG centers into account, the number of applications should have been 598 for the SY16 lottery in order for the centers to fill all their spots through the lottery system. Therefore, the number of applications required for full capacity enrollment accounts for 86 percent of TAG-identified first graders. This requires more than doubling the number of lottery applicants, which were 294 for SY16. Since SY13, the number of applications for the school-wide TAG centers grew to be twice as much as the applications for the school-in-school TAG centers. This trend continued into SY16, when school-wide centers received two and half times more applications than school-in-school centers. Thus, the decline in lottery applications is a much bigger problem for school-in-school centers than it is for school-wide centers.

The second source of the under-enrollment is related to the decisions parents make after they are offered placement into TAG centers. The rate of parent acceptance dramatically increased from 53 percent for SY09 to 82 percent for SY16. In addition, across these eight schools years, about a quarter of parents declined placement or failed to meet post-lottery

deadlines to register their children in the assigned TAG centers. In SY15 and SY16, of those parents who did not accept placement, about three-fourths missed deadlines for submitting necessary paperwork. In sum, TAG centers remain under capacity by about 33 percent on the aggregate, with under-enrolment at about 50 percent in four of six school-in-school TAG Centers.

Parent Perceptions of Lottery Participation and TAG Center Enrollment

We were able to use parent survey data to further our understanding of the reasons why parents choose to enroll or not enroll their child in a TAG center. Over a third (35%) of the parents who responded to the survey reported that they have never applied to a TAG center lottery. ES-Table 2 displays the top reasons parents did not apply to the TAG center lottery. The data indicates that low participation in the TAG center lottery can be attributed to lack of awareness (35%) and a lack of information about the TAG center (27%). In addition, many parents expressed a lack of interest in the TAG center because of the following: preference for the neighborhood school because it is reputable (26%) and provides high-quality TAG services (17%), dissatisfaction with the distance to the TAG center (17%), a desire to not separate siblings (16%), and the decision to enroll child in a charter or specialty school (14%). In sum, the reasons for TAG parents opting out of the TAG center experience can be categorized in two major issues: lack of awareness and lack of interest.

ES-Table 2: Top Reasons for Not Applying to the Lottery

Reason for Not Applying to Lottery (n=266)	%
Was not aware of the TAG center lottery	35.3
Not given enough information about the TAG center	27.1
Prefer the neighborhood school because it is high-performing/has a good reputation	26.3
TAG center is too far from home or bus ride would be too long	17.3
Prefer the neighborhood school because it already has high-quality TAG services	16.5
Already has child enrolled in the neighborhood school, don't want to separate my children	16.2
Decided to enroll my child in a charter school or specialty school	13.9

On the other hand, half (50%) of the parents who responded to the survey had a child who was enrolled in a TAG center. The reasons why parents chose to enroll their child in a TAG center were not surprising. A high majority (73%) of the parents reported that the TAG center would provide the best opportunities and about 57 percent of parents reported that the TAG center provides high-quality TAG services. Many of the parents also expressed dissatisfaction with their child's neighborhood school, including that their child was not being challenged (46%), the TAG services offered in the neighborhood school were not good enough (37%), and

that the neighborhood school was not reputable (18%). About 38 percent reported that they were being strategic by enrolling their child in a TAG center so that their child can automatically be placed in a TAG center in middle school.

TAG Student Middle School Readiness

The analyses of Grade 5 PARCC data indicate that if all TAG students attended a TAG center, they would have an average PARCC proficiency rate of 63 percent in reading and 53 percent in math, and if all TAG students did not attend a TAG center, they would have an average proficiency rate of 63 percent in reading and 56 percent in math. The differences in the proficiency rates between all TAG students in TAG centers and all TAG students not in TAG centers were not statistically significant. This finding suggests that that there is no impact of TAG center attendance on PARCC reading and math proficiency. Regarding the timing of the entry to a TAG center, the findings indicate that if all students had entered a TAG center in Grade 2 they would have had a lower average PARCC proficiency rate in reading and in math, compared to entering a TAG center later in Grade 3 or 4 by about 6 percentage points (60% for Grade 2 entry vs. 66% for Grade 3 or 4 entry) in reading and 2 percentage points (49% for Grade 2 entry vs. 51% for Grade 3 or 4 entry) in math, respectively. As with the finding on TAG center vs. non-TAG center, none of the reported differences is statistically significant (i.e., p-value is less than .05). In sum, the findings indicate that students who receive TAG services are equally prepared for middle school regardless of the method or commencement of TAG service delivery. Among students who start receiving TAG services in the second grade, receiving all TAG services in a center or enrolling in a center in Grade 2 does not make a difference for their readiness for middle school.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings presented in this report, we make the following recommendations to improve the TAG program.

- Improve the dissemination of information about the TAG, TAG lottery, and TAG center
- Ensure TAG identification is completed before lottery deadline and parents are informed about their children's TAG status and the opportunity to apply to a TAG center.
- Consider the possibility of universal lottery for all TAG identified first graders.
- Examine the consolidation of TAG centers and rearrangement of TAG feeder patterns.
- Establish a system of accountability that monitors the implementation of TAG services at neighborhood schools.