

Fairfax County Federation of Citizens' Associations
Resolution on the Advanced Academic Program
Draft August 6, 2015

WHEREAS, many studies have shown that advanced learners are best served when grouped together in academic classrooms; and

WHEREAS, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) established the Advanced Academic Program (AAP) as the "Gifted and Talented Program" in the 1960s and 1970s under the rubric of special education, to serve the two percent of the population who score at or above 140 on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Quotient Scale; and

WHEREAS, FCPS has changed the criteria for placing children into the AAP so that a variety of information is considered when identifying advanced learners, including—among other possible criteria—test scores on both the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test and the Cognitive Abilities Test, as well as teachers' ratings on the Gifted Behaviors Rating Scale (with commentary), report cards, parent questionnaires, and student work samples; and

WHEREAS, FCPS provides services to advanced learners along a continuum of Advanced Academic services, ranking students according to their needs from Level I to Level IV, where Level IV represents students who require placement in a full-time AAP; and

WHEREAS, FCPS established "Centers" in which to gather Level IV AAP students from various base schools in order to ensure that these students would have an academic and socio-emotional cohort not typically available in their base schools; and

WHEREAS, approximately 6 percent of all students in grades 3-8 were enrolled in the Level IV AAP during the 1999-2000 school year;¹ and

WHEREAS, approximately 19.7 percent of all students in grades 3-8 were enrolled in the Level IV AAP during the 2014-2015 school year;² and

WHEREAS, the increase in the percentage of Level IV-identified AAP students has led to concerns that, as former FCPS teacher of the year Vern Williams has commented, "kids aren't grouped as rigorously [and therefore top students do not have] more than just four or five peers close enough in ability to choose from to create a peer group;"³ and

¹ FCPS School Board Work Session. *Draft Proposal for Expansion of Advanced Academic Level IV Centers*, 10 Dec. 2012, p. 18.

² The numerator is taken from a spreadsheet provided by FCPS to the Advanced Academic Program Advisory Committee and cited in an e-mail to Fairfax County Association for the Gifted members on 3 Feb. 2015. The denominator is taken from FCPS' Adopted Capital Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2016-2020, published on 5 Dec. 2014.

³ Davis, Noah. "What Makes You So Smart, Middle School Math Teacher?" *Pacific Standard Magazine*, 24 Oct. 2014.

WHEREAS, the special needs of the top students within the AAP may significantly differ from the needs of other students within the program; and

WHEREAS, the 2013 George Mason University review of FCPS' AAP stressed the importance of "critical mass" for gifted students, defined in part by the presence of at least two classes per grade level or subject area; and

WHEREAS, even given the expansion of the Level IV AAP population to 19.7 percent of students, no single elementary school consistently identifies 50 or more students per grade level as Level IV-eligible; and

WHEREAS, FCPS' most recent Capital Improvement Program (CIP) suggests establishing AAP Centers at Franklin Sherman and Chesterbrook Elementary Schools which would not admit AAP-eligible students from outside their base school populations, and thus do not meet the traditional meaning of a Center within FCPS; and

WHEREAS, some elementary schools provide Level IV AAP services to their base school students through a Local Level IV program; and

WHEREAS, parents of students at elementary schools that have a Local Level IV program have a choice of whether or not to send their AAP-eligible students to a Center; and

WHEREAS, one of the strengths of FCPS as a school system is that it provides essential services to families through a variety of programs, based on which program is right for each individual child, rather than a "one size fits all" approach to education,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Federation:

1. We recommend that FCPS reject the suggestion within the CIP to establish "One School Centers," such as those proposed at Franklin Sherman and Chesterbrook Elementary Schools; and
2. We recommend that FCPS direct the Department of Facilities and Transportation that in future planning, the CIP must take into consideration that the maintenance of a high-quality AAP requires FCPS to offer the option of a strong Center-based education to all Level IV-identified students in elementary school.