Advanced Academic Services Advisory Committee

Annual Report – 2025-2026 School Year

Advanced Academic Services Advisory Committee Annual Report

June 2026

For ACTION ___
For INFORMATION _X_

FROM: Evan Smith, Chair, Advanced Academic Services Advisory Committee (AASAC) and Katie Baker, Vice-Chair, Advanced Academic Services Advisory Committee (AASAC)

THROUGH: Melanie Kay-Wyatt, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

Pierrette Finney, Ed.D., Chief Academic Officer
Carmen Sanders, Executive Director of Instructional Support
Mashari Whitfield, Director of Advanced Academics and Gifted Programs

TO: The Honorable Chair Michelle Rief, and Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: 2025–2026 Advanced Academic Services Advisory Committee (AASAC) Year-End Report

ACPS 2030 STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS:

- Goal 1: Create a safe, caring and inclusive school environment where students feel connected, supported and respected.
- Goal 2: Engage and challenge each student, every day to achieve academic excellence.
- Goal 3: Recruit, develop and retain a diverse team of talented professionals by fostering a supportive and growth-oriented workplace.
- Goal 4: Cultivate trust by engaging and communicating clearly with our community to achieve our vision.
- Goal 5: Prepare each student for life after high school by providing the guidance, skills and support they need for college, careers and other future goals.

SUMMARY: During the 2025-2026 school year, the Advanced Academic Services Advisory Committee (AASAC) fulfilled its mandate to advise the School Board on Advanced Academic Services delivered by Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS)

in grades K-12. Consistent with its standing role under the AASAC bylaws, this year's work centered on a comprehensive review of progress under the ACPS Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted 2023-2028 across all six goal areas: Identification; Delivery of Services; Curriculum and Instruction; Professional Development; Equitable Representation of Students; and Parent/Guardian and Community Involvement. The Committee also conducted a focused deep dive on advanced math pathways, engaged with the AAS Indicator Report developed by ACPS, and considered the implications of the FY 2027 budget environment for Advanced Academic Services. The findings and recommendations in this report aim to strengthen Local Plan implementation, build durable monitoring infrastructure for the current and next Local Plan, improve advanced math pathway design, protect resources for advanced academic services, and protect instructional time for AAS-identified students.

Meaningful progress this year spans identification, staffing, curriculum, and monitoring. 2024-25 was the most representative year for identification on record; two new middle-school Advanced Academic Resource Teacher positions were filled; Honors Math 6 curricula were substantively revised; and the AAS Office and Accountability and Research Department delivered the first revised Local Plan Indicator Report covering all six goal areas.

Four concerns shape this year's recommendations. First, **advanced math access** — ACPS is the only top-twenty Virginia division, and the only Northern Virginia division, without an accessible pathway to complete Algebra I before 8th grade; the current ad hoc acceleration process is little used and compresses access to advanced high school STEM. Second, **the continued AAS resource gap has real student impact** — school-based AAS staffing is approximately 10.5 FTE below Local Plan targets, concentrated at the schools serving Alexandria's highest-need students; the FY 2027 adjusted budget would further cut the centrally-managed itinerant team that backstops those schools; and each year, school-based AASTs are pulled from instruction for weeks to run identification screening, interrupting services to already-identified students. Third, **monitoring infrastructure that lags policy** — implementation indicators for the current Local Plan were built after the fact, and several Committee data questions from March remain unanswered. Fourth, **a paused Honors curriculum review** — the Honors Steering Committees did not meet in 2025-2026, leaving a gap first flagged in the 2017 external evaluation unaddressed for another cycle.

Based on its work this year, the Committee makes the following new recommendations:

1. **Establish an accessible accelerated math pathway** that allows advanced math students to enroll in Algebra I in 7th grade and Geometry in 8th grade, with automatic screening of all Honors Math 6 students using multiple readiness measures consistent with Virginia HB2686. This is time-sensitive: changes for 2026-2027 must be communicated to families soon.
2. **Acknowledge and address the gap between Local Plan commitments and AAS resources.** Remove the two proposed AAS teacher cuts from the FY 2027 budget; make AAS staffing at Local Plan levels a Board budget priority for FY 2028 and beyond; and, in the meantime, publish service standards calibrated to actual staffing.

3. **Protect service delivery to identified students during the screening cycle** by reviewing and, if necessary, redesigning the screening process so school-based AASTs are not pulled from instruction for weeks each year during the December-April window.
4. **Build durable monitoring infrastructure.** Near term, stand up a centralized AAS accountability system with a public dashboard, school-level visibility, regular public review cycles, and improved responsiveness to data requests. For the next Local Plan, build implementation metrics and multiple funding scenarios into the Plan itself.
5. **Resume and complete the Honors curriculum review,** delivering during 2026-2027 clear curriculum standards for grades 6-12 that distinguish general education, Honors, and Tier II/III AAS interventions — with particular attention to high school English (including English 10) and to twice-exceptional students.

The Committee renews nine recommendations from prior years where the underlying issues remain unresolved:

1. **Strengthen K-3 service delivery** — consistent push-in services, expanded cluster grouping and co-teaching, and clearer Tier II expectations and monitoring.
2. **Enhance transparency, communication, and shared accountability** — launch the AAS family survey developed this year and a public AAS dashboard in 2026-2027.
3. **Continue investing in technology infrastructure** — extend this year's digital screening progress across the full identification and service-delivery workflow.
4. **Maintain regular, two-way engagement with key stakeholders** — including the family survey, a community roundtable, and dedicated listening sessions on math acceleration.
5. **Monitor the experiences of AAS-identified students** through a student survey paired with disaggregated achievement and participation data.
6. **Consider new advanced courses incorporating AAS strategies** — particularly an advanced option above Honors in English 10.
7. **Initiate ongoing public monitoring of the Local Plan** and commission an external review of AAS during 2026-2027 — the first since 2017.

BACKGROUND: Throughout the year, AASAC held ten meetings, including four work sessions dedicated to Local Plan goal-area review and the advanced math deep dive. The Committee received regular updates from the AAS Office and presentations from the Office of Accountability and Research; heard from the former Co-Chair of the Arlington Advanced Academics & Talent Development Advisory Committee, on Arlington's advanced math pathways; and provided input on an in-development ACPS family survey of advanced learners. On March 9, the Committee engaged with the 2025-2026 Local Plan Indicator Report covering all six goal areas, offering feedback on chart design, disaggregation, and the addition of an executive summary. The Committee also considered the FY

2027 budget environment, including the May 2026 adjusted budget recommendation that proposes elimination of two AAS teacher positions.

The 2025-2030 ACPS Strategic Plan, adopted by the School Board in May 2025, sets five goals spanning academic excellence, safe and inclusive schools, a supported staff, community trust, and post-secondary readiness. The Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted is an important vehicle for all goals, including delivering academic excellence — particularly for students from historically underrepresented groups whose access to engaging and challenging instruction the Strategic Plan identifies as essential to closing opportunity gaps.

RECOMMENDATION: The Superintendent recommends that the School Board approve the 2025–2026 AASAC Year-End Report.

CONTACTS:

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Scope of Work

AASAC's charter is established in accordance with 8 VAC 20-40-60.

The purpose of this Committee is to advise the School Board through the Division Superintendent of the educational needs of all gifted/advanced students in the Division. As a part of this goal, the Committee annually reviews the Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted, including revisions, and determines the extent to which the plan for the previous year was implemented. The recommendations of the Advisory Committee are submitted in writing through the Division Superintendent to the School Board.

In 2025-2026, the Committee did not adopt a narrow scope of work. A draft proposing three focus areas was discussed on September 29 but not adopted. At the October 27 work session, the Committee decided to focus on:

- A comprehensive review of progress under the 2023-2028 Local Plan across all six goal areas: Identification; Delivery of Services; Curriculum and Instruction; Professional Development; Equitable Representation of Students; and Parent/Guardian and Community Involvement.
- A focused deep dive on advanced math pathways at ACPS, including comparison to peer Virginia divisions and to new Virginia mathematics-acceleration guidance.
- Engagement with the draft 2025-26 Local Plan Indicator Report developed by the AAS Office and the Office of Accountability and Research.
- Consideration of the FY 2027 budget environment and its implications for Advanced Academic Services.

Committee Membership

ACPS Advanced Academic Services Advisory Committee 2025-26 Roster				
Name	**Affiliation**	**Term**	**Expiration**	**Voting Member**
Ettasue Harris	Parent, Community Member (City of Alexandria)	2nd Term	June 30, 2026	Yes
Evan Smith	Parent, Community Member (City of Alexandria)	2nd Term	June 30, 2026	Yes
Jeremy Miller	Parent, Community Member (City of Alexandria)	1st Term	June 30, 2026	Yes
Katie Baker	Parent	2nd Term	June 30, 2026	Yes

Kelley Organek	Parent, Community Member (City of Alexandria), Staff Member	1st Term	June 30, 2027	Yes
Lillian Pace	Parent, Community Member (City of Alexandria)	2nd Term	June 30, 2026	Yes
Matthew Henry	Staff Member	2nd Term	June 30, 2027	Yes
Willow Darsie	Parent, Community Member (City of Alexandria)	2nd Term	June 30, 2027	Yes
Sapna Patel Duchesne	Parent	1st Term	June 30, 2027	Yes
Efrate Ayele	ACPS Student	1st Term	June 30, 2026	Yes
Mashari Whitfield	Staff Liaison	N/A		No
Ryan Reyna	School Board Liaison	N/A		No

Committee Meeting Dates

- September 29, 2025 – Alexandria City High School, King Street Campus
- October 27, 2025 – Work Session – Via Zoom
- November 10, 2025 – Alexandria City High School, King Street Campus
- January 12, 2026 – Work Session – Via Zoom
- February 9, 2026 – Alexandria City High School, King Street Campus
- March 9, 2026 – Work Session – Via Zoom
- April 13, 2026 – Alexandria City High School, King Street Campus
- May 11, 2026 – Work Session – Via Zoom
- May 28, 2026 – Alexandria City High School, King Street Campus

Key Findings

Consistent with its standing role under the AASAC bylaws, the Committee this year conducted a comprehensive review of progress under the 2023-2028 Local Plan across all six goal areas, supported by monitoring worksheets used at the November 10, January 12, and March 9 work sessions. The review identified meaningful progress and areas of continued or new concern. The narrative below summarizes findings from that review, organized by goal area. Four themed findings follow, each focused on an area of Committee attention this year.

Findings from the Local Plan Goal-Area Review

Identification and Equitable Representation of Students. The AAS Office expanded the SAA portfolio screening process from grades 3–5 to grades 3–8 this year, completed in spring 2026, and developed standardized portfolio work samples for grades 6 and 7 across social studies, science, math, and language arts. The Office consolidated the referral form and permission-to-screen into a single document to improve accessibility for families, and the transition of the SAA portfolio process from paper to a secure digital platform is in progress, with a target completion of summer 2026. The Office strengthened its partnerships in service of equitable identification, including consultation with gifted-education expert Dr. Scott Peters on the HOPE Scale and cross-division collaboration with Fairfax County Public Schools on identification practices. Data presented in March indicated continued improvement in proportional representation of students from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups being identified for AAS, including the most representative year on record. At the same time, the Indicator Report shows that only 22% of identified Young Scholars in grades 3–5 are enrolled in SAA or GIA services (190 of 865 students); the Committee continues to look for visibility into the supports and progress of identified Young Scholars who have not transitioned into services.

Delivery of Services. The AAS Office filled two new middle-school Advanced Academic Resource Teacher (AART) positions this year — at George Washington Middle School and Francis C. Hammond Middle School. A new central-office Elementary Instructional Specialist for Advanced Academics position was posted in March 2026 to backfill the role vacated when Mashari Whitfield was promoted to permanent Director of Advanced Academics and Gifted Programs. Two new central-office itinerant teachers (one elementary, one middle school) also began work this year, extending coverage to schools with the fewest school-based AAS staff. Even so, K–3 push-in service delivery remains uneven, with schools below 1.5 AASTs struggling to meet the Local Plan's described frequency of push-in lessons; tier II expectations remain unclear and inconsistently monitored; and AAS-identified students at the high school have no school-based AAS staff to support them, despite the Local Plan calling for one AAST at each of the two high-school campuses.

Curriculum and Instruction. The AAS Office, in collaboration with division math specialists and peers from Arlington Public Schools and Falls Church City Public Schools, substantively revised the Honors Math 6 curricula to embed above-grade-level standards and explicit differentiation expectations, supported by common division unit assessments. The Office launched a partnership with the University of Connecticut Neag School of Education to strengthen Tier I instruction through sustained professional learning, with particular focus on broadening access for historically underserved students. AAS curriculum guides aligned to division sequence and pacing were updated and now incorporate research-based gifted-education resources. Outside of the Math 6/7 revisions, however, clear curriculum standards distinguishing Honors from general education across grades 6–12 are still absent: the Honors Steering Committees convened in 2024-2025 to develop such standards did not meet in 2025-2026. Walkthrough data presented in March

indicated, for middle-school math, limited evidence of above-grade-level or enriched content and limited evidence of tasks requiring multi-step problem-solving, justification, or extended explanation.

Professional Development. AAS staff continued monthly professional learning for school-based AASTs, including sessions on critical and creative thinking strategies, inquiry-based learning, and collaboration. Critical and creative thinking professional learning was extended to secondary ELA teachers. Asset-based resources were introduced to support equitable talent recognition during school-based AAS screening meetings.

Parent/Guardian and Community Involvement. Family-facing AAS materials continued to be translated into multiple languages, and the AAS Office held informational sessions for families on referral and screening, eligibility, appeals, and acceleration. The AAS Office presented to ACPS family liaisons at the Family and Community Engagement Center in April. The Committee, through a member subcommittee, developed a draft AAS family survey in collaboration with the AAS Office. Several planned community engagement activities did not deploy this year, however: the draft AAS family survey has not been launched, the community roundtable on AAS topics scoped by a Committee subcommittee was not held, and no public AAS dashboard tied to the Local Plan goals has been launched.

Monitoring of the Local Plan. The 2025-2026 Local Plan Indicator Report represents a significant step forward, but its delivery in March limited its usefulness as a working document within the school year, and several Committee data questions raised at the March 9 session have not been responded to. The Committee returns to this point in a dedicated finding below.

Advanced Math Pathway Design

The Committee established a Math Deep Dive Subcommittee within its 2025-2026 work to examine advanced math pathways at ACPS. The subcommittee's research compared ACPS's current design to peer divisions (Arlington Public Schools, Fairfax County, Falls Church City, Loudoun County, Prince William County, and Williamsburg-James City County) and to neighboring Montgomery County, Maryland. Former Co-Chair of the Arlington Advanced Academics & Talent Development Advisory Committee, presented to AASAC on February 9 on Arlington's intensified math pathways. ACPS staff presented on our district's math program on April 13 and on revised acceleration plans for 2026-2027 on May 11.

The Committee found that ACPS is the only top-twenty Virginia school division by size, and the only Northern Virginia division, that does not offer a readily accessible pathway through which students can complete Algebra I before 8th grade. The 2023-2028 Local Plan instead provides an ad hoc, parent-driven acceleration referral and review process; request volumes have been very low — in the single digits for SY24-25 — in contrast to the 140 students who took the 7th grade SOL in 6th grade in the 2024-2025 school year (the final year ACPS administered that assessment). The Committee heard through public comments and from families that

awareness of the acceleration option is limited; that the process requires sustained parent advocacy through multiple steps; and that approved students access bridging material only through online coursework rather than in-class instruction. Across the divisions the Committee examined, Arlington Public Schools enrolls approximately 17% of its students in 7th grade Algebra I Intensified and plans to enroll 25–30% in the near future; Fairfax County has expanded access to Algebra I for many sixth graders meeting multiple readiness measures. Virginia's HB2686 directs divisions to “establish multiple additional pathways to enrollment in advanced or accelerated mathematics such as teacher recommendations, parental recommendations, student preference, or student aptitude as demonstrated through other means of evaluation such as grades, other standardized testing, portfolios, or observation.”

The Committee also examined knock-on effects of the current ACPS model on advanced STEM pathways at the high school. Delayed access to Algebra I and Geometry compresses students' access to advanced math and science prerequisites; reduces the number of students who can take Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment STEM courses during high school; and creates comparative disadvantages for ACPS students applying to scholarships and competitive colleges. These effects fall disproportionately on families that lack the mobility or resources to pursue advanced math outside ACPS.

At the May 11 work session, the AAS Office presented its conclusion that the revamped Honors Math 6 course piloted in 2025-2026 contains enough Math 7 standards to provide a jumping-off point to Algebra I in 7th grade and a foundation on which a structured accelerated pathway can be built.

Effects of Resource Limitations on Local Plan Implementation

The 2023-2028 Local Plan established the school-based staffing levels needed to deliver its commitments: two Advanced Academic Support Teachers (AASTs) at every elementary and K–8 school, one AAST at each of the high school's two campuses, and a Secondary Advanced Academic Specialist at Central Office. Current school-based AAST staffing across these placements is approximately 10.5 FTE below those targets. ACPS partially compensates through a centrally-managed pool of 4.6 FTE itinerant AASTs, who sit on the Central Office budget rather than at any school and rotate among the schools with the fewest school-based AAS staff. This itinerant approach was not the Plan's design — the Plan called for fully staffed school-based teams — but it has become ACPS's operational response to the funding gap and now anchors how Advanced Academic Services reach the most short-staffed schools. The structural shortfall continues to constrain Local Plan implementation across every goal area, with real effects on students and teachers.

The school-based gap is concentrated where the need for AAS staffing is greatest. Eight elementary and K–8 schools — Charles Barrett, Cora Kelly, Ferdinand T. Day, John Adams, Samuel Tucker, William Ramsay, Jefferson-Houston PK–8, and Patrick Henry K–8 — currently operate with one school-based AAST against the Local Plan's target of two; Lyles-Crouch operates with 1.5; and the

high school's two campuses operate without any school-based AAST despite the Plan calling for one at each. These under-staffed schools serve Alexandria's highest-need student populations: the largest shares of economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and students from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. Last year's report flagged this concern; it remains true.

The Committee finds that this resource gap is not an abstract budget issue but a daily operational constraint with direct consequences for students. The clearest example is the AAS identification and screening process. ACPS processes nearly 1,700 AAS referrals each year (the 2024-25 cycle volume; this year is comparable) through a process that requires AASTs to administer cognitive ability assessments, score work samples and other student products, evaluate teacher narratives, build and norm portfolios, participate in eligibility committees, and prepare individualized multilingual eligibility communications for families. With current staffing, school-based AASTs are pulled from their classrooms for weeks at a time during the December–April screening window to handle this workload. During those weeks, AASTs are not delivering services to students, including SAA-identified students in grades 4 and 5 who lose core reading and math instructional time from a gifted-trained educator as a result. The Committee and AAS Office have flagged this trade-off in successive prior years; but the practice continues. Screening is essential — it identifies the next cohort. It is also a resource-intensive, multilingual process that rests on specialized assessment and portfolio-review expertise, and operates within a tight calendar window. But identifying future students cannot come at the cost of the instruction owed to students already identified, especially when the same equity rationale supports both. There is no single fix; but this needs to be addressed and any solution will require combining several operational changes, some of which carry implementation cost or require School Board policy support.

Other operational consequences appear across the Local Plan's goal areas. K–3 push-in service delivery remains uneven across schools, with schools below 1.5 AASTs struggling to meet the Plan's prescribed frequency of push-in lessons; co-teaching models remain underdeveloped; Tier II expectations are unclear and inconsistently monitored; AAS-identified students at the high school have no school-based AAS staff to support them. Collectively, these observations from the Committee's Local Plan goal-area review describe a service model — the one the School Board adopted — that is not fully in place at most schools in the division.

Looking forward, the resource gap is poised to widen rather than close. The Superintendent's adjusted FY 2027 budget recommendation would eliminate two centrally-managed AAS teacher positions — a roughly 43% reduction in the 4.6-FTE itinerant team that currently extends coverage to the eight under-staffed schools and their 3,000+ K–3 students. ACPS reported in March that 2024-25 was the most representative year on record for AAS identification by race and ethnicity; those gains came largely from the schools the proposed cuts would most affect.

Limitations of Available Metrics for Monitoring the Local Plan

The Committee found the 2025-2026 Local Plan Indicator Report presented on March 9 to be an improvement on previous versions, reflecting more than a decade of joint work between the AAS Office, the Office of Accountability and Research, and AASAC. For the first time, the report covered all six Local Plan goal areas and incorporated multi-year data on identification representation, MAP performance and growth for AAS-identified students, walkthrough findings, and family communication. The Committee greatly appreciates this body of work and looks forward to additional improvements in future years.

Two limitations reduced the report's usefulness as a monitoring tool this year. First, timing: the draft was presented in March, late enough that the Committee could not use it as a working document to guide its monitoring within the same school year. An earlier delivery — for example, a preliminary version in the fall — would let AASAC use the report as a working document throughout the year and would compound report quality year over year as Committee feedback is incorporated into successive iterations. Second, responsiveness: several Committee data questions raised at the March 9 session, including specific requests for additional disaggregation and follow-up trend analysis, have not been responded to.

Beyond the Indicator Report itself, the broader monitoring infrastructure for the current Local Plan was not built in advance of the policy changes the Plan introduced. Implementation indicators for major Local Plan changes — including the elementary GIA service-delivery model, the identification and screening redesign, and the removal of the accelerated math pathway — were developed after the fact rather than as part of the Plan itself. Success criteria for those changes were not established before they took effect. The Committee views this as a lesson for both near-term data accountability and the design of the next Local Plan.

Honors Curriculum Review Work Paused This Year

In 2024-2025, the AAS Office convened Honors Steering Committees composed of participants selected from different ACPS stakeholder groups to evaluate Honors classes broadly and consider developing clear curriculum standards distinguishing Honors courses from general education and from Tier II and Tier III AAS interventions in grades 6–12. In mid 2025, the effort was paused with a restart date undetermined. Honors courses at ACPS, especially in middle school and including English 10 at the high school, have been documented to fall short of meeting advanced learners' needs for at least a decade. This concern was highlighted in the 2017 external evaluation and has appeared in multiple AASAC reports. The pause this year leaves an established gap unaddressed.

Recommendations

New Recommendations

1. Establish an Accessible, Data-Driven Accelerated Math Pathway that allows advanced math students to enroll in Algebra in 7th grade and Geometry in 8th grade.

The Committee supports the math acceleration approach the AAS Office presented at the May 11 work session that ACPS should automatically screen students in 6th grade for potential placement into Algebra I in 7th grade. As such, Geometry becomes available to 8th grade middle school students on the pathway**. This new approach replaces** the ad hoc, parent-driven acceleration request process with automatic screening consistent with Virginia HB2686's guidance to establish multiple pathways to advanced mathematics. **The Committee recommends that ACPS proceed with this approach for the 2026-2027 school year**, with one significant adjustment described below. The Committee further recommends that the School Board formally revise the 2023-2028 Local Plan as needed to accommodate this new approach and update the Program of Studies in fall 2026. Timing carries urgency: any changes for the 2026-2027 school year must be communicated to families as soon as possible. The Committee asks the Board and ACPS leadership to take the following actions.

- **Formalize, while continuing to refine, the new Math 6 Honors math course for 6th graders piloted in the 2025-2026 SY that combines 6th and 7th grade math standards and serves as a jumping off point for two different math pathways. The most advanced pathway should include Algebra in 7th grade and** Geometry in 8th grade, with ACPS maintaining both as in-person middle school courses.
- **Offer access to this pathway to all students enrolled in Honors Math 6, automatically screening all students who show readiness for Algebra in 7th grade.** In the screening, ACPS should use data measures and methodologies recommended in Virginia HB2686 and should not rely on a single test to identify students but instead maintain an inclusive stance that gives many students a chance to enter the pathway. ACPS would review data such as abilities and achievement tests, grades, SOL scores, teacher narratives, and acceleration assessments. While the AAS Office proposed an approach that would limit automatic screening to AAS-math-identified students, the Committee asks ACPS to expand the scope of automatic screening to include all students enrolled in **Honors Math 6**. This is more consistent with the open-enrollment Honors model ACPS broadly uses, casts a wider net to ensure no advanced students are missed, and improves equity by broadening the pool of students who can benefit from acceleration. To enable this expansion, the Committee anticipates that

revisions to the Local Plan may be needed to remove any language that limits automatic screening to AAS-identified students; the Committee supports these revisions.

- **Maintain robust pull-out SAA math instruction in 4th and 5th grade** as the foundation for the new pathway, ensuring identified students continue to receive direct instruction from a gifted-trained educator throughout elementary school.
- **Strengthen the design and delivery of 7th grade Algebra I for accelerated students. Establish a dedicated 7th grade Algebra I course** that intentionally addresses bridging material from the compacted 6th/7th grade standards, with curriculum review to ensure content is differentiated, learning gaps are intentionally filled, and scaffolding supports students at this point in their math sequence.
- **Communicate clearly with families about the new pathway,** including the opportunity to opt out of Algebra I placement and the option for enrolled students to move to the next-most-challenging math course in the first quarter of the school year without penalty.
- **Account for the cohort of students currently in 6th grade in 2025-2026** who have been disproportionately affected by the lack of the newly proposed advanced math pathway and by Covid-era disruptions to their elementary math experience. By August 2026, the AAS Office should identify a pool of students from this cohort whose readily available data measures (abilities and achievement tests, grades, SOL scores, and teacher narratives) demonstrate readiness for Algebra I, communicate to those students and families that they are recommended for Algebra I placement in 7th grade in fall 2026, and ensure those students have access to Geometry in person in 8th grade.

Local Plan Impacts: Identification; Curriculum and Instruction; Equitable Representation of Students.

- [placeholder for staff response if desired]
- [placeholder for Board response]

2. Acknowledge and Address the Gap Between Local Plan Commitments and AAS Resources

The Committee recommends that the School Board and ACPS leadership acknowledge the reality that current resources are insufficient to deliver the 2023-2028 Local Plan as designed. This resource gap is producing concrete and inequitable effects on students. The School Board must either adjust its budget priorities in future years to align AAS resources with the Local Plan, or request that AAS service delivery and operational practices change to reflect the current budget reality. Three actions follow from that acknowledgment.

- **Protect AAS staffing in the FY 2027 budget.** The proposed elimination of two AAS teacher positions in FY 2027 would cut the centrally-managed itinerant team — currently 4.6 FTE — by roughly half. The reduction would fall on the eight

under-staffed schools the team supports: schools that serve the largest shares of economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and historically underrepresented students in the division. Cutting AAS staffing at these schools would undercut the work that produced ACPS's recent equity gains in identification. The Committee asks the School Board to remove these two positions from the cut list during the FY 2027 add/delete session and identify the savings elsewhere.

- **Make AAS staffing at Local Plan levels a Board budget priority for FY 2028 and beyond.** As the FY 2028 budget development cycle begins this fall, the Committee asks the School Board to include AAS staffing at Local Plan levels in the budget priorities it communicates to division staff. This should include establishing budget planning factors (i.e., ratios) based on (1) identified AAS students at each school and (2) total K-3 students at each school (consistent with the Talend Development approach included in the Local Plan). If the resulting staff-produced draft budget does not provide for AAS staffing at those levels, the Board should add it during review and set out an explicit multi-year path to alignment, with annual milestones tied to the Local Plan's goal-area metrics. The 10.5 FTE school-based gap has been a constant since the Plan was adopted; without explicit Board action, the costs of this gap will continue to fall, each year, on the students the Local Plan's equity commitments were designed to serve.
- **In the meantime, adjust AAS service delivery and operational practices to reflect the current budget reality.** Acknowledging the gap also means operating within it. The Committee asks the AAS Office and ACPS leadership to develop and publish service standards calibrated to actual school staffing levels, to consider reallocating existing resources to reduce gaps, and to prioritize the Local Plan commitments most directly tied to identified students' day-to-day experience. The AAS Office's planned shift to automatic Algebra I screening for AAS-math-identified students in 2026-2027 is an example of the operational adaptation the Committee supports: it simplifies a process that has been operationally difficult under current capacity, broadens access, and lets staff focus their time where it most matters. The same logic should be applied across the AAS Office's work — to prioritize, simplify, and adapt operations so that what is delivered to students is honest, consistent, and as effective as current resources allow.

Local Plan Impacts: Identification; Delivery of Services; Curriculum and Instruction; Equitable Representation of Students; Parent/Guardian and Community Involvement.

- [placeholder for staff response if desired]
- [placeholder for Board response]

3. Protect Service Delivery to Identified Students During the Identification Screening Cycle

The Committee recommends that ACPS fully review, and if necessary, redesign, the AAS identification and screening process so that students already identified for AAS services receive uninterrupted instruction during the screening cycle.

Each year, school-based AASTs are pulled from their classrooms for weeks at a time to handle screening; SAA-identified students in grades 4 and 5 lose core reading and math instructional time from a gifted-trained educator as a result. Identifying the next cohort of AAS students is essential — but it cannot come at the cost of the instruction owed to the students already identified, especially when the same equity rationale supports both. The Committee has flagged this trade-off in successive prior years; the operational practice that produces it has not changed.

This is a hard operational problem. The screening process is large, multilingual, rests on specialized assessment and portfolio-review expertise, and operates within a tight calendar window. There is no single fix; an effective response will likely combine several operational changes, some of which carry implementation cost or require School Board policy support. The Committee asks ACPS — in collaboration with school principals, AAS Office staff, and AASAC — to protect AAST instructional time during the screening window, beginning with the 2026-27 cycle. Options worth considering include:

- **Hiring or contracting dedicated screening staff** during the December–April window — retired or part-time AAS teachers, qualified assessment specialists, or central-office staff specifically assigned to screening tasks — to absorb the workload currently carried by school-based AASTs.
- **Reducing manual review volume by expanding automatic identification** — using existing MAP, SOL, CogAT/NNAT, and grade data to automatically flag students who clearly meet thresholds, reserving full portfolio review for genuinely borderline cases.
- **Shifting screening logistics** — paper handling, copying, mailing, scheduling, and multilingual communication production — to dedicated administrative staff rather than school-based AASTs.
- **Reallocating school-based AAST responsibilities during screening peaks** so that AASTs at multi-AAST schools cover for one another during pull periods, and at no point is a school left without an AAST actively delivering services to identified students.
- **Adjust threshold for automatic screening.** We recommend the AAS Office review data to determine if the threshold should be raised to reduce burden on staff while not negatively impacting identification.

The Committee recognizes that the AAS Office's own staffing capacity to operationalize new approaches is itself constrained. The Committee therefore asks ACPS to identify the combination of these (or other) operational changes that, given current staffing and resources, will most effectively protect instruction for identified students during the screening window, and to commit to a phased implementation timeline beginning in 2026-27. The Committee welcomes the opportunity to partner with the AAS Office on this redesign.

Local Plan Impacts: Identification; Delivery of Services; Curriculum and Instruction; Equitable Representation of Students.

- [placeholder for staff response if desired]
- [placeholder for Board response]

4. Build Durable Monitoring Infrastructure: Data Accountability Now, Built-In Metrics in the Next Local Plan

The Committee recommends that ACPS strengthen its data accountability for Advanced Academic Services in the near term and, looking forward, build implementation metrics into the next Local Plan from the start. Both asks address the same underlying issue: monitoring infrastructure has consistently lagged the policy changes it is meant to track, at cost to the Committee's ability to advise, to ACPS's ability to course-correct, and to families' ability to understand what is happening with AAS.

Near term — strengthen data accountability for the current Local Plan. The Committee asks ACPS to develop and implement a centralized, data-driven accountability system for Advanced Academic Services that supports ongoing monitoring of equity, implementation, and student outcomes. The Committee envisions this system including:

- A public-facing AAS dashboard with disaggregated data (including from qualitative sources like classroom walkthrough reports) and trendlines that allows the broader community to see progress against Local Plan goals.
- School-level visibility into identification, service delivery, and student outcomes, so that progress and disparities are visible at the building level.
- Regular (e.g., quarterly) review cycles to assess progress toward Local Plan goals and to identify where targeted support is needed. The results of these reviews should be made public and presented to AASAC and the School Board.
- Improved responsiveness to data requests from the Committee and other stakeholders, with structured intake and turnaround commitments that recognize the Office of Accountability and Research's capacity constraints.

Future-facing — build metrics and funding scenarios into the next Local Plan. The next Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted is anticipated for 2028 and beyond. The Committee asks ACPS to apply the lessons of the current Local Plan's development to the next one: (1) build implementation indicators tied to each major change the Plan introduces, finalized as part of the Plan rather than developed several years after adoption; (2) plan explicitly for multiple funding scenarios, articulating what the Plan looks like at full funding versus at reduced funding levels and what activities are deprioritized when full funding is not achievable; (3) sequence policy changes alongside the supporting curriculum, staffing, and professional-learning infrastructure required to make them succeed; and (4) embed structured stakeholder engagement — including AASAC — across both Plan development and ongoing implementation. Doing so would prevent the next Plan from repeating the pattern in which monitoring infrastructure, resource planning, and supporting infrastructure trail the policy changes whose effects they are meant to track.

Local Plan Impacts: Identification; Delivery of Services; Curriculum and Instruction; Professional Development; Equitable Representation of Students; Parent/Guardian and Community Involvement.

- [placeholder for staff response if desired]
- [placeholder for Board response]

5. Resume and Complete the Honors Curriculum Review

The Committee recommends that ACPS resume the Honors Steering Committee work paused in 2025-2026 and commit to delivering, during the 2026-2027 school year, a clear set of curriculum standards for core subjects in grades 6-12 that delineate the pace and expectations of (1) general education (non-Honors) classes, (2) Honors classes, and (3) Tier II and Tier III AAS interventions within Honors classes. ACPS has been working on this challenge for at least 11 years, including through the 2017 external evaluation's call to revamp middle school AAS and through the AAS Office's 2024-2025 Honors Steering Committees. The pause this year — which the Committee understands may be a consequence of leadership transition in the AAS Office — leaves a long-standing gap unaddressed for another cycle. The Committee opposes models that would functionally remove Honors classes (such as the "Honors for All" approach discussed by the 2024-2025 Steering Committees) and continues to recommend that ACPS enhance the Honors and other AAS courses already in place, cluster gifted students together within courses and enrichment, and extend new course offerings where appropriate. To make the work concrete, the Committee asks the AAS Office to:

- **Reconvene the Honors Steering Committees in fall 2026** with explicit deliverables, timelines, and regular updates to AASAC throughout the work.
- **Pay particular attention to high school English** — and to English 10 specifically — where the absence of an advanced option above Honors has been raised in multiple prior AASAC reports without resolution.
- **Address the needs of twice-exceptional students** in Honors, Dual Enrollment, and Advanced Placement courses, where accommodations are reportedly inconsistently met. Advanced Placement teacher training and the subject-based Master's credential required for Dual Enrollment instructors do not include professional development on advanced or gifted-identified learners; the Committee asks ACPS to build the necessary professional learning into the curriculum-standards work, while at the same time avoiding conditioning the work on a preponderance of available PD funds.
- **Cluster gifted-identified students within Honors course sections** wherever feasible, and provide guidance to school leaders on master-schedule strategies that support clustering.

Local Plan Impacts: Curriculum and Instruction; Professional Development.

- [placeholder for staff response if desired]
- [placeholder for Board response]

Continued Recommendations

6. Strengthen K-3 Service Delivery (Recommendation #1 from 2024-25 Report)

We recommend that ACPS ensure all K-3 students receive push-in services consistent with 2024-2025 implementation goals presented to the School Board in January 2025 by the AAS Office (i.e., students at schools with 1.5 or more AASTs receive at least 20 push-in lessons annually and at least 10 lessons in schools with fewer staff).

We also recommend that ACPS expand the use of cluster groupings for students who require Tier II services in grades K–3. In schools where cluster grouping is not feasible, **we recommend that school leaders implement cross-classroom flexible grouping**. Clustering and flexible grouping are widely recognized best practices in gifted education and ensures that advanced learners are consistently grouped with peers of similar readiness levels during core instructional blocks—particularly in math and reading. To support broader and more consistent implementation, **we recommend that ACPS provide guidance and training to principals and instructional leads** on the benefits of these strategies and how to implement them within existing master schedules and staffing models.

In addition, **we recommend ACPS expand support for co-teaching models** that better differentiate instruction and strengthen Tier II instruction for GIA identified and high achieving students.

Lastly, **ACPS should also develop and communicate clearer expectations for Tier II instruction and monitoring** to ensure consistent service delivery to students not identified for Tier III but who require services beyond Tier I.

Update for 2025-2026: Push-in service delivery remains uneven across schools. Cluster grouping is not yet systematized; co-teaching models remain underdeveloped at most schools; and Tier II expectations remain unclear and inconsistently monitored. Walkthrough data presented in March, particularly for middle-school math, showed limited evidence of above-grade-level or enriched content and limited evidence of tasks requiring multi-step problem-solving — patterns that reflect the broader challenge of consistent Tier I and Tier II implementation. The Committee continues to view K-3 service delivery and Tier I/II rigor as foundational to the broader equity work the Local Plan is meant to support.

Local Plan Impacts: Curriculum and Instruction

- [placeholder for staff response if desired]
- [placeholder for Board response]

7. Enhance Transparency, Communication and Shared Accountability (Recommendation #2 from 2024-25 Report)

AASAC recommends four important actions to raise awareness of AAS services with families and other interested parties across the district. These include:

- **Launch a public dashboard on the ACPS website to elevate awareness of AAS programming and improve monitoring of all six goals and associated domains of the Local Plan.**
- **Develop and conduct a survey** focused on parents/guardians of children identified as GIA, SAA, or Young Scholars to gather insights on strengths and needs within the AAS program.
- **Hold multilingual Q&A sessions and recorded presentations to** engage with parents/guardians around the identification process and expectations for AAS curriculum.
- **Encourage ACPS to regularly update the FAQ and resources sections on the AAS website** to increase access to resources outlining Local Plan progress and available enrichment programs.

Update for 2025-2026: Family-facing materials continued to be translated into multiple languages this year. The AAS Office held informational sessions for families on screening, identification, appeals, and acceleration, and presented to ACPS family liaisons at the Family and Community Engagement Center in April. A draft AAS family survey was developed in collaboration with an AASAC subcommittee but was not deployed during the school year. The community roundtable on AAS topics, scoped by a Committee subcommittee, was not held, and no public AAS dashboard has been launched. The Committee renews this recommendation with particular emphasis on launching the survey and the dashboard in 2026-2027.

Local Plan Impacts: Community Involvement

- [placeholder for staff response if desired]
- [placeholder for Board response]

8. Invest in Technology Infrastructure to Improve AAS Operational Efficiency (Recommendation #3 from 2024-25 Report)

The current AAS screening and identification process relies heavily on manual, paper-based systems that create significant operational inefficiencies and divert staff time from direct student services. During the 2024-25 screening cycle, nearly 1,700 referrals were processed manually, requiring staff to hand-write eligibility decisions, manage paper portfolios, and physically mail materials in

five languages. For AASTs and AAS Office staff, the screening requires “all hands on deck from December until April,” even with administrative assistants from other departments helping to stuff envelopes.

Implementing a database and electronic file management and screening tool—several of which are currently commercially available—would save hundreds of hours of work, most of which could instead be spent in the classroom, and would address multiple critical needs. Benefits would include improving efficiency and accuracy through reduced manual errors and real-time data access, enhancing equity by automatically flagging students who meet screening thresholds to help identify underrepresented students who might be overlooked, and enabling longitudinal tracking to support data-driven program evaluation. Electronic systems could also integrate with existing student information systems to automatically generate reports and correspondence in multiple languages while reducing long-term costs from printing and storage.

We recommend that ACPS immediately move to procure a secure, electronic system to support AAS screening and identification (and potentially to support service delivery). The Committee believes this technology investment would more than pay for itself by freeing AAS staff to focus on their core educational mission rather than administrative tasks. In a constrained budget environment, efficiency improvements that maximize current resources and enhance equity should be a priority.

Update for 2025-2026: ACPS made meaningful progress this year by transitioning the SAA portfolio screening process from paper to a secure digital platform, with full implementation targeted for summer 2026. ACPS also consolidated the referral form and permission-to-screen into a single document, improving accessibility for families. The Committee welcomes this progress and continues to recommend that ACPS extend the digital infrastructure across the full screening and identification workflow and explore integration with existing student information systems, automated multilingual correspondence, and longitudinal tracking to support data-driven program evaluation.

Local Plan Impacts: Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Development, Equitable Representation of Students

- [placeholder for staff response if desired]
- [placeholder for Board response]

9. Maintain or establish regular, transparent, and two-way engagement with key stakeholders including AAS students, parents, PTA members, teachers, and AAS in-school liaisons. (Recommendation #6 from 2024-25 Report; Recommendation #3 from 2023-24 Report)

Communication from the AAS office increased this past school year, including information translated to languages of ACPS families; however, some important gaps still need attention. ACPS has not solicited views of ACPS students or families with regard to AAS services, and while the AASAC allows for public comment to be submitted, it is the only venue for feedback to flow to the AAS office. ACPS has also neither hosted nor discussed with the Committee a “dedicated listening session(s) on the changes to the

mathematics acceleration," which was included in Recommendation #4 in the 2023-2024 EOY report. The Committee is encouraged that this SY the AAS Office committed to a survey in the 2025-2026 SY. This is a step in the right direction, and the AASAC looks forward to hearing more about and contributing to those plans.

Update for 2025-2026: An AASAC subcommittee developed a draft AAS family survey in collaboration with the AAS Office during 2025-2026; the survey has not been launched. A community roundtable on AAS topics, scoped by a separate Committee subcommittee, was not held. ACPS has not yet hosted the dedicated listening sessions on math acceleration changes called for in prior reports. The Committee renews this recommendation and asks ACPS to operationalize structured, two-way stakeholder engagement in 2026-2027, including launching the family survey and holding the community roundtable.

- [placeholder for staff response if desired]
- [placeholder for Board response]

10. Monitor the experiences of AAS-identified students (GIA, SAA, and Young Scholars) by collecting disaggregated AAS-student data from social emotional surveys and using other data collection methods. (Recommendation #7 from 2024-25 Report; Recommendation #10 from 2023-24 Report)

Students are the essential stakeholder of ACPS advanced academic services. The Committee was encouraged to hear this spring that in the 2025-2026 SY the division plans to survey AAS students and/or alumni. The Committee has noted in several past reports the need for statistically sound qualitative and quantitative data surrounding student experiences.

Update for 2025-2026: The student survey anticipated for 2025-2026 has not been launched. The Committee renews this recommendation and asks that a student survey, paired with disaggregated achievement and participation data, be launched in 2026-2027 to give ACPS and the Committee meaningful visibility into how AAS-identified students experience the program.

- [placeholder for staff response if desired]
- [placeholder for Board response]

11. In conjunction with the development and analysis of curriculum standards for Honors courses, consider adding new advanced courses that include AAS strategies such as enrichment, acceleration, and extension. (Recommendation #8 from 2024-25 Report; Recommendation #9 from 2023-24 Report)

Neither in the staff comments to last year's EOY report where this recommendation appears nor in its deliberations during the 2024-2025 SY, did the AASAC receive information regarding new courses being added to the Program of Studies which utilize AAS strategies such as enrichment, acceleration, and extension. Members of the Committee this year have expressed concern regarding limitations of the two-campus high school and its Academy-structured model for the high school as limiting factors for advanced

learners accessing the courses that are offered. Professional development for teachers delivering existing and new courses is essential.

Update for 2025-2026: During 2025-2026, no new advanced courses utilizing AAS strategies were added to the Program of Studies, and none were reported as under active development. Committee members continued to express concern that the two-campus high school and Academy-structured model create scheduling constraints that limit advanced learners' access to the courses that do exist. The Committee asks ACPS to draft and review new advanced courses — particularly an advanced option above the Honors level in English 10 — in alignment with the broader Honors curriculum standards work.

- [placeholder for staff response if desired]
- [placeholder for Board response]

12. Initiate an ongoing plan to monitor and evaluate the Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted with yearly results shared with the ACPS community. As part of this process, ACPS should consider accelerating the next regular external review of AAS. (Recommendation #9 from 2024-25 Report; Recommendation #5 from 2023-24 Report)

The Committee continues to recommend that ACPS initiate the process for the next external review of AAS. Background to this request includes the fact that nearly 10 years have passed since any external evaluation. Also, given that the Local Plan is not fully staffed, an evaluator could provide constructive perspectives and recommendations.

Update for 2025-2026: The case for an external review is stronger this year than at any point since the 2017 review. The current Local Plan is at its midpoint; the major design changes it introduced — including the removal of the accelerated math pathway, the elementary GIA service-delivery model, and substantial changes in identification and screening — have not been externally evaluated. AAS staffing remains approximately 10.5 FTE below Local Plan targets, and the FY 2027 budget environment is creating additional pressure on staffing rather than supporting alignment. The Committee asks ACPS to commission and complete an external review during the 2026-2027 school year.

- [placeholder for staff response if desired]
- [placeholder for Board response]

Appendix

Committee Meeting Attendance

- September 29, 2025

    - Committee Members: Evan Smith (Chair), Katie Baker (Vice Chair), Ettasue (Shawna) Harris, Lillian Pace, Dr. Matthew Henry, Jeremy Miller, Willow Darsie, Kelley Organek
    - Committee Advisors: Mashari Whitfield (Staff Liaison)
- October 27, 2025 (Work Session)
    - Committee Members: Evan Smith (Chair), Katie Baker (Vice Chair), Ettasue Harris, Lillian Pace, Matthew Henry, Jeremy Miller, Willow Darsie, Kelley Organek
    - Committee Advisors: Mashari Whitfield (Staff Liaison)
- November 10, 2025
    - Committee Members: Evan Smith (Chair), Katie Baker (Vice Chair), Ettasue (Shawna) Harris, Sapna Duchesne, Jeremy Miller, Willow Darsie, Kelley Organek, Efrata Ayele
    - Committee Advisors: Mashari Whitfield (Staff Liaison); Ryan Reyna (School Board Liaison, via phone)
- January 12, 2026 (Work Session)
    - Committee Members: Evan Smith (Chair), Katie Baker (Vice Chair), Efrata Ayele, Sapna Patel Duchesne, Matthew Henry, Jeremy Miller, Kelley Organek, Lillian Pace
    - Committee Advisors: Ryan Reyna (School Board Liaison)
- February 9, 2026
    - Committee Members: Katie Baker (Vice Chair), Lillian Pace, Dr. Matthew Henry, Jeremy Miller, Willow Darsie, Kelley Organek
    - Committee Advisors: Mashari Whitfield (Staff Liaison); Ryan Reyna (School Board Liaison)
- March 9, 2026 (Work Session)
    - Committee Members: Evan Smith (Chair), Katie Baker (Vice Chair), Ettasue Harris, Lillian Pace, Dr. Matthew Henry, Jeremy Miller, Kelley Organek, Efrata Ayele

    - Committee Advisors: Mashari Whitfield (Staff Liaison)
- April 13, 2026
    - Committee Members: Evan Smith (Chair), Katie Baker (Vice Chair), Lillian Pace, Sapna Duchesne, Jeremy Miller, Willow Darsie, Kelley Organek
    - Committee Advisors: Mashari Whitfield (Staff Liaison); Tim Beaty (School Board Member, attending)
- May 11, 2026 (Work Session)
    - Committee Members: Evan Smith (Chair), Katie Baker (Vice Chair), Sapna Duchesne, Matthew Henry, Jeremy Miller, Willow Darsie, Kelley Organek
    - Committee Advisors: Mashari Whitfield (Staff Liaison); Ryan Reyna (School Board Liaison)
- May 28, 2026
    - Committee Members: Evan Smith (Chair), Katie Baker (Vice Chair), Sapna Duchesne, Matthew Henry, Jeremy Miller, Willow Darsie, Efrata Ayele, Ettasue Haris
    - Committee Advisors: Mashari Whitfield (Staff Liaison)
- June 4, 2026
    - Committee Members: Evan Smith (Chair), Katie Baker (Vice Chair), Sapna Duchesne, Matthew Henry, Jeremy Miller, Willow Darsie, Efrata Ayele, Ettasue Haris, Lilian Pace, Kelley Organek
    - Committee Advisors: Mashari Whitfield (Staff Liaison)