ADVANCED ACADEMIC PROGRAMS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (AAPAC)

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE SCHOOL BOARD SCHOOL YEAR 2025-2026

APPROVED BY THE COMMITTEE ON MAY 22, 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Committee Charge Page 3

Strategic Plan Alignment Page 3

Executive Summary Page 4

Approval Page 5

Background Information Page 7

Recommendations Page 15

Previous Year Charge Follow-Up Page 21

Proposed Committee Charge for 2026-2027 Page 22

Appendix:

- A) Data sources that were used in reaching the recommendations Page 23
- B) Experts consulted in reaching the recommendations Page 24
- C) Attendance of Committee members Page 25
- D) Minority Report Page 27

COMMITTEE CHARGE

The 2020 external review of identification practices for Full-Time Advanced Academics recommended the division expand Local Full-Time AAP services into every elementary and middle school over the next five years, with accompanying review and support for high level implementation.

AAPAC will learn about the implementation of the expansion of Local Full-Time service delivery model, the strengths and challenges of the local and center-based delivery models, and consider how the current service delivery models meet (or do not meet) the needs of our advanced learners.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT

We approached our charge this year with two Strategic Plan Goals in mind.

Goal 3: Academic Growth and Excellence. “Every student will acquire critical and creative thinking skills, meet/exceed high academic standards, and achieve their highest academic potential.”

> The Advanced Academic Program (AAP) offers a continuum of services to meet students’ varied advanced academic needs. Full-Time AAP services support identified students in grades 3-8 meet and exceed their academic potential through programming with increased depth, complexity, and pacing in all academic content areas, with progress reporting based on extended standards. Full-Time AAP services are offered in both designated Center schools that serve eligible students from multiple elementary and middle schools as well as Local Full-Time schools that serve eligible students from only the neighborhood school. This dual service delivery model offers every identified student access to rigorous academic opportunities in a setting that their family determines best meets their needs.

Goal 4: Equitable Access and Opportunity. “Every student will have access to high-quality academic programming and resources to support their success.”

> The expansion of the Local Full-Time program over the last 5 years addresses access inequities that have existed in the past for families for a variety of reasons (e.g. transportation time, preferring neighborhood schools for relationships or siblings attending the same school, enrollment in an immersion program). This increased opportunity of access allows families to balance various considerations to pick the service delivery model that best meets the needs of their student.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the 2020 FCPS AAP External Program Review (Plucker et.al), the authors made the following recommendation:

> *Over the next five years, expand Local Level IV services into every elementary and middle school* ***with accompanying review and support for high level implementation*** (Plucker et. al, 2020, p. 43).

This year's Advanced Academic Programs Advisory Committee (AAPAC) charge was a follow-up on this recommendation:

> *AAPAC will learn about the implementation of the expansion of the Local Full-Time service delivery model, the strengths and challenges of the local and center-based delivery models, and consider how the current service delivery models meet (or do not meet) the needs of our advanced learners.*

To address this charge, the committee first came to an agreement that this work would not be about figuring out which Full-Time AAP service delivery model (Center or Local) was "better." Instead, AAPAC sought to examine the Full-Time program as a whole and discover the benefits and challenges that exist within and across the two service delivery models (Center and Local).

The committee invited authors from the external program review, Advanced Academic Resource Teachers (AARTs) at both Local and Center-Based Full-Time AAP schools, and Classroom Teachers at both Local and Center-Based Full-Time AAP schools to present information related to our charge. Key takeaways from these panel discussions were collected in a digital document of monthly reflections accessible and contributed to by all committee members. Additional information from families, and students was intended but ultimately unavailable given time constraints, competing interests related to the Middle School AAP Centers discussion, and restrictions regarding conducting surveys.

The committee's exploration of this charge highlighted benefits and challenges of the two Full-Time AAP service delivery models. ***The committee believes that the current Center and Local Full-Time AAP dual-delivery models offer separate and distinct benefits to students and their families and we want to be clear that we do not advocate for changing it.*** Based on our findings, we developed five recommendations for the FCPS School Board to consider:

1. Recommendation #1: Collect reliable data on fidelity of implementation & student outcomes
2. Recommendation #2: Invest in teacher capacity for working with advanced learners
3. Recommendation #3: Improve communication about and positioning of the Full-Time AAP model
4. Recommendation #4: Strengthen collaboration among Full-Time AAP teachers & schools
5. Recommendation #5: Conduct a robust evaluation of Full-Time AAP

In addition to the report, a subgroup of members introduced additional language in a minority report.

APPROVAL

Voting Member Name	Eligibility to vote (Attended at least 50% of meetings eligible to attend)	Support Majority Report	Signed on to the Minority Report
Sourabh Pawar Braddock	Eligible to vote	Yes	No
Randi Cosentino Dranesville	Eligible to vote	Yes	Yes
Jason Planakis Franconia	Eligible to vote	Yes	No
Melissa Keppel Hunter Mill	Eligible to vote	Yes	Yes
Leah Richardson Mason	Eligible to vote	Yes	No
Bana Miller Mount Vernon	Attended fewer than 50% of meetings	-	-
Cara Berman Providence	Eligible to vote	Yes	Yes
Nicolas Geadah Springfield	Attended fewer than 50% of meetings	-	-
Meg Dombro Sully	Attended fewer than 50% of meetings	-	-
Jing Huang Temple At Large (McElveen)	Eligible to vote	Yes	No
Courtney Marsh At Large (McDaniel)	Eligible to vote	Yes	No
Will Chilcutt At Large (Moon)	Eligible to vote	Yes	No
Abdulrahman Khalaf HS Student	Eligible to vote	Yes	Yes
Yasmine Chatib HS Student	Attended fewer than 50% of meetings	-	-
Sarah Knowles Fairfax City	Attended fewer than 50% of meetings	Yes	Yes
Holly Glaser (co-chair) University (GMU)	Eligible to vote	Yes	No
Lisa Bertin Comm Org - FCAG	Eligible to vote	Yes	Yes

Voting Member Name	Eligibility to vote (Attended at least 50% of meetings eligible to attend)	Support Majority Report	Signed on to the Minority Report
Cheryl Napoli (co-chair) Comm Org - FCCPTA	Eligible to vote	Yes	No
Nancy Trainer Comm Org - Ffx Fed of Ctzns Associations	Eligible to vote	Yes	Yes
Mark Nelson MSAOC student representative	Attended fewer than 50% of meetings	Yes	Yes
Cindy Agner ES Admin	Eligible to vote	Yes	No
Sonya Williams MS Admin	Eligible to vote	Yes	No
Cary Dimmick HS Admin	Eligible to vote	Yes	No
Patty Edwards ES Teacher	Eligible to vote	Yes	No
Mary Keane MS Teacher	Eligible to vote	Yes	No
Jenifer Maglicic HS Teacher	Eligible to vote	Yes	No
Angelica Anderson HS Teacher	Eligible to vote	Yes	Yes

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Students' advanced academic learning needs are not one-size-fits-all. FCPS' Advanced Academic Programs provide a continuum of services for students K-12, with specific services for identification in grades K-8:

1. **Access to Rigor (Grades K-6):** All students receive talent development lessons with critical and creative thinking strategies and AAP curriculum lessons.

2. **Subject-Specific AAP Services (Grades K-6):** Identified students receive AAP curriculum lessons in the general education setting in content areas of academic strength.

3. **Part-Time AAP Services (Grades 3-6):** Identified students receive AAP curriculum lessons in the general education setting in content areas of academic strength. In addition to daily differentiation, students will also have direct services from a certified teacher, often the AART. The delivery model of Part-Time AAP services vary based on instructional models and scheduling structures.

4. **Full-Time AAP Services (Grades 3-8):** Identified students receive AAP curriculum lessons full-time. Programming has increased depth, complexity, and pace in all academic content areas. Student progress reports reflect assessment for extended standards that go beyond grade level standards in all four content areas.

A variety of grouping models are used to deliver AAP services across the continuum. Over the course of this year, the committee has noticed that terms used for the grouping models have been used interchangeably when they are, in fact, not interchangeable. To ensure consistent communication, we have included the following definitions for grouping model terms used throughout the report:

- **Cohorting:** The practice of grouping all students eligible for Full-Time AAP at one grade level in a school together *(elementary and middle)*
    - In a Full-time AAP center program, this would be at least one full classroom per grade level of students who are eligible for Full-Time AAP
    - In a Local Full-Time AAP program, this would be all students who are eligible grouped together within one class for a specific grade level but may not make up an entire class
- **Clustering:** A practice in Local Full-Time AAP of grouping minimum groups of 6-8 students who are eligible for Full-Time AAP in more than one class *(elementary)*
    - Used in necessary situations. Examples of necessary situations might include: language immersion programs, times when Full-Time AAP eligible students need to be separated, the number of eligible students at a grade level exceeds the class size cap
    - Used only if there are 12+ students at a grade level to ensure a threshold minimum number of students in a cluster within a class
    - Schools discuss their intention to group in this way and why with the AAP office, include the grouping model with scenario examples in their Local Full-Time

School Plan, and inform parents. Parents are informed of the intention/possibility:

- For newly eligible students, this happens at Full-time AAP orientation for newly eligible students (spring) so that parents understand the model before making their choice of service Full-Time AAP service delivery model (center or local) for the next school year
- For students who are not newly eligible, parents are informed early in the school year prior to the possibility of a grouping model change based on enrollment patterns that might necessitate a change

Introducing AAPAC's 2025-26 Committee Charge

The 2020 FCPS AAP external program review conducted by a team of four highly regarded researchers in the field of gifted education used FCPS data and focus groups from multiple stakeholders (e.g. parents, students, teachers, administrators, FCPS leadership) to create a set of recommendations for improving equity in FCPS AAP services. In the report, "Good Progress but Challenges Remain: Achieving Equity in Fairfax County Public Schools Advanced Academic Programs", linked here and in Appendix A, the authors made the following recommendation:

> *Over the next five years, expand Local Level IV services into every elementary and middle school* ***with accompanying review and support for high level implementation.*** *Identification for Local Level IV services should be committee decisions based on local/school-based norms to the extent possible, primarily to reinforce that every school has academically talented students, regardless of their current performance levels* (Plucker et. al, 2020, p. 43).

This year's committee charge was a follow-up on this recommendation from the external reviewers:

> *The 2020 external review of identification practices for Full-Time Advanced Academics recommended the division expand Local Full-Time AAP services into every elementary and middle school over the next five years, with accompanying review and support for high level implementation.*
>
> *AAPAC will learn about the implementation of the expansion of Local Full-Time service delivery model, the strengths and challenges of the local and center-based delivery models, and consider how the current service delivery models meet (or do not meet) the needs of our advanced learners.*

To address this charge, the committee invited authors from the external program review, Advanced Academic Resource Teachers (AARTs) at both Local and Center-Based Full-Time AAP schools, and Classroom Teachers at both Local and Center-Based Full-Time AAP schools to present information related to some of our key questions.

Key takeaways from these panel discussions were collected in a digital document of monthly reflections accessible and contributed to by all committee members. Additional information

from administrators, families, and students was intended but ultimately unavailable given time constraints, competing interests related to the Middle School AAP Centers discussion, and restrictions regarding conducting surveys.

What follows is the collection of charge-related information we received over the course of this year's work and the recommendations we propose to address our findings.

Current State of Full-Time Service Delivery Models

Students accessing Full-Time AAP Services are centrally identified, primarily in the spring of each year, and have the option to attend a Full-Time AAP Center school or remain at their base school as long as it offers Local Full-Time AAP services. As of Fall 2025, 29 elementary schools serve as Full-Time AAP Centers. In addition, 109 elementary schools offering Local Full-Time AAP are either fully established or in the process of expanding. Only one elementary school (Orange Hunt Elementary) has not yet started the process of expansion due to overcrowding and a need for building program capacity (see Appendix A). Ensuring Orange Hunt is able to offer local Full-Time AAP should be a consideration in the next comprehensive boundary review.

The number of students eligible for Full-Time AAP services varies greatly between schools. Based on enrollment numbers from September 2025, elementary schools across the district range in size from a total population of 253 students at one end to a total population of 1,020 students at the other. This wide population variance plays out in enrollment in Full-Time AAP, as well, with anywhere from one student to 103 students who are eligible and attending a school in a particular grade level across Local and Center-based programs.

Students who choose to seek Full-Time AAP services through a Center-based program are grouped in classrooms with other centrally identified, full-time eligible students. Students who elect to remain at their base school to receive Local Full-Time AAP services are grouped based on guidance from the AAP office. All students receive full-time access to the AAP curriculum in all four core content areas. A comparison of the two models can be seen in the figure below.

Center & Local Full-Time Program Comparison

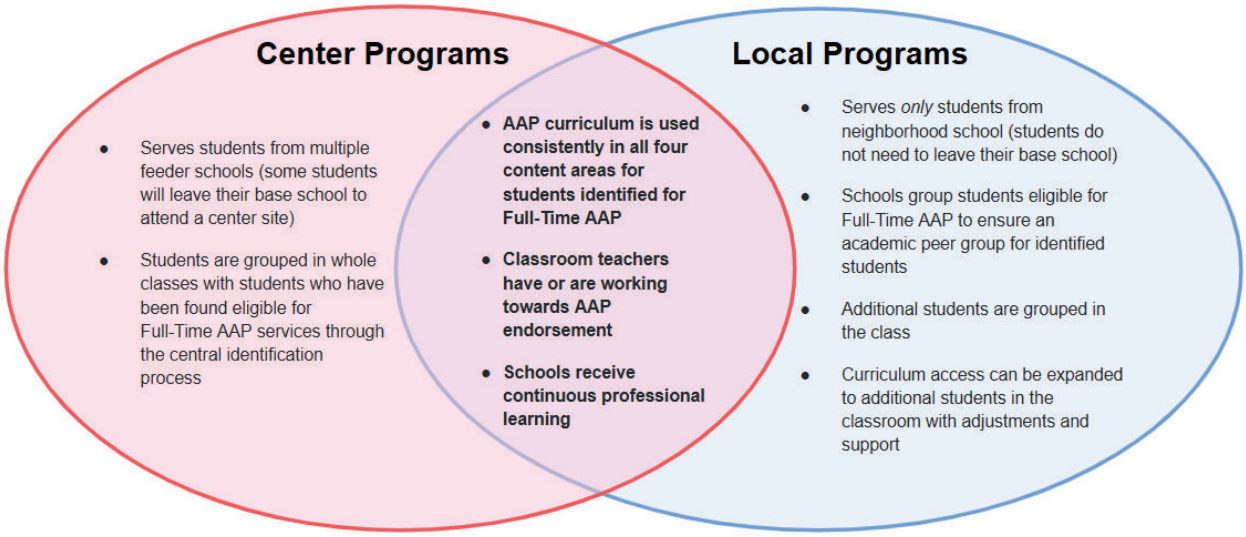

Diagram from Central Office Full-Time AAP orientation slide deck - Spring 2026

In the committee discussion on full-time service delivery models, a question arose about grouping practices in Local Full-Time AAP classrooms and their relation to student outcomes. As a result, the committee reviewed the journal article, *What One Hundred Years of Research Says About the Effects of Ability Grouping and Acceleration on K–12 Students' Academic Achievement* (Steenbergen-Hu, S., Makel, M.C., & Olszewski-Kubilius, P., 2016). The meta-analysis found that the best grouping model for advanced learners is a "special grouping for the gifted." This means that dedicated programming and specialized resources are provided in an environment specifically designed for gifted learners, where the curriculum can be more easily accelerated and enriched to reflect the rigor needed by these students. While the article stated that cluster grouping also has a positive effect on advanced learners, quantitative research methods showed the effect is less intense/less significant in comparison to grouping that provides a dedicated, specialized instructional environment.

Family Choice Patterns

Families have the choice each year on whether to send their centrally-identified students to a Center-based or a Local-based Full-Time AAP school. Data from the last several years shows that an average of 62% of families with an option between local and center programming choose to stay in their Local Full-Time program, with an average of 38% choosing the Center-based Full-Time program. Anecdotally, committee members and AAP staff have heard a variety of reasons for why families may choose one model over the other, including reasons why families who first chose Local switch in subsequent years to Centers and vice versa. Data is not collected about the distinct reasons individual families select a particular delivery model or why they switch from their initial choice. Given that there is currently no reliable data about the reasons for families' choices, we do not believe assumptions should be made about the

strength of programs based solely on the rate of families choosing one delivery model over another and **we believe that continuing to offer that choice is important to maintain.**

The dual-delivery model offers a key strength in its flexibility and ability to meet the diverse needs of advanced learners by providing families with meaningful choice between Local Full-Time and Center-based Full-Time options. This approach recognizes that students are not one-size-fits-all. Some prefer to remain in their neighborhood schools, benefiting from a cohort of familiar peers, community connections, and convenience (e.g. proximity to home). Other students benefit from the larger peer cohorts in center-based settings that may not be available in smaller neighborhood schools, the flexibility to have cohorts change from year to year because more than one class per grade level is available at the center, or access to higher-level in-person math instruction. The current dual service delivery model allows families to select the environment they believe will best support their child's academic and social-emotional needs. Offering choice also supports families' needs, such as keeping siblings together or minimizing transitions, while ensuring access to differentiated instruction across both settings. When making a decision on the best school for their student, ensuring clear communication from both the Local Full-Time and Center Full-Time program will empower families to make an informed decision on the best needs of their child.

There have been challenges with offering both the Center and Local Full-Time models in FCPS. There can be a lack of clear understanding of the differences between the Local and Center-based Full-Time program, making it difficult to determine which setting best serves individual students. In some areas, a feeling of competition between delivery models persists and can impact school culture and community cohesion. Some schools are addressing this by holding joint orientations between Centers and feeder schools for newly eligible students.

2020 AAP External Program Review

Dr. Jonathan Plucker and Dr. Scott Peters – two of the four 2020 external review researchers – joined the committee virtually in December 2025 to discuss questions related to the report's recommendation to expand Local Full-Time AAP to every school. **Drs. Plucker and Peters stated that the intention of the recommendation to expand Local Full-Time program access was not to eliminate Full-Time AAP Centers but instead to ensure local programming was available for students and families who chose to remain in their local elementary school for a variety of reasons.** They reiterated that focus groups during their review shared misconceptions (e.g. explicit naming of the goals of AAP in FCPS, perceptions of hierarchy of services and implications regarding secondary opportunities), many of which FCPS AAP has been working to clarify since 2020. They also repeated their ideas about how to improve AAP identification processes, as recommended in the report; these processes, however, have already been updated since 2020 (e.g. implementing local norms; replacing the Gifted Behavior Rating Scale with a culturally-responsive and psychometrically-validated tool: the HOPE gifted rating scale).

Benefits & Challenges of Center & Local Full-Time AAP Models

In the months of February and March, we heard directly from panels of AARTs and Full-Time AAP classroom teachers who work in both the Center and Local Full-Time programs. They shared information about how the program is implemented in their individual schools, as well as the benefits and challenges of their specific delivery models. They also made recommendations to the committee. The committee's monthly reflections ensured that our small group discussions captured the key takeaways from our panels, noting the benefits and challenges that face Center and Local Full-Time programs. A summary of the benefits and challenges for each model, as noted by members of the committee, can be found below.

	Center-Based Full-Time AAP	**Local Full-Time AAP**
Benefits, Affordances, Successes	● Have at least one, and sometimes multiple, classroom(s) of full-time eligible students, potentially allowing for flexible grouping based on more than just academic needs (e.g., social and emotional needs). ● A narrowed range of differentiation requirements based on a more homogeneous group. ● Potentially greater number of full-time AAP teachers, broadening the capacity for collaboration within and across full-time classrooms.	● Remaining in their neighborhood school to receive full-time AAP services supports students' familiarity, consistency, and sibling support - factors in social and emotional well-being. ● Increased use of - and collaboration around - AAP extensions and resources support widespread efforts in talent development.
Challenges, Constraints, Barriers	● Students may feel more intense pressure when grouped only with intellectual peers. ● Supporting students and families in a sense of belonging when switching to the center from their base school.	● Cohort sizes of full-time eligible students vary across schools and grade levels based on small/large schools. ● Concern that students may be grouped with fewer intellectual peers.

Teachers who teach in each of the two delivery models shared that they commonly face instructional tensions between covering required/mandated curriculum and providing the depth, pacing, and differentiation advanced learners need. For example,

- The teacher panel noted that the requirement to implement the Benchmark Language Arts curriculum as mandated was not always responsive to advanced learners' need for adjusted pace or the use of pre-assessment to find areas where students have already

mastered grade level skills. They expressed appreciation for administrators who gave them flexibility in implementing curriculum based on student data, but noted that they knew such flexibility was not evenly permitted by administrators across the division. They recommended that this need be more clearly communicated to school leaders.

With math, they voiced concerns about the focus on acceleration over depth and complexity, rather than finding a way to marry all three. Altogether, these tensions - and accompanying communication - can lead to inequities in access and experience, undermine confidence in the system, and create a structure in which the two models compete rather than function as complementary pathways.

Middle School AAP Centers Discussion

In September 2025, the School Board directed FCPS Superintendent, Dr. Michelle Reid, to bring a proposal to expand Full-Time AAP Centers from 14 middle schools to all 26 middle schools. Our committee met with Superintendent Reid in early January and dedicated our regularly-scheduled January meeting to continue the discussion with Dr. Sloan Presidio, Chief Academic Officer. While important, these discussions diverted some of the committee's capacity to hear from additional stakeholders, as described previously.

As the school division continues to discuss the expansion of Middle School Full-Time AAP Centers, we hope that our recommendations from this report will simultaneously inform those conversations. The Committee made recommendations for expansion related to ensuring a critical mass cohort of eligible students, having accountability systems to ensure academic rigor, and ensuring teacher readiness to understand and meet the needs of advanced learners. Those recommendations informed the program standards presented at the April School Board work session on this topic.

We still have questions about what constitutes critical mass at the middle school level. While not the focus of our charge this year, we do think the Middle School AAP Centers discussion is linked to the content of this report, including Recommendations 1 (Collect Reliable Data on Fidelity of Implementation & Student Outcomes) and 5 (Conduct Robust Evaluation of Full-Time AAP). We suggest FCPS implement these recommendations at both the elementary and middle school level prior to making decisions about modifying Middle School AAP Full-Time programs.

Limitations of this Report

Given the competing priorities of the committee this year (the charge alongside the Middle School AAP Centers discussion), we were not able to explore all of the qualitative data sources we were hoping to hear from, including families and students. Understanding family choices, student experiences, and teachers' perspectives across a large school division would require surveys or focus groups beyond the scope of an advisory committee.

Additionally, a robust comparison of student outcomes would require analysis of myriad protected student data. The data we *were* able to access as a citizen advisory committee (student numbers, by grade level, in anonymized Local and Center service delivery models

within anonymized pyramids) limited the conclusions we could draw related to our charge. As a result, we have included a recommendation that this charge be extended into a deeper program review with parties who have the access to confidential data that a citizen's advisory committee does not, as well as permissions to survey stakeholder groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from our exploration of this year's charge and monthly panel discussions revealed that FCPS would benefit from a balance of firm program standards and flexibility to be responsive to various school contexts. Our recommendations below are guided by this need for balance as the district works toward providing the best Full-Time AAP experience for our students.

1. Collect Reliable Data on Fidelity of Implementation & Student Outcomes

The primary goal of all AAP services is to ensure that students continue to grow even if they are proficient in grade level standards before the school year begins or the pace of instruction that they need is different from their same-age peers. These students require access to compacted instruction and advanced differentiation based on their asynchronous development. Some students may require reduced review time so that there is time for increased depth or research projects rather than reviewing grade level concepts already mastered. Thus, FCPS must provide consistent expectations to ensure equitable access to rigorous instruction.

Our first recommendation addresses this need: **Collect Reliable Data on Fidelity of Implementation and Student Outcomes**. The AAP team already collects information from schools through a Fidelity of Implementation Tool. Using this tool, schools evaluate whether they meet defined implementation standards and reflect on their future goals for continued improvement. The AAP office collects this data to identify targeted areas of need for additional professional learning. However, the current tool relies on self-reporting, which limits the data's reliability when used to compare across school sites. It also does not contain student outcome measures.

We recommend that the current Fidelity of Implementation Tool be revised to include objective, non-negotiable implementation measures for evaluating both Full-Time AAP service delivery models (Center and Local), such as:

- Grouping decision-making based on enrollment
- Teacher endorsement/certification
- AAP curriculum implementation
- Additional measures unique to a particular model (Center or Local) or school setting (e.g., language immersion)

In addition to the Fidelity of Implementation Tool, we recommend that multiple data points are used to gather a more comprehensive picture of implementation within full-time AAP programs. These data points would include, but not be limited to:

- **Teacher qualifications:** We recognize the value of staffing Full-Time AAP classrooms with teachers who hold an AAP endorsement. We recommend that

the status of teacher endorsements in Full-Time AAP classrooms (Local and Center) be tracked and reviewed on an annual basis.

- **Academic rigor and growth:** In addition to SOL scores, an outcome measure related to academic rigor and growth over the school year (e.g., MAP test data, Portrait of a Graduate portfolios specific to critical and creative thinking) would support determining the impact and success of programming aligned with its purpose. Ultimately, we want students to feel challenged and engaged in the Full-Time AAP classroom.
- **Equitable extracurricular access:** After school opportunities vary from school to school. The committee believes it is important to also measure markers of equitable access to extracurricular academically-focused opportunities (e.g. Science Olympiad, MathCOUNTS, National History Day, Robotics, Model UN). In schools where fewer extracurricular experiences are offered, a root cause analysis is suggested to better understand and support them in developing and sustaining additional academically-focused opportunities for students.
- **Student experience:** Measures related to student experience should also be included in the evaluation of each program, ***particularly those related to social and emotional health.*** Students whose academic needs are undersupported are at risk for underachievement or depression. Tracking migration between Center and Local Full-Time programs might also yield insight into student and family experiences, particularly if paired with surveys or exit interviews.

Additionally, AAPAC proposes that **longitudinal outcomes** are tracked for students who attended Center and Local Full-Time AAP programs in elementary and middle schools. Collecting this data could support evaluation of the long-term impacts of each service delivery model. Potential measures could include AP/IB/DE coursework and test scores, highest level of math achieved, advanced diploma rates, high school GPA, SAT/ACT scores, middle and high school course selection, and more.

Finally, AAPAC proposes that the AAP team create a plan for monitoring and supporting schools who are consistently not meeting Full-Time AAP Fidelity of Implementation Standards.

2. Invest in Teacher Capacity for Working with Advanced Learners

In our panel discussions with Advanced Academic Resource Teachers (AARTs) and Full-Time AAP teachers, we heard a nearly uniform request to **Invest in Building Teacher Capacity for Working with Advanced Learners**. While Full-Time AAP teachers need to hold an endorsement in Advanced Academics within five years, there is not an immediate financial incentive for teachers to do this, and the coursework takes place outside of contract hours.

Teachers also shared that there is a need to better understand the unique social-emotional learning needs of advanced learners. While there are currently Academy courses (professional learning opportunities) for teachers related to this topic, we

encourage the AAP team to integrate the information in these courses into other offerings (e.g. Full-Time Lead meetings) to expand reach and awareness. In addition to teachers, it would be helpful for school counselors and school leaders to gain awareness of the cognitive and affective needs of advanced learners, including twice-exceptional (2e) learners.

In saying this, we also recognize that there are scarce opportunities for teachers to receive the professional learning that they need on a number of topics, and that conversations are currently taking place about the school calendar. ***It is imperative that teacher professional learning be a strong consideration when designing school calendars.***

Our recommendation to invest in teacher professional learning includes several key actions to address the above considerations, such as:

- Consider teacher professional learning needs as school year calendars are developed.
- Require and incentivize AAP certification by providing substitute coverage - or stipends if outside contract hours - for completing AAP-related professional learning.
- Guarantee funding for professional learning coursework completed outside of FCPS Academy Courses for staff seeking an AAP endorsement.
- Reward AARTs and Full-Time AAP teachers for pursuing ongoing professional learning by establishing tiers of expertise, with an included financial benefit.
- Limit the number of hours the AART is in the master schedule so they have time to serve as a differentiation coach/resource for teachers, as well as plan local professional learning on advanced learner needs.
- Integrate learning about the unique social-emotional needs of advanced students in division professional learning (e.g. Full-Time AAP Teacher lead meetings, AART meetings, inservice offerings).

3. Improve Communication about & Positioning of the Full-Time AAP Model

It is important to note that AAP in FCPS has continuously evolved based on current research and recommendations from external program reviews as well as reports from this committee, yet not every family is informed about current practices. **We would like to emphasize that we recommend maintaining both the Center and Local Full-Time AAP models.** However, one challenge identified by both Center and Local Full-Time teachers was how competition between Center and Local schools for the same students may cloud families' understanding of the similarities and differences between the two service delivery models.

For example, while the curriculum and extended standards are the same in Center-based and Local Full-Time programs, Centers typically offer a larger cohort of students and group students in homogeneous classes consisting only of centrally-identified, full-time eligible students. At Local Full-Time programs, class composition and grouping practices will vary across schools depending on the number of students eligible and the impact of integrating with other programs offered at the site (e.g. language immersion programs). Some local programs in larger schools may have a significant number of full-time eligible students in a class; others may not. School leaders must actively monitor Local Full-Time AAP classrooms for critical mass and seek support from the AAP team to address how specialized programs may adversely impact grouping options. Thus, our third recommendation addresses this challenge of competition between delivery models: **Improve Communication & Positioning of the Full-Time AAP Model.**

The AAP office has provided a standardized orientation slide deck for Center and Local Full-Time programs to show to newly eligible families. The deck is customizable with specific information about the individual school (e.g. PTO, student work/project samples, parent or student panels to share about their experience or decision making). At the panel presentation to AAPAC, AARTs and teachers shared that some Center and Local programs have started to offer joint orientations for families of newly eligible students where the Center and Local programs present together. This practice was shared at an elementary principals' meeting in January 2026, and a small number of pyramids began to take this approach for orientations in April 2026. While it doesn't work for every pyramid because of split feeders, it is an example of one way that some pyramids have addressed improving communications about the delivery models for families.

Key action items related to this recommendation include:

- Shifting language about the two full-time delivery models from "choice" → "best fit for student need."
- Increasing transparency around the similarities and differences between the two service delivery models.
- Clarifying and defining grouping models being used at Full-Time AAP sites for both families and school staff to ensure consistent communication for all
- Sharing student outcome data (once established) with families to help them determine what is the best fit for their student.
- Strongly recommending that connected Full-Time Local and Center-based schools offer joint orientations (local and center conduct their orientations together) where possible.

4. Strengthen Collaboration Among Full-Time AAP Teachers & Schools

Our next recommendation, **Strengthen Collaboration Among Full-Time AAP Teachers & Schools,** comes out of suggestions made by AARTs and Full-Time AAP classroom teachers. They all noted a need for additional collaboration between teachers responsible for delivering Full-Time AAP services across grade level teams. Some noted they would like opportunities for collaboration between the Center and Local Full-Time AAP teachers across schools. Additionally, the committee recommends a space for sharing best practices between the schools so that teachers are not having to create and re-create lesson resources in silos.

As noted previously, ensuring that the school calendar intentionally includes time for teacher professional learning and collaboration will be critical to making this level of alignment possible across schools. Key action items related to this recommendation include:

- Increase across-school collaboration between Local Full-Time and Center programs for interested teachers (both vertical and horizontal).
- Share best practices system-wide (e.g. joint orientations).
- Consider structural alignment in the next boundary review so eligible students can stay within their high school pyramid for both elementary and middle school center options.
- Consider professional learning and collaboration time in designing school year calendars.

5. Conduct Robust Evaluation of Full-Time AAP

As mentioned earlier, AAPAC recognizes that we are a public citizens advisory committee with limitations around the data we can and cannot access. While data confidentiality is of utmost importance, the inability to access protected data limited the scope of our exploration. Additionally, we did not have permissions to conduct widespread surveys of families and students that would be important to understand on this topic. This leads us to our fifth and final recommendation: **Conduct a Review for Robust Evaluation of the Full-Time Program**. This review, conducted externally if budget allows, should focus on the implementation of the expansion of the Local Full-Time program, evaluation of both the Center and Local Full-Time programs to ensure they are still operating with fidelity of implementation, and helping to establish additional outcome measures that can be used every year by the county to ensure the programs continue to operate with fidelity and the appropriate rigor. Reviewers should be granted permission to:

- Research and compile outcome measures for ALL Full-Time programs, Center and Local.
- Seek stakeholder input about experiences, including families, students, AARTs, Full-Time AAP classroom teachers, and administrators about topics such as:

decision-making between delivery models (including families who have switched from one to the other) and the benefits and challenges of delivery models in meeting the academic and social-emotional needs of advanced learners.

- Make recommendations based on findings to ensure the programs are meeting the needs of advanced learners.

PREVIOUS YEAR CHARGE FOLLOW-UP

Last year's AAPAC's charge was:

> AAPAC will learn more about the Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) options for FCPS high school students, including analyzing access, participation rates, and numbers of student exams in order to make recommendations about effective practices and possible areas for improvement.

Updates of work on this topic include:

- The FCPS website crosswalking elements of Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) has been updated to include Dual Enrollment (DE). Having all three options on the same page makes it easier for families to make comparisons about options for advanced coursework in high school.
- School Counseling Services, in collaboration with the Goal 4 workgroup, continues to develop resources, tools, and more robust communication between schools and families regarding academic advising/course planning.
- The Career & Transitions team and the Office of Special Education have partnered with DE staff on training about accessing special education accommodations for students with disabilities in DE classes. The Student Rights and Responsibilities document, outlining students' legal rights and responsibilities in DE courses, was added to the DE webpage.
- As a division, we continue to explore options for a tool to support the Academic and Career Plan (ACAP) and the Academic and Career Planning Portfolio (ACPP). We are actively preparing for an RFP. In the meantime, the middle school course catalog is now available in Naviance. This means that while 8-11th grade students can course plan as usual using the HS catalog, now 6th and 7th grade Naviance users can also use Course Planner for middle school courses. This change will better support students who access HS credit bearing courses while in MS.
- AP Seminar English 10 is offered in all AP FCPS high schools and one IB school. This course counts toward the 10th grade English graduation requirement. FCPS approved AP Business Principles and AP Cybersecurity for the 2026-27 school year. This expands offerings to a department which previously did not have any AP courses.
- FCPS DE has collaborated with Radford University to offer a teacher credentialing cohort for mathematics and with GMU for a cohort for History teachers. The Office of Professional Learning has been included in those conversations so that any tuition reimbursement available could be used where applicable.
- FCPS is piloting an IB/DE Business Management course in SY 2026-27 and plans to work with NOVA to offer more IB/DE courses in the future. This will increase DE options for students. DE staff have established ongoing collaboration with counterparts in Loudoun County Public Schools and Prince William Public Schools to align requests and advocacy with NOVA.
- We are continuing to train schools on use of the FCPS AP Exam Workbook and the College Board Instructional Planning Reports. All AP Academic Coordinators received the

training as well as teachers who attended training for AP Biology, English Language, and World Languages. Training will continue to expand to teachers in Math and Social Studies for SY 2026-27SY.

- We are continuing to train schools on the use of the FCPS IB Exam Workbook. All IB Coordinators received the training as well as IB Science department chairs, IB staff at Edison high school, and IB Social Studies teachers who attended training in SY 2025-26.

PROPOSED COMMITTEE CHARGE, 2026-2027

The Advanced Academic Programs Advisory Committee (AAPAC) will focus on feedback on updates to the next iteration of the FCPS Local Plan for the Gifted and the topic of social-emotional well-being of advanced learners. Committee work will focus on the following areas:

- Local Plan for the Gifted: VA regulations governing educational services for gifted students require school divisions to submit a Local Plan for the Gifted every five years. The committee will learn about the VA regulations, and review and provide feedback on FCPS' 2028-2033 Local Plan for the Gifted before it is submitted for its mandatory five-year School Board approval.

- Social-emotional needs of advanced learners topics:
    - Explore current research on the unique psychological, social, and emotional needs of advanced learners, and examine how well the division's current practices align with those findings to identify areas of strength and potential growth.
    - Learn more about the advanced coursework experiences of secondary students from multiple stakeholder groups (e.g. students, school counselors). Topics might include: availability of challenging coursework and/or academic extracurricular opportunities, academic balance and workload, and emotional wellness of secondary students enrolled in advanced courses.

APPENDIX A: Documents Reviewed

External Program Review

- *2020 External Program Review: Good Progress but Challenges Remain: Achieving Equity in Fairfax County Public Schools Advanced Academic Programs*

Bibliography of Articles and Websites

- *High Achieving Students Deserve to be Challenged in Schools*
- *What One Hundred Years of Research Says About the Effects of Ability Grouping and Acceleration on K-12 Students' Academic Achievement*

Documents Reviewed

Please contact the AAP office at aap@fcps.edu for a copy.

- *Current state of Full-Time AAP (Fall 2025)*
- *FCPS Full-Time AAP Fidelity of Implementation Tool*
- *Sample Outcomes of School Choice of Local or Center-Based Full-time AAP - SY2526*
- *Summary of Fidelity of Implementation Tool Recommendations*
- *AAP Continuum of Services Chart*
- *Full-Time AAP Expansion Overview*
- *Overview of Professional Learning Opportunities for Full-Time AAP Teachers*

APPENDIX B: Guest Speakers

Thank you to the following guest speakers who shared their expertise with AAPAC this year:

December 2025: External reviewers from the 2020 AAP Program Review

- Dr. Jonathan Plucker, Johns Hopkins University
- Dr. Scott Peters, University of Wisconsin

February 2026: Panel of AARTs from Local and Center-based AAP Programs

- Pamela James, Fox Mill Elementary, Local Full-Time AAP
- Alyssa Grabel, Timber Lane Elementary School, Local Full-Time AAP
- Kim Keleher, Poplar Tree Elementary School, Center-based Full-Time AAP
- Ashley Raymond, Willow Springs Elementary School, Center-based Full-Time AAP

March 2026: Panel of classroom teachers from Local and Center-based AAP Programs

- Lauren Plaugher, Bull Run Elementary School, Center-based Full-Time AAP
- Jen Howard, Mantua Elementary School, Center-based Full-Time AAPr
- Haley Gotcher, Waynewood Elementary School, Local Full-Time AAP
- Cathy Gundlach, Providence Elementary School, Local Full-Time AAP

APPENDIX C: Attendance Record

Voting Member Name	Oct 21	Nov 18	Dec 16	Jan 20	Feb 24	Mar 17	Apr 21	May 19	Eligibility to vote (Attended at least 50% of meetings eligible to attend)
Sourabh Pawar Braddock	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Eligible to vote
Randi Cosentino Dranesville	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Eligible to vote
Jason Planakis Franconia	Y	Y	-	-	Y	Y	-	Y	Eligible to vote
Melissa Keppel Hunter Mill	Y	-	-	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	Eligible to vote
Leah Richardson Mason	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Eligible to vote
Bana Miller Mount Vernon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Attended fewer than 50% of meetings
Cara Berman Providence	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Eligible to vote
Nicolas Geadah Springfield	Y	-	Y	-	-	Y	-	-	Attended fewer than 50% of meetings
Meg Dombro Sully	Y	-	Y	-	Y	-	-	-	Attended fewer than 50% of meetings
Jing Huang Temple At Large (McElveen)			Y	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Eligible to vote
Courtney Marsh At Large (McDaniel)					Y	Y	Y	Y	Eligible to vote
Will Chilcutt At Large (Moon)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Eligible to vote
Abdulrahman Khalaf HS Student			-	Y	-	Y	Y	-	Eligible to vote
Yasmine Chatib HS Student			-	-	-	-	-	-	Attended fewer than 50% of meetings
Sarah Knowles Fairfax City		Y	-	-	-	Y	-	-	Attended fewer than 50% of meetings
Holly Glaser *(co-chair)* University rep (GMU)	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	-	Y	Y	Eligible to vote
Lisa Bertin Fairfax County Association for the Gifted	Y	-	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Eligible to vote

Voting Member Name	Oct 21	Nov 18	Dec 16	Jan 20	Feb 24	Mar 17	Apr 21	May 19	Eligibility to vote (Attended at least 50% of meetings eligible to attend)
Cheryl Napoli *(co-chair)* Fairfax Co Council of PTAs	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Eligible to vote
Nancy Trainer Fairfax Federation of Citizens Associations	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Eligible to vote
Mark Nelson FCPS Minority Student Achievement Oversight Committee student rep		Y	Y	-	-	Y	-	-	Attended fewer than 50% of meetings
Cindy Agner Elementary Administrator	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Eligible to vote
Sonya Williams Middle School Administrator	Y	Y	-	Y	-	Y	Y	-	Eligible to vote
Shared - Larry Stroud/ Cary Dimmick High School Administrator	Y	-	Y	Y	-	Y	-	-	Eligible to vote
Patty Edwards Elementary Teacher	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Eligible to vote
Mary Keane Middle School Teacher	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Eligible to vote
Jenifer Maglicic High School Teacher	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Eligible to vote
Angelica Anderson High School Teacher	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Eligible to vote
Kirsten Maloney Committee Staff Liaison K-12 Senior Manager, AAP	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Non-voting member
Michael Gillespie C&I Cross Curricular Director	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Non-voting member
Jamie Wilson Elementary Senior Manager, AAP	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Non-voting member

APPENDIX D: Minority Report

We agree with the majority report, and believe that it could benefit from additional supportive detail and context gathered during the committee's work this year. Our charge asked us to complete two tasks: (1) to perform a review of the Local Full-Time AAP expansion, and (2) to describe the strengths and challenges of the local and center models. The additional information provided in this supplemental report helps answer this charge.

Review and Support for High Level Implementation

The 2020 external review of the AAP recommended an expansion of Local Full-Time services with the following phrase bolded, underlined, and italicized: ***with accompanying review and support for high level implementation***. The majority rightly describes that our committee could not perform such a review, for two reasons:

1. FCPS currently provides few concrete standards and no objective metrics with which to evaluate whether a school is providing "high level implementation."
2. The data that our committee requested in order to evaluate the expansion of the Local Full-Time program was not provided.

Even if our committee couldn't perform this review, we believe FCPS can and should. **The purpose of the evaluation in Recommendation #5 is to help FCPS form a picture of what a successful Center and a successful Local Level program look like.** This is essential work. We suggest a comprehensive review with multiple data points (including objective and subjective data, as well as academic and socio-emotional measures) precisely because the definition of success in the AAP is currently undefined.

As noted in the report, the best research on gifted education suggests that the dedicated, specialized instructional environment represented by Centers has a much more significant effect on student outcomes than smaller cluster grouping. Until 2020, Local Full-Time programs were required to group students eligible for Full-Time AAP services together, and to fill those classrooms with students who were "pushed in" based on teacher and administrator input. Now, schools are permitted to use a cluster grouping model which requires just 6-8 students eligible for Full-Time AAP services in a class. In a grade with 14 eligible students, therefore, FCPS permits schools to split those students into two classrooms with just 7 students, rather than requiring them to be placed together with one another.

The FCPS central office must approve this cluster grouping model when it is requested. More flexible guidance about grouping students helps schools deal with a variety of constraints. While it can be necessary to split larger cohorts into smaller clusters, we have some concerns

about whether low per-class numbers within a cluster support high level implementation of the AAP. We also note that many Local Level programs operate with fewer than 10 full-time eligible students in at least one grade; these conditions are currently present in 38 of the 50 Local Level programs whose data were provided to our committee. None of this information indicates dispositively that our Local Full-Time expansion is not proceeding at a high level, but we are concerned that these figures are low and warrant further investigation.

We therefore suggest that—following the data collection and analysis suggested in the majority report—**FCPS establish base thresholds which schools must meet to be labeled a Local Full-Time program**. Such criteria might include: minimum numbers of cohorted students per grade; a commitment to a certain number or percentage of certified teachers; a certain subset of extracurriculars, in-class extensions, or other academically-oriented activities, and/or a commitment to meet a certain set of objective outcomes for students eligible for Full-Time services.

If a school does not meet these standards, its AAP should be given a different label (such as "Offers Advanced Coursework," or perhaps a label indicating an AAP which is not full time), so that families can properly understand their choices. More refined labeling can provide some measure of transparency for the public to understand if schools offer advanced programming, but do not operate the program according to centralized standards, or are not meeting benchmarks. Additionally, we suggest **FCPS establish clear benchmarks and metrics for Centers** as well. We suggest FCPS track data regularly to ensure these benchmarks are met, to help ensure fidelity of implementation with much more specificity than the current Fidelity of Implementation Tool can provide.

Distinct Benefits of Center and Local Full-Time Models

We agree with the majority report's assertion that Centers and Local Full-Time programs offer separate and distinct benefits to students and their families. We would like to elaborate on this idea. **Both Centers and Local Level programs provide essential choices for families**. The expansion of the Local Level program ought not to come at the expense of maintaining robust Centers, nor should Centers thwart advanced programming at other schools.

The Local Level program was designed to expand access—keeping identified students in their neighborhood schools, reducing transportation and equity barriers, and broadening the reach of advanced services. These benefits are real. Families may prefer their local program for a variety of reasons, such as their comfort with staff/administration/community, or the logistical simplicity of keeping siblings at their neighborhood school. This model reflects important FCPS values. However—as Dr. Scott Peters warned the committee in December—local programs can face significant challenges in ensuring fidelity of implementation.

As the majority states, a meta-analysis summarizing 100 years of research on ability grouping shows that programs like FCPS' Centers generate strong academic growth for advanced learners, whereas the effect of cluster grouping is only moderate. Experts who have directly analyzed FCPS observed this here in practice. In December, AAPAC met with two of the four researchers who wrote the 2020 external review. One of them, Dr. Jonathan Plucker, commented that it "makes sense that [Centers] are different and able to better serve the most advanced learners." He suggested that one key question families may want to ask in choosing the right model for their child is, "When is a student so advanced that he or she cannot be appropriately served in their home school?" There are many variables in a family's decision, but this frank suggestion echoes many committee members' experience choosing the proper placement for their students, and could provide excellent language for FCPS to provide families in order to ensure the kind of transparency discussed in Recommendation #3.

In addition, our work suggests that Centers may be more likely than Local programs to address the unique social and emotional needs of profoundly advanced students, and potentially of twice exceptional (2E) students. One staff member who spoke to AAPAC this year highlighted the challenges of working with students who struggle to overcome perfectionism, and sometimes (due to their asynchronous development) struggle to relate to others. Providing a strong peer community for these students is central to their success, however defined.

One model is not superior to the other. Instead, we suggest that **Centers and Local Level programs are both essential delivery models, but may serve somewhat different purposes for some students**, particularly in light of the small number of students clustered in some classrooms at some schools. Centers gather together students from various base schools to create a large academic and socio-emotional cohort not typically available at local schools. The Local Level program supports broader access, equity, and neighborhood continuity. But where the gifted cohort is small or where classroom composition reshapes pacing, the classroom experience may drift away from the differentiated, accelerated curriculum the AAP is designed to deliver.

A Note on Middle School Center Expansion

We would like to briefly add to the majority's recommendation that **FCPS should not further expand middle school AAP Centers** until objective criteria, benchmarks and metrics have been established to ensure fidelity of implementation. The question of critical mass was discussed in different terms within our committee than was presented to the School Board. Dr. Presidio told our committee in January that an FCPS AAP Center in middle school requires a critical mass of at least 100-150 students. Much lower figures were presented to the Board in its April 7, 2026 work session. Larger cohorts are recommended in middle school for multiple reasons, chief

among them the difficulties involved in middle school student scheduling (since students' elective choices will vary), and the need for teacher focus and collaborative teaming (which suggests a larger cohort since middle school teachers are subject-area specialists with up to six instructional classes).

To maintain a rigorous AAP, FCPS must ensure we have clear standards, metrics, and criteria which provide the foundation for ***review and support for high level implementation for both center and local delivery models at both elementary and middle schools***.