

## **Gifted Services Questionnaire: Maura McMahon**

### **Do I support continuing to send students to Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Fairfax?**

Yes, I support continuing Arlington's participation in TJHSST. This is a unique academic opportunity that APS does not currently provide our students and has the ability to offer through our partnership with Fairfax County Public Schools.

As long as our costs to send each student is comparable to our per pupil costs, I see no reason to discontinue our participation. As FCPS looks to share its costs of maintenance or renovations, we will need to carefully consider our share of that responsibility and work closely with FCPS to ensure APS does not shoulder a disproportionate or cost-prohibitive burden.

### **What would I do differently to support gifted students?**

Beyond additional intensified class offerings, a number of things I would like to consider are:

1. More co-taught classes to allow more individual attention and "differentiation." Not all teachers are as skilled at managing a classroom of diverse abilities and interests. Having two teachers would allow the class to participate in the main lesson together, and then break into different groups for more in-depth discussions, projects, and study according to the students' individual levels. This approach honors APS' commitment to inclusion and providing challenging opportunities for students at all levels. On-going, meaningful professional development would help all teachers develop skills and better awareness of the individual needs of students.
2. Our Arlington Tiered System of Support (ATSS) could be better used to serve our higher-achieving students. The fact that a student earns a "B" or an "A" in a class does not mean he/she could not benefit from greater challenge. We need to be able to design opportunities during the ATSS service delivery periods to cater more to each individual child's needs. A high grade in a particular subject does not necessarily mean a student is achieving at his level of potential. We should be using ATSS to further engage these students in various subjects, and offer opportunities for independent study or projects of their choosing.
3. Accountability. Consistently throughout these past few months and across the County – on a variety of issues – I have heard from both teachers and parents that our principals have too much autonomy and are not held accountable. Whether in regard to gifted services, special education services, use of technology, or the implementation of other initiatives such as ATSS, we need to enforce consistent expectations across schools. A principal should have some degree of flexibility to best serve his/her unique student body; but within specific expectations and with

accountability for implementing the policies and expectations that help ensure student of all levels of ability are appropriately challenged.

We have a fairly strong focus in the elementary schools to identify and serve students (albeit, again with a degree of inconsistency across schools); but then we do not offer the challenging coursework for them when they arrive in middle school.

4. The personalized learning initiative can, at least theoretically, help as well. But this is yet to be fully implemented and will take time. Applying APS' new standard of looking to see if each student makes 'a year's worth of progress' each year should be useful in keeping our focus on our gifted students and keeping them challenged and engaged. Rather than looking at test scores and grades... we will have to take a closer look at our higher-achieving students to see that they are progressing.