

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

In March 2008, the Baton Rouge Association of Gifted and Talented Students (BRAGTS) published a document describing the organization's concerns regarding the Gifted and Talented Program in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System.

On April 29, 2008, the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board requested a Task Force be formed to review the BRAGTS document and its recommendations.

The Office of Innovative and Specialized Programs, which includes the Gifted and Talented Programs, organized two staff planning sessions to evaluate the recommendations and determine the impact to the school system.

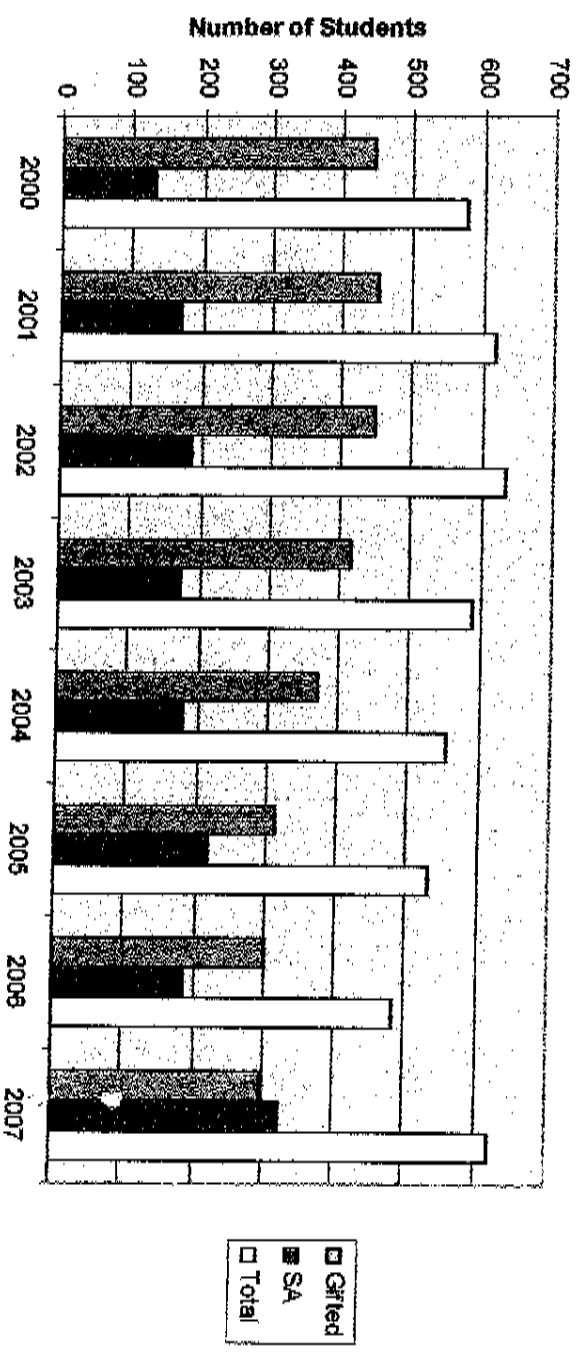
A "Staff Report" prepared by the EBRPSS Administration has been presented to the EBRPSS School Board at the June Meeting.

The Following is a presentation to clarify the BRAGTS original positions and to respond to the Staff Report.

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

Reasons for BRAGTS Concern:

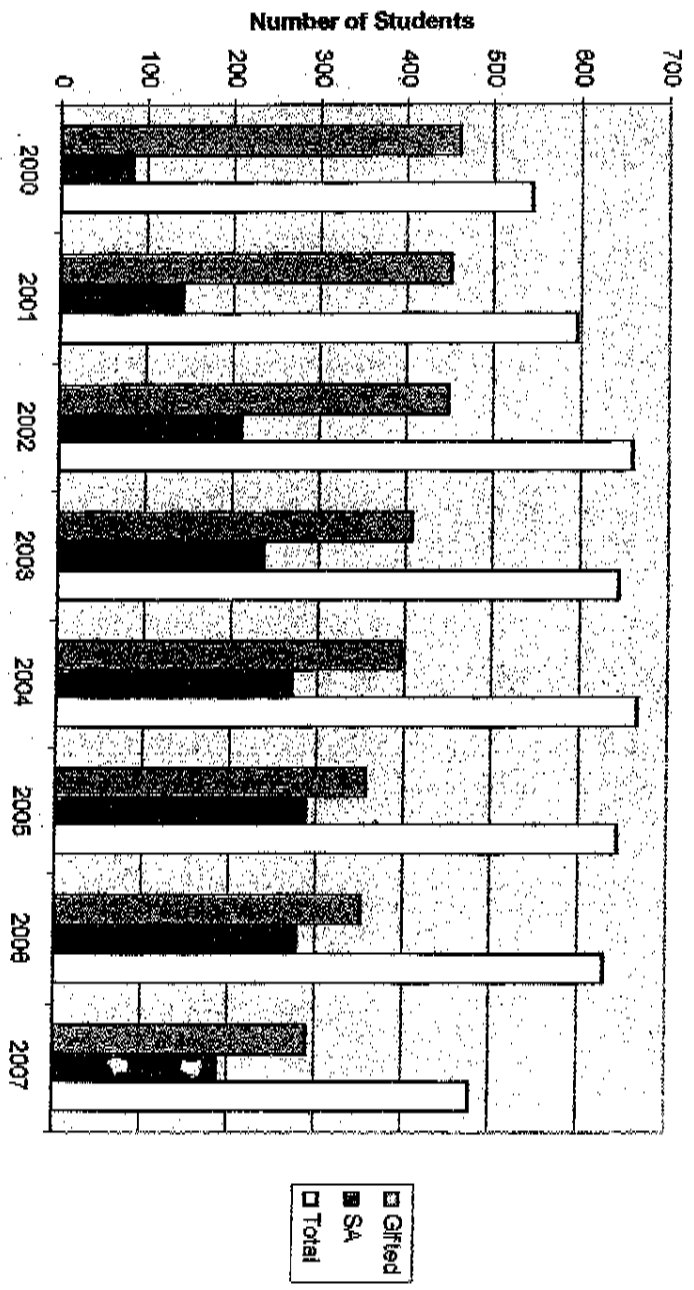
GIFTED/SCHOLASTIC ACADEMY COUNTS FOR ELEMENTARY SITES (Based on October 1 Attendance Counts)



BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

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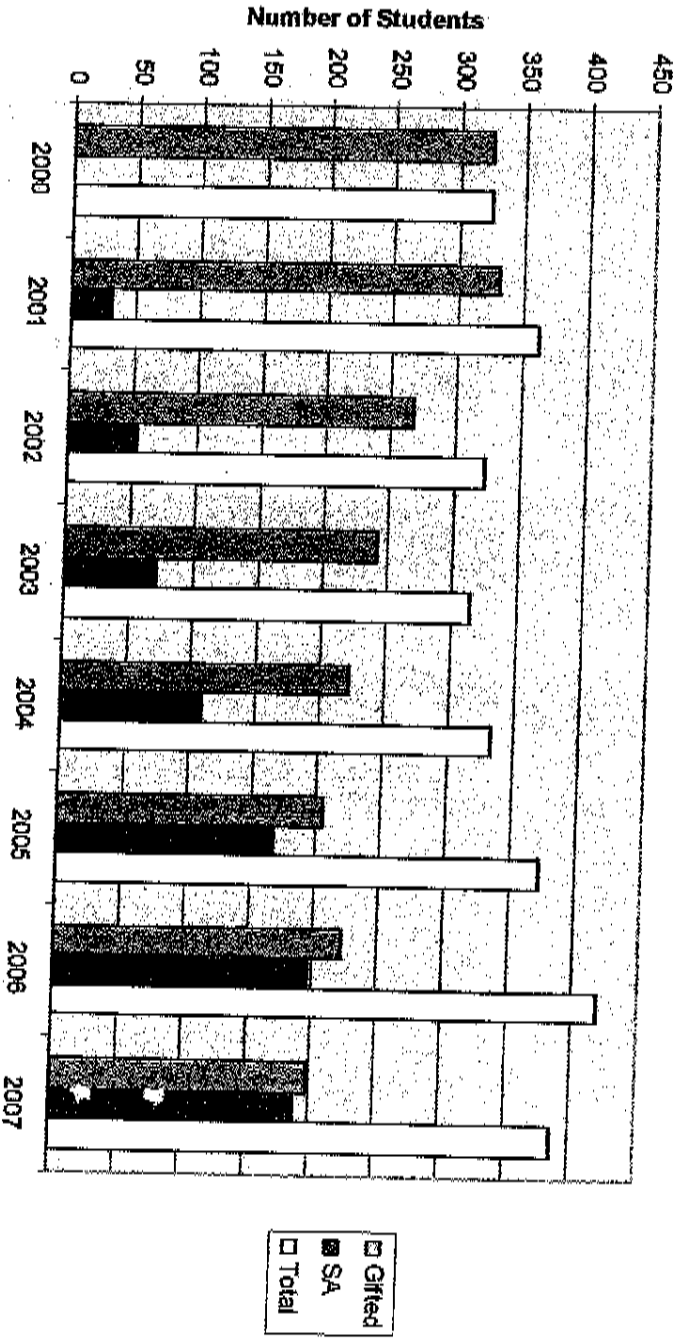
GIFTED/SCHOLASTIC ACADEMY COUNTS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL SITES (Based on October 1 Attendance Counts)



BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

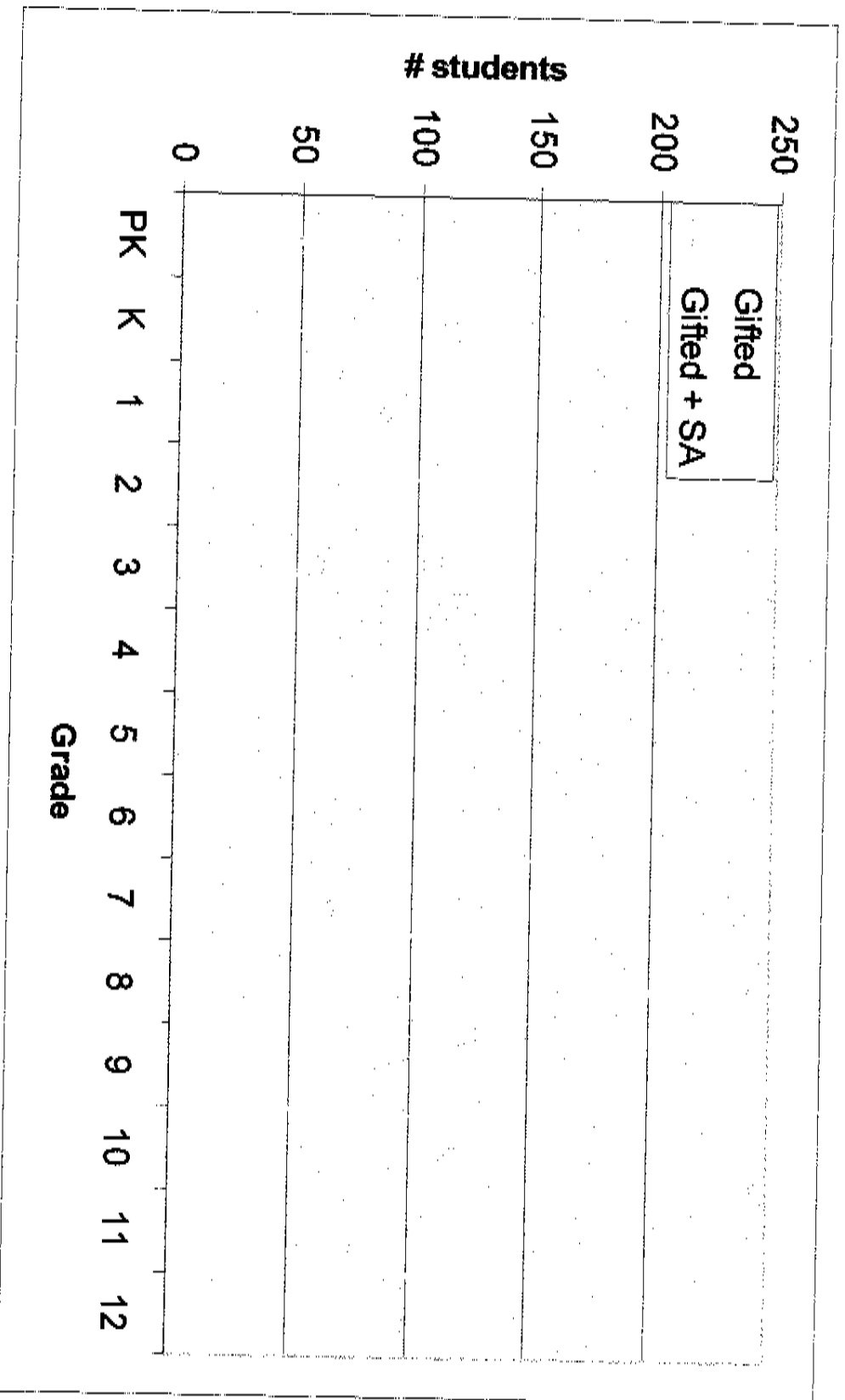
Reasons for BRAGTS Concern:

GIFTED/SCHOLASTIC ACADEMY COUNTS FOR HIGH SCHOOL SITE (Based on October 1 Attendance Counts)



BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

Reasons for BRAGTS Concern:



BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

In March 2008, the Baton Rouge Association of Gifted and Talented Students (BRAGTS) published a document that addresses the organization's concerns regarding the Gifted and Talented Program in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System.

Issues and Cautions with the BRAGTS document:

Not enough data – developed without EBRPSS involvement – EBRPSS's choice.

If Too General – Haven't said anything

If Too Specific – Easy to shoot holes in details and ignore fundamental concepts
BRAGTS tried for "somewhere in between" and got some of both

Concepts are more important than specifics – sometimes naming a specific site or program is necessary to start the dialogue.

Document is not a collection of individual points – issues are collective.

G/T program should not be viewed as stagnant – goal is to increase participation – this means more students if we do the right things.

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

General Comments

The recommendations presented are a beginning and not an end to addressing the declining participation in the EBRPSS Gifted and Talented Programs. It is important to view them as a group as well as individual items. If each item is reviewed on its own and stagnant participation in the G/T programs is assumed, then the recommendations hold reduced value. However, if the combined effects are considered, it is believed that these recommendations will start a process of increased participation in the G/T programs. While this report focuses on Identified Gifted students, the talented services should not be ignored.

Recommendation 5.1.4 addresses the need for an on-going team of EBRPSS employees and parents to steer and grow all G/T programs.

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

5.1.1 For the 2008-09 school year, designate Glasgow Middle School as a Gifted/Talented Academy, comprised of grades pre-K – 8 G/T and Scholastic Academy (SA) students.

Staff Pros

Continuity of the gifted curriculum from Pre-K to 8th grade at one site
Address the academic needs of high functioning gifted students district wide
Appealing to parents
Opportunity to increase number of students which will expand program

Staff Cons

Capacity issues would limit enrollment
Limited time to implement for 2008-2009 school year
Facility needs for students in pre-K to 8th grade
Possible district wide School Performance Score (SPS) impact
Social issues for students separated from general population
Relocation of choice and regular education students

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

Staff Position Statement

At this time, the recommendation to designate Glasgow Middle School as a

Gifted/Talented Academy, Pre-K through 8th grade, is not feasible based on the capacity of the school site. Additionally, it is the opinion of staff that designating Glasgow Middle School as a dedicated gifted site would severely impact existing self-contained gifted/talented programs within the school system. In order to implement this recommendation, two hundred twenty-eight (228) students currently living in Glasgow's attendance zone and one hundred twenty-five (125) choice students currently attending Glasgow Middle School would be displaced. A total of three hundred fifty-three (353) middle school students would have to be reassigned to other middle school locations at a time when middle school sites are currently struggling with capacity issues. The reassignment of the students to nearby middle schools would impact the School Performance Score at the receiving schools. In addition, the schools losing gifted students to the dedicated gifted site would eventually notice an impact on their School Performance Score (SPS).

Renovations would need to be considered at Glasgow in order to accommodate pre-K-8th grade. In addition, the suggested timeline for the 2008-2009 school year does not allow for renovations and establishing policies and procedures for admissions to a dedicated gifted site.

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

BRAGTS Comments

The suggestion of using Glasgow Middle as the selected site is not the key issue. Any other school in satisfactory physical condition in a central location within the district that the School Board feels would be suitable to designate for this purpose would also establish the stability in the program at a G/T Academy that families feel they do not currently have at their current sites.

Additional dialogue on this issue has included the difficulty in moving students and that the moves would upset students and parents. It is important to note that there are already upset students and parents as illustrated by the steady decline in Identified Gifted Students receiving services in the EBRPSS.

In a presentation to the April 29 School Board workshop, it was stated that a Long Range Facility Plan for the magnet schools included designating Audubon Elementary as a dedicated Magnet site. The presentation and discussion did not include the Cons listed for similar proposals for Gifted sites and did not address the future of the Gifted program at the school (started in the 2007-2008 school year).

Socialization: Gifted education involves grouping according to ability - ability grouping is accepted in terms of Grade level, reading and math class assignments, elective levels (Spanish I, II, II ,...), magnet school dedication, etc. Why would Gifted ability grouping be considered unacceptable?

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

BRAGTS Comments

Con 1: Capacity issues would limit enrollment BRAGTS would like to point out that the children currently in the school system would simply be redistributed over the available schools. As parents from the community who have their qualified children currently in private schools recognize that the School System is providing an attractive alternative for them, the number of identified children will indeed increase in the Gifted Program and thereby the School System. However, we assume that this is indeed a goal that BRAGTS shares with the School System i.e., to attract more students, and not a negative aspect. Having a commodity that is in demand is actually a good thing.

BRAGTS would also like to point out that not all students will choose to attend the academy, such as those students who wish to avoid disruption in their already established habits (parents live or work close to their current sites, or 4th and 5th graders who wish to finish out elementary school at their current location, families who are satisfied with their sites, etc.), so that we do not anticipate an immediate capacity issue.

The basis of this Con is two-fold: 1) All Gifted Students would attend the site; and 2) the total number of Identified Gifted students in the EBRPSS remains constant. As explained above, neither of these assumptions is correct. Parents and students will still choose various sites per their individual needs and situations and it is believed that implanting these proposals will initiate a growth in the participation in the programs.

Con 2: Limited time to implement for 2008-09 school year

If opening a Gifted Pre-K-8 Academy is still perceived to be too large an undertaking for the 2008-09 school year, in order to address this Con, BRAGTS would like to suggest a rolling implementation as a possible alternative.

At a minimum, work should begin now to be ready for the 2009-2010 school year.

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

BRAGTS Comments

Con 4: Possible district wide School Performance Score (SPS) impact

Any impact on SPS would not be district-wide since you are simply relocating the same children to different schools within the district – hence the average scores remain the same. If anything, by attracting more Gifted children from the community, the System will see higher scores because there will be more high performing children that have been attracted to join the system.

It should be noted that waivers have been granted by the State DOE for such moves.

The BESE board has issued waivers to other school districts whereby student test scores go back to their home school. This would “spread” the generally higher GT and magnet scores across the district benefiting more than just those schools that currently contain gifted programs.

This approach has been acknowledged by Superintendent Placide in her April 28, 2008 letter to the School Board for the Magnet and Gifted and Talented Program Workshop. In her presentation cover letter, Ms. Placide noted that she has “submitted a request to the State Department of Education’s staff to provide comments regarding the concept of routing accountability scores back to the home school. This would include our magnet schools, autonomous schools, gifted sites, etc.” BRAGTS supports this effort and commends the school system and Ms. Placide for taking this step which has the potential to nullify this issue in its entirety.

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

5.1.2 For the 2008-2009 school year, establish self-contained classes at all grade levels at Parkview Elementary for G/T and SA students.

Staff Pros

Accelerates process to add grade levels recommended by the Board in March 2007

Help expand program

Extend another self-contained gifted choice in southeastern region of the school system

Staff Cons

Impacts other gifted sites/locations

Capacity issue in 2008-2009; lack of classroom space

Additional cost: teachers, transportation, classroom space

Staff Position Statement

On April 29, 2008, the School Board approved a proposal to expand Parkview Elementary School's gifted program to second grade for the 2008-2009 school year and expand to fifth grade for the 2009-2010 school year. The staff agreed that the recommendation has been accelerated although not as quickly as the organization proposed. Currently, Parkview Elementary School has five hundred ten (510) students in attendance with a capacity for five hundred ten (510) students. Next year's projections are five hundred nineteen (519) students.

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

5.1.2 For the 2008-2009 school year, establish self-contained classes at all grade levels at Parkview Elementary for G/T and SA students.

BRAGTS would like to thank the School System and Board for approving the new Gifted grade levels for Parkview Elementary and for accelerating their original plan. We appreciate their support of gifted children at this site.

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

5.1.3 For the 2008-2009 school year, designate McKinley Senior High as a combined Gifted/Talented/Academic Magnet Academy.

Staff Pros

Would expand the high school magnet program

Easy access to university level courses or possible AP courses

Established comprehensive athletic program at McKinley

Could possibly improve McKinley's SPS score

Expand magnet feeder progression for high school

Established gifted transportation routes

Staff Cons

Additional cost to implement (depending on program type)

Capacity and facility issues

Difficult to implement for 2008-2009 school year

High functioning students may opt to move from their current school

Community students may not qualify for an academic magnet program

Baton Rouge High and McKinley High are in close proximity

Staff Position Statement

The staff planning session concluded that the Great Scholars Academy will be very similar to a magnet program and will attract students from throughout the district, although there are some concern about the neighborhood students and how this would impact these students. The current enrollment at McKinley High School is nine hundred seven (907)

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

5.1.3 For the 2008-2009 school year, designate McKinley Senior High as a combined Gifted/Talented/Academic Magnet Academy.

BRAGTS Comments

Con4: High functioning students may opt to move from their current school

If scores are brought back to the home school district, this should not pose a problem – the same students are going to be performing at a high level somewhere in the school district. Plus, by making attractive sites, the school system will attract many parents who are paying high tuition costs for non-gifted education at private schools.

Note that if test scores are sent back to the home school as mentioned previously, the impact of high functioning students enrolling in the gifted program will likely be to increase the home schools scores.

Con5: Community students may not qualify for an academic magnet program

BRAGTS regrets that at the time of writing our proposal, we were unaware that a 2.5 GPA is attached to the concept of 'academic magnet' within this School System. BRAGTS did not intend to require a minimum of 2.5 (or other) GPA with this point in the proposal. Instead, what we meant is that the school would have magnet designation and resources and an academic focus for the site. The school system can designate any requirements as it sees fit, but they do not have to exclude the community students. Our idea was to create an academically oriented program that inspires achievement and holds students accountable.

Con6: Baton Rouge High and McKinley High are in close proximity

BRAGTS did not intend for McKinley High become a "copy-cat" of the BRMHS model of academic magnet. We'd like to see something fresh and innovative that works with the community and stimulates the students there.

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

5.1.4 Form a joint task force comprised of EBRPSS School Board designees and BRAGTS to study and make recommendations addressing the decline in numbers of students in the G/T and SA Programs, especially the 50% decline of students from grade 8 to grade 9, by the October 2008 meeting of the EBRPSS School Board.

Staff Pros

Increasing identified G/T students will increase state funding
A task force is being can examine each concern and report to the Superintendent
Provides collaboration and improves communication among stakeholders

Staff Cons

None

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

Staff Position Statement

The School Board has authorized the Superintendent to organize a task force to convene and review the BRAGTS proposal. This task force is composed of school administrators, students, teachers, Central Office staff, BRAGTS members, and parents. The *first* Gifted and Talented Programs Task Force meeting has been planned for Tuesday, May 27, 2008.

BRAGTS Comments

BRAGTS recommendation 5.1.4 was to form a joint task force to study the declining enrollment problem and make recommendations. Our understanding of the School Board directive at the April 29th school board meeting was that a task force be formed to evaluate the BRAGTS proposal. These are somewhat different objectives, but certainly the two could be merged. If the current Task Force (which first met 5/27/08) is allowed to continue its work beyond merely evaluating the specific BRAGTS recommendations, then recommendation 5.1.4 would indeed be satisfied. However, if the current Task Force is only allowed to evaluate the specific recommendations in the March 2008 BRAGTS proposal, then this recommendation has not been implemented.

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

5.1.5 All current self-contained and resource sites should be supported by the EBRPSS in order to serve all areas of the parish. This support needs to include, but not be limited to, increased publicity for each site, increased efforts to identify G/T students, and inclusion of Gifted/Talented in the site name or designation.

-5.1.5.1 The BRAGTS, as stated in its bylaws, supports G/T programs wherever they may be located; the BRAGTS is strongly in favor of the retention and development of the current sites, including the newly-formed resource sites in the southeastern part of the district and the necessary elementary sites across the district.

Staff Pros

Marketing and publicizing campaign

Create an awareness campaign for the Gifted and Talented Program

Attracts more students into the public school system

Designates school with Gifted and Talented label in school's name

Staff Cons

Additional cost for facilities and awareness campaign

Focusing on the Gifted and Talented label in the school's name

eliminates recognition of other school programs at individual sites

Additional cost to change school's sign/marquee

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

Staff Position Statement

The staff planning session supports both the resource and self-contained gifted models in place currently with both programs using various media outlets. In the last twelve months, the school system has taken a proactive approach in publicizing the gifted/talented programs utilizing a variety of marketing strategies. The school system should continue this approach as schools discover a need for gifted services at new sites, such as the five new gifted/talented programs implemented during the 2007-2008 school year. Gifted and Talented site designation should be a site based decision based on School Board approval.

BRAGTS Comments

The focus of this recommendation is more on the continued support of the existing sites than on signage. However, a common comment from parents is the inequity of site designations and the community awareness and recognition that EBRPSS has a Gifted and Talented program. Signage creates “permanent advertising” for the sites and the programs.

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

5.1.6 Implement the School Board policy approved March 2007 of screening all kindergartners across the district.

Staff Pros

Utilize existing data/resources to identify students

Continue assessing under identified populations to increase the number of students in the program

Opportunity to expand program as numbers increase

Staff Cons

Additional expense/cost for personnel and training

Cost of screening instrument

Time for additional testing takes away from students' instructional time

Need to develop a procedure for screening and reporting data

Staff Position Statement

The school system should use existing screening tools as part of the universal screening process for kindergarten and/or pre-kindergarten students. Those students meeting an established score will be invited to be screened in an effort to identify high performing students who have the potential and need for a specialized learning program.

BRAGTS Comments

Cost is not an issue since the School Board implemented this recommendation as policy by unanimous vote at their March 20, 2007 meeting. It is difficult to understand the nature of missing "instructional time" for pre-k and kindergarten students, especially when the purpose is to place them into an appropriate academic program.

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

5.1.7 Implement an aggressive marketing strategy to focus on the G/T program.

Staff Pros

Recruit more students

Highlights the program

Helps identify additional Gifted and Talented students

Increased revenue per student

Creates parental and community awareness

Equalizes “playing field” regarding magnet programs and gifted/talented programs

Marketing strategy/plan

Staff Cons

Cost of print advertisements, billboard, television, radio, etc.

Staff Position Statement

The staff planning session recommends enhancing our marketing strategy through a written marketing plan within budget constraints.

BRAGTS Comments

BRAGTS supports the schools system recommendation to enhance the marketing strategy and recognizes that there will always be budgetary restraints. It is recommended that the Task Force recommended in section 5.1.4 be included in developing or commenting on the campaigns.

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

5.1.8 Make every administrative effort to channel magnet students through the academic magnet pathway and gifted students through the gifted pathway.

Staff Pros & Cons

The staff could not determine a list of pros and cons.

Staff Position Statement

The administration makes every effort to channel magnet students through the academic magnet pathway and gifted students through the gifted pathway. Every effort is made to provide parents with information about the system's programs so they can make well informed choices. The consensus of the group was the need for parents and students to make their own choice in their child's education. The staff is committed to improving the quality of the Gifted/Talented Program, Pre-K through 12th grade.

BRAGTS Comments

The intention of this recommendation is not to dictate or limit options to students but to increase them. Many parents have commented that even after entering magnet programs they did not know that the Gifted and Talented programs existed. This recommendation seeks to address the ongoing awareness issues between the system programs.

BRAGTS Comments on Staff Report

Where Do We Go From Here?

EBRPSS School Board plans to discuss the Gifted and Talented Programs in the October Meeting.

It is requested that this team (or a similar group) work with the EBRPSS Administration to develop specific and meaningful recommendations for the next steps to support and expand the identification and participation of Gifted and Talented students in the EBRPSS. Recommendations for the 2009-2010 school year should be presented at the EBRPSS School Board as part of the October 2008 meeting.

The implementation or recommendation 5.1.4 is central to an on-going process of continuous improvement in the Gifted and Talented programs.