

From: BRAGTS Board of Directors

Date: 12 June 2008

To: June 12 G/T Programs Review Committee

Re: Response to the EBRPSS Staff Report (Draft):

G/T Programs Review Committee May 2008

Introduction

The Baton Rouge Association for Gifted and Talented Students (BRAGTS) thanks the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board and Staff for forming the Task Force to review the March 2008 BRAGTS proposal and for compiling relevant data for the Task Force. In addition, BRAGTS is very supportive of the recent expansion of the self-contained gifted program to Parkview Elementary as well as the new marketing program and summer gifted screening. However, we remain gravely concerned that these efforts do not go far enough. A general meeting of BRAGTS was held on Monday, June 9 at which concerns about the May 2008 draft report were discussed. We recognize that this report is a draft document, and as such, is open for comment.

Executive Summary

- ▲ 98% of our survey respondents want a dedicated gifted school
- ▲ BRAGTS anticipates that gifted enrollment would increase dramatically and therefore EBRPSS enrollment as high achieving students leave private schools for public, particularly in the current economic climate.
- ▲ With more gifted students in the system, test scores would increase overall for the district.
- ▲ Test scores can be sent back to home schools for both gifted and/or magnet schools.
- ▲ Using gifted students to inflate test scores at specific schools masks the real issues at these schools that need to be addressed.
- ▲ Capacity/zoning issues can be worked out and have been for the magnet schools.
- ▲ The pros outweigh the cons.
- ▲ At a minimum, as an alternative to the Glasgow concept, BRAGTS will accept a binding commitment from EBRPSS that they will phase in a G/T Academy (at least two grades per year) starting with the 2009-2010 school year. We strongly believe that this level of commitment is necessary to show the Greater Baton Rouge community that EBRPSS truly wants the Gifted Program to thrive.

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.

Detailed Comments

The following corrections, comments and concerns address some of the issues raised by said draft and have been approved by a consensus of the BRAGTS Executive Board based on their understanding of the wishes of the BRAGTS general membership.

Page 2, Introduction

Please correct title of BRAGTS (“for” not “of”): Baton Rouge Association **for** Gifted and Talented Students.

Page 3: Issue paragraph

This information is not accurate. BRAGTS is concerned primarily with the declining number of identified gifted students receiving services.

Section 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 Report Pros and Cons:

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

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

Pro 1: Continuity of the gifted curriculum from Pre-K to 8th grade at one site

Based on a survey of parents conducted by BRAGTS in 2006, **98% of parents of gifted students WANT dedicated sites for their children** like the sites of the various academic magnet programs.

BRAGTS would like to reiterate that its 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. At the time of writing our proposal, BRAGTS did not have access to the detailed data needed to properly analyze the impacts on potential sites. Now that this communication has begun, we would like to work together with the staff to identify the optimum location and format for a G/T Academy. Our membership has also repeatedly expressed the idea that housing magnet and gifted programs together would also be acceptable to them. BRAGTS originally made the suggestion for Glasgow based on our research and the fact that Glasgow:

- is in a central location within the district
- is in close proximity to the largest gifted demographic area it would serve (70808 zip code where most of our members reside), cutting travel time for students and saving transportation costs for the system
- has a physical plant and location that are acceptable and attractive to parents (and staff)
- was originally constructed to be an elementary school
- has fencing and outdoor areas commensurate with the requirements for elementary children already in place
- is a Blue Ribbon School (reputation is already established as an institute of academic excellence)

- already is home to gifted middle school
- has gifted-certified staff in place

BRAGTS would also like to point out that there are other Pros associated with designating a pre-K through 8 G/T and SA (and now Great Scholar Program) facility:

Additional Pros associated with a Gifted Academy:

Combined teaching resources

An academy of this nature would serve to combine resources and staff to better serve the needs of the gifted students working at multiple grade levels. (For example, fifth graders working above grade level in math could attend math classes with 6th through 8th graders instead of working independently and receiving limited help from a teacher trying to teach multiple grade levels of math.)

Transportation cost savings

The majority of BRAGTS survey respondents live in the 70808 zip code. Busing routes would be shorter to a centrally located school. This results in advantages not only for the children who no longer have to endure long bus rides, but also for the School System and Transportation Department who no longer have to plan long routes for a few children living in outlying areas of the district, thus saving gasoline costs. Any centrally located school in acceptable physical condition would serve the purpose.

Impact on the greater community and the number of children enrolled in public schools

Another important Pro is that a Gifted Academy is not only attractive to *current* gifted families, it would also attract many parents of current private school children back into the school system, as well as those who have left the gifted program for private schools or magnets.

It is also important to establish a reputation of the School System as one that is able and willing to deal with the gifted population, especially in consideration of the fact that Baton Rouge is home to two major universities and many smaller colleges and technical industries that are seeking to attract employees from out-of-state.

Section 5.1.1 Cons

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

BRAGTS would respectfully like to point out that in 1997 both Glasgow and Westdale Middle Schools were populated by G/T students from Scotlandville and Crestworth Middle Schools, respectively, in a matter of days, after being on the latter campuses for two weeks at the start of the school year. This happened after the AGTS Baton Rouge Chapter and parents of gifted students threatened to boycott Scotlandville Middle based on incidents that had occurred.

BRAGTS would also respectfully like to point out that when the System converted “Westdale Elementary” to “Westdale Heights Academic Magnet”, hundreds of students were moved from that school to other, already crowded schools. Two of the schools that took on over one hundred students each at that point were Buchanan Elementary and Bernard Terrace Elementary – both gifted program sites.

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 the following three year rolling implementation as a possible suggestion:

a) Begin with 6th grade traditional students for 2008-09 and require these students (roughly 75 from the Glasgow attendance zone) to transfer to other schools [Westdale, Kenilworth and McKinley Middle Magnet (the latter is currently 255 students under capacity— also see below)]. This should allow for two gifted sections each of 4th and 5th grade (or alternatively, Pre-K and K as the School System sees fit) to be accommodated. The approximately 125 Choice students who are usually expected to enter Glasgow Middle early in the school year could be redirected to other middle schools, including magnet middle schools, such as McKinley Middle, which we understand to be 255 students below capacity. It has been pointed out to BRAGTS that Choice students are not allowed to choose Magnet schools, but we would respectfully point out that this is indeed what ‘choice’ is all about... it would seem that it would be more fair to allow students from failing schools to have a chance at some of the System’s best middle schools.

b) For 2009-2010, implement the same strategy in terms of gifted 3rd and 4th graders occupying the space vacated by the absence of traditional 7th graders (An advantage of this is that no one will have to be moved this year), and

c) For 2010-2011, finalize the process for the gifted pre-K through 2nd graders.

Such a strategy would give time for renovations if they are found to be necessary and minimize impact on other sites. It would also provide a gradual transition for all involved (teachers, parents who need some time to decide where they would like their children to attend school or be able to plan for coming years, transportation dept., etc.).

Once again, this is one possible acceptable way to implement the changes needed and there may be other acceptable scenarios. BRAGTS has confidence that the School Board, Office of Innovative and

Specialized Programs, and the Task Force appointed to evaluate the BRAGTS proposal will come up with an acceptable solution.

Con 3: Facility needs for students Pre-K to 8th grade

As stated already on page 4 in the paragraph describing Glasgow, Glasgow was originally constructed as an elementary school and has facilities as commensurate with current physical plant requirements for elementary schools as any elementary school of its vintage in this System that currently houses elementary children (Buchanan, Polk, Brookstown, etc.)

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 understands the School System’s concern for disruption of the SPS that may result if a Gifted Academy is formed (although the data presented at the May 28 meeting is not as alarming as it was projected to be at the April School Board Meeting) and although some schools might be labeled as ‘in decline’, their scores would probably not immediately drop to ‘takeover levels’ if some of the gifted students left.

The use of gifted students’ scores to pull up failing scores of the schools they are housed in is an artificial construct. It is inequitable to allow poorly performing students’ scores to be masked and brought up by those of the gifted students, thereby avoiding the embarrassment and monetary issues involved with takeover. It is also inequitable to continue to allow gifted students’ scores to be brought down by poorer performers and to saddle them with the burden of keeping up their school’s scores when they could shine as a source of pride for themselves and the School System as a gifted academy.

BRAGTS would like to respectfully point out that the current masking of poor scores by the Gifted students’ scores at the schools where Gifted programs are housed is not only deceptive, it actually performs a disservice to the poorly performing students who will not receive the help they might otherwise qualify for.

Con 5: Social issues for students separated from general population

With regard to social issues, data will need to be produced that shows that such schools have social pathology; it hasn't seemed to harm Ben Franklin in New Orleans or the Newsweek top 50 public high schools, many of which are dedicated gifted sites. Most parents with students in the g/t program sites will tell you that their children felt socially isolated until they joined the G/T program when they finally found children with similar proclivities and interests. Also, gifted children have been shown to have an ability to relate well to other children in a wide range of ages. Also the children in the EBRPSS Gifted program are exposed to children of different cultures and races since the makeup of the gifted classroom is usually a microcosm of the community in which we live: classroom composition usually includes equal numbers of Asian children, Indian children, African American children and Caucasian children. Children from the 'general population' cited in Con number 5 also qualify for gifted services and participate in the gifted program, providing a diverse environment. The number of children from the 'general population' participating in the Gifted program should also increase as they are identified by increased gifted screening efforts at the kindergarten level.

Also, 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?

Con 6: Relocation of choice and regular education students and comments with regard to the position statement on page 3:

Although the School System states that 353 students would have to be displaced from Glasgow Middle to accommodate a Gifted Academy, McKinley Middle Magnet currently has an unused capacity of 252 students and could accommodate all but 100 of these displaced Glasgow students. These remaining 100 students could easily be absorbed by other middle schools, especially considering the fact that such maneuvers are routinely done toward the beginning of every school year when Choice students must be accommodated (Some middle schools accommodated 125 Choice students per school last year).

In the 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).

To repeat: BRAGTS would like to reiterate that its 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.

5.1.2 For the 2008-09 school year, establish self-contained classes at all grade levels at Parkview Elementary for G/T and SA students

Staff Report Pros and Cons:

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

Cons

- Impacts other gifted sites/locations
- Capacity issue in 2008-2009; lack of classroom space
- Additional cost: teachers, transportation, classroom space

First of all, 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.

Con 1: impacts other gifted sites/locations

If impacting other G/T sites will always be a “Con” then the document implies that the G/T students will always be “hostages” at their current sites, which may be far from home, and/or in a declining program. We are often told that if parents choose to place their children in magnet programs that it is their “choice” but parents are offered no choice within the gifted program itself. We request the Staff to recommend measures to enhance current sites to make them more attractive. Cost and capacity will always be an issue, but all of these were also issues for dedicated academic magnet schools. If the School System is serious about stabilizing the program, it could bring in modular buildings as is currently done for “choice” students when there are capacity issues at those schools. BRAGTS has been told that if the “numbers” are up, the School System will provide the space and yet when the numbers are sufficient we are told there are capacity problems and that modular buildings are too expensive. At the same time when there are capacity issues for placing choice students in the same facilities, modular buildings are provided. Again, this is an example of something being possible for other programs but not for G/T.

Con2: Capacity issue in 2008-09; lack of classroom space

Capacity and facility issues can always be addressed by zoning which also answers other “Cons” in this report (e.g., BRMHS being in close proximity to McKinley High).

5.1.3 For the 2008-09 school year, designate McKinley Senior High as a combined Gifted/Talented/Academic Magnet Academy

Staff Report Pros and Cons:

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

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

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.

Finally, 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. Why is it okay for BRMHS to attract high-functioning and G/T students from other schools (such as high performers from McKinley and Tara) but not for McKinley to attract high-functioning students? Keep in mind that the gifted program does not pull students from other schools, the gifted program provides services that gifted students need and to which they are entitled. Gifted students should be sought out and given the services they need as a special population, anything less does a disservice to that student.

What BRAGTS is suggesting here is the concept of an innovative magnet program defined in a way that is inclusive of “Community students”.

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. We sincerely hope to minimize the loss of any

students and hope that a special magnet program would help provide every opportunity and resource to succeed. BRAGTS does not want to push any neighborhood children out of McKinley High.

However, it is our belief that many current McKinley students would indeed qualify even if a 2.5 GPA were required. The separated score data from McKinley High suggest that the community population is indeed capable of achieving academic magnet GPAs. This might even be an incentive for those students who are not currently performing to their academic capacity to put out more effort to be able to stay at McKinley High in an innovative magnet program.

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

Please note that Westdale Heights and BRCVPA Elementary Schools are in contiguous zones, yet both are dedicated magnets. How does the School System justify to G/T parents that such maneuvers can be done for dedicated academic magnets but not G/T?

Many in our membership do not perceive Baton Rouge High and McKinley High as being 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.

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 Report Pros and Cons:

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

Cons

None

Comment: We kindly ask the Staff to have a look at Pro 2 and revise the wording to be as intended.

Position Statement – 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.

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 Report Pros and Cons:

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

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

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.

Con 2: Focusing on the Gifted and Talented label in the school's name eliminates recognition of other school programs at individual sites

There are labels in school names across the district that "eliminate recognition of other school programs at individual sites". McKinley Middle (dedicated) Magnet in the '90s housed a G/T program that was not reflected in the official school "label". Today there are words like "Academy", "Magnet", "Preparatory", "Excellence", "Pre-College", "Montessori", and "Center" (reference: Baton Rouge phone book) all in school titles which required name changes, so there is a precedent for the labeling of schools. Note that the school map on the EBRPSS website includes "Gifted and Talented" in these school names.

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

Staff Report Pros and Cons:

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

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

Con 1: Additional expense/cost for personnel and training

Con 2: Cost of screening instrument

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. It is BRAGTS opinion that wherever the word "Cost" appears it should be substituted with "Cost/Benefit"; otherwise, staff is being disingenuous.

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

Staff Report Pros and Cons:

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

Cons

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

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.

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

Staff Report Pros and Cons:

Pros & Cons

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

Comment:

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.

Additional comments

A “Pro” which was left out on almost every recommendation is that gifted students NEED gifted education and are entitled to receive appropriate services by law. Educating and providing as many identified gifted students as possible with the services to which they are entitled should be of utmost importance to the EBR school system. The current gifted program grossly under-serves the needs of the gifted student population of EBR, leaving many parents feeling as though they have no choice but to seek education (that is not always in the best interest of the student) for their children elsewhere. Another consistently overlooked “Pro” is that each item will help to ensure the stability of the program. This point cannot be overstated, as it is probably one of the most significant concerns of parents of gifted students. Almost all of the “Cons” (and many of the “Pros”) could equally apply to the dedicated magnet sites as they were / are being established. One can re-read each of the recommendations, and substitute the dedicated magnet concepts. All of these issues were successfully navigated in establishing dedicated magnet programs; so how can the School System suggest otherwise to G/T parents?

G/T parents and students are keenly aware of the inequity in treatment of the G/T Program as compared to the Magnet Program, which is another reason many choose not to accept gifted services. A “Pro” for 5.1.7 states that implementing aggressive marketing strategies “equalizes ‘playing field’ regarding magnet programs and gifted/talented programs”. This one statement shows a lack of understanding of the nature of the problem in declining participation. If anyone thinks that print materials (“within budgetary constraints”) will correct the issues, then we have failed to make our point.

BRAGTS requests that the EBRPSS review the methodology used in the economic analysis of the “increased cost” (a common Con) presented when program changes are proposed. When a Gifted

class is added, the school board is presented with the cost of a new teacher and new class room supplies (instructional materials, etc.). If the students in the class were not gifted, teachers and supplies would still be required. Recognizing that the maximum class size changes and instructional materials may have different costs and that state funding for Identified Gifted students is different, an economic analysis showing the difference in cost from a base class to a gifted class would be more representative of the actual net cost to the school system.

A common element of many of the Cons that was not written in the Staff Report but has been expressed verbally in conversations is that many of these recommendations and issues will be "hard" to do. BRAGTS and most parents in EBRPSS understand that dealing with these complex issues is hard but that we must undertake them to improve the education opportunities for the children of the district. This is why BRAGTS continues to offer its support to the EBRPSS in service on a joint task force and in any other ways that will help improve the education of the children of the district.

At a minimum, as an alternative to the Glasgow concept, BRAGTS-will accept a binding commitment from EBRPSS that they will phase in a G/T Academy (at least two grades per year) starting with the 2009-2010 school year. We strongly believe that this level of commitment is necessary to show the Greater Baton Rouge community that EBRPSS truly wants the Gifted Program to thrive.

Thank you for this opportunity to work together with you on this important issue.