

February 19, 2010

Dear Board Members and Administrators,

The news of impending educational budget cuts in the state trickling down to the district has provided the impetus for this letter. I am writing on behalf of the gifted program in our district (RISE) with the intention and hope of conveying the valuable role it plays in the educational quality of our community.

My husband, Stan, and I have been blessed with three children who have had the privilege to participate in our school's RISE program for over 8 years now. I have been actively involved in many of their academic activities by volunteering in various capacities throughout their school years. In addition, I have filled in as a substitute teacher, mainly in the RISE classroom for the past 5 years or so.

With this background I wish to share with the board my observations of the impact that the gifted program has on students in our district. On a personal note, I can tell you that "RISE days" were always the highlight of our children's week. I guarantee that just about every RISE parent will have the same testimony! This is not a slam on the regular classroom teacher –it is simply a fact that most gifted children are not sufficiently challenged there and as a result of continual boredom they tend to lose interest in learning.

Being challenged academically is certainly crucial to a young student's growth but I also appreciate the lessons in humility as they work with peers at their same level. In addition there is reassurance and social growth in the comfort of an environment where it's okay to be "different" and they are encouraged to think outside the box. I have noticed individual students who step into a new secure identity as a result of being in the gifted program rather than shrinking into isolation on the fringes of mainstream.

The gifted program opens up doors of opportunity that may have never even been knocked on. Some children are identified despite (or even because of) behavior problems or learning disabilities that mask their potential abilities. Disadvantaged children who would feel otherwise "labeled" receive a boost in their self-esteem when their unique talents are discovered. Being placed in a classroom where they are allowed to think and work creatively offers them a chance to develop confidence and new skills to cope. They are offered hope and a new direction in life. Without this gifted program many of these potential future contributors would be lost, as they sink into academic apathy and likely becoming problem students as they move up.

Our small community is unique in that it offers educational options in both parochial and private schools in the area. While Lafayette County C-1 schools strive to provide quality public education, we are too often limited by legislative mandates. Now with further financial constraints we are at risk for compromising our current standards. As parents seek the best for their children we stand to lose some of our best and brightest students to these private institutions or to homeschooling.

I feel our gifted program at Lafayette County C-1 is vital to the definition of a quality education in our community. Our written policy promises students *"the opportunity for the maximum development of each individual within the limitations of his/her capacities."* (Laf. Co C-1 Educational Philosophy/Mission, Policy #0200.)

Please defend the gifted students in our public schools and protect this program when you are facing budget cuts both now and in the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Julie Echelmeier