



School for Highly Gifted Students

- **Only public school of its kind in Houston**
 - Private School Competition
 - Rainard School for the Gifted
 - The Rubican Academy
- **Open in 2011-2012 for K-4**
 - Expect approximately 30 students
 - Expand up as students age
 - Welcome out of district students (as space allows)
- **School within-a-school format**
 - Director
 - 3 Teachers
- **Multi-age setting**
 - Individualized learning




History

- **Task Forces**
 - Recommended by 2005 Elementary GT Task Force
 - Written into AAS Five-Year Plan by 2007 AAS Task Force
 - Formed Highly Gifted Program Task Force March 2009
- **Research**
 - Book Studies
 - High IQ Kids
 - Teaching the Digital Generation
 - Extensive review of programs across the U.S.
 - Conference attendance - TAGT & NAGC
 - Ongoing support from Davidson Academy, Reno
 - Site visits
 - SEGA, MOSAICS, PEGS - St. Louis
 - LEAP - Carrollton-Farmers Branch



Community Forums


- **April 2010 community forums**
- **Parents invited**
 - Referral pool of 33 with 140+ in subtest of GT testing
 - Davidson Institute Young Scholars network
 - Texas Parents of Profoundly Gifted network
 - Houston Area Cooperative on the Gifted and Talented
- **Interest forms for 25 children total - 7 out of district**



Specialized Staff

- **Director**
 - Promote the school
 - Oversee development of expansion to secondary
 - Extreme level of parent interaction
 - Counsel parents and students
- **Assistant Director (secondary expansion)**
 - Oversee integration for electives
 - Provide college and career counseling
 - Facilitate mentorship and research opportunities
- **Teachers**
 - 10-12 students: 1 teacher preferred
 - Certified in Gifted Education
 - Certified for both elementary and secondary

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Eligibility & Expansion

- **Eligibility**
 - IQ of 145 or higher (WPPSI, WISC, SB, RIAS)
AND
 - 145 standard score on achievement test (KTEA, WIAT, WJIII Ach)
- **Other Programs**
 - Temple: 21 (1st-5th) in 1st year
 - MOSAICS: 7 (1st-3rd) to 24 to 45 (1st-6th)
 - Paradise Valley Unified: 25 (4th-6th) to 102 (1st-6th) in 7 years
 - PEGS: 5 to 106 (1st-12th) in 18 years
 - LEAP: 50 (1st-6th) to 240 (K-12th) in 24 years
- **Expected Growth**
 - 10 students/year
 - 1 additional teacher/year
 - Parents are likely to move to SBISD for the school

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| Elementary | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Grade Levels | K-4 | K-5 | K-5 | K-5 | K-5 | K-5 | K-5 | K-5 |
| # students | 30 | 40 | 50 | 55 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 |
| # classrooms | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Student:Teacher | 10:1 | 10:1 | 10:1 | 11:1 | 10:1 | 10:1 | 10:1 | 10:1 |
| Administration | Director | | | | | | | |
| | Administrative Assistant | | | | | | | |
| Teachers | LA/SS tchr (K-8) | | | | | | | |
| | Math tchr (K-12) | | | | | | | |
| | Sci tchr (K-12) | | | | | | | |
| | Math tchr (K-12) | | | | | | | |
| | Sci tchr (K-12) | | | | | | | |
| | LA/SS tchr (K-12) | | | | | | | |
| Secondary | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 |
| Grade Levels | | | 6-7 | 6-8 | 6-9 | 6-10 | 6-11 | 6-12 |
| # students | | | 20 | 25 | 30 | 40 | 50 | 60 |
| # classrooms | | | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| Student:Teacher | | | 10:1 | 12.5:1 | 10:1 | 10:1 | 10:1 | 10:1 |
| Administration | Asst. Dir. | | | | | | | |
| Teachers | LA/SS tchr (sec) | | | | | | | |
| | Math/Sci tchr (sec) | | | | | | | |
| | Sci tchr (sec) | | | | | | | |
| | Math tchr (sec) | | | | | | | |
| | LA/SS tchr (sec) | | | | | | | |
| | Sci tchr (sec) | | | | | | | |



Location

- **Elementary - Valley Oaks Elementary**
 - Supportive staff
 - Building is 100 under capacity
 - School for Highly Gifted could be considered in construction
- **Secondary – Westchester Academy**
 - 6th-12th
 - Culture supportive of differences
 - Building is 400 under capacity

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Sample Secondary Core Schedules

- **Marco**
 - Age 15 (peers 10th gr)
 - Officially 10th grade
 - English II
 - U.S. History
 - Physics II
 - Math via university
- **Lillian**
 - Age 12 (peers 7th gr)
 - Officially 9th grade
 - English II
 - World Geography
 - Algebra II
 - Chemistry
- **Toni**
 - Age 11 (peers 6th gr)
 - Officially 6th grade
 - 8th grade ELA and SS
 - Algebra II
 - Biology

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Particulars


- **Courses built around student need**
 - Small groups of student in the same courses
 - Small groups for thematic discussions across courses
 - Same graduation requirements as any other school
 - No weighted grading
- **Lottery if demand exceeds limits due to staffing**
- **No transportation provided**
- **School Director reports to Director of Advanced Academic Studies**
- **Seek partnership with Rice or other university**

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Budget Estimates

| # Students | Year 1 30 | Year 2 40 | Year 3 70 | Year 4 80 | Year 5 90 | Year 6 100 | Year 7 110 | Year 8 120 |
|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Payroll | \$307,500 | \$375,435 | \$656,172 | \$675,857 | \$834,441 | \$925,553 | \$1,021,380 | \$1,112,125 |
| Administrative | \$9,000 | \$10,000 | \$12,500 | \$13,500 | \$15,500 | \$14,000 | \$14,500 | \$15,000 |
| Instructional | \$37,250 | \$48,100 | \$58,590 | \$83,210 | \$100,330 | \$118,950 | \$137,570 | \$159,190 |
| Technology | | \$1,741 | \$8,501 | \$12,111 | \$41,023 | \$27,616 | \$39,131 | \$24,733 |
| Subtotal | \$353,750 | \$448,276 | \$735,763 | \$784,678 | \$991,293 | \$1,086,119 | \$1,212,582 | \$1,318,047 |
| Per Student | \$11,792 | \$11,207 | \$10,511 | \$9,808 | \$11,014 | \$10,861 | \$11,023 | \$10,984 |
| Start-up | \$59,865 | | \$46,250 | | | | | |
| Contingency | \$88,438 | \$112,069 | \$183,941 | \$196,170 | \$247,823 | \$271,530 | \$303,145 | \$329,512 |
| Total | \$502,053 | \$560,345 | \$965,954 | \$980,848 | \$1,239,117 | \$1,357,649 | \$1,515,727 | \$1,647,559 |

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**Spring
Branch**
Independent School District
www.springbranchisd.com

Giftedness doesn't know rich or poor; neither should access to appropriate academic environments...

Recognizing that there are many more similarly gifted children out there unable to afford access to such an environment, it is frustrating to think about missing the opportunity to have a school available where all highly gifted kids from all socioeconomic backgrounds can interact with each other.

— Jon & Paige Larrabee

Spring Branch ISD School for Highly Gifted Students Proposal - Summary

The mission of the Spring Branch ISD School for Highly Gifted Students is to provide highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted children an advanced educational opportunity matched to their individual abilities, strengths and interests.

There are no public programs or schools designed specifically to meet the needs of highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted students in the Houston area. These students, who have IQs of 145 or higher, are as different from average students as students with IQs below 55. Being so different from average creates educational needs that are extremely difficult to meet, even within the regular GT program. Parents of highly gifted children are desperately seeking appropriate educational settings for their children. By creating a school-within-a-school for this specific population, SBISD will be filling a great need for students across the Houston area. The school will attract students from private schools and other school districts.

Key Points

- Open in 2011-2012 for students the appropriate ages to be in grades K-4. Extend ages served each year.
- Use a school-within-a-school format with a separate director and core teaching staff for the School for Highly Gifted Students.
- Provide individualized instruction at the appropriate pace, depth, and complexity needed by highly gifted students in a multi-age setting.
- Meet students' affective needs by providing a true peer group and service learning opportunities.
- House the K-5 school within Valley Oaks Elementary and the 6-12 school within Westchester Academy.

This school was first recommended in 2005 by the Elementary GT Task Force. A second task force with predominantly new members recommended it again in 2007. Based on the experiences of other public school districts in urban areas (Carrollton-Farmers Branch in

Carrollton, TX and Paradise Valley Unified in Scottsdale, AZ), the school will grow as it attracts families to the district. Opening a school designed specifically for highly gifted students will demonstrate that SBISD is committed to meeting the educational needs of ALL students.

Spring Branch ISD School for Highly Gifted Students

Proposal

Mission and Goals

The mission of the Spring Branch ISD School for Highly Gifted Students is to provide highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted children an advanced educational opportunity matched to their individual abilities, strengths and interests.

The goals of the Spring Branch ISD School for Highly Gifted Students are:

- To provide students an opportunity to learn with intellectual peers;
- To provide a Differentiated Learning Plan (DLP) that appropriately challenges each student's abilities allowing her/him to engage in the curriculum at a pace and depth consistent with the student's knowledge, skills and personal motivations;
- To allow students the opportunity to identify and develop their unique talents and skills at an advanced level and be supported by teachers, professors and other experts in their fields of interest;
- To provide students a learning environment that recognizes their social emotional needs and fosters leadership, integrity, personal responsibility, conscientious citizenship, understanding and an appreciation of individual differences, along with respect for others;
- To provide students counseling and guidance in the graduation pathway, the college application process, and career planning;
- To engage parents in the learning process and provide opportunities for understanding and nurturing their children.

Need

There are no public schools or programs in the Houston area designed specifically to meet the academic, intellectual, and social emotional needs of highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted students. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to fully meet these students' needs within the regular classroom or within the current gifted and talented program (SPIRAL). These students are an unusual subgroup of gifted students. Students score in the highly gifted range at

a ratio 1:1000. As IQ increases, so does the rarity of a student scoring at such an unusual level. In the field of gifted education, the majority agree on the following designations (Gross 7; Sheely and Silverman 7):

- Highly gifted IQ of 145 – 159
- Exceptionally gifted IQ of 160 – 179
- Profoundly gifted IQ of 180 +

There are highly gifted students enrolled in SBISD and living within the district. In the 2010-2011 school year, there are six students enrolled in SBISD that have documentation to indicate they are highly or exceptionally gifted. Two additional students left SBISD in 2009-2010 to be homeschooled and two others currently attend Rainard School for the Gifted. A review of the GT evaluation data from 2007-2008, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010 reveals 77 students who have group administered abilities scores of 140 or higher in at least one subtest. Of these, 33 are in the grade level range for the proposed school. Certainly all of these students will not be determined to have an IQ of 145 or higher, but this is a sizable referral pool.

The highly gifted population has needs as great as students served in separate classrooms within special education. The need for special services comes from being significantly different from average. The level of educational need of *highly* gifted students corresponds with that of students with an IQ of 41 to 55. *Exceptionally* gifted students' needs correspond with those of students with an IQ of 21 to 40, while *profoundly* gifted students' needs correspond with those of students with an IQ of 20 or below. We do not expect the needs of students with an IQ of 55 or below to be met in the regular classroom or a mixed ability classroom (such as Pre-AP/GT). We have very specialized services and settings for these students, depending upon the severity of the needs. However, we have no such differentiated services or settings for the corresponding population among the gifted who have equally great needs.

Part of the difficulty in meeting the needs of highly gifted students is their asynchronous development. The development of gifted children is out of sync; different aspects of gifted children develop at different rates. There is a mismatch between the intellectual age and the physical age of most gifted children (Silverman 39). The higher a child's IQ, the more dramatic

this asynchrony. A highly gifted eight year old may need high school level language arts instruction at the same time she needs health fitness with other eight year olds and mathematics instruction at the 5th grade level. At one time, a single student is operating at different developmental ages cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically. In addition, there can be great variance within the cognitive domain according to subject area.

Currently, we meet the needs of highly gifted students through a combination of single subject acceleration and grade skipping. This type of acceleration is a well documented, successful, cost-effective strategy for meeting the academic needs of gifted children (Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross 1: 2). Acceleration meets the academic needs of typical gifted students and can also address some social emotional needs. It is a much better option than requiring gifted children to remain in classrooms where they have mastered all or most of the content to be presented. According to Karen Rogers' work, however, gifted children make the most academic growth when grouped together in stand-alone classrooms as they facilitate students' access to advanced curriculum (2002, 212-215). Highly gifted children have more extreme needs than typical gifted students. Even when accelerated into a higher grade level for instruction, highly gifted students will learn at a significantly faster pace and depth than the students around them. Putting a highly gifted student in a classroom with older students does not meet his pacing needs or his ability to deal with a subject in depth. The student continues to be quite different from classmates in all settings.

Highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted students have trouble finding a setting that fits. They do not fit with their age peers and they do not fit with the students in accelerated classes. They also do not fit among the general gifted population. "...placing PG [profoundly gifted] children in a classroom in which they have no true peers causes great social angst" (Walker 111). Grouping highly gifted children allows them to feel valued and normal (Neville 165). A school where highly gifted students can learn together, with others who are similarly different from average, with curriculum that is individualized in pace and depth, is much more likely to meet these students' exceptional needs. It is a setting in which it's possible to provide what Rogers describes as key while avoiding "social angst". "The keys to schooling these children are to link them whenever possible with others closest to them in intellectual functioning; to provide

consistent, daily challenge with appropriate pacing and little practice; and to accelerate their exposure to content and skills they will need to be successful in college and in their adult lives” (Rogers, 2007, 99).

Conflicts with other programs

Creating a school for highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted students will not conflict with any other program. The current GT program will continue to serve gifted students. Highly gifted students will not attend the SPIRAL at Bendwood program, but the SPIRAL program will continue to serve other GT students throughout the district. The Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students (TEA) requires GT programs to provide “an array of learning opportunities that are commensurate with their abilities” (8). The needs of gifted students are as varied as students served by the Special Education Department. SBISD provides an array of services and settings (learning opportunities) for students with varied disabilities and needs. By expanding our GT services to include those specifically designed for highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted students, SBISD will be providing an array of services and settings to meet the varied needs of gifted students.

Research

In 2005, the Elementary GT Task Force recommended a school-within-a-school be developed to meet the needs of highly gifted students. This task force was made up of parents, principals, teachers, and other district administrators. They made a number of recommendations to improve the GT program in SBISD and many were implemented. The school for highly gifted students was not. In 2006-2007 another task force was formed to develop a five year improvement plan for the Advanced Academic Studies (AAS) Department. This task force also included a wide range of stakeholders. Their work was facilitated by Dr. Joyce Juntune of Texas A&M University. This task force included a school for highly gifted students in the plan they developed. As a result of its inclusion in the SBISD Five-Year Educational Plan, the Highly Gifted Program Task Force was formed in March 2009.

The Highly Gifted Program Task Force began by conducting an internet search for schools designated specifically for gifted children. This initial research investigated the ages served,

entrance requirements, program design, and curriculum for each school. At the same time, the task force conducted two book studies. First the task force read *High IQ Kids* by Kay, Robson, and Brenneman. Second they read *Teaching the Digital Generation* by Kelly, McCain, and Jukes. Deeper investigations were conducted for programs with clear purposes and an academic focus (as opposed to a social emotional focus). Lynette Breedlove and Barbara Cofer conducted site visits at three schools for highly gifted students in St. Louis (in conjunction with the National Association for Gifted Children conference). Several task force members traveled to Carrollton-Farmers Branch to view LEAP, their program for highly gifted students. The group spoke extensively with Gerry Charlebois, the Director of Advanced Studies, and toured various classrooms for highly gifted students at all levels. Finally, the task force participated in a phone conference with the leadership of the Davidson Academy in Reno, Nevada. The Davidson Academy is a public school for highly gifted students in Nevada. It serves students who are working at a secondary level. The Davidson Academy was developed through the Davidson Institute for Talent Development which extensively supports highly gifted students and their families across the United States.

The task force included parents of highly gifted students and a university professor with great expertise in the topic. The input of these important task force members contributed greatly to the group's work.

School Structure

The School for Highly Gifted Students will be a school-within-a-school. It will have a dedicated director and teaching staff for core content areas, with a student to teacher ratio between 10 and 12 to 1 due to the extreme level of individualization required. The placement of the School for Highly Gifted Students within an existing campus is cost effective as it will allow the small, specialized program to utilize host campus services and faculty for other student needs such as meals, access to a nurse, specials and electives. Highly gifted students will also have opportunities to interact with age peers in these shared settings.

Thematic focus

Instruction will be highly individualized to meet the extreme variance in academic needs of the students. Students will be provided instruction according to readiness, rather than age. Highly gifted students need facilitation in their learning more than direct instruction. Curriculum will be built around in-depth research, interdisciplinary instruction, project and experience based learning, and provide students choices. By grouping highly gifted students together, students will have the opportunity to explore content at great depth and complexity.

Grade levels

In 2011-2012, the school will open to serve students the appropriate ages to be in grades K through 4, with students not yet fully enrolled as 5th graders. Each year thereafter, the school will expand to serve an additional grade level age student (i.e. K-5 in 2012-2013). Students will be in multi-age settings, much like a one room school house. Students will progress at independent rates with instruction that focuses on depth, complexity, and readiness, rather than simple acceleration. The school will operate largely without grouping by grade level designations.

The task force feels strongly about offering students a range of graduation options. If students are simply accelerated through the current Pre-AP and AP curriculum via a series of single-subject and whole grade skips, highly gifted children will graduate quite early (age 14, for example). While this is appropriate for some highly gifted students, it may not be the preference for many. Curriculum will be specifically designed to provide an appropriate pace and depth of learning. Many opportunities for in-depth study of student selected topics will be woven into the curriculum. Through the use of differentiated learning plans designed by the student, parents, and teachers, instruction will be tailored to the student. The School for Highly Gifted Students will provide multiple graduation pathways for students including transition programs (university programs designed for students of middle school age), early entrance to college (university programs that allow students entry without high school graduation), early graduation, and traditional age graduation. Davidson Academy of Nevada specifically advised against designing a school in which most students graduate early. In their experience, many universities are not open to drastically underage students. Rather, they want to see students who have taken

advantage of many, varied opportunities. Like the Davidson Academy, the SBISD School for Highly Gifted students will give students the opportunity to go well beyond state standards to study deeply, develop expertise, and investigate a wide range of disciplines.

Size

The school will open in 2011-2012 with up to 30 students. Based on data from various programs, rapid growth is expected. LEAP in Carrollton-Farmers Branch, a district similar to ours with a population of 26,000 students, serves 240 students K-12. The Self-Contained Gifted Program in Paradise Valley Unified (Phoenix, AZ) served 85 students 1st-6th grade last year and is opening a second location due to demand. PEGS, a highly gifted program that serves students from 20 districts in the St. Louis area, includes 106 students K-12. Finally, MOSAICS in Parkway (St. Louis, MO) opened with 7 students 1st-3rd in 2008-2009. They have 45 students enrolled for 1st-6th this year.

Highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted students are difficult to serve in a traditional school system. Rainard School for Gifted Students is the only private school in the Houston area designed specifically to serve gifted students and requires a 135 IQ for entrance. Many parents have tried a wide variety of public, private, and charter schools looking for a good educational fit for their exceptional children, only to decide to homeschool as a good fit is very difficult to find. It is very likely that a public school program designed specifically to meet the needs of this population will draw students to SBISD from homeschooling and private schools.

Home students

The School for Highly Gifted Students will serve all students in SBISD who qualify for the services offered. Students who choose to attend will be enrolled in the school for highly gifted students; it will become their home campus.

Potential external students

This school has great potential to attract students from outside Spring Branch ISD. The task force feels strongly about accepting transfers from outside the district for those students who qualify for the specialized services offered. Available spaces will be given to SBISD residents

first, then those living outside the district. SBISD residents must make up the majority of the students. Unlike our usual transfer students, students who transfer in to the School for Highly Gifted will be allowed to stay in the school through graduation. Once enrolled, transfer students will not be denied access to the school based on space. It will be very difficult for students to transfer to a regular school setting once enrolled in this highly specialized school. Students will be working at different levels in different subject areas which will be difficult to translate into a grade level for traditional school settings.

Siblings of enrolled transfer students will be eligible to apply for out of district transfers to the host campus as space allows. Siblings will be subject to space limitations and the usual rules for transfers.

Target students

Only students who qualify according to the specified standards and procedures will be accepted to the school for highly gifted students. The task force recognizes the expertise and experience the Davidson Academy of Nevada has in serving highly gifted students and therefore recommends establishing similar criteria for eligibility in the SBISD school. Students will be required to qualify through the SBISD GT Evaluation Process, have documented IQs of 145 or higher, and have standard scores of 145 or higher on individually administered achievement tests.

Application process

An additional level of evaluation will be added to the current GT Evaluation Process in SBISD. In Level 1 of the current process, qualitative data from three sources (student/parent, classroom activity, and teacher) are collected. Those students who have data indicating potential giftedness go on to Level 2. In Level 2, students are administered a norm-referenced abilities test. Those students who have a preponderance of evidence (Level 1 and Level 2 data) indicating a need for GT services are identified as GT by subject area.

To identify students as highly gifted, a third level will be added to the process. Students who have a subtest score of 140 or higher in the Level 2 evaluation will be invited to apply for the

School for Highly Gifted students. Students testing in Spanish with a nonverbal subtest score of 140 or higher or a Spanish subtest score at the 99th percentile will be invited to apply for the school. Interviews, IQ testing, and achievement testing will be conducted for those who apply. Testing conducted outside of SBISD that meets specified criteria will be accepted. Level 3 evaluation will be conducted during the school day for students enrolled in SBISD. It will be offered after school and on a Saturday for those outside the district.

Timeline

| | |
|---------------|---|
| December 2010 | Board Approval |
| December 2010 | Posting for Director of SBISD School for Highly Gifted Students |
| January 2011 | Invitation to Level 3 evaluation of currently enrolled students who meet criteria for application |
| January 2011 | Level 3 evaluation of currently enrolled students who meet criteria for application |
| January 2011 | Posting for teachers |
| Jan/Feb 2011 | Director starts |
| February 2011 | Teachers offered positions |
| February 2011 | Application deadline and interviews of students not enrolled in SBISD |
| February 2011 | Testing of applicants not enrolled in SBISD |
| March 2011 | Interviews and testing of SBISD applicants from 2010-2011 GT Evaluation Process |
| March 2011 | Decision letters sent to all applicants |
| August 2011 | Opening of SBISD School for Highly Gifted Students |

Lottery

SBISD does not offer special education services by lottery to those with an IQ below 55. Specialized services for gifted students should be no different. The task force strongly believes all SBISD students who qualify for the School for Highly Gifted Students should have the opportunity to enroll in the school. A lottery will only be used in extreme circumstances until plans for expansion can be revised. SBISD residents will receive available seats in the school before out of district transfers.

State accountability

State accountability will stay with the School for Highly Gifted Students. Elementary age students will take state accountability tests according to their age unless they have officially skipped grades. Students who are taking courses with End of Course exams will take them as close to the time of course completion as possible, as the state allows. (It is highly likely students will be taking some EOCs while elementary and middle school age.) This is an issue for the Davidson Academy. They have found success with doing a brief test review approximately two weeks before administration of state assessments. Students review the expectations of the state exams to prepare, as they tend to over think problems.

Internships

Highly gifted students need significant opportunities to study with experts in their fields of interest. The School for Highly Gifted Students will seek to provide middle and high school age students with interest based opportunities for mentorship and internship.

Curriculum and Instruction

Students' academic and intellectual needs will be met through rich curriculum that is individually tailored in pace, depth, and complexity. According to VanTassel-Baska, curriculum appropriate for highly gifted students provides a flexible, accelerated pace and complex learning experiences that are slightly above their tested levels (151). A Differentiated Learning Plan (DLP) will be developed for each student that documents mastered TEKS and provides a plan for instruction. Curriculum will be developed based on the TEKS, proven curriculum for gifted students, teacher expertise, and student need. All of the programs for highly gifted students that were reviewed utilized teacher created curriculum based on state standards.

To provide for the wide variety of need at the secondary level, students are likely to take courses through the Academy of Choice and university partnerships. The teachers at the School for Highly Gifted Students will supervise the online courses and facilitate extensive in-depth studies related to the courses to provide the needed depth, complexity, and pacing students will need.

Teaching methodologies

Highly gifted students need a facilitator for their learning. The School for Highly Gifted Students will utilize a combination of face to face teaching and online applications to provide appropriate instruction for each student. Curriculum from the College of William and Mary will provide the foundation for instruction in reading and social studies. The curriculum is well researched and proven to be very effective with gifted students. Science instruction will utilize College of William and Mary curriculum along with FOSS kits. For mathematics, curriculum will combine Project M3: Mentoring Mathematics Minds from University of Connecticut, Jiji Math from the Mind Research Institute, the work of Edward Zaccaro, and online math programs such as that offered through EPGY at Stanford.

Large amounts of independent study will deepen students' experiences. However, students will participate in shared learning experiences daily. They will work in small groups with others pursuing the same coursework. In addition, students will work in larger groups on thematic projects and discussions. The themes will serve to connect students' work beyond their immediate courses and will cross grade level and age. These projects and discussions will provide students opportunities to work together within the community of the school in intellectual pursuits, contributing to a shared learning environment and support network. This will complement service learning projects.

Student growth potential

Measuring academic growth of the gifted is quite difficult. Gifted students are identified as such through extreme scores on nationally normed tests. To determine the level at which a student is functioning academically, out of level tests are necessary. The students must be tested on an assessment designed for much older students. This raises the ceiling of the test. The school will utilize out of level testing to measure growth. Out of level testing will also inform instruction and play a role in the development of the DLP.

Electives

The school-within-a-school format provides students an opportunity to take specials and electives with the heterogeneous population of the host school. This provides the students

opportunities to interact with age peers. It is also a cost effective way to provide highly gifted students a wide array of elective options.

Student leadership opportunities and community service

All students will be expected to participate in community services projects. Both individual and school-wide projects will be conducted. Service learning is an important part of meeting highly gifted students' academic and social/emotional needs.

Next level credit

The School for Highly Gifted Students will expand to upper grades as enrolled students age. It is very likely that elementary students will be completing courses for high school credit. Caution will be taken to ensure students receive the appropriate transcribed credit. The task force has set the primary goal of the program to be university success. For that reason, counseling will be provided to ensure smooth transition through the student's selected graduation pathway, be it a transition program (university program designed for students of middle school age), early entrance to college (university program that allow students entry without high school graduation), early graduation, or traditional age graduation.

Dual Credit/Advanced Placement

Students will certainly be able to earn dual credit once they have documented mastery of required TEKS within a subject area. It is highly likely students will take online courses through various universities while enrolled in the School for Highly Gifted Students. A student who completes Algebra in fourth grade is very likely to take courses beyond Calculus while still enrolled. Students will be prepared for AP exams in various areas, though they may not take AP courses as typically outlined by the College Board. College credit for courses is based on AP exam scores, not course performance. The College Board allows students to take AP exams without taking the corresponding courses.

Social and emotional learning

There are two reasons to develop a separate school for highly gifted students. One is to meet their extreme academic and intellectual needs. The second is to meet their social and emotional

needs. Highly gifted students are a very small part of the population. They are different in many ways from their age peers. Unlike their corresponding population with an IQ of 55 or below, students with an IQ of 145 or higher are keenly aware of their differences. They experience the world differently than age peers, learn differently than age peers, and have very different interests. Highly gifted students rarely have the opportunity to find one another. They do so primarily through participation in summer programs. These programs tend to be quite expensive. Highly gifted students whose parents are unable to afford private school or university summer programs are unlikely to meet truly like peers.

Students must first learn about themselves and their highly gifted peers. Then they will be able to learn to effectively interact with others. Through specials, electives, and community services projects, highly gifted students will have opportunities to learn important communication and social skills necessary to their future success.

School Support

Campus Improvement Team

This very small school-within-a-school will need its own campus improvement team (CIT) that includes representation from the host campus. The host campus's campus improvement team will need to include a representative from the School for Highly Gifted Students. The two campuses will need to work together in many ways to ensure success of the special program. The host CIT will need to support the placement of the School for Highly Gifted Students on the campus.

Community Forums

Two community forums were held in April 2010. GT Parent Advisory Committee members and parents of potentially highly gifted students were invited. The Texas Parents of Profoundly Gifted sent their members information about the forums, and Davidson Institute sent information about the forums to parents in the Houston area participating in their Young Scholars Program. Thirty-seven people attended the two meetings.

An overview of the proposed school-within-a-school was presented at the forums. Parents of potentially highly gifted students were encouraged to complete an Interest Form that asked for input, interest level, and contact information. As a result of the meeting and the networking of parents of highly gifted students, we have interest forms from 29 families (two have students out of the opening age range). Parents within the district and outside the district are very interested in the program. They are searching for educational programs that meet the needs of their unusual children.

Space

To open, the school will need the exclusive use of two classrooms and an office. It is anticipated a third classroom will be needed in Year 3 and a fourth classroom in Year 5. The first choice of location for elementary age students is Valley Oaks Elementary (VOE). Valley Oaks is centrally located and currently has space to accommodate a small school-within-a-school. The expected enrollment for 2011-2012 is approximately 600 students and the campus should be able to accommodate 700. As VOE is on the schedule to be rebuilt, it might be possible to consider the needs of the School for Highly Gifted Students in planning for the new building. The principal of VOE, Gary Henry, is an active member of the task force and understands the need for this specialized school. The current counselor is a former diagnostician with a special interest in gifted education. The campus has the administrative support and the physical space to support a School for Highly Gifted Students.

As the school expands to accommodate students of secondary age, Westchester Academy (WAIS) is the first choice. This campus houses a charter school where differences are appreciated and honored. Currently, two highly gifted middle school students attend WAIS and are thriving. Several gifted students who needed acceleration in mathematics have successfully attended WAIS for instruction. The culture of the school is conducive for hosting a school-within-a-school of unusual students. The community service emphasis and wide range of ages are a match between the two schools. The expansion to secondary age students is expected to occur in the 2013-2014 school year. WAIS enrollment is expected to be under 1100 students and the building capacity is approximately 1500 students. When the school expands to serve secondary students in Year 3, two classrooms and an office will be needed. A third classroom

will need to be added in Year 5 as the secondary enrollment increases and the school expands to the high school level. A fourth classroom will be needed in Year 7.

The second choice of location is to house the School for Highly Gifted Students at Meadow Wood Elementary (MWE) and then expand to WAIS. MWE is expected to have an enrollment of 462 with space to accommodate 700 in the 2011-2012 school year. The proximity of MWE (the original location) and WAIS would make it easier for a single school director to manage both sites.

The third choice of location is to house the school at Valley Oaks for elementary age students, Northbrook Middle for middle school age children, and Spring Woods High School for high school age students. This is the least desirable option for several reasons. First, it will be difficult for a single school director to manage a school located on three separate campuses. Second, staff will need to be hired for each location. Operating on two campuses will limit the number of staff required to serve students at the secondary level as the staff may serve both middle and high school age students. Third, three separate faculties will need to be trained to understand highly gifted students and their needs as it will affect instruction in electives and extracurricular activities.

Professional advisory council

A professional advisory council will be assembled to support and guide the expansion and future development of the school. The school director and Director of Advanced Academic Studies will work together to secure the involvement of known experts in the field of gifted education and specialists in meeting the needs of highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted students.

Volunteers

The school will utilize the help of volunteers to serve as mentors, chaperones, and specialists in various disciplines.

PTA and parent groups

Parent involvement is a key element to the success of the School for the Highly Gifted. The task force strongly believes the parents of highly gifted children should be viewed as partners in their children's education. Parenting is difficult for parents of average children. It is much more complex when the child is significantly different than average. Parents of highly gifted children have the same trouble as their children in finding a true peer group. It is difficult for them to find others like them, with the same parenting struggles, from whom they can ask advice or share their worries. As Cathy Marciniak writes in *High IQ Kids*, "My life is full of things that other parents can't relate to....They do not have to go through the theological adventures of determining how prayer resembles the Vulcan mind-meld, whether the devil ever has to go to the bathroom, and whether roadkill goes to heaven so the pet dogs up there can have fun chasing it" (18).

A parent support group that follows the SENG model will be established. Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) is a non-profit organization focused on providing parents of gifted children support. They are an extensive organization whose Board and Advisory Committee are primarily made up of psychologists who are experts in gifted education. They have established guidelines for a model of parent support groups. The groups discuss various topics related to parenting gifted children and are facilitated by trained leaders ("SENG-Model Parent Support"). The School for Highly Gifted Students' parent group will provide parents timely information regarding the research on highly gifted children, parenting tips for this specialized population, and suggestions for meeting their needs at home. It will provide opportunities for parents to gather and discuss their experiences with their children and participate in shared problem solving.

Community events utilizing parent volunteers will be developed to help the community better understand this special population. Parents will play an active role in the development of their children's DLPs so that the school, the student, and the parent are working together.

Staffing

Staff needed

For the first year of the program, up to 30 students are expected to enroll. The school will open with a director, three teachers, and an administrative assistant. The director will report to the Director of Advanced Academic Studies. From discussions with Gerry Charlebois of Carrollton-Farmers Branch, Dina Brulles of Paradise Valley Unified, and Michelle Ryder of PEGS, it is very important the school have a director who is solely responsible for the school. This person must have a deep understanding of highly gifted students and be very comfortable with high levels of parent interaction. In the programs the task force visited, leaders reported extremely high levels of parent contact. The director will communicate with many parents seeking information about the school, trying to determine if it is a good fit for their children. The director will also have a great deal of interaction with parents of enrolled students. Highly gifted children are intense and usually have parents who have similar characteristics. It is preferable that the director have a degree in counseling as he or she will need to serve in this capacity, as well. It is expected that a single director solely responsible for the school will manage two locations as it expands to include secondary age students.

Teachers will be hired as student enrollment increases to maintain a student to teacher ratio under 12 to 1, with a goal of keeping it close to 10 to 1. This school will be providing highly specialized instruction and services, much like those provided for students in self-contained special education classes. While highly gifted students do not have the need for specialized physical care provided in self-contained special educational settings, they do require individualized instruction from highly trained teachers. SBISD Special Education staffing varies significantly based on the specific type of programming, but is usually below 10:1. The programs for highly gifted students in St. Louis try to maintain a ratio of 8:1. The Davidson Academy plans for a ratio of 12:1 but actually has one full time teacher for every 9.5 students and additional part time teachers who primarily teach elective courses. (See the Staffing Layout and Student Core Course Plans in the Appendix.)

Teachers in the School for Highly Gifted Students will provide instruction for core subject areas. Students will integrate with students from the host campuses to take elective courses. Special

education staff at the host school may be called upon to serve twice exceptional students who enroll in the School for Highly Gifted Students. Twice exceptional students are gifted students with disabilities. Students will primarily be served by teachers within the specialized school, but support services from special education staff may be needed.

The school will open with three teachers. One teacher will be certified in Reading K-8 and Social Studies K-8. The second teacher will be certified in Secondary Mathematics and Mathematics K-8. The third teacher will need the same dual certificates in Science. It is very likely that the math and science teachers will have secondary certificates upon hiring and will need to acquire the elementary certification immediately. As elementary enrollment grows, it is expected that an additional math teacher will be hired in Year 2, a science teacher in Year 3 and a language arts/social studies teacher in Year 5.

In Year 3 when the school expands to serve secondary students, an Assistant Director will be needed to oversee the students and instruction at the second location. As with the director, this person will need to have a counseling degree and preferably experience in college counseling. This person will be responsible for discipline, teacher supervision, parent communication, assessment, mentor recruitment, college and career guidance and planning, and liaising with the host school. Two secondary certified teachers will be hired to open the secondary location. One teacher will be responsible for language arts and social studies, the other for mathematics and science. As the secondary enrollment increases, it is expected that an additional science teacher will be hired in Year 5, a math teacher in Year 6, an English/social studies teacher in Year 7, and a science teacher in Year 8.

Non-certified staff

Due to the intense interest and the depth of learning that is typical among highly gifted students, experts in various fields are likely to be utilized to provide specialized instruction for students, under the supervision of the teacher of record. This will include university professors and professionals from various fields. These experts will contribute greatly to students' independent study and research.

Professional learning community

Due to the specialized nature of the school and the small size, the school's faculty will function as a team, much like a department at the secondary level or grade level team at elementary.

Meeting the needs of the students will require the teachers to act as a team to provide the appropriate interdisciplinary and individualized instruction students require. Teachers will also work with the district support personnel in the various content areas.

Teachers will interact with the host school faculty in professional development and special campus events. It is important that the host school faculty have an understanding of highly gifted students and their needs to support the presence of these students on campus. In addition, electives and specials faculty will need training in meeting the students' needs in their heterogeneous classrooms.

Professional Development

Type

The director and teachers at the school will need specialized training in meeting the needs of highly gifted students. In the summer before the school year, faculty will be engaged in book studies and workshops that familiarize them with the curriculum from the College of William and Mary. In addition, they will have the opportunity to connect with teachers at the Davidson Academy and other existing programs for highly gifted students.

Experts

Highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted students are a very unusual group. Understanding this population is a subspecialty within the field of gifted education. There are several experts currently active in the field with regard to this group. They include:

- Jan Davidson, Davidson Institute for Talent Development
- Shelagh Gallagher, University of North Carolina - Charlotte
- Miraca U.M. Gross, University of New South Wales, GERRIC (Australia)
- Kathi Kearney, Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children, Gifted Development Center
- Karen Rogers, University of St. Thomas (MN)

- Linda Silverman, Gifted Development Center
- Joyce VanTassel-Baska, College of William and Mary

Teacher externships

It may be possible to arrange teacher externships at the Davidson Academy, particularly for the third teacher who is preparing for the secondary expansion. With such a small, specialized school, externships during the school year would be difficult though not impossible.

Training for volunteers

Volunteers will need training in the nature and needs of highly gifted students. The school director will arrange this as needed. Volunteers will be welcome at any specialized professional development offered to the teachers by the district.

Common planning time

Due to the small size of the school, common planning time during the school day is unlikely. After students are dismissed for the day, teachers will be expected to plan together at least once a week.

Marketing Plan

The task force plans to enlist the expertise of the Community Relations Department to market the school. Their success in marketing various programs and initiatives is remarkable. This will also ensure the marketing is consistent with other district initiatives.

Differentiation

The School for Highly Gifted Students will be a specialized school for a specialized population. The students it serves will differentiate it from anything else in the district. The multiage classrooms, high level of individualization, and extensive use of independent study will be different than other programs offered in the district; however, in many ways, the school will be similar to specialized classrooms within the Special Education program

Internal marketing

It will be very important to market the school within the district. Teachers who have not encountered this unusual group of students need to understand how they are different from typical gifted students. Through the book studies offered by the AAS Department, a number of teachers have learned about highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted students. They clearly see the need for a separate setting designed specifically for the population and view the students' needs in the same way they view the needs of students with IQs below 55.

At the elementary level, information regarding the school will be disseminated through the Elementary Campus GT Coordinators. These educators are leaders on their campuses with regard to the GT program. The AAS Department will provide an electronic presentation that the coordinators will share during a faculty meeting. This method of training and informing teachers has been successful in the past for other aspects of the GT program. For the secondary level, an electronic presentation will be disseminated by the GT contact person on each campus. In addition, a short explanation of the school will be added to all GT professional development presented within SBISD.

External marketing

The most effective way to market the school is by word of mouth. There is an extensive network of parents of highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted children in the Houston area. Texas Parents of the Profoundly Gifted (TPPG) was organized by a parent in Houston. Their purpose is to provide a support group for parents and a peer group for children. The leader of the group is very supportive of SBISD's efforts to provide an appropriate educational setting for these students.

The Davidson Institute for Talent Development (DITD) is an organization that supports highly gifted students and their families. To be a part of their Young Scholars program, a student must have an IQ of 145 or higher. DITD provides a wide array of services, including providing a family consultant who helps families find appropriate educational opportunities. DITD provides the Davidson Academy of Nevada. TPPG and DITD will help us inform parents about the school. They have been in close contact with the task force and are very supportive.

It will also be important to inform local pediatricians about the school. Highly gifted students have remarkable development from birth. They tend to reach developmental milestones much earlier than their age peers. Providing pediatricians information about the school, the services offered, and the developmental traits indicative of the target population will help connect parents to the school.

The GT coordinators and directors through the Houston area are aware of SBISD's efforts to develop a program to meet the needs of highly gifted students. They helped disseminate information about the community forums in April. While they are slightly concerned about losing students, they are keenly aware of the difficulties of truly meeting the needs of the students. As they see they are unable to meet the needs of students, they will refer the parents to our school.

Competition

There are no public schools in the Houston area that specifically serve highly gifted students. There is one private school in Houston that requires an IQ of 135 or higher to attend. Rainard School for the Gifted is located within SBISD near Sherwood Elementary. It is a small school (under 100 students) that recently expanded to the high school level. Rainard serves a wider range of gifted students than the proposal school seeks to serve. We have several families that have transferred into SBISD from Rainard and some who go back and forth each year. Tuition is \$12,400 - \$13,400 a year ("Elementary and Middle").

Evaluation

Student progress will be evaluated utilizing out of level tests and independent study products evaluated by experts in the field. Each student will have a DLP which will be developed with input from the parent, student, and teacher, based upon assessment data. Monitoring of students' progress relative to their DLPs will inform teachers. Each student will participate in independent study projects similar to those described in the Texas Performance Standard Project developed by TEA. The final product must be presented to evaluators who are knowledgeable about the

topic of study. In addition, students will take age appropriate TAKS and/or course appropriate EOCs. This data will also indicate student progress.

Retention of students in the school will be an important indicator of successful implementation, as will students' performance on assessment data. If students demonstrate a minimum of a year's growth and stay enrolled in the school, implementation will be successful.

Expansion

The school will serve a greater age range of students as the years progress, adding a grade level each year after opening except in Year 3. In Year 3, the school will open a second location for secondary age students. In this year, it will expand to accommodate students for 6th and 7th grade. The task force anticipates enrolling an additional 10 students per year at elementary and secondary until reaching an enrollment of 60 students at each level. Enrollment is expected to level off at approximately 120 students, total.

Budget (See the Budget in the Appendix)

The school will need an annual budget. As the school attracts out of district transfers and students from private schools, it will become more sustainable. There are three specific costs that will be associated with the school which would not occur if the students were not brought to a central location. These are the director's salary and benefits, specialized curriculum materials, and professional development. There will be some start-up costs associated with gathering the necessary furniture, equipment, and supplies to begin the school. In addition, there are some expenses that will level out over time to approximately what it would have cost to serve the children without gathering them together. Shifting a couple of students from several campuses increases costs initially. Reducing the enrollment in a grade level on a campus by 1 or 2 is unlikely to have significant impact on the campus's need for teaching units. However, gathering the students centrally creates a need for a teaching unit at the School for Highly Gifted Students. Initially, the teacher to student ratio will be much lower than 1 to 22. However, as the school grows, it is likely to reach the typical elementary classroom size, bringing the cost down to that of providing teachers on their zoned campuses. Finally, there are costs that will be incurred to identify and serve highly gifted students regardless of whether we attempt to serve them on their

home campuses or at this school. These include the cost of online courses (particularly in mathematics), test materials, and test administrators.

Grants

At this time, the task force is not aware of any appropriate grant sources. The school director and Director of Advanced Academic Studies will continue to search for funding sources. The director will work diligently toward developing a university partner in order to meet the needs of the secondary students. In addition, business partnerships will be sought for mentoring possibilities and funding for technology.

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School for Highly Gifted Students - ESTIMATED Budget

| | | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 |
|--|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Elementary Component | K-4, 30 Stu | | | K-5, 50 Stu | K-5, 55 Stu | K-5, 60 Stu | K-5, 60 Stu | K-5, 60 | K-5, 60 |
| Secondary Component | | | | 6-7, 20 Stu | 6-8, 25 Stu | 6-9, 30 Stu | 6-10, 40 Stu | 6-11, 50 Stu | 6-12, 60 Stu |
| Administrative Staff | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Teachers | 3 | 4 | 7 | 7 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 12 |
| Students | 30 | 40 | 70 | 80 | 90 | 100 | 110 | 120 | 120 |
| Classrooms | 2 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| Payroll | | \$307,500 | \$375,435 | \$656,172 | \$675,857 | \$834,441 | \$925,553 | \$1,021,380 | \$1,122,125 |
| Director | | \$99,000 | \$101,970 | \$105,029 | \$108,180 | \$121,425 | \$125,068 | \$128,820 | \$132,685 |
| Administrative Assistant | | \$37,500 | \$38,625 | \$39,784 | \$40,977 | \$42,207 | \$43,473 | \$44,777 | \$46,120 |
| Teacher 1 – LA/SS (K-8 cert) | | \$57,000 | \$58,710 | \$60,471 | \$62,285 | \$64,154 | \$66,079 | \$68,061 | \$70,103 |
| Teacher 2 – Math (K-8 & sec certs) | | \$57,000 | \$58,710 | \$60,471 | \$62,285 | \$64,154 | \$66,079 | \$68,061 | \$70,103 |
| Teacher 3 – Science (K-8 & sec comp certs) | | \$57,000 | \$58,710 | \$60,471 | \$62,285 | \$64,154 | \$66,079 | \$68,061 | \$70,103 |
| Teacher 4 – Math (K-8 & sec certs) | | | \$58,710 | \$60,471 | \$62,285 | \$64,154 | \$66,079 | \$68,061 | \$70,103 |
| Teacher 5 – Science (K-8 & sec comp certs) | | | | \$60,471 | \$62,285 | \$64,154 | \$66,078 | \$68,061 | \$70,102 |
| Teacher 6 – LA/SS (K-8 & sec certs) | | | | | | \$64,154 | \$66,079 | \$68,061 | \$70,103 |
| Assistant Director | | | | \$88,061 | \$90,703 | \$93,424 | \$96,227 | \$99,113 | \$102,087 |
| Teacher 7 - LA/SS (sec cert) | | | | \$60,471 | \$62,285 | \$64,154 | \$66,078 | \$68,061 | \$70,102 |
| Teacher 8 - Math/Science (sec cert) | | | | \$60,471 | \$62,285 | \$64,154 | \$66,078 | \$68,061 | \$70,102 |
| Teacher 9 - Science (sec comp cert) | | | | | | \$64,154 | \$66,079 | \$68,061 | \$70,103 |
| Teacher 10 - Math (sec cert) | | | | | | | \$66,079 | \$68,061 | \$70,103 |
| Teacher 11 - LA/SS (sec cert) | | | | | | | | \$68,061 | \$70,103 |
| Teacher 12 - Science (sec comp cert) | | | | | | | | | \$70,103 |
| Administrative | | \$9,000 | \$10,000 | \$12,500 | \$13,500 | \$15,500 | \$14,000 | \$14,500 | \$15,000 |
| Office supplies (including batteries and ink) | | \$3,500 | \$3,500 | \$3,500 | \$3,500 | \$3,500 | \$3,500 | \$3,500 | \$3,500 |
| Printing/copying | | \$1,500 | \$1,500 | \$3,000 | \$3,000 | \$3,000 | \$3,000 | \$3,000 | \$3,000 |
| Professional development | | \$2,000 | \$2,500 | \$4,500 | \$4,500 | \$5,500 | \$6,000 | \$6,500 | \$7,000 |
| Marketing | | \$2,000 | \$2,500 | \$1,500 | \$2,500 | \$3,500 | \$1,500 | \$1,500 | \$1,500 |
| Instructional | | \$37,250 | \$48,100 | \$58,590 | \$83,210 | \$100,330 | \$118,950 | \$137,570 | \$156,190 |
| William and Mary Curriculum (LA, SS, Sci) | | \$650 | \$0 | \$990 | \$1,110 | \$1,230 | \$1,350 | \$1,470 | \$1,590 |
| Reading materials | | \$600 | \$600 | \$600 | \$600 | \$600 | \$600 | \$600 | \$600 |
| Science materials | | \$500 | \$500 | \$1,000 | \$1,000 | \$1,000 | \$1,000 | \$1,000 | \$1,000 |
| EPGY online mathematics programs | | \$9,000 | \$14,000 | \$24,000 | \$29,000 | \$39,000 | \$49,000 | \$59,000 | \$69,000 |
| TXVSN | | | | | \$16,000 | \$24,000 | \$32,000 | \$40,000 | \$48,000 |
| Instructional materials | | \$1,500 | \$2,000 | \$3,500 | \$4,000 | \$4,500 | \$5,000 | \$5,500 | \$6,000 |
| Test materials | | \$3,000 | \$6,000 | \$4,500 | \$5,500 | \$5,000 | \$5,000 | \$5,000 | \$5,000 |
| Test administration | | \$22,000 | \$25,000 | \$24,000 | \$26,000 | \$25,000 | \$25,000 | \$25,000 | \$25,000 |
| Technology | | \$0 | \$14,741 | \$8,501 | \$12,111 | \$41,023 | \$27,616 | \$39,131 | \$24,733 |
| Netbooks (1:1) \$616 expansion/replacement | | | \$6,160 | \$6,160 | \$6,160 | \$24,640 | \$12,320 | \$24,640 | \$12,320 |
| Yearly netbook technology cost (\$7) | | | \$210 | \$280 | \$490 | \$560 | \$630 | \$700 | \$770 |
| Replacement Battery (\$75) | | | \$2,250 | \$750 | \$2,250 | \$750 | \$3,000 | \$1,500 | \$3,000 |
| Technology storage | | | | \$950 | | \$2,050 | | \$1,100 | |
| iPod Touches (10 per campus) replacement | | | \$21 | \$21 | \$2,411 | \$43 | \$2,411 | \$2,411 | \$43 |
| Flip camera (2 per campus) replacement | | | | \$240 | | \$480 | | \$480 | |
| ACTIV Boards expansion | | | \$4,500 | | \$600 | \$9,300 | \$600 | \$5,100 | \$900 |
| ACTIV Expressions replacement | | | \$100 | \$100 | \$200 | \$200 | \$200 | \$200 | \$200 |
| Laptop expansion/replacement | | | \$1,500 | | | \$3,000 | \$7,500 | \$3,000 | \$7,500 |
| Desktop replacement | | | | | | | \$955 | | |
| Subtotal: | | \$353,750 | \$448,276 | \$735,763 | \$784,678 | \$991,293 | \$1,086,119 | \$1,212,582 | \$1,318,047 |
| | per student | \$11,792 | \$11,207 | \$10,511 | \$9,808 | \$11,014 | \$10,861 | \$11,023 | \$10,984 |
| Start-up | | | | | | | | | |
| Administrative | | \$6,455 | | \$4,500 | | | | | |
| Office supplies | | \$2,000 | | \$1,000 | | | | | |
| Office furniture | | surplus | | surplus | | | | | |
| Laptop computer | | \$1,500 | | \$1,500 | | | | | |
| Desktop computer | | \$955 | | | | | | | |
| Marketing | | \$2,000 | | \$2,000 | | | | | |
| Classroom | | \$12,900 | | \$10,400 | | | | | |
| Classroom furniture (utilize surplus, order specialty furniture) | | \$1,900 | | \$1,900 | | | | | |
| Classroom materials | | \$2,000 | | \$1,000 | | | | | |
| Teacher Laptop computers | | \$4,500 | | \$4,500 | | | | | |
| Printer | | \$1,000 | | \$1,000 | | | | | |
| Instructional materials | | \$3,500 | | \$2,000 | | | | | |
| Student Technology | | \$34,510 | | \$28,350 | | | | | |
| Netbooks (1:1) \$616 | | \$18,480 | | \$12,320 | | | | | |
| Technology storage | | \$1,900 | | \$1,900 | | | | | |
| iPod Touches (10 per campus) | | \$2,390 | | \$2,390 | | | | | |
| Flip cameras (2 per campus) | | \$240 | | \$240 | | | | | |
| ACTIV Boards | | \$9,000 | | \$9,000 | | | | | |
| ACTIV Expressions (1 set per campus) | | \$2,500 | | \$2,500 | | | | | |
| Professional Development | | \$6,000 | | \$3,000 | | | | | |
| Teacher Professional Development/Curriculum Development | | \$6,000 | | \$3,000 | | | | | |
| Subtotal: | | \$59,865 | | \$46,250 | | | | | |
| Contingency | | \$88,438 | \$112,069 | \$183,941 | \$196,170 | \$247,823 | \$271,530 | \$303,145 | \$329,512 |
| Total: | | \$502,053 | \$560,345 | \$965,954 | \$980,848 | \$1,239,117 | \$1,357,649 | \$1,515,727 | \$1,647,559 |

Staffing Layout and Student Core Course Plans

| Elementary | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 |
|-------------------|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Grade Levels | K-4 | K-5 | K-5 | K-5 | K-5 | K-5 | K-5 | K-5 |
| # students | 30 | 40 | 50 | 55 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 |
| # classrooms | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Student:Teacher | 10:1 | 10:1 | 10:1 | 11:1 | 10:1 | 10:1 | 10:1 | 10:1 |
| Administration | Director | | | | | | | |
| | Administrative Assistant | | | | | | | |
| Teachers | LA/SS tchr (K-8) | | | | | | | |
| | Math tchr (K-12) | | | | | | | |
| | Sci tchr (K-12) | | | | | | | |
| | Math tchr (K-12) | | | | | | | |
| | Sci tchr (K-12) | | | | | | | |
| LA/SS tchr (K-12) | | | | | | | | |
| Secondary | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 |
| Grade Levels | | | 6-7 | 6-8 | 6-9 | 6-10 | 6-11 | 6-12 |
| # students | | | 20 | 25 | 30 | 40 | 50 | 60 |
| # classrooms | | | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| Student:Teacher | | | 10:1 | 12.5:1 | 10:1 | 10:1 | 10:1 | 10:1 |
| Administration | Asst. Dir. | | | | | | | |
| Teachers | LA/SS tchr (sec) | | | | | | | |
| | Math/Sci tchr (sec) | | | | | | | |
| | Sci tchr (sec) | | | | | | | |
| | Math tchr (sec) | | | | | | | |
| | LA/SS tchr (sec) | | | | | | | |
| Sci tchr (sec) | | | | | | | | |

| | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Year 11 | Year 12 |
|----------------------|------------|------------|----------|---------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Name | Marco | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Age | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | | | |
| Official Grade Level | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | 9th | 10th | 11th | 12th | | | |
| English | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | Eng I | Eng II | Eng III | Eng IV | | | |
| Social Studies | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | World Geog | World His | U.S. His | European His | Gov/Eco | | | |
| Math | Algebra II | Statistics | Pre-Calc | Calc BC | Calc III | University | University | University | University | | | |
| Science | 6th | 7th | 8th | Biology | Chemistry | Physics | Physics II | Chemistry II | University | | | |

| | Lilian | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|--------|-----|-----|-----|---------|----------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|--|
| | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | |
| Name | Lilian | | | | | | | | | | |
| Age | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | |
| Official Grade Level | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | 9th | 10th | 11th | 12th | |
| English | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | Eng I | Eng II | Eng III | Eng IV | University | |
| Social Studies | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | World Geo | World His | U.S. His | Gov/Eco | |
| Math | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 7th | Algebra | Geometry | Algebra II | Statistics | Pre-Calc | Calc BC | |
| Science | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | Biology | Chemistry | Physics | Biology II | Chemistry II | |

| | Toni | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|-----------|---------|---------|-----|---------|----------|------------|------------|-----------|--------------|------------|------------|
| | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| Name | Toni | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Age | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| Official GL | K | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | 9th | 10th | 11th |
| English | 1st - 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | Eng I | Eng II | Eng III | Eng IV | University |
| Social Studies | 1st - 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | World Geo | World His | U.S. His | Euro His | Gov/Eco |
| Math | 1st - 2nd | 3rd-4th | 5th-6th | 7th | Algebra | Geometry | Algebra II | Statistics | Pre-Calc | Calc BC | Calc III | University |
| Science | 1st - 2nd | 3rd-4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | Biology | Chemistry | Physics | Chemistry II | Physics II | Biology II |

September 8, 2010

SBISD

Re: Proposed Highly Gifted Program

To Whom It May Concern:

Last spring, my wife and I attended Lynette Breedlove's presentation about SBISD's proposed Highly Gifted Program. I have never been so excited about school !!!

My son Jacob is in 3rd grade at Frostwood. Last year, the highlight of his week was attending his PGP classes. (Based upon his experiences, he has conclusively decided that he wants to be a robotic engineer when he grows up. ☺) This year, he vibrates with excitement, looking forward to Thursday, when he gets to attend S.P.I.R.A.L.

(My daughter Zoe is now at Memorial Middle School. Last year, she also attended SPIRAL. It was the highlight of her week. As a result, it was the highlight of MY week. Thank you for this outstanding program.)

Unfortunately, Jacob's enthusiasm about school the rest of the time diminishes notably. He gets excellent grades, finishes his work, and gets along fine with his classmates. But frankly, he is rather bored. I believe that his teachers try to challenge him the best they can, but they must focus on an entire class, most of whom are not at Jacob's level. And just giving him more of the same type of school-work does not really kindle much spark.

I believe the SPIRAL program matches Jacob with teachers, classmates and curriculum that challenge him. I KNOW that the program inspires him. I recognize that this sounds corny, but the possibility of a full-time program would be a dream come true.

When I attended Rice University (eons ago), I had the privilege of being around brilliant minds. (No one confused mine with theirs.) Those kids thrived in the advanced academics. Their peers inspired them even more. Would they have been geniuses without those programs? Of course. But would they have achieved their potential? I wonder.

I truly believe that Jacob has a great mind, with enormous potential. Please approve SBISD's proposed Highly Gifted Program to help him reach that potential.

Please call if I can help in any way.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey W. Wheelock

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W: (713) 722-8118

jwheelock@dwlegal.com

Monday, November 29, 2010

To Whom It May Concern,

As parents (including one who is a public educator), we want to thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts about the proposed program for highly gifted learners that is being considered for Spring Branch ISD. To start, we would like to say that we are not only in full support of such a program for our daughter, but as parents, educators, and citizens of the greatest nation in the world, we think we have a moral imperative to devote as much time and resources to highly gifted students as is already afforded students on the rest of the learning continuum. So, let us begin with the obvious question:

Why?

Academic acceleration for highly gifted students has been thoroughly researched and documented, and here are some of the most significant findings of these studies as highlighted in the *Templeton National Report on Acceleration*:

- Acceleration is the best educational intervention for high ability (gifted) students, and works better than any other type of educational arrangement
- Acceleration is highly effective for academic achievement, and is far more effective than the most successful school reform models
- In radical acceleration programs (acceleration by two or more years), highly gifted students achieve high, sometimes extraordinary, levels of academic success
- Accelerated students are more likely than non-accelerants to aspire to advanced educational degrees
- Intellectually precocious students who experience acceleration early in the academic career view their pre-college education experiences much more positively
- Acceleration is usually effective in terms of social-emotional adjustment
- Accelerated experiences for students appears to be **critical** for developing world-class scientific leaders

But what happens when highly gifted students do not receive acceleration:

- When presented with curriculum developed for age-peers, they can become bored, unhappy, disengaged, and get turned off from learning
- Gifted learners are often not high achievers when they are in educational arrangements that do not challenge them
- When not challenged, gifted students will often “dumb themselves down” in order to avoid work they do not find meaningful, and also not to be singled out as “smart” among their same-age peers
- The *Marland Report* states: “The boredom that often results from discrepancies between the child’s knowledge and the school’s offerings leads to underachievement and behavior disorders affecting self and others”
- A 1993 report concluded that “Over half the population of gifted students do not match their tested ability with comparable achievement in school”
- Longitudinal studies on students who were capable, but not accelerated, found these students to have greater rates of dropping out, depression, lack of confidence and motivation, and even higher rates of suicide

- These studies also found: “Many highly gifted children underachieve seriously in the regular classroom and that, by the end of elementary school, many have almost completely lost the motivation to excel”

Our Own Experience

While these facts may just be words on a page, they illustrate the very “real” uphill battle our family has faced in the last 11 years in attempting to find the best possible educational arrangement for our two daughters, Rachel (11) and Maegan (8), students at Westchester Academy and Wilchester Elementary, respectively. To bring these startling facts to light, let us share our own story.

When our oldest daughter was two years old, she started to pull books from her bookshelf and began to read them without ever having had any reading instruction. After having a pre-school lab teacher tell us that our daughter was reading high school textbooks to her student teachers, we knew that our daughter was special. That was confirmed when she took an IQ test that put her in the profoundly gifted range. While to many parents this information would have been a blessing, for us it was merely the beginning of a long, difficult road we have traversed in our attempt to best educate our children.

As a public educator for 15 years, I know first-hand the well-meaning, yet ill-informed mentality that exists in most schools in regards to highly gifted students: *we don't need to spend money or resources on those kids – they're smart, and will do well no matter what we do*. Having spent most of my career in special education, I know that federal oversight and aggressive litigation has made it easier for students with disabilities to receive appropriate educational services. But gifted students have not received the same attention.

It was this disparity that led us first to enroll Rachel in a nearby private school that advertised itself as serving only gifted learners. Initially, Rachel was happy to be socializing with gifted peers, but in her second year when I joined the faculty of the school, I learned that even this school could not accommodate the few highly gifted students enrolled there. In fact, I found the school to be much like a public school campus where most of the curriculum and educational focus was on the middle part of the curve, and the two extremes (highly gifted and disabled students) very rarely received services that were appropriate for them. Because of that fact, we decided to home school Rachel. Initially, I was approached by several parents of the private school to teach their children as well in the home school setting with our daughter. But the experiment failed, as Rachel once again was not being challenged in an environment with proper acceleration. While the other students were gifted, Rachel's high abilities still made her feel like an outsider.

By this time, our youngest child, Maegan, was old enough to attend pre-school at the Wildcat Way. Having exhibited some of the same advanced characteristics as her sister, we had her tested and she actually scored higher on an assessment Rachel had taken at the same age. We felt very strongly that Maegan was ready for kindergarten, but because of the state age requirements and a strong resistance from Wilchester's administration at

that time, we were unable to provide that acceleration for her. So, Maegan spent a year in pre-school without being challenged at all. This trend continued when she moved to Wilchester the next year, where Rachel had finally decided to attend, as well. While we were able to advocate for Maegan's skipping kindergarten, we were still met with a great deal of resistance on the campus level for both our daughters. STAT meetings often became a very hostile environment, even when we had the support and backing of the district's G/T director, Dr. Breedlove. It was a perfect illustration of misinformed educators who were all but resistant to change.

So where are we now? Rachel is now in 6th grade at Westchester Academy, and is only accelerated in 7th grade math. While Rachel is learning new concepts, she does not appear to be academically challenged and breezes through her work with all A's in Pre-AP classes. The problem, though, is that Rachel has had such bad experiences with her previous educational arrangements that she is not willing to even consider acceleration, in fear of seeming "out of place" with her peers. Even though she is capable of high school work (and even university level in some areas), she has become another casualty of an educational system that forced her to adapt to their rules, and not do what is best for her. Consequently, she has become content with not being challenged. As for Maegan, she is now in 3rd grade at Wilchester, and is only accelerated for 4th grade math. Maegan is bored, unchallenged, and has great difficulty finding peers with whom she can relate to. At only 8 years old, she seems to have lost her excitement and motivation to learn and excel. While this proposed program cannot help our oldest daughter, we really hope that it can bring about the part of Maegan that used to love learning. That is really what the goal of education is – to foster a life-long love of learning. Isn't it?

It Affects All of Us

Having said all this, we don't want to make it seem as if Spring Branch has failed our children. On the contrary, Dr. Breedlove's constant search for better ways to accommodate highly gifted learners has kept us in the district, because we know that Spring Branch is at the forefront of doing what is best for each individual student. Now, we are so close to seeing our hopes and dreams for our children come to fruition in the form of this new program. While we have personal reasons for seeing this program succeed, we would like you to consider the possibilities that this program could have. People are always asking where the next Einstein will come from, where the cure for cancer will come from, and where our next world leader will originate from? Wouldn't it be nice for the answer to all these questions be **Spring Branch Independent School District?**

Thank you again for allowing us to share our story and our feelings about this wonderful program.

Sincerely,
Corin Connelly and Rebecca Dodds

Letter of Support for the Proposed *Highly Gifted Program*

November 30, 2010

To the Trustees of Spring Branch I.S.D.:

I am writing to enthusiastically support SBISD's proposed *Highly Gifted Program*, which would be the first of its kind in this part of Texas. Spring Branch has a sterling reputation for serving its special-needs students, and this innovative program would extend that vision to another deserving population.

Extreme giftedness is a double-edged sword: the gift for incredible learning comes with equally extreme emotional and social challenges. I am the parent of two highly gifted elementary-aged boys, and I can tell you first-hand about the differences between these children and others: they have an astounding ability to concentrate deeply for hours or even days without interruption; they have an obsessive appetite for learning that drives them to read encyclopedias for fun; they have incredibly *intense* personalities that overwhelm other children and even some adults; and they have nearly-debilitating degrees of perfectionism.

Highly gifted students are different in so many ways from their age peers – socially, academically, emotionally, and often physically – that putting them in a typical classroom is often a recipe for failure. Studies have consistently shown that when these children's specialized needs are not met they usually give up, shut down, and check out.

Sadly, many of these highly-gifted students are never identified at all, and their attributes are viewed as irritants rather than as gifts. Families without resources for testing, counselors, and specialized schooling may not comprehend why their child is so different. They may not understand the intensity of emotion displayed, and mistakenly assume it is bad or defiant behavior. They grow exhausted by the unappeasable curiosity and creativity of a kid who is always pushing, pushing, pushing to know and do more. Most adults (educators included) become weary – and insulted – by the constant questioning and correcting.

Through the *Highly Gifted Program*, SBISD would have a specific mechanism to identify, test, and serve these highly-differentiated children and their families. The *HGP* would be a community of their own, where they can learn, grow, and develop with support and understanding. It would provide not only the academic challenges they crave, but also the counseling that they need. It would be a community for the parents and families as well, giving them guidance and encouragement.

For over fifty years, SBISD has been an educational leader and standard-bearer in Texas. I believe that this program is the next step in the District's remarkable legacy, and hope that you will approve and fund it for the next academic year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mitra Miller Roehr".

Mitra Miller Roehr
SBISD Resident

Dear Spring Branch Board of Directors,

My wife Karen and I are writing this letter to ask for your consideration and support for Lynette Breedlove's plan for the Spring Branch ISD to offer a dedicated learning environment for highly gifted children.

Our daughter Emily is a highly gifted child who just turned six in November. Emily learned to read at two years of age and shared many of the characteristics of a highly gifted child. After learning to read, she began to learn so quickly that we struggled to keep her challenged until she was old enough to enroll in school. We had always planned to enroll Emily into the Wilchester Pre-K program, but as time passed we began to realize that although the Pre-K program would still be a good experience for Emily in terms of social growth and motor skill development, it wouldn't challenge her academically. In July of 2009, when Emily was 4, the district tested her for giftedness and she scored in the profoundly gifted range. At four years old – too young to even enroll in Kindergarten, she was already reading at or above a 3rd grade level and her math and science skills were also several grades ahead.

Two months before Emily was to start Pre-K, we realized that she was going to need a different learning environment in school in order to stay challenged. We panicked. Many gifted and talented educators and parents of gifted children agree that if a highly gifted child is not challenged, he or she can regress and become disinterested in school and even lose their love of learning – a travesty for any child. Suddenly, we had visions of Emily, who was already reading chapter books, in Pre-K learning the letters of the alphabet, or sitting in the corner reading alone while the other kids learned them. We were worried she'd dislike school as a result and that it would set the tone for her moving forward. We didn't know what we were going to do and we felt helpless.

So we interviewed at private schools to learn what they could offer, and we talked to other parents who had similar experiences. What we learned was disheartening. There really wasn't an educational environment tailored to highly gifted children – especially young children. We learned that gifted children were special needs kids, but unlike other special needs kids, a coordinated curriculum targeted to their abilities didn't exist, at least not in a full-time form. Spring Branch offered the Bendwood program, but it was only one day a week and was designed only for third grade and up, so it wasn't an option for Emily at the time. So we pursued the best alternatives we could find. The wonderful staff at Wilchester Elementary and Spring Branch ISD worked with us to build a plan for Emily that involved flexing her between Pre-K and 1st Grade, and eventually going to first grade full time. It wasn't a perfect solution, but it was the best option we had, and we were grateful beyond words that we had a school and a district that worked so diligently to support our child, even if it meant trying new ideas and new methods.

In Emily's case, it meant skipping two grades before she had started Kindergarten. We struggled with this decision due to her young age. Although she often preferred to be around older children, she was still just five years old. But her brain worked like an 8 or 10 year old, so we felt that we had to find a middle ground. For the most part, the only real option parents have to keep highly gifted kids challenged is skipping grades. The current system doesn't really support a structured alternative. We

have been told that it's likely Emily will need to skip again, maybe more than once. This is something Karen and I dread, and it's likely we wouldn't support skipping any additional grades even if it is best for her academically, because it will be so awkward for her socially. This means that at some point, we'll have to choose whether to compromise her normal social growth or her academic growth, neither of which is ideal.

When we learned of Lynette's plan to propose a dedicated school with a special curriculum for highly gifted kids, we immediately supported her efforts. If such a program had existed 2 years ago, Emily might be in Kindergarten right now with kids her own age, learning at a pace suitable for her abilities. She might be looking forward to a full 12-grade school career instead of going to college at 16. With sufficient resources, such a school would provide a great environment for highly gifted kids like Emily to learn at their own pace, while still affording them the comfort and normalcy of doing so with kids their own age and with similar abilities. It would give them the opportunity to maximize their potential while still being a regular kid who doesn't feel out of place or self-conscious about their abilities. It would teach them that their gifts are not something they should hide in order to fit in, but rather are something they should be proud of and that should be exercised.

Karen and I hope that you will give Lynette your full consideration for this proposal. We truly appreciate how much the Spring Branch ISD values education and how far they have gone to make it better for our kids. We feel that we have a district and a school in Wilchester that have dedicated professionals who love kids and that are both creative and bold when it comes to educating them. We realize that budgets are tight, especially now. We also understand that embracing a new program is always a risk for its earliest supporters and it's not always easy to lead the charge. But we also strongly believe that this program will be good for kids, and could ultimately make them happier, more productive adults. And who knows – maybe some of these kids will go on to do great things because they were given the opportunity at such a young age to reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

John and Karen Madaras

JON AND PAIGE LARRABEE
7726 N. HUNTERS CREEKWAY DRIVE
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77055

September 13, 2010

Lynette Breedlove, Ph.D.
Advanced Academic Studies
Spring Branch ISD
901 Yorkchester
Houston, Texas 77079

Re: Proposed Academy for the Highly Gifted

Dear Dr. Breedlove:

We are writing to express our support for the proposed Academy for the Highly Gifted. Our children – Will, 6, and Caroline, 4 – both currently attend a private school that focuses on the needs of a similar population of gifted students. The positive transformation in our children as a result of this focused, personalized gifted education has been phenomenal. Let me share their stories:

Will: Will began his education in a Montessori classroom where he was allowed to advance at his own pace and do work at his ability level. In connection with a job related move, we decided to move him from that setting for Pre-Kindergarten. Will spent a year in a traditional Pre-Kindergarten classroom that taught a set curriculum with little or no deviation based upon students' existing capabilities. We watched with increased frustration and concern as he became more and more of a social problem in the classroom. It took us several months of efforts to meet with teachers and discuss his progress before we finally realized the scope of his academic frustration. At the start of the pre-kindergarten program, Will was able to read chapter books. However, several months into the school year, he was still being asked to identify letters of the alphabet. His teachers had no idea he could even read. He was immensely bored and refused to do assignments. Thus, his teachers thought he had behavior problems and referred us to the school's guidance counselor. The reality was he was being asked to do work he had done two years earlier. It wasn't a challenge or of interest for him. He was unwilling to simply comply with the request, choosing instead to repeatedly get in trouble for sneaking out of class activities or recess to visit the school library.

After an immensely difficult school year, and on the recommendation of the school counselor, we decided to send Will to summer camp at the school he now attends. The summer camp rekindled his interest in learning and restored his trust in educators. It did the same for us. After struggling with a school for a year, it was so refreshing to have a school say to us, "We understand what your child is going through. We want your child here. He can succeed here." The change in philosophy produced immediate and profound results in Will. It is no longer a battle to get Will to school; he wants to go.. He is happy and successful, working at his own level across various subjects. At the end of last year, at the age of six years and one month, Will tested at a third grade equivalent for math, at a fourth grade equivalent for reading and a fifth grade equivalent for spelling. More importantly, though, is the fact that his school not only tested him to these levels, but actually allowed him to work at these levels, regardless of his calendar age.

Giving gifted kids academic challenges is, however, only one front in the battle. The reality is that most gifted children are very asynchronous in their development. While academically they may be far ahead of their peers, socially they are often left behind. That was true for Will as well. Putting him in

a school surrounded on a full-time basis by a peer group of other gifted children who “get” him, with frequent interaction with older, similarly gifted kids as role models and guidance by educators who will face head-on the social challenges inherent with asynchronous development, has resulted in remarkable growth for him. We are not confident that this environment, with its many benefits, can be obtained through any means other than a full-time program. A part-time or pull-out program focused on certain academic subjects, can’t replicate the social environment of a full-time peer group.

Caroline: Like so many gifted girls, our daughter didn’t exhibit the tell-tale signs of social frustration and classroom behavior issues that so frequently plague gifted young boys. Having grown accustomed to associating high level giftedness with misbehavior, Caroline’s eager to please, go-with-the-flow attitude initially led us to believe that she, perhaps, was either not gifted or not as gifted as her brother. While Will preferred workbooks and reading, Caroline tended toward dolls, dress-up, and all things pink and sparkly. In other words, nothing about her attitude or her interests suggested to us she was gifted. Nevertheless, there were signs that suggested otherwise: the amazing memory for detail, the expansive vocabulary, the clever sense of humor, and the problem solving abilities. Hoping to have her begin at the same school as her brother, we had her tested just after her fourth birthday. While confident in her abilities, we were, frankly, stunned by the results that clustered beyond (and, on several metrics, well beyond) three standard deviations removed from the norm.

For us, the contrast between how gifted boys and gifted girls react when frustrated or bored academically was startling. Whereas Will had reacted outwardly when bored academically, Caroline would simply comply with whatever was being asked of her. If a teacher gave her an assignment appropriate for a child a year younger than her, she would do it without complaint. Likewise, if a teacher gave her an assignment appropriate for a child two years older than her, she would do it without complaint. As you can imagine, few, if any, teachers ever tried to give her harder work than was age-appropriate for her. Although we are only a few weeks into the 2010 school year, I am pleased to report that a full-time gifted education is serving Caroline every bit as well – albeit in a completely different way – as it does Will. She is amazingly happy at school, willingly participating in class discussions on a wide variety of topics, and coming home to tell us all about it.

While we are extremely fortunate to be able to pay for this private school education for our children, we find ourselves increasingly frustrated both as parents and as taxpayers that we are forced to go this route to provide our children with the kind of education they need and deserve. Moreover, we hate to see other families struggle with finances to afford the “luxury” of giving their children the education they need. Last year, we even saw one family challenged with the decision of which of their two highly gifted children needed gifted education more, because they couldn’t afford to send both children to private school. Giftedness doesn’t know rich or poor; neither should access to appropriate academic environments. Why should our children be the only ones who can enjoy the specialized gifted education they have, just because we can afford both tuition and taxes? Recognizing that there are many more similarly gifted children out there unable to afford access to such an environment, it is frustrating to think about missing the opportunity to have a school available where all highly gifted kids from all socioeconomic backgrounds can interact with each other. The proposed Academy for the Highly Gifted would be a wonderful step in the right direction for our family, SBISD and Houston as a whole.

Regards,



Jon and Paige Larrabee