

INFORMATION FOR SCHOOL BOARD

December 6, 2010

ANALYSIS FOR MOVING GIFTED PROGRAM GRADES 7-12 TO AUBURN FRESHMAN CAMPUS

ACTION STEPS: In helping to make a decision on the proposal to move grades 7-12, we recommend that the board ask the Administration to make an initial assessment to elucidate some of the potential costs, challenges, and opportunities of the move. This initial assessment could be done in 2 to 3 weeks. It would do the following:

1. Based on current numbers of gifted students and classes the students take in grades 7 -12 input these numbers into a master schedule for the Auburn Freshman Campus building.

With the help of an Assistant Principal at Auburn, the Assistant Principal at Washington and 4 Auburn teachers representing math, science, social science, and English, the group could get detailed numbers from this simple analysis that would clarify some of the issues and give data that would be invaluable to the administration and board. Real numbers and cost considerations with space, class sizes, class offerings, and class schedules would be clearer and aid the board in understanding the implications of the move.

2. Make an initial cost estimate for what facility improvements in science labs, library needs and other considerations might be needed.

As far as we know, only a cursory look at total building capacity and number of rooms has been done. Coupled with the master schedule analysis, this initial look at costs would also bring out clarify issues.

3. Develop and present to the board some options for handling sports, arts, other elective classes and extra-curricular programs

Parents and others have questions about these issues that no one in the administration has yet looked into. It is time to make some suggestions based on an initial analysis. We believe that due to cost challenges, some alternatives for these issues can be eliminated immediately, and other creative ideas must be explored. Let's look at these now, so everyone can have the most realistic expectations for what a viable proposal might look like.

This analysis would help clear up some of the questions and concerns that parents, teachers and board members will have about the move such as:

1. How many Academy students and non-Academy students are taking the same classes such as AP classes, foreign languages, ROTC, computer science, CAPA (arts in general) classes and other electives?
2. How many Academy students are there at Auburn in each class?
3. How would sports be handled? Clubs? Social Events? Band? Etc for both the main and freshman campus?
4. What would happen to the students who have dropped out of the Academy but have been allowed to take an Academy class or who were taking an AP course? Would they be allowed to reenter the program? If they did not, would we have enough students to offer AP courses? Based on the AP results of non-Academy students, is it even advisable for many of them to take AP courses?
5. Based on the current numbers or realistic assumed numbers for next year, what commitments are needed to keep the courses necessary to bring in more students in the future?
6. Based on best guess assumptions, what number of students in grades 9 through 12 would be necessary to make the move educationally and financially sound? How many years could one reasonably expect the program to grow to this size?
7. What would it cost to put in the necessary 5 science labs and which rooms would work?
8. What are some lower cost alternatives to offer an effective library?
9. PGE is strongly against virtual courses for most classes. From past experience at Auburn we don't believe, there is an affordable service out there that offers gifted education virtually. The administration has been researching virtual classes for the district. What virtual classes might be effective and keep costs down?
10. In the past two years counselors, at the apparent approval of administrators, have allowed a few gifted students to opt out of core Academy courses that used to be required to stay in the Academy; likewise counselors have been allowed to put non-Academy students in Academy classes. If we move, are we going to water down the program even more in order to increase the numbers further or will the board give clear direction to the administration to enforce the integrity of the gifted program?

Summary of Input from Parents, Teachers and Students from past meetings and most recent forum at Washington Academy. Next Forum at Auburn this December 9, 7:00pm at Auburn Freshman Campus.

Summary of Challenges to the Gifted Program heard from teachers, parents and students:

- 1 Losing focus of core mission to serve the gifted population at all grade levels
- 2 Attrition without new replacements at the high school levels due to normal attrition, move to other schools and many remaining at Auburn in regular ed classes
- 3 Lack of consistent written curriculum and continuity between grade levels
- 4 At the high school level lack of any gifted counseling or administrative support to counsel students and parents on how to succeed and stay in the program
- 5 No reliable organizational structure, plan or will especially at the high school level to recruit, train and retain specialized teachers for the gifted and specialized courses. (see Econ Macro AP scores 2010)
- 6 Lack of consistent collaboration among teachers between grade levels and subjects

Summary of Reasons heard from parents for the Move:

- 1 Demand for greater capacity in the Gifted Program at the grade and middle school levels.
- 2 Standards and policies are slipping without focused administrative attention to the program. One building with single-minded focus on gifted (like Washington) will help.
- 3 More control and focus can be put on recruiting, training and retaining teachers really motivated and suited for the gifted teaching methodology
- 4 Don't see the resources and will to tackle the issues at the Auburn Academy that need attention. Moving is not preferred but in the current environment it is probably the best alternative.
- 5 Getting good numbers on the Academy will be easier and can be used to promote the program and recruit more students.
- 6 Move will increase teacher, administrator and parent communication across grade levels that are currently very poor.
- 7 Some students leave the program because their attention is diverted away from academics in the Auburn environment. A stand alone school will help these students focus more.
- 8 Some minorities leave because of peer influence from other groups on the main school. The move will give them the support to persevere.

Summary of Reasons heard from parents for not moving:

- 1 Students will miss the social benefits of a larger school and interaction with students with more diverse interests and backgrounds.
- 2 Don't believe the administration has really looked at the issues on class sizes that will result given non-academy students are in the same classrooms for some of the courses
- 3 Too many changes causing too many distractions from the key issues.
- 4 Lack of trust in administration to implement it well causes belief that it is a risky plan
- 5 Fear that as many class options will be available as are at the main campus
- 6 Don't believe that the administration is recognizing the synergy that exists between the CAPA and Academy programs.
- 7 The move will distract from the problem of the program moving away from its gifted mission of over 30 years towards a good regular ed accelerated program