

Dear Parents,

The Gifted Advisory Council would like to extend our sincerest apologies for the glitch that occurred at last Thursday's meeting. As attendees will attest, Ms. Dofka was unable to present the prepared Power Point presentation due to an unexpected delay. Because of the Sunshine Law, the presentation material (originally prepared for school board members) had to be approved by Ms. Jackson, our superintendent, and Mr. Carland, our school board's attorney, prior to being made available to the public. Each did their best to speed up the process, but Ms. Jackson experienced an unexpected delay at a superintendent's meeting on that date, and her approval came an hour too late.

Again, please accept our apologies. This entire situation has been moving very quickly. Many GAC members worked through the Thanksgiving holiday to make this meeting possible for our parents. We tried our best, but unfortunately, many questions went unanswered that night. To clear up some of the concerns and misconceptions expressed at the meeting, we've taken some of our parents' and students' questions and provided responses to them below. We hope this helps, but if you have additional questions, please feel free to contact us via our website at www.questgac.org.

“Our district doesn't have the money to move Quest. How can we pay for this?”

Challenger is the district staff's recommended location because it is not only financially doable; it will actually bring money to the program. The cost to move is estimated at \$175,000. The additional FTE generated by including the gifted students at Challenger will more than make up for the cost of the move. If you add to that the cost savings realized through the elimination of the second county-wide bus system at Explorer, even more revenue is generated. This is a revenue stream that will continue in subsequent years. This is money that can go back into the gifted budget. This is money that can go to field trips, program enhancements, and materials for Quest students.

“If I move, I'll miss my teacher and I won't have all the great technology at Challenger that is here at Explorer.”

The entire program is slated to move – not just the students. All Quest teachers have been guaranteed a job at the new location. Equipment and materials will move with the program as well. Also, the building at Challenger is almost identical to Explorer's.

“Why wasn't Explorer listed as an option on the survey?”

As Mr. Malcolm explained, the school board is looking at several options for relieving the overcrowding at Explorer. One of those options is moving Quest. Cathy Dofka was directed by the school board to provide them with alternative locations should they decide to proceed with that option. Explorer is not an alternative location. We did our best to word the notice to convey this. We apologize if this was not worded clearly enough.

“Why should the Quest students have to move? Why shouldn’t the other students be the ones to move? Wasn’t this school built for us?”

Unfortunately, Explorer was not built for the gifted students. As families in the area surrounding the school will tell you, Explorer was promised to them as a neighborhood school. Many Quest students are attending Explorer out of zone.

“Why don’t we just tough it out and endure overcrowding for one more year? Won’t the rezoning for the new K8 school provide relief?”

Yes, the rezoning that will occur coincident with the opening of the new school in August of 2011 will provide some relief. According to Jim Knight, our head of school services, rezoning now to provide relief next year is no longer possible. Due to regulations that require several public meetings and notices to be spaced “x” number of days apart, there is not enough time left to make that happen. The school board would have had to initiate rezoning in September or October for it to happen next year.

Thus far, Quest students have not been impacted by the extreme overcrowding currently experienced in most other classrooms. This may change next year. The school can only hold so many students, and there is an apartment complex across the street from the school that is nowhere near capacity. Should more students enroll next year, Quest will most likely experience double classrooms.

Parents need to know that this is the 3rd time in less than 1.5 years that the school board has considered moving Quest Academy. As long as Quest is at a zoned school, moving may always be a topic of conversation and debate. Unlike magnet schools, zoned schools are not exempt from capacity evaluations when developers want to develop in that school’s zone. If a school is at capacity and a developer needs to compensate the district monetarily, moving Quest (the nonzoned students that don’t have real rights to those seats) will always be the least expensive option for any developer. Magnets are exempt.

“My Quest child has siblings attending Explorer on the general education side. If Quest has to move, I’ll end up with children at two different schools.”

This is true; however, if Quest remains at Explorer, there is a greater chance your children on the general education side will be asked to move to another school when the school is rezoned.

Additionally, because Challenger is a magnet school, your Quest child’s siblings do not have to live in any particular zone to attend Challenger too. If Quest moves to Challenger, you will have the option of submitting portfolios for the other children in your family.

“Won’t Challenger be overcrowded?”

Because Challenger is a magnet school, they can control the number of students they allow into their school each year. As you know, with a zoned school, this is not possible. Being able to cap enrollment is what makes a magnet such an excellent fit for the gifted center.

Under state statute, districts must serve all of their gifted students. Should Quest receive new students, they can't turn them away because there is no room at the receiving school. To do so would be in violation of state statute. This is why the ability to control the enrollment at the receiving school is so important. Is it not practical to rezone a school on an annual basis as Quest grows.

Sue Stoops and Cathy Dofka have worked out a plan that will have Challenger back to accepting their usual compliment of portfolios in two years time. In the first year, they will still admit siblings and some portfolio students. In the 2nd year, they will be able to receive many more portfolio students. According to their projections, to accommodate Quest, they will only need to bring one doublewide portable onto the campus for a short period of time.

“We’ve already moved our kids once, why should we have to move again?”

We feel your pain! This is exactly why Challenger was recommended to the board by the gifted task force at the inception of the program two years ago. The task force knew that the gifted center would always be vulnerable to a move as long as it was housed at a zoned school. The board had originally given direction to put Quest at Challenger, but they changed direction in the last hour.

The only way Quest will have stability and the ability to grow and flourish is if it is housed on a campus where the enrollment numbers can be controlled – a magnet.

Please take into account that the general education students already moved once too. They don't want to move again either.

Research tells us that heightened sensitivity and empathy to the world around us and our fellow man is one of the characteristics of gifted students and adults. For us to move, we'd be looking at moving the entire program – a move that would **not** involve new teachers, new students, or all the typical stress that one experiences when changing schools; however, if it is the general education side that is forced to move, they **will** experience a much greater element of change – they **will** have new teachers, new classmates, and all the stress that comes with such a change.

Respectfully,

Quest Academy Gifted Advisory Council