

Testimony by Alisa Gao at Board of Education on July 12, 2016

Dear Mr. Chairman and board members:

My name is Alisa, and I am a rising junior at Richard Montgomery's IB program. I've attended gifted schools since fifth grade, thus giving me a lot of experience with magnet curriculums. From first through fourth grade, I attended Farmland Elementary, and was always placed in the "highest" math class and consistently scored at the top of my class in most subjects. This was why I decided to transfer to the GT program at Lucy V. Barnsley. From my standpoint, the gifted and talented programs are essential to our county and our education system because of the challenges and more intense classes they offer to academically willing students. Being in such programs, I know for sure that we followed a different, more interest-centered path. In middle school, I attended the humanities program at Eastern, and I was able to see every day the different emerging interests of different students, and how these programs were able to cater towards our different needs. From Eastern, I gained an interest for the first time in filmmaking, which I still have today.

I know there has been debate in the board over the selection process of gifted programs in our system, and I want to voice my input on this topic. Gifted programs are just like ESOL programs and special education programs: they are need based. There are students who need to be challenged and those students are motivated to pursue a higher level of education. After transferring to a magnet school, I found myself surrounded by other students, many more driven than me. This environment was able to foster a more competitive and hardworking spirit within me, which has really benefitted me in high school.

So, in a few short phrases, gifted programs are supposed to satisfy the needs of students who are academically capable and whose home school can not satisfied their needs with the regular curriculum. It is almost solely academic-based, and therefore the students who enter should be selected primarily by a merit-based system. I also realize that there are disadvantaged groups out there, primarily the socioeconomically challenged, as less money could mean less resources. Race is different from socioeconomic status because being a certain skin color does not automatically mean you lack resources or need assistance. For those in disadvantaged groups I would suggest providing early education assistance and free tutoring or test prep to get them better prepared.

While I do agree that diversity is necessary in today's society, the problem can't be solved by artificially creating "diversity" forcing gifted programs to proportionally reflect the county's racial demographics. America is the land of equal opportunity, and I believe that equal knowledge of availability of these programs can be achieved easily. However, America is not the land of equal results, which I think should be kept in mind when thinking about selections.

Thank you!