

TO: THE RAPIDES PARISH SCHOOL BOARD, MR. WILTON BARRIOS, JR., MR. STEVE BERRY, MR. MARK DRYDEN, MR WILLARD MCALL, DR. STEPHEN CHAPMAN, MS. LINDA BURGESS, MR. KEITH BREAZEALE, MR. DARRELL RODRIQUEZ, MRS. SANDRA FRANKLIN; AND TO MR. JEFF POWELL, THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE RAPIDES PARISH SCHOOL BOARD.

January 10, 2022

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED, CONSISTING OF PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS OF CURRENT STUDENTS ATTENDING BOLTON HIGH SCHOOL AND ENROLLED IN THE CONSERVATORY PROGRAM, AS WELL PROUD GRADUATES OF OUR SCHOOL, AND CITIZENS INTERESTED IN THE SUCCESS OF OUR SCHOOL, ARE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THE SERIOUS ISSUES FACING BOLTON HIGH SCHOOL AND THE BOLTON CONSERVATORY FOR THE PERFORMING & VISUAL ARTS.

We bring these issues to your attention in the sincere belief that by all citizens working together with the School Board and Superintendent, and the School Board working together, there can be quality education in all of our parish schools giving the very best education possible to the young people of our parish; and in addition, offering the arts as well as sports. If, however, we are led to understand by the Board's actions and inactions beginning in 2022 there is only going to be a banding together of a majority of Board members who by their votes only care and support the schools in their districts, abandoning Bolton High School for failure or closure, we will do all we can to not support you and not support the Board in any attempt for passage of any Bond issue.

Bolton High School has since 1915 proudly boasted an outstanding faculty teaching at a high level, producing outstanding graduates. Many of these graduates are currently living in our parish - teachers (retired and active), physicians, engineers, architects, businessmen, pharmacists, lawyers, and elected officials, among others. They live and vote in all of the School Board districts.

You, the elected Board and appointed Superintendent, are facing at least two important issues in 2022. One is mandated rezoning and the other is contemplation of again coming to the voters asking for support to pass a Bond issue. Town Talk article Friday January 7, 2022.

We are concerned with those two issues, as well as other issues, all of which affect our school: "Open Enrollment", which we address as Issue #1; the Bolton

High School zone, which we address as Issue #2; the constant turn-over of Principals, which we address as Issue #3; and the Bolton High School Conservatory of Performing and Visual Arts, which we address as Issue #4.

Bolton High School was designed for and has capacity to house and educate 1,200 students every school year. It did so from 1926 until 2000.

Since 2005, Bolton High School has struggled each year to reach and educate one-half of the number of students it has capacity, capability, and willingness to educate.

Why? The four issues we identify answer the question as all four are directly related to the actions and inaction on the part of the Rapides Parish School Board adversely impacting our school.

By identifying these issues for you, we intend to be vocal regarding resolution by the Board on behalf of Bolton High School and the Conservatory for the Performing and Visual Arts so that our school and this marvelous program succeed.

Issue #1: -“Open Enrollment” -. Open enrollment is designed to afford our parish’s students the option to apply to a school outside of their zone, and if they meet the established criteria, to be accepted to the out-of-zone school.

Open enrollment can only work successfully if all of our schools are fully supported by the Board and given one or more quality programs.

Since the implementation of open enrollment in Rapides Parish, the Board has initiated several unique programs at Bolton, yet quickly pulled each program from our school. No program therefore was allowed to accomplish the goal or revitalization.

Here are some examples of past Board actions: The Board gave to Bolton High School a Pre-Law course to encourage students to attend Bolton High School. It barely began as a course at Bolton, when the Board took the course from Bolton High School and gave it to another school. If a student wanted to study Pre-Law, the in-zone and out-of-zone student would not thereafter choose Bolton High School.

The Board a few years ago publicly designated Bolton High School as a “Gifted” and “Advanced Placement” school as an incentive to attract students to attend Bolton. After one year, the Board designated other schools as “Gifted and AP”. Thus, once again, deprived any incentive for students to attend Bolton High School if they wanted and were eligible for “Gifted and AP”.

The Board then designated Bolton High School several years ago as the “Digital Academy” to attract students to choose to attend Bolton; after one year the Board gave the computers and program to other schools. Once again taking away in-zone and out-of-zone students to have a reason to choose Bolton High School.

These actions by the Board prevented any chance of Bolton High School being revitalized. This is not only about “numbers”. The Board has not conceptualized the open enrollment opportunity, which is to establish programs unique to each high school in the district, and thus build healthy, competitive, and equitable student interest and enrollment across all high schools. What has resulted is quite the opposite and raises equity and opportunity concerns for those high schools with declining enrollment.

As it does relate to numbers, the number of students attending any high school in our parish should not be in and of itself a concern, except when there is a substantial drop.

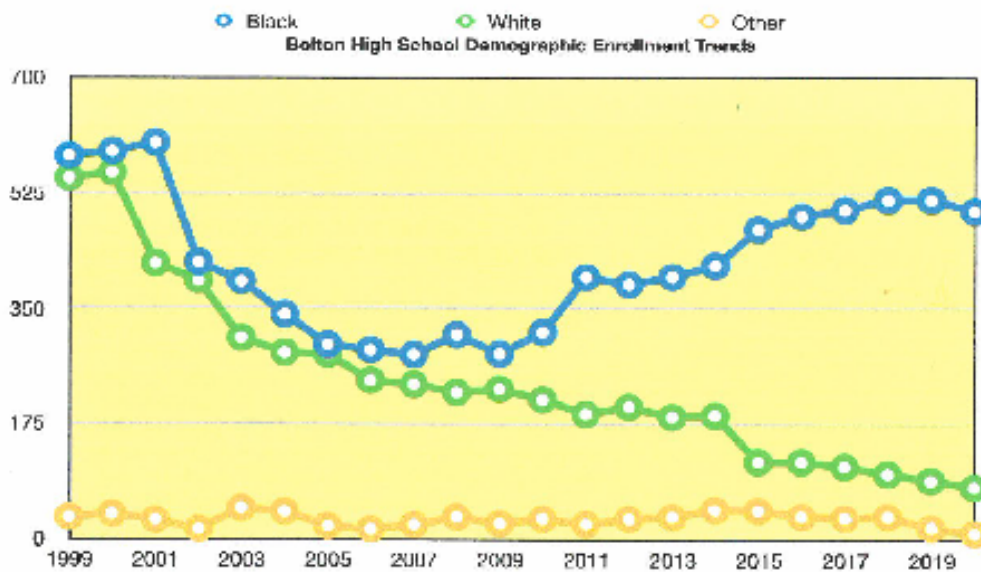
The demographics for Bolton High School show a substantial drop from 1182 students in 1999 to 595 students as of August 2021 which demonstrates a continuing trend in declining enrollment. The loss of 587 students represents a 49.66% reduction in total enrollment.

It is important to note that a 50% drop in the student population within a four-year- period can be considered a statistical anomaly, meaning that the likelihood of that event happening on its own is virtually impossible.

Although the total enrollment stabilized after the initial drop between 2000-2005, the racial breakdown of student numbers changed dramatically. Beginning in 2009, a shift in the racial makeup of the school began to occur. During the years 2009-2021, the African-American population increased by 43.57%, while the Caucasian population decreased by 65.91%. All other racial groups decreased by 58.33 percent.

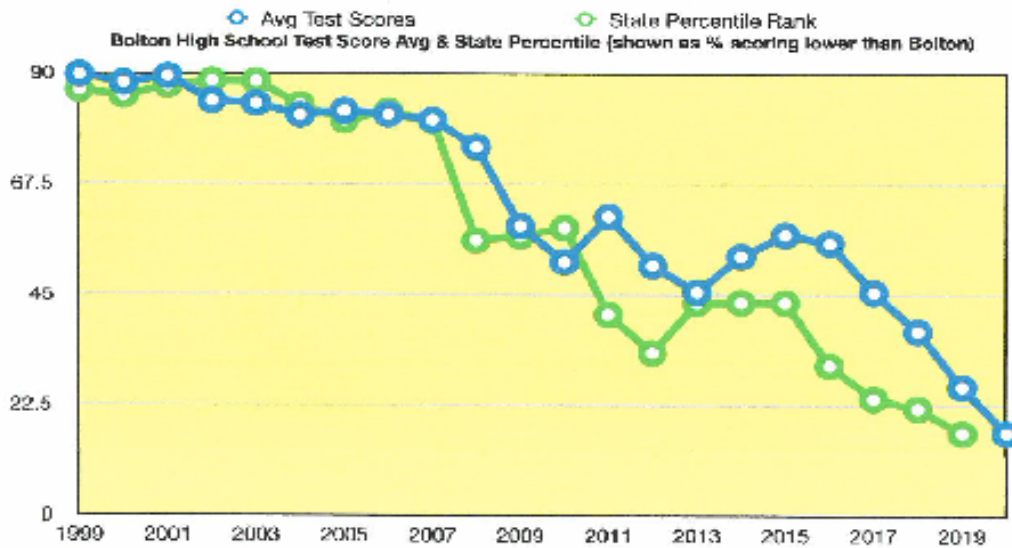
The makeup of race in the number of students in any high school in our parish should not be in and of itself a concern, except when the student makeup over the years at Bolton High School from 1999 to school opening August 2021 shows clearly African-American students are an increasing percentage each year, far higher than the percentage of all other races, which is resulting in segregation of the races, the very opposite of diversity mandated by law. Minority enrollment of 79% of a student body is higher than the Louisiana state average of 55%.

Apparently from this on-going trend, the Board is either not aware of (or does not care about) the lack of diversity at Bolton High School. Take note of the following:



The statistics also reveal a trend in declining test scores, school performance scores, and percentile rankings.

The enrollment drop from 2000 to 2005 had little impact on test scores. However, beginning in 2008, the first year of Open Enrollment, the test scores began to decline. In the years 2008-2013, the average test score dropped 35 percentage points, and since that time has dropped another 30 percentage points. This landed Bolton High School in the 16th percentile ranking statewide. The ranking in 2000 was in the 85th percentile.



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education

(2019-2020 and 2020-2021 scores were not reported due to covid).

Issue #2: The Bolton High School Zone. The zone for Bolton High School needs to be changed and enlarged to provide for both equality and equity.

The purpose of desegregation of our parish’s schools and the purpose therein of the zone is to ensure educational equality for all of our parish’s students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, identity, religion, family income, or regional location with equitable distribution of students among schools and equitable access to a 21st century education.

The Board’s policy of awarding money to schools based on the school’s number of students is conducive for schools to land-grab where the largest number of students are available to ensure statistically the higher performing students and resulting test scores. It is important when the issue of zoning is discussed that the Board strive to have an equal and equitable number of students in each school so that schools share similar numbers of students of low, average, and higher performance.

It is Important for the Board to note that the geographic size of zones does not make the zones equal. The important fact bearing on equality of the zones in our parish depends on the number of residents the Board puts into each zone. If there are only a few residents in the land-area of a zone there will not be many

students to attend schools in that zone. Fewer students equals fewer enrollments in a school and equals fewer dollars from Louisiana's Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) and from you, the Board.

The Bolton school zone is currently a small geographic area, which primarily consists of commercial property. This substantially reduces the number of residential homes having school-aged students eligible to attend Bolton High School.

The Board cannot have a policy of giving money to schools based on the number of students enrolled and expect equity. Over the years, the Board has taken away geographic areas that were in the Bolton zone and given them to other school zones. First, Penny Acres was taken away, then Grundy Cooper was taken, then Woodworth. All of these areas were rezoned to Alexandria Senior High, substantially increasing its numbers (and thus money to it from the Board), while substantially decreasing the numbers at Bolton (and thus money taken away by the Board).

To compound the problem, the Board (in taking away those areas of the parish that had been zoned for Bolton) set the stage for what evolved into a diversity flatline and dramatic academic decline.

In addition to the small commercial zone appropriated to Bolton High School, the Board has placed more and more special education students at Bolton, regardless of race or the school zone in which they live.

In the past, they were best served by attending the school in the zone in which they lived. There has not been any showing by the Board that zoning method for their attendance had failed.

Additionally, there has not been any showing by the Board that all special education students need to go to one school, nor studies that show that one school has to be Bolton High School.

If the law requires all special education students, with the exception of those with severe learning disabilities, take state-mandated assessments and further requires their scores be included along with the scores of all other students of the school they attend, then the Board is not striving for equality among the parish's schools if the Board sends them to one school.

Issue #3: Stability: Turnover in Principals for Bolton High School. Since Penny Toney followed Ron Akins as Principal (both graduates of Bolton High School), there has been a revolving door of Principals, none of whom were graduates of Bolton High School. Bill Higgins for three years, then Misty Slayter, then Clovis Chrisman for three years, Matt Burns for 1 and ½ years, and for the 2021-2022 school year Dewayne Vines, who is in the middle of his first year. The frequent turnover in Principals at Bolton High School over the past ten years has presented yet another challenge in revitalizing our school. Great leaders need at least 3 to 5 years to change the culture of a school.

How can any Principal have a fair chance to get to know Bolton High School, its history, its needs, its students and their needs, the faculty and their needs, one who can and will prevent other schools from poaching Bolton's faculty, who can and will recruit the best faculty to replace those retiring, and who is a disciplinarian who keeps faculty and students safe while they enjoy higher education, unless she/he is given a chance of being at the school for a reasonable period of time and actively demonstrates the desire to make Bolton High School and its Conservatory program great? If Dewayne Vines loves Bolton High School and is fully supportive of the Conservatory program and he is the man capable of fulfilling those expectations, give him a chance to be at Bolton for at least five years. If he does not care for the school or the Conservatory, in fairness to him, appoint another as Principal.

Issue #4: The Bolton High School Conservatory for Visual and Performing Arts. The Board adopted the Conservatory program due to the mandate of the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) to improve the school performance score for Bolton High School, but the Board failed to adequately fund it per the Program and Budget submitted, and in addition someone or more persons connected to the Board placed blockages that limited the Conservatory's chance of success. These blockages were in spite of and in contradiction of the clear written language of the two Motions that created the Conservatory program. Someone is playing games, or failed to read the Motions passed along with specific pages of the 13 pages of the Revitalization proposal.

Since 2017, the LDE noticed the trend in declining test scores. At the same time, enrollment remained slightly ½ of the capacity of students to be educated at

Bolton High School. Meanwhile, (in spite of the law to require integration of the races) a path of increasing segregation of one race was predominating.

The LDE was not the only one in 2017 noticing the decline. Alumni of the school have increasingly become alarmed and upset.

The LDE took action in 2017 by mandating action by the Rapides Parish School Board and the Superintendent to revitalize the school.

The School Board, through its Superintendent, initiated a search for a plan to address Bolton High School failures.

Conversations began in the Fall of 2017 between the Superintendent of the School Board, several staff members, and Mr. Richard Rudd.

Mr. Rudd was asked by the Board to serve as a consultant to ascertain the feasibility of implementing a parish-wide Performing & Visual Arts Academy to “revitalize” Bolton High School.

The Board wanted to know the requirements for starting such a program and how to ensure its success. The stated vision was to establish a program unlike any other in the state of Louisiana to attract students to Bolton High School in order to increase its enrollment and diversity, improve test scores, and raise the graduation rate. The planning stages continued through 2017-2018.

Mr. Rudd obtained information about other performing arts schools in other states and the benefits they had for students (such as Nashville School of the Arts and those in Dallas, Houston and Atlanta areas). He checked out the facility at Bolton High, and brought his information and his proposal to the Superintendent and the Board.

What Mr. Rudd presented to the Superintendent and to the Board was a written proposal entitled “Revitalization of Bolton High School”, consisting of 13 pages, attached as Exhibit #1.

The Superintendent presented Mr. Rudd’s 13 page proposal to the Board.

As presented then, and as shown by Exhibit #1 (pages 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13), this Conservatory program for the first time in our parish recognizes artistically and academically gifted students, not just gifted athletes. Students who never before had the opportunity to know they were gifted in something other than or in

addition to athletics could now be recognized and developed for classical vocal music and choral music, music theory & composition, classical instrumental music (piano, strings, brass, winds, guitar), visual arts, creative writing, dance, jazz instrumental music (piano, strings, brass, winds, guitar), media arts, musical theatre, theatre design, and acting along with the academically gifted.

Necessary funding was clearly spelled out in detail on page 6 Exhibit #1, with money coming from Title IV and District 62.

The Board having received this thirteen page program presentation, and obviously having read it as was their elected duty (and, as demonstrated later, by their voting and accepting certain specific pages of the written proposal), the Board recognized that such a program would be something unique for our students to distinguish our parish, but would also give reason for in-zone and out-of-zone students to apply for enrollment at Bolton, and also an incentive for academically and artistically gifted students to apply for enrollment in the Conservatory. Such enrollment would have a positive impact on the performance scores of Bolton High School. This Conservatory would become the first such program in a public school in the State of Louisiana.

The Board adopted this submitted Revitalization program by two Motions and votes thereon.

The Board met December 4, 2018 with Richard Rudd in attendance. Unbeknownst to Dr. Brenda Rudd and Richard Rudd, literally hours before the meeting began, someone had circulated to the Board members a document purporting to contain cost figures that a renovation of the Auditorium at Bolton High School would cost the Board over one million dollars. Such was not a fact, was not true, was not in the written Revitalization proposal given to the Superintendent and Board by Richard Rudd, which he refuted. Why anyone (who in good faith had read all or even a part of the 13 pages for the Revitalization proposal) would make such a claim to the Board, and do so secretly at the last minute, is difficult to imagine. After refutation and further discussion, the Motion was made by Dr. Stephen Chapman and seconded by Mr. Willard McCall to approve page 3 of back-up and discuss the funding and finalization of the program at a special meeting in January 2019. Page 3 (Exhibit #1) reads as follow: 'that this program will be active 2019-2020 school year, with the spring 2019 utilized to create the program and

establish public acceptance and positive perception of the conservatory (Item 6). (1) Current faculty and staff at the school will be presented with the concept and its benefits; (2) Advertise and hire the Conservatory Program Facilitator/Director (12 month); (3) The Conservatory Program Facilitator/Director will: a. Assist the principal in the recruitment of conservatory faculty (i) The principal will conduct interviews and submit recommendations to the Superintendent. b. Conduct an intensive advertising campaign to promote the conservatory. c. Accept and evaluate student applications. d. Conduct student interviews/auditions. e. Assess and prepare the curriculum, instructional resources and facility". On role call the motion passed unanimously. Actually page 3 of the Revitalization proposal, which the Board voted on to accept for the program did not stop at "e". The other part of page 3 stated "Initial Cost Projections: Faculty Program Facilitator/Director, (new 12 month teacher positions in the parish", One of the following positions listed will serve as the Program/Facilitator Director: Choral Director (9 month teacher + 10%); Dance Director (9 month teacher +10%); Theatre Director (9 month teacher +10%); Orchestral Strings Director (9 month teacher +10%); Visual Arts Director (9 month teacher +10%); Band Director (Band, including jazz, symphonic, percussion and marching). Estimated Cost: 12-month teacher \$77,342; 2 additional 9-month positions \$135,648. Extra-curricular stipend \$25,949. Total Cost \$238,939." End of page 3.

The Board did not meet again on any issue involving Bolton High School or the Conservatory until Tuesday, February 14, 2019 "at 4:59 p.m. Public notice was given by the Board, stating that all members of the public were invited; but the Superintendent told both Brenda and Richard Rudd they were not to attend.

In any event, the meeting proceeded as scheduled on February 19. A Motion was made by Dr Stephen Chapman and seconded by Mrs. Sandra Franklin to "approve the funding proposal presented in the summer of \$163,815, funding source is Title IV, and further approve pages 1-5 and pages 8-13 of the original proposal (Exhibit #1) on December 4, 2018." That Motion passed unanimously.

The Board knew from the written "Revitalization" proposal the Board had (pages 6 and 7) that (a) the "funding proposal presented in the summer" was not \$163, 815; and (b) and that the sum of \$163,815 fell far short of the amount of money the Board knew the Conservatory needed for the successful start-up of the

program. The Board knew from the proposal (page 7) that money was to come from “District 62 = \$247,500 (one-time expense - \$14,000 (annual allotment))”.

We either are forced to believe that the Board (a) by its vote on the two Motions were deliberately making sure the Conservatory never got off the ground, or they were making sure if it got off the ground it would fail, or (b) the Board knew they would later address the funding issue and award the money the Conservatory needed from District 62 money or from the General Fund, or had grants lined up. None of that happened. The Board made no effort to make it happen.

Instead of the Board finding and awarding the money it knew the Conservatory needed, within twelve months of the launch of the Conservatory at the beginning of school for the 2019-2020 school year, the Board allowed Alexandria Senior High School to hire a Theatre Director as a faculty member with starting salary for a second-year teacher and slated to assume the position for the 2020-2021 school year, with money awarded out of District 62 for its theatre production start-up!

Bolton High School, the Conservatory, and the undersigned, do not object to Alexandria Senior High having a Theatre Director. The principal can hire whomever he wants. What is objected to is the Board taking money from District 62 that the Board knew the Conservatory needed to succeed, and give District 62 money to Alexandria Senior High.

So, once again, the Board approves and initiates a program to be unique to Bolton High School as part of its revitalization program, and in less than one year gives funds to start up a theatre program at Alexandria Senior High school.

Here is what we know the Board did accomplish by its two Motions and its vote approving those two motions; and we assume the Board also knows:

From approval of page 1 of the Revitalization (Exhibit #1), the Board approved and knew of the “Overview of the Program” including the “Purpose”, the “Demographics” accepting the Conservatory “will exist to serve any Rapides Parish student 9-12 who desires and meets the criteria for acceptance”; the “Components” which includes “dual enrollment and advanced placement classes in the arts”, and that “the Conservatory would exist as a school within a school while offering courses in the arts to all Bolton Students, and Conservatory students will complete academic requirements through the academic faculty, staff, counselors and administrators of Bolton High School.”

From approval of page 2 of the Revitalization, the Board approved and knew of the “Benefits” of the Conservatory to “have a positive impact on the overall academic performance and student enrollment of Bolton High School; high achieving artistic students will increase the overall academic performance of the school, improve graduation rates, decrease the dropout rate, and improve student discipline and morale”; it will be “unlike any other school in the State of Louisiana”; and “will increase public awareness and support of the plan to install new life and vitality to Bolton High School”, and “Why Bolton” was chosen.

From approval of page 4 of the Revitalization, the Board approved and knew the duty it placed on the “Conservatory Program Facilitator/Director” via the described “Job Goal”, which was clearly stated to be – “to facilitate and coordinate the implementation of a performing & visual arts conservatory program at Bolton High School”, with her written “Performance Responsibilities”

1. To establish and maintain objectives in the area of faculty, development, technology, student growth and artistic excellence;
2. To develop relationships and partnerships within the artistic community and foster parental and community involvement in the program;
3. To serve as Director of either Vocal Music, Dance, Theatre, Instrumental, Orchestra or Visual Arts;
4. To develop and maintain the highest level of ensemble performance in their artistic discipline.”

From approval of page 5, the Board approved of and knew the other mandated responsibilities of the Conservatory Program Director/Facilitator, numbers 5 through 12.

Responsibility #5 was “To assist in the development of curriculum and instruction for the departments in the Conservatory with an emphasis on expanding Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment courses within the fine arts curriculum to meet student needs and overall objectives”;

Responsibility #6 was “To develop student interest in the conservatory through alliances with K-12 schools”;

Responsibility #7 was “To establish and execute a professional growth and self-evaluation plan”;

Responsibility #8 was “To work effectively and foster open communication with school personnel and staff”;

Responsibility #9 was “To submit accurate records and report promptly”;

Responsibility #10 was “To Exhibit professional ethics and consistently demonstrate self-direction”;

Responsibility #11 was “To accept and perform other duties assigned by the principal or his/her designee”;

Responsibility #12 was “To follow State, School Board and School policies.”

Dr. Brenda Rudd and Mr. Richard Rudd were successful when they were on the faculty at Pineville High School in presenting choral groups, plays and musicals. While they were at Pineville High School, they had time to build a program that after initial funding presented successful plays and musicals that created the necessary funds to pay for future plays and musicals.

They brought that information of monetary need to the Board in discussing the Conservatory program if the Board adopted it. There had to be money given to the Conservatory for the Director to build the program.

They, as the presenters in their original proposal to the Board, stated the need for funds from District 62 to be dedicated to Conservatory program expenses via a one-time investment that would allow the program to grow while becoming self-funding. This initial investment was a critical component for the success of the program.

The Board knew before the February 19, 2019 vote that additional funding beyond the Title IV funds was necessary for the Conservatory to succeed.

Anyone familiar with the production of musicals and plays by schools in our parish knows the producer has to pay money for the right to acquire/rent musicals or plays and purchase/rent costumes. This initial investment was a critical component for the success of the Conservatory program. Once the programs are presented and successful, money is generated to pay for future programs.

Based on the two Motions and unanimous votes of approval by the Board and approval of pages 1-5 and 8-13 of the Rudd’s written Revitalization proposal the Board had before it and voted on (Exhibit #1), the concept for the Conservatory was agreed to by the Board as presented in the original written document, and the award of the Conservatory program as spelled out in Exhibit #1 was made by

the Board to Bolton High School to revitalize it, with a program to appeal to all of the students in the parish, to increase the number of students, to improve test scores, to have a “school within a school”, with “dual enrollment and advanced placement classes while offering courses in the arts, with high achieving artistic students to increase overall academic performance of the school and improve student discipline and morale”, to increase public awareness, and with clear delineation of authority placed on the Conservatory Program Facilitator/Director.

Dr. Brenda Rudd was then hired to be the Conservatory’s Facilitator/Director and she carried out the balance of the obligations placed on her and the Conservatory by the Board in good faith that she and the hired faculty would have the support of the Board for the Conservatory program and would support making the Conservatory program do what it was designed to do: meet the mandate of the Louisiana Department of Education and revitalize Bolton High School.

The requirements for the Spring of 2019 were met by her.

A distinguished faculty was hired. Dr. Brenda Rudd as Director of Choral Activities, Tracie Campbell as Director of Visual Art, Richard Rudd as Director of Theatre, Mandy Frazier as Director of Dance, Matthew Rudd as Director of Orchestral Strings, Casey McKinnerney as Director of Bands; Chloe Warren Berthelot as Theatre Choreographer, and Nick Lena as Theatre Sound Designer.

The concept of the school’s Conservatory program as approved by the Board’s vote with referenced pages of the proposal is divided into four arts clusters, and each prospective student applies to one: Dance (Exhibit #1, page 13; Music (Exhibit #1, pages 9 and 10); Theatre (Exhibit #1, page 11; or Visual Arts (Exhibit #1, page 12). Each cluster offers a set of classes that include training in the performance, technical, production, and theoretical aspects of the cluster’s particular art form. Students take academic courses to meet Louisiana graduation requirements.

By your vote approving these clusters, youth throughout our parish (regardless of their background and regardless of their parents’ income) can apply (Exhibit #1, page 8) to seek enrollment in this Conservatory for the Performing and Visual Arts for “intensive training well beyond the normal high school experience in the artistic disciplines of vocal music, instrumental music (orchestra & band), theatre, dance and visual art.”

By your vote, you afford our youth the unique opportunity, if enrolled, to learn classical and jazz instrumental music through the piano, violin (strings), guitar, brass, and various musical instruments, without paying for a private tutor.

By your vote, you afford our youth the unique opportunity, if enrolled, to learn how to sing, and can have their voices trained in classical vocal music and choral music as well as learn music theory and composition, without paying for a private tutor.

By your vote, you afford our youth the unique opportunity, if enrolled, to be taught the media arts, and dance without being required to be in community-wide opportunities that requires costs and fees.

There is still work, however, you must do.

The Conservatory faculty with the “dual concept” as referred to in the Motions and vote by the Board was supposed to have been independent and not charged by the Board against the allotted Bolton academic faculty allotment.

The “Bolton Conservatory for The Performing and Visual Arts” began when our parish’s public schools opened in August for the 2019-2020 school year. An outstanding group of students applied for and were accepted into the program. Education began, productions were presented with success.

Even during the first five months of operation, and before COVID 19 struck in March 2020, stumbling blocks were created either intentionally, or through sheer negligence by one or more persons, to hinder the Conservatory from succeeding, and thus preventing Bolton High School from being revitalized:

Money needed for the Conservatory as spelled out on pages 5 and 6 was not awarded. The money needed and requested by Dr. Rudd for operating the Conservatory from the Title IV Federal program could not pay all necessary expenses, and could only pay for items designated by the Federal program; restrictions made clear to the Board by the Administrator of the Federal program before either of the two Motions were voted on. Before the Board voted, the Board knew the Conservatory needed money to pay for expenses such as theatre royalties and rentals, production costs, concert attire, set materials and music rentals that Title IV would not pay for.

The failure of the Board to provide this funding for this initial investment severely handicapped the Conservatory's ability to produce theatrical productions, musical concerts, dance recitals, and visual art shows. It impeded the implementation of an effective marketing campaign, the scheduling of professional artists to mentor students, and the ability to produce events open to parish students and parents for recruitment purposes - educating families and building awareness of the Conservatory program and benefits for enrolling as students.

In spite of the Board's passage of the two Motions that spelled out and made it clear how the Conservatory was to operate, even specifically referencing and approving by unanimous Board vote specific pages of the Revitalization proposal, the District and Bolton High School administration made it clear to Dr. Rudd that she is not to place promotional billboards, signs, or any advertising in school zones other than Bolton. Furthermore, she is not to attempt to schedule visits or dispense promotional materials in any school other than schools zoned for Bolton High School. These schools are Brame and Alexandria Middle Magnet School. The visits to Brame are limited to addressing students zoned for Bolton High School.

Incredible. That was a clear violation of the Motions passed, and the purpose and authority of the Conservatory in the Revitalization of Bolton High School in Exhibit #1 (see page 3 items #1 and 3b, and page 5 items #5 and 6), as well the purpose of Open Enrollment.

It also turns out, in spite of the clear mandate of page 5, Dr. Rudd is not allowed to "assist in the development of curriculum and instruction for the departments in the Conservatory with an emphasis on expanding Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment courses within the fine arts curriculum to meet student needs and overall school objectives"!

With the Conservatory approved, the Conservatory faculty was not to be included in the Bolton High School faculty allotment. Yet, it turned out it is. It should not be, and that needs to be corrected based on the Motions passed.

The School Board, by these two Motions, was to have a Conservatory program available for all parish students whether in the Bolton zone or outside of the Bolton zone, and for the Conservatory representatives to be allowed access to all parish schools to make all faculty and students aware of the Conservatory and its benefits as spelled out in the Motion: "to develop student interest in the

conservatory through alliances with K-12 schools”. Again, the Rudds were told “someone at Central office” said they would only be permitted to promote the Conservatory to students in the Bolton zone. Not only is such a statement not true, it defeats the whole concept of “Open Enrollment” and the purpose of the two motions passed for the “revitalization” of Bolton High School.

In addition, the Board is not making it clear to the Principals of the parish’s K-12 schools that the Board wants these principals to let the Conservatory representatives into their schools. How else can students know of the program and its benefits? How else can Bolton High School be revitalized if no one knows of the Conservatory? Gaining admission into K-12 schools to inform students about the Conservatory, particularly when money needed from the School Board is not so far forthcoming, is necessary for its growth.

The Conservatory, while housed at Bolton High School, was designed to be a district-wide program, open to any student in our parish who qualified for acceptance. Upon acceptance into the Conservatory program, students were informed they would earn their academic requirements through the programs already in place at Bolton High School.

“The Conservatory was not intended to merely bring classes in the arts to Bolton High School as part of a comprehensive high school. The vision and design of the Conservatory was to operate as a parallel school within a school serving artistically gifted students. The mission of the Conservatory states in part: ‘We provide intensive, integrated training in the arts to build a bridge to the post-secondary and professional world for artistically gifted students in Rapides Parish’.”

The Conservatory was only in operation for five months when the Coronavirus struck the world and impacted Louisiana in February 2020.

This virus severely impacted our lives, and all schools. School Boards, schools, faculty and students had to learn to cope to survive.

The harsh impact of the virus was particularly severe on the Conservatory as it only had just begun, when all was new, when Directors and faculty and students were only beginning to learn what was proposed to have been scheduled; then had to be upset, reset, moved around, then cancelled.

In spite of this, the launch of the Conservatory in the 2019-2020 school year proved successful due to the Conservatory's leadership, faculty, students, and volunteers. Three very successful, well-attended productions were presented for the enjoyment of the public: Little Mermaid, Into the Woods, and Dream Girls. In addition, the students and public received the joyful presentation of the first Annual Winter Gala. The Conservatory was lined up to put on its season finale production (and money-maker) in April of the 2019-2020 school year (Phantom of the Opera). They had the rights, the show was cast, rehearsals were set to begin, and then COVID 19 struck on March 13, 2020. Performances scheduled had to be cancelled, money paid for rights to show, for costumes, for materials was lost and unable to be recouped, students just learning parts were disappointed, there was no ability to raise money, and very limited ability to fully promote the program to prospective parents and students. The virus forced seniors in their last year at Bolton High School who had enrolled in the program at the start of the school year 2019 to give up all that had been scheduled for them March through May of 2020. The gaining momentum of the program within the school, across the school system, and amongst the local community suddenly came to a halt.

Regaining that momentum would prove quite challenging throughout the 2020-2021 school year as COVID 19 restrictions, the Delta variant, fluctuations in virtual and in-person instruction, and countless quarantines impeded the Conservatory's desire to showcase student training and skills through performances, which were needed to generate funds and essentially keep the program afloat. However, the training of Conservatory students never ceased throughout it all; instructors remained dedicated to the tutelage of students and the mission of the Conservatory.

For the second year of the Conservatory, despite being in the midst of the pandemic, the Conservatory held a virtual Arts on the Lawn in December 2020 (originally planned for an out-door, in-person event in November). The Conservatory also managed for the second year to put on an outstanding and well-received production of Hairspray in May 2021 when restrictions had subsided. The Visual Arts classes were able to have the traditional, and very creative, Bolton Arts Walk on the school sidewalks.

Remaining committed to the mission and to the students, in the summer of 2021 the Conservatory released its musical theatre seasons for 2021-2022 and 2022-

2023: Rock-of-Ages, Cinderella, Anastasia, Phantom of the Opera, Aida, and Beauty and the Beast. Despite the ongoing virus, Rock-of-Ages was presented in October 2021 and was a huge success, along with an enjoyable presentation of the Conservatory's 2nd Annual Winter Gala in December of 2021.

But, as will be shown, due to the on-going virus, the lack of money needed from the School Board, the hampered ability to make K-12 students aware of the Conservatory, Bolton High School is not being revitalized, and, the Conservatory is not flourishing as it should.

For the 2021-2022 school year, there are 102 ninth grade students zoned for Bolton High School who are attending other high schools; 69 tenth grade students zoned for Bolton are attending other schools; 35 eleventh grade students, and 35 twelfth grade students zoned for Bolton High School. That represents a total of 264 students zoned for Bolton who could have chosen to attend Bolton High School but chose not to. All or some would be eligible this school year to apply for the Conservatory if they were given a chance to know about it.

For the 2021-2022 school year, there are 67 students at Bolton enrolled in the Conservatory who live outside of Bolton school zone; but, of that number only 15 are tenth graders, and only six are ninth graders. Without promised money and with limitations hampering promotion of the Conservatory to all K-12 students, there is a downward trend of enrollment in the Conservatory by out-of-zone students. How many additional out-of-zone ninth and tenth graders would have been excited about applying to enroll in the Conservatory at Bolton High School if they had an opportunity to know anything about it?

Nevertheless, 315 students are enrolled in the Conservatory classes at Bolton High School for the 2021-2022 school year. That is more than one-half of the total student population currently enrolled in the school. But without monetary and moral support from the School Board to allow the Conservatory to carry out the mission and authority the Board gave it through the Board's two motions and designated pages of the Revitalization, Bolton High School is not going to be revitalized; and more shameful, gifted students will not be able to be enhanced by creative programs at one location.

Bolton High School, in order to carry out its mission and the mandate of the Louisiana Department of Education to you the Rapides Parish School Board for

improvement in its school performance scores (SPS), has to have creative programs that appeal to students throughout our parish, that are unique to Bolton High School, and remain only at Bolton High School.

What is needed now for the Conservatory's success and the revitalization of Bolton High School is on-going support by the Board, by the principal, and by the faculty of Bolton High School for the Conservatory and the mission and goals as stated by the of Motions passed with all thirteen pages of the written proposal (Exhibit #1), and with a principal that loves Bolton High School who will be allowed by the Board to stay at Bolton High School for at least five years.

For the Rapides Parish School Board to comply with the LDE's mandate to revitalize Bolton High School, it is critical for the Board now to complete the following actions:

1. Approve the original funding as stated in the written Revitalization paper given to the Board by Richard Rudd, attached at Exhibit #1 pages 6 and 7, as requested for the Conservatory so that money is made available to the Conservatory beginning January 2022;

2. The District Administration needs to make sure the importance of the Conservatory program, as passed by the Board is understood by the current Bolton High School principal and faculty. They should receive a packet which includes the pages referenced in the Motions in Exhibit #1, along with an informative package, so that they can become fully aware of the purpose and structure of the Conservatory;

3. Communicate the purpose and the vision of the parish's Bolton Conservatory to principals of all K-12 schools in the parish, ensuring they know and understand the one-of-a-kind opportunity as well as the rolling/year-round enrollment status the Conservatory carries. Let the principals understand they are to allow the Facilitator/Director of the Conservatory to visit their schools and present the concept and mission of the Conservatory to all students, teachers, and parents; and

4. Insure that the Conservatory Facilitator/Director and faculty will be parish positions outside the normal Bolton High School teacher allotment as granted in the two motions passed by the Board and as requested in the Revitalization of Bolton High School paper attached as Exhibit #1, which the Board approved.

We intend to make sure action is taken by the Board before we are asked to support any Bond issue.

In addition to Action-Now on the part of the School Board to revitalize Bolton High School and make sure the Conservatory program is a success as it was designed to be, the Board needs to know there is a rumor floating around that Alexandria Senior High School wants to enlarge its building to house more students. Whether that money is to come from a Bond issue being voted, we do not know. We do not know the validity of this rumor. But we are opposed to any expenditure of public money to add more space to Alexandria Senior High, or add more space to any parish high school as long as the Board fails to take the action necessary to fill Bolton High School to its capacity of 1,200 students. Once filled, it will be easy to support any bond issue to add on to other schools.

Does it make sense to the voters of our parish that the Board on one hand takes away area after area of the geographic territory in the District of Bolton High School, not allow special programs to be exclusive at Bolton High School, not support the Conservatory, leave empty classrooms at Bolton, give geographic areas to Alexandria Senior High, take money from District 62 to fund a Theatre program at ASH, while depriving the Conservatory of District 62 money, then ask the public to support a Bond issue to increase the classroom space at Alexandria Senior High?

The undersigned live and vote in all of the Districts the elected Board members represent. We are not against any school.

We are for equal and equitable treatment of all schools in our parish. We have helped schools and the School Board over the years. It is only by equal treatment of all our schools that our school system can be a leader in state academic achievement. The District administration and Board must keep abreast of demographic changes that affect school performances and create innovative programs, supported by the Board, for any school that needs revitalization. Bolton High School has a mandated program in place that needs Board support to get back on track as an outstanding academic institution.

Can we work together for the betterment of our parish and our schools?

Long before the December 29, 2021 Town Talk article by Margaret DeLaney, Oliver Varden and Chris Langley we are aware of the problems facing our schools

and our teachers before and after the Coronavirus. It is our hope to be a part of working with you to help resolve them.

Signed: Katie Douglas Atkinson, Nicole Bolen, Jay Bolen, Dorman Clayton, Gail Clayton, Marc Durbin, Beverly Easterling, Dana Scherer, Cyndy Scott, Natalie Scott, Sue Sullivan, Stephen Tumminello, Katie Vanderlick, Reddex Washington, Jennifer Wright, and Rob Wright.

Allie Paige Nowlin – President, Bolton High School Alumni Association.