

CBG Meeting with Mr. Siddiqi
January 27, 2009
7:00 P.M., Robious Forum

Parents of sixth-grade Venturers and seventh-grade Navigators had been invited to attend this meeting about the future of the gifted program at Robious.

Mr. Siddiqi welcomed parents and thanked them for coming. He said that this meeting was an opportunity for him to prepare parents for what is coming.

This morning, Mr. Siddiqi was briefed about the budget shortfall by the Chesterfield County School Superintendent, Dr. Marcus Newsome. Chesterfield County Schools are especially dependent on state funding. The current real estate market and economic times are having a strong impact on CCPS. Approximately 150 teachers in CCPS will lose their jobs because of the budget cuts. There may or may not be school counselor cuts as well. Robious will lose two assistant administrators next year. The student to teacher ratio will be increased by one in middle and high schools. Every school has had to cut its budget by 20% this year, and will cut its budget by an additional 20% next year.

There will be some impact on the gifted program at Robious.

Currently, we have four teachers per grade level in the gifted program. It would be ideal to continue this scenario, but it seems most unlikely at this time. There will be no teacher transfers this year; therefore, Mr. Siddiqi will not be able to bring teachers from Manchester to Robious as he has in the past two years. There are two options available to Mr. Siddiqi for eighth grade teachers:

1. The eighth grade team could be filled with current Robious teachers. Some disadvantages would be that these teachers would not have experience teaching in a gifted program, would not have gifted endorsement, and would not have had training in teaching gifted learners.
2. There could be an eight-person "vertical team," in which the sixth and seventh grade team teachers would also teach the eighth grade classes. Disadvantages would be that they would lose their common planning time, which these teachers find extremely valuable. Students in ASE could not necessarily go to a teacher for individual help, since those teachers may be teaching other classes. The eight teachers would also have an extra class to prepare for, which means more work for them. Mr. Siddiqi has spoken to the eight teachers, and they have mixed feelings about a vertical team.

The foreign language program will change. Beginning next year, only Spanish and International Languages will be offered to sixth grade students. Hopefully, French, German, and Latin would be offered to seventh and eighth grade students. This is because the class sizes of third year languages in middle school are too small. Mr. Siddiqi urged CBG parents to think about what is fair for all students. If CBG classes are very small, other non-CBG classes will have to be too big. We do not yet know what will be offered for the rising eighth graders who would be taking a third year of a language next year.

Earth Science may not be offered as an elective next year. Likewise, FPS may not be offered next year. ASE will remain in the program.

Mr. Siddiqi said “the good news” is that we have a good community with strong parental support at Robious. He added that we should be thankful that our children have the opportunity to attend their home school, rather than being bused to a CBG program at another school.

Mr. Siddiqi welcomes parental input about the eighth grade team by means of phone calls, emails, or letters.

These three REBO board members spoke and offered to answer questions: Samantha Marrs, REBO President; Susan Cheatham, REBO Treasurer; and Leslie Hausser, Venturer Representative. They distributed a letter to parents urging them to contact Dr. Newsome, Patty Carpenter (School Board Rep. for Midlothian), Dan Gecker (Midlothian Board of Supervisors), Delegate Manoli Loupassi, and Senator John Watkins. It is critical at this time when budget plans are being made that parents make their voices heard and express to these people the importance of the gifted program at Robious.