

Dear Dr. Lewis,

We are parents of children who attend, or previously attended, the IB Programs at Lucille M. Brown Middle School and/or Thomas Jefferson High School. We are very concerned that these programs, which have been in existence since 2002, are failing the students they are intended to serve, ultimately failing our community. We believe poor management to be the cause. We ask that new leadership be put in place at Lucille M. Brown for both the school and IB program, and that more attention be given to strengthening the program at Thomas Jefferson.

The IB program attracts the highest achieving middle school students in Richmond Public Schools, and is touted on the RPS website as “a rigorous college preparatory program.” We can show you through extensive documentation that Brown IB has been plagued with inconsistent teachers, ineffective discipline policies, abysmal internal and external communication, and a lack of meaningful IB-specific opportunities such as speakers, community service projects, and field trips, thereby missing a profound opportunity to offer educational experiences of the highest level to the diverse and talented student population of RPS.

Over the past three years, excessive time, energy, and money have been spent in an attempt to improve the school climate at Brown by holding special meetings, bringing in mediators, conducting a three-day retreat at VCU, and generating surveys. We have not noticed any significant improvements to low teacher morale, poor discipline, deplorable communication, and an overall climate of fear and intimidation of teachers.

It is distressing to us, and should be to you, that the IB Program at Thomas Jefferson is not a primary choice for high school for many Brown IB students or other RPS top performing students. Last year, only six IB students from Brown went on to the IB program at TJ. It is not attracting or keeping the best students because of its reputation for academic inferiority, disengaged faculty, mismanagement, and an unsafe learning environment.

Considering the \$500,000 that has been given to RPS from the City for “IB Improvement,” we are asking you to take a serious look at the IB program at Brown and TJ and develop an action plan for improvement. At the very least, the IB Program must have competent, enthusiastic leadership, both at the building and program levels, and qualified, effective teachers in an environment that supports its global curriculum. We urge you to make the necessary administrative and structural changes to the IB Program so that it lives up to its mission and vision. Parents, teachers and students wait at the ready to be invited into a productive conversation about improving the IB program in Richmond Public Schools.

We are requesting a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss this issue further, and to help work on improvement strategies. You may respond by email, or by contacting Beth Bortz at 804-929-5844 or Yvette Conte at 804-353-9254.

Sincerely,

Beth and David Bortz – parents of Brown IB graduate, 2nd District  
Yvette and Anthony Conte – parents of two Brown IB graduates, 2nd District Wendy and Todd Martin – parents of current Brown IB student, 2nd District Ann and Eric Thomas – parents of three Brown IB graduates, 4th District  
and the undersigned:  
Jon Baker – parent of current Brown IB student and one graduate, 5th District Kim Banks – parent of current Brown IB student, 5th District  
Mary Blanchard – parent of three Brown IB graduates, 4th District  
Steven Boehling – parent of two Brown IB graduates, 4th District  
Mark and Shelli Brady – parents of Brown IB graduate, 4th District  
Lisa and David Burrington – parents of current Brown IB student and one graduate, 4th District  
Kate Crowther – parent of two Brown IB graduates, 4th District  
Richard Day – parent of current Brown IB student, 4th District  
Lisa and Casey Dunaway – parents of two current Brown IB students, 5th District  
Wendy Fleetwood – parent of current Brown IB student, considering leaving Brown; 3rd District  
Denton Freeman – parent of Brown IB graduate; will not send rising 5th grader to Brown, 1st District  
Leyla Gueranmayeh – parent of current Brown IB student, 1st District  
Betsy Harrell-Thomas – parent of Brown IB graduate, chose not to send second child; 5th District  
Sharon Hickman – parent of three Brown IB graduates, 2nd District  
Wendy Hudson – parent of current Brown IB student and one graduate  
Jennie Irwin – parent of current TJ IB student , 5th District  
Mary and Dave Johndrow – parents of Brown IB graduate, 5th District  
Kathy Laing – parent of Brown IB graduate, 2nd District  
Kristin Lyons – parent of two Brown IB graduates, 4th District  
Sara Wilson McKay and Scott McKay – parents of current Brown IB student, 2nd District  
Alex Miller – parent of Brown IB graduate, chose not to send second child; 1st District  
David and Linda Mills – parents of Brown IB graduate, 4th District  
Kathleen Monk – parent of two Brown IB graduates, 4th District  
Terry and Catherine Murphy – parents of former Brown IB student, now attending private middle school, 3rd Anne Pedin – parent of Brown IB graduate, 4th District  
Elmer Peters – parent of Brown IB graduate, 4th district  
Janet Pinson – parent of two Brown IB graduates; one attended TJ/IB for one year, 4th District  
Laura Potter – parent of two current Brown IB students, 2nd District  
Michele Roediger – parent of Brown IB graduate, chose not to send second child; 4th District  
Paige Rosemond – parent of Brown IB graduate, 4th District  
Wendy Shannon – parent of two Brown IB graduates, undecided about rising 6th grader, 2nd District  
Kelly Tobe – parent of two Brown IB graduates, 4th District  
Jessica Troutman – parent of current Brown IB student, 2nd District  
Evelyn Woodward-Johnson – parent of current Brown IB student and two graduates, 5th District  
Sue Zechini – parent of two Brown IB graduates, 4th District

*cc – Mr. Jeffrey Bourne, Mr. Donald Coleman, Mrs. Tichi Pinkney Eppes, Ms. Kimberly Gray, Mrs. Shonda Harris-Muhammed, Dr. Derik Jones, Mrs. Kristen Larson, Mr. Glen Sturtevant, Jr., Mrs. Mamie Taylor, Dr. Thomas Beatty, Mrs. Victoria Oakley*

Please see below for a list of concerns:  
Overall School Climate and Leadership at Brown

- Unsafe environment – during the 2011-12 school year, after a teacher at Brown reported that a student allegedly had a gun in the school, it took 30 minutes for the principal to find out who made the report. In the meantime, there was no school lock-down, despite statements to the contrary reported to the media. Parents were lied to about the presence of ammunition found with the weapon.
- A teacher at Brown reported that s/he has taught at other urban schools and always felt safe because s/he trusted the principal. S/he stated that the environment at Brown was “complete chaos”; at Brown s/he did not feel safe because the principal lacks control and organization.
- During a school field trip, students were on the bus without a chaperone (who got off the bus at Albert Hill Middle School) and a student was assaulted.
- Low teacher morale affects teaching as well as teacher involvement in school activities. Teachers at Brown are fearful to bring up problems, and don’t feel like they are listened to by administration. Lack of respect for administration leads to teachers’ unwillingness to problem-solve.
- Disruptive behavior is tolerated. Teachers feel that there aren’t effective consequences to bad behavior. “Having meaningful consequences.” was the response that teachers participating in the VCU retreat gave most often to the

question, “If there were just one thing you could change at Brown, what would it be?”

- There is no in-school suspension, which has been requested by teachers repeatedly in SPMT meetings.
- School cleanliness is not a priority. Cafeteria tables are not wiped down between lunch periods. Bathrooms and bleachers in gym are routinely not cleaned before whole-school events (i.e. PTA meetings, musical concerts). Trash and broken glass are often found along the walkways outside of the building. The greenhouse area, seen from the street, is a mess.
- Profane graffiti was left in the IB hall bathroom over the summer, plainly visible on the first day of school.
- There is no toilet paper or soap in the bathrooms. Students must ask for these items, which are kept by the teachers in the classroom.
- Constant calendar conflicts. Rooms, field trips, and events are often double-booked because of ineffective or non-existent master calendar.
- Orchestra students could not attend the All-City program this year due to failure to procure a bus (as was promised).
- Transportation problems are not reported or resolved by the administration. Students whose buses are consistently late must rely on their parents to deal with the difficult-to-reach RPS Transportation.
- Several years of scheduling fiascos at the beginning of the school year. Schedules were sent to families, when the principal knew for a fact that they were incorrect.

- Several years of major problems with morning intake – entire student body in gym until they could go to homerooms, causing frequent fights – were resolved this year only when a parent, suggested that the students go directly from buses to their homerooms.
- An incident where mercury from a broken thermometer was left in place and covered up for weeks on a desk in a science classroom, was questioned by parents, then denied by staff and administration.
- There is excessive tardiness by students and teachers. We request that you review teacher absenteeism, which appears to be excessive as well.
- The “school within a school” model should be reviewed, as it seems to contribute to dissension among teachers and students.

#### IB Curriculum and Leadership

- There is concern that not all teachers are adequately qualified to teach academically advanced students, or to teach at all, specifically in the Science and English departments.
- The IB Diploma is admittedly very difficult to attain, but was practically impossible to accomplish last year at TJ because there weren't teachers equipped to teach the required courses.
- There is poor communication by the principal and IB Coordinator. Emails are not always returned. Written information arrives home late and often changes. Not all teachers give their email addresses or use MyGradebook. Certain IB teachers do not respond to parent emails. School website is not updated, and is poorly maintained.
- Sixth graders at Brown must choose either Art or Music as their elective for all three years. Students do not receive exposure to both.

- One foreign language (Spanish) is offered at Brown – lamentable for a program that promotes global learning. In contrast, Henrico County IB MYP offers Spanish, French, and Chinese. The French program at Brown was dropped, supposedly due to lack of interest. But for years the instructor was so poor that even those students interested in French chose Spanish. This teacher was only removed after she physically struck an IB student.
- Deadlines for assignments seem to be moving targets. Students are not consistently held accountable for turning in their work on time. “Mandatory” reading journal assigned to 7th graders over summer was neither collected nor graded.
- There is an extreme emphasis on SOL testing and review; this wastes time in a selective program full of high-achieving students. According to the IBO, “IB-MYP students are expected to go beyond minimum expectations.” Second-semester Technology students were unable to access computers during the SOLs resulting in fewer assignments than the students who took Technology first semester. Final exams in Science were cancelled due to SOL testing.
- There are few special events, community service opportunities or speakers in the IB Program. A few field trips and speakers that took place in recent years were parent- initiated and parent-coordinated. There is no vehicle to continue these special events, so when those parents left the school, these events did not happen again.
- There is disparity in sizes of classes at Brown because students are grouped based on participation in the optional summer math program.
- Until parents discovered, and then complained about it to the School Board, IB teachers from Brown were “farmed out” to failing schools during the final weeks of school, leaving Brown IB students with substitute teachers at the end

of the year, when they should have been reviewing coursework in preparation for high school.

- There is weak advocacy for program. An IB Advisory Board, made up of administrators and parents, was finally authorized by the School Board after many requests for one in the program's ten years of existence. Many parents don't know the IB Advisory Committee exists, and a TJ parent was told by the IB Coordinator that it was only for Brown parents (it is not).
- Poor marketing of the IB program. We need vibrant, knowledgeable, open, and honest speakers to "sell" the program to prospective parents and students.
- Deficient IB website (look at Henrico County's very informative Guide to IB Programs).
- IB Coordinators are not required to attend Gifted Advisory Committee meetings, where the IB programs are often discussed.
- Misinformation was given about the summer math program for rising 7th graders. In addition, the form was sent home on its due date.
- Parents and students are not invited to regularly review and collaborate on ideas. Parents specifically are not seen as partners in education, but as nuisances or threats.
- IB teachers have little opportunity to shape the quality of the program and have a powerless stance toward challenges or ideas for improvement. They additionally seem unaware of how to best advocate for and achieve positive changes that would benefit students.

- The hierarchy of the program is vague. Principal vs. IB Coordinators vs. Gifted Programs Coordinator. Parents and students are not aware of “who’s in charge” or who can resolve concerns of theirs.
  
- IB classrooms at Brown are consistently overcrowded.
  
- Lack of foresight – IB at Brown will have more students this fall than ever before. The overcrowding problem has not been resolved in the past. How will these students fit in the space allowed for the IB program? Parents have asked this question to the principal at Gifted Advisory and IB Advisory Board meetings, and it was clear that she had no plan for this.