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Media Advisory

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School Board Approves Plan to Establish Autonomous Schools

Baton Rouge, LA-The East Baton Rouge Parish School Board approved staff recommendation at their January Board Meeting to establish two small autonomous public schools that will be housed in the school system. Board members agreed to allow staff to enter into agreements with two external partners to provide services for two schools in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System. The East Baton Rouge Parish Laboratory Academy and the CAN! Academies of East Baton Rouge are scheduled to open in August 2007.

The East Baton Rouge Parish Laboratory Academy will begin with a total of 100 ninth-graders attending class in specific classrooms that will be housed at Istrouma High School. At least half of the new school's incoming ninth-graders will come from Istrouma's attendance zone while the remaining 50 student's can choose to attend from other attendance zones. The enrollment will increase by 100 new ninth graders each year to eventually grow to a maximum of 400 students by 2011.

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The small high school will be modeled after the successful Bronx Lab School in New York City, an Institute for Student Achievement (ISA) partner school. ISA will work in partnership with The East Baton Rouge Parish School System, The Bronx Lab School, F-E-G-S Health and Human Services System, and ADVANCE BATON ROUGE to develop and implement East Baton Rouge Parish Lab High School. Students attending the East Baton Rouge Parish Laboratory Academy can expect a rigorous college preparatory curriculum which will provide a second chance for at-risk youth and their families to achieve economic independence, and hope for a better life through relationship-based education and training.

The Board also voted to name David Zielinski as the new School Director for the East Baton Rouge Parish Laboratory Academy. Mr. Zielinski has served for three years as head of the upper school at Episcopal High.

The main campus of the CAN! Academy of Baton Rouge is expected to enroll 400 students and will be housed on Cadillac Street where the current Baton Rouge Preparatory Academy currently exists. Two satellite campuses at Prescott Middle School and Glen Oaks Middle School will also house an additional 100 students each. The CAN! Academies will focus on the relationship between teachers and students, technical skills training and specific learning plans tailored for each student. The Texas based AmericaCAN! will operate the academies in East Baton Rouge Parish. The curriculum is geared toward over-aged students.

While the East Baton Rouge Laboratory Academy and the CAN! Academies will have more autonomy than other schools in the district; they must continue to meet all state accountability requirements. The goal of this alternative education design is to reduce the number of high school drop outs and create opportunities for a successful post-secondary education experience for students. “As a school system that continues to think outside the box for different ways to raise academic scores, I have seen that this is a program which has worked in school systems with similar student populations as those in East Baton Rouge Parish. It has a proven track-record and we have entered into this agreement with the confidence that student achievement will rise at these schools,” said Superintendent Charlotte D. Placide. She also said that strict benchmarks and measures will be used to make sure that this program helps those students who are enrolled.

While a portion of the funding to begin operation for the academies will come from a \$3.1 million dollar education grant given by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the bulk of the funding will come from the East Baton Rouge Parish school system. The funding amount spent per student at these schools is equal to the average provided to other East Baton Rouge Parish Schools. Other financial partners include: Institute for Student Achievement, Federal Employment and Guidance Services, national non-profit partners working with ADVANCE BATON ROUGE, Baton Rouge Area Foundation, and the Isaac Hayes Foundation.

For more information, please contact Chris Trahan at (225) 922-5620.

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