Uncertain future of school spurs frenzy

BR Magnet alumni work to save building

BY CHARLES LUISIER
Advocate staff writer

The uncertain future of Baton Rouge Magnet High School has ignited a digital frenzy among the school's far-flung alumni.

"OMG!!! They can't tear down my Alma Mater!!! That is insane... I hope they come up with another plan or something," wrote Mia Georgette Hunt, Class of 2001.

"It will be devastating if they tear down good ol' brmhs! what a tragedy!" chimed in Helen Pham, Class of 2002.

These posts are found on a special Facebook group sparked by the controversy.

The group, "For Baton Rouge High, We Raise Our Cry," takes its name from the school's alma mater.

Meghana Chalasani, Class of 2002 and now an LSU student, founded the online group days after reading about the building's possible demise.

"I always knew it was a fantastic school as a stepping stone," Chalasani said of the academic magnet school. "It wasn't until I went off to college that I realized the way it prepared me. It was priceless."

On July 25, the School Board shelved plans to renovate the school's crumbling exterior; bids came in two to three times above projections and would have required three years, not the original 18 months, to complete.

Instead, East Baton Rouge Parish Superintendent Charlotte Placide convened a committee — it held its first meeting Sept. 5 — to consider alternatives. They range from a complete renovation and modernization to building a new high school at another location.

Placide said she hopes to settle the school's future by December.

Chalasani was appalled that the school system might vacate, or, worse, demolish the stately

Baton Rouge Magnet High School ninth-grade geography students, including Taylor Kimball, center, and Caleb Shilling, foreground, sit below walls marred by peeling paint and plaster Wednesday. Since officials announced plans in July to demolish the high school, alumni and others have started a digital campaign, including a Facebook group and an online petition, to save the building.

Contacts, resources

BATON ROUGE MAGNET HIGH SCHOOL: Principal Nan Greer, nngreer@ebrschools.org
School Web site: http://brmhs.ebrschools.org/
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BATON ROUGE HIGH ALUMNI ASSOCIATION: http://www.brhsalumniassoc.org/
At 10 1/2 a.m., civil libertarians walked into the Board of Education building, as part of a strategy to change the makeup of the board, to block the construction of a new high school in the district, and to force the school board to round up its plans for the future.

1. The school board has made a decision to build a new high school. The community is divided on this issue.
2. The school district is facing a financial crisis, and the proposed new high school is one of the ways they hope to address it.
3. The community is concerned about the cost of the new high school and the impact it will have on the existing schools.
4. The school board is considering alternative options, such as renovating existing schools or exploring the possibility of shared facilities with neighboring districts.
5. The community is divided on the issue of whether the new high school is necessary and if its current schools are sufficient.