

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

For many reasons, vacations, family commitments, and work conflicts, no representative from the Help Mt. Hebron Committee can appear tonight to testify. Because we have no advance knowledge of what solutions the Superintendent and the Department of Education will propose to you tonight, our comments to you must be more generalized.

Mt. Hebron's deficiencies and problems have been on-going for several years. These many problems are attested to in report after report, with the most recent Gilbert Assessment Report indicating we are in the worst shape of the 4 high schools studied. Mt. Hebron's place at the front of the line is legitimate. While the many reports have continued to identify a core of problems, each new report discovers more. All of us agree that before a true solution can be devised a comprehensive list must be compiled. The Superintendent assured us in July that staff would compile such a list from the reports issued in April 2006, October 2006, November 2006, January 2007, along with the June 2007 Gilbert Assessment Report and Help Mt. Mt. Hebron's Assessment. This compilation should be available to you tonight. For your information, we as well have compiled a comprehensive list that will be provided to you shortly.

Now is the time to act and act wisely. We must move out of this endless "do loop" we are stuck in. More schools don't need to be assessed to see where they stand against Mt. Hebron. Rather, there is enough information to decide the best course of action. Decisions must be made this budget cycle as to what to do about Mt. Hebron. The community has waited long enough. The reports have repeatedly identified deficiencies and problems. For example, findings in the April 2006 were re-affirmed in June 2007 Gilbert Assessment Report. We know what is wrong with Mt. Hebron and now is the time to devise new solutions.

Any solution, however, must address all of Mt. Hebron's problems. It is clear from the comprehensive list that the Department's proposed option 2B is woefully inadequate and unacceptable to the community. Option 2B leaves too many problems to fester and is an ineffective expenditure of our tax dollars.

Instead, what are required are comprehensive solutions, not the previous piecemeal approach that remains the preference of the Department of Education. What must be done? Simply,

- Safety issues and code violations must be eliminated.
- Educational/Academic shortcomings and deficiencies must be resolved.
- The building's environment must be improved to a Howard County standard.

What form will the solution take? Be it a massive renovation that is carefully planned and coordinated or a replacement school, Mt. Hebron's solution needs to work for 30+ years. If any problem remains unaddressed, the Board and the community need to fully understand and publicly state the consequences and the costs of forgoing action. All costs, even the costs of inaction need to be publicly and fully disclosed.

The Help Mt. Hebron Committee has repeatedly partnered with the Department of Education, the Board of Education, the County Executive and the County Council to ensure that this process and Mt. Hebron's solutions are well thought out, complete and long lasting. We are here to continue to speak on the community's needs and ask questions.

The goodwill we've established is undermined if the Department again recommends option 2B. The community will question why, when even more problems are uncovered, the Department continues to leave them out of their solution. Option 2B is the wrong answer. Option 2B does not fully address basic health and safety standards or minimum academic standards and would not raise Mt. Hebron's overall rating vis-à-vis the CEFPI assessment tool to an upper Satisfactory category and certainly would not place us in the Excellent category. The community will continue to object to 2B.

Our hope is that together, through our continued collaboration and dialogue, a community-supported solution is developed. We must provide the County Executive and County Council with a full disclosure of Mt. Hebron's needs. No solution should censor or sweep deficiencies and problems under the rug for future government leaders to discover and deal with. The questions to answer are straightforward. What are all Mt. Hebron's deficiencies and problems? How will they all be resolved in the existing building? How does the total cost (including temporary costs incurred) of this massive renovation compare with that for a replacement school?

As always, we will look forward to working with the Board and the Department on behalf of the students, staff, and community of Mt. Hebron.

Sincerely,

Cindy Ardinger, Chair, Help Mt. Hebron Committee  
Linda Dombrowski, Vice Chair, Help Mt. Hebron Committee  
Tony Culler, President, MTH PTSA