

she wanted to be a part of this evening and (b) having a school Board member in the house to her is old hat, her mother is a school Board member at Har Shalom Congregation. So she now considers me part of being a two-fer. They have always been my secret weapons. My mother had planned to be here this evening also but weather considerations kept her in Harrisburg. I know she would have loved to share this event because I am following a family tradition. In 1961, I received my high school diploma from my uncle who was a member of the Board of Education in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

"My 82-year-old mother's influence will be with me in this new endeavor. I was raised by a single parent. My father died when I was two years old. So I can share some of the concerns felt by single parents and their children. But in my day, we didn't know we were considered a 'dysfunctional' family. In fact, there was always a strong parental involvement in my schooling.

"Likewise, I can identify with our multiple language households. My earliest recollections as a child was going to the corner grocery store with my grandfather, where he and his contemporaries and a precocious four-year-old, would hear tales about the old country and read the latest news from a New York Yiddish newspaper. My grandmother, whom I lived with, never spoke English at home. But that didn't stop her from making sure that her five children got a proper public education or that her grandson had books to read at an early age.

"Another influence will be that of my fourth grade teacher, Miss Mallaby at the Steel School in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. She was stern, strict and fair. And she created an atmosphere where students wanted to learn. Miss Mallaby never would have understood the term 'work to the rule.' In fact, in her classroom, it was the students who learned how to 'work by the ruler.' In her case, it was 18 inches long, but to a fourth grader it looked much larger!

"Of course, times were different then. But I think it's helpful every once in a while to remember where we came from and to examine the similarities of past experiences with the conditions we face today.

"I know that contemporary America is more complex than American life in the 1950's. That complexity has led to a call for change in the way we deliver public education. It is probably why earlier this year, the 50-year-old president of Yale University, Dr. Benno Schmidt, resigned to accept a new challenge: developing a nationwide system of private schools aimed at introducing new approaches to education, including the integration of technology into curriculum. He is joining a growing chorus of those who believe that we need a revolution in elementary and secondary education in America.

December 1, 1992

"In Montgomery County we are fortunate in having one of the premier public school systems in the country. For us it is not a revolution but evolution. But even in Montgomery County, the winds of change are blowing.

"As with any fundamental change, some are frightened by the prospect of altering the systems and relationships that have been developed. But we in Montgomery County can't be afraid to change, we must become partners in the evolution.

"All of us here share a common vision of an excellent, innovative educational opportunity in a public school environment where students, parents and teachers make a difference. Our challenge is to fulfill that vision for a student body that is changing and with limited rather than limitless resources. I am eager to be a participant in the opportunities that change will introduce. Thank you."

Re: STATEMENT BY MRS. GORDON

Mrs. Gordon made the following statement:

"As I begin my tenure as a Board member, I must look back and share my excitement and pride with many of you: my parents, you taught me the value of hard work, public service and that nothing is impossible if you work hard enough; my husband, Steve, you supported and encouraged me for the last 23 years and you never once said, 'don't or can't or shouldn't' though you have questioned my sanity quite a few times; my daughters Christina and Lisa who struggled with your mother always being around and yet not being there for just you, you have grown into caring and responsible young women. I love all of you. To the friends in the Tamarack community who welcomed me many years ago, to my colleagues and friends at Page Elementary who understand the value of a true parent-teacher partnership, to the Paint Branch PTA presidents and principals who dedicated long hours for the good of our children, to the members of MCCPTA who work tirelessly for education in Montgomery County -- thank you.

"The last two years have been a whirlwind of activity and emotion and I would not have gotten through it without the unquestioning support of Al Shanefelter, Miriam Rappoport, Mary Ann Bowen and Phyllis Feldman. To all of you who worked so diligently on the campaign, you share this victory with me. I promise to represent you well.

"To Sharon, thank you for being a Board member who always understood that the Board's first priority is the children of Montgomery County. Good luck to you in your future endeavors. I look forward to working with my fellow Board members, the Board staff and continuing to work with Dr. Vance and MCPS staff.

"In his speech before EDPAC, Mr. Roscoe Nix issued this challenge 'to become the catalyst for radical, fundamental, educational changes that will benefit not only our community but also can become a national model.' I believe this is the greatest challenge that we face as we move into the twenty-first century. Change is inevitable. Change is often difficult. It leads to uncertainty and most of us would rather plod along with what we know than to venture into an arena where failure seems a real possibility and success is only a dream. We cannot, however, be content with the way it has always been lest we fall into the regrets of what might have been. That would surely short change our children. The children we teach today must be prepared to live in the world of tomorrow. We must give them the thirst for knowledge and the understanding to explore and question, to make good decisions and wise choices. These are skills that will enable students to be leaders in an ever-changing global society.

"Montgomery County has always had educational excellence as its goal, and shrinking resources and changing demographics should not be excuses for anything less. We must change and we will, the challenge--to become a model for excellence. For the children of Montgomery County, we cannot accept less."

Re: STATEMENT BY MR. EWING

Mr. Ewing made the following statement:

"It is appropriate to begin with thanks. And first of all, I am most grateful to my two sons, who are graduates of Montgomery County Public Schools and who love education, and who are teachers. One of them is here tonight, and the other one is too far away. They encourage me and they inspire me. I am grateful also to the 170 thousand plus citizens who voted for me, and therefore made it possible for me to be here tonight. I am grateful to the people who did not vote for me, for not being any more numerous. I am also grateful for their effort to keep me humble. I hope it works. I am grateful to the hundreds of volunteers who worked for my election, cheerful even in the face of a less than perfect campaign organization. I have often said that school Board campaigns are ramshackle at best, and I think that is true.

"Finally, I have a friend who is my campaign treasurer, who unaccountably also was willing and able to manage the campaign, insofar as it was managed, and who did all this with joy and generosity. Wil Friedman is a wonder. Thanks, Wil.

"Montgomery County, and America, are at a crossroads in education today. Here, in the county, we can choose to make wise, prudent investment in the talents of our people, and sustain the excellent educational enterprise we have created over many long years; or, we can choose to diminish it, with reduction after

reduction, until the school system succumbs, as so many have across the nation, to mediocrity, to failure, to death through a thousand small and large cuts. Across the nation, savage reductions are being taken in school system budgets, condemning literally millions of children to an inferior education that will not allow them to compete and win in tomorrow's economy, nor will it allow them to become informed, effective citizens, nor will they be enabled to understand fully and in their leisure time enjoy the arts, literature, science. Civilization, in the sense of a civil and cultured society of human beings who share a broad range of common values, will be diminished. These results though already before us in some degree are not inevitable. There is time still to save ourselves and our children, but there is not much time, and I think some evidence that there is not enough will.

"Far too many of us are prepared to settle for less, because far too many of those in positions of power, in elective office, tell us that there is a serious fiscal crisis which obliges all of us to reduce costs, to be efficient, to take reductions. We are told all too often that these reductions in the budget for education are justified because everyone is suffering reductions, in the public sector and in private business; are acceptable because teachers and administrators are overpaid, will only eliminate frills and unnecessary expenditures; and finally, and worse yet, we are told that the public does not want to pay any more, in the form of any higher taxes, for education, and that that settles the matter. And worst of all, the Board of Education is often told that it is its job to be satisfied with whatever it is that it receives, and that the Board should publicly proclaim that whatever it gets is not merely adequate, but will permit the school system to continue to offer an excellent educational program regardless. I don't believe that, and I don't think you believe that. And certainly the general public does not fall for that sort of transparent nonsense, whose purpose it is to get the Board to take others off the hook for bad decisions.

"Indeed, there are precious few who take it to be their responsibility to lead the public to a larger understanding of the enormous importance, the urgent priority of education in today's America. If there were more who were willing to speak up for children, for their educational needs, and for the resources needed to meet those needs, the public, I believe, would listen. America's citizens, this county's citizens, are not fools. But in the absence of inspired leadership, they may not perceive their own true interests.

"I submit that now is not the time for us to give in or give up, or to conclude blindly and despite the evidence before our eyes, like Dr. Pangloss, that 'all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds.'

"Now is the time, instead, to continue to spell out needs, to make clear the negative impact of further reductions in budgets, to argue powerfully for the priority of educational expenditures, and to urge that the dollars be found to sustain and enhance this school system.

"Some have said that the election results do not support my view, that they are a mandate instead for conservatism, for cutbacks, for make-do policies, for being satisfied to manage on less, for being willing to accept a decline in quality. With regard to election returns since we do not have access to every citizen's views or his or her mechanisms for making up their minds, we are left with a situation like that in Alice in Wonderland where the election, in the case of Alice it was a word, mean exactly what I say they mean and no more and no less. And so my interpretation is as valid as the editor of the Journal or the editor of the Gazette, or anybody else. So I offer you my interpretation. I am an outspoken believer that the public understands what it does when it goes into the voting booth. And I think that the fact is that I got 67 percent of the votes, and I think people knew what they were doing. I think that that means that my views are clear to the public and that they chose to vote for me because they wanted me to continue to do the kind of thing I have been doing. They knew enough about my views for me to say if you don't agree with me, 'vote for somebody else.' I am an outspoken believer, too, that it is important to give public education the very highest priority. I am a fervent supporter of all-day kindergarten and of better early childhood programs. I am a supporter of our teaching and support staff and of good salaries for them. I am an unreconstructed supporter of racial and ethnic integration in the public schools. I believe in providing special help to those who need it most -- to the poor, to the educationally disadvantaged, to those with disabilities, to those whose native language is not English. I have high aspirations for and high expectations of every student and every teacher. I don't hide my views. I proclaim them. I am what I am. In the election just held I carried every precinct in the county. So it is no accident that I am here tonight. And I will continue to pursue what I believe to be right for the education of children in the next four years.

"Let me speak candidly to you tonight of my deepest worry about public education. If budget cuts continue this year and the next year and the next and so on into the future, there is great danger, danger that goes far beyond the loss in educational quality for every child. The danger is that the social fabric, always fragile even in our great nation, may be seriously rent. Let me explain.

"There is a pattern well known to many of us, perhaps to all of us, in large urban areas that we must not allow ourselves to replicate. As areas become increasingly urban, they become

increasingly poor and the proportion of minority residents - and students - increases. As the proportion of minority students increases, there have been many in urban areas who have not found the will, not found it in their hearts, to continue to support public education with their tax dollars. As the middle class sees funding reductions for education and a real or prospective decline in quality that has followed, the middle class either leaves -- moves to more distant suburbs or places its children in private schools -- or becomes disenchanted and alienated from its schools. Many may not be able to escape, and so, with literally no place to go, they stay but they feel trapped, they become resentful, they become embittered.

"Witness Boston, or New York, or Chicago. And there are countless other examples. The decline of public education has become the bankruptcy of public education in far too many places, and the pattern repeats itself.

"Montgomery County has rejected actions that would have taken us down this road, until now, and we must not let that happen here.

"I take it as my task, I hope it will be the Board's task as well, to speak out for the needs of children, to ask not always for what is affordable, but for what is necessary if children are to be educated appropriately and effectively, if unmet needs are to be addressed. And there is a long and now lengthening list of unmet needs. I will not go through that list. Those of you in this room, I think, know it and, I think, are aware that there are major problems beginning to emerge in public schools.

"It is essential that we speak to the concerns of parents and of all citizens about education. And I take that as one of my tasks as well over the next four years. I believe the school system must inspire in the middle class the confidence that we can and will meet the needs of their children. I think that we must ensure that the increasing number of students who come from poverty-stricken homes and those who are ill-prepared are given the extra help they need. The litmus test of a decent and a just society is what is done for those most in need. It is a special mark of Montgomery County's history over the last several decades that it has been willing, almost always, to meet that test.

"We must also speak to the concerns of citizens at large. We must meet their need for much greater certainty that the dollars they entrust to us are effectively and efficiently spent. Greater accountability for results is not merely desirable. It is the great sine quo non for the public's willingness to continue to support public education through taxes. We must make clear what we are doing and why, for whom, at what cost and with what results. That is the basis on which we can build increased public support. People want to know and have a right to know how well their tax dollars are being spent. If we do not speak to

December 1, 1992

this issue more effectively than in the past, others will declare that the school system does not have an interest in accountability.

"With regard to accountability, it is also important to speak to the criticisms of the school system when those are unfair or inaccurate. There are those who have served on the Board who have not thought it dignified to engage unfair critics in debate. I am less concerned about dignity than I am about making sure the record is straight. In these difficult times, the arguments about levels of funding or programs need to be made honestly. If the critics make inaccurate or unfair statements, they need to be corrected, and they need to be corrected publicly and promptly. I plan to do that.

"At the Board table, I have sometimes talked about passion -- about the need to commit oneself passionately to the urgent business of education. This sometimes seems to embarrass or amuse people. But I am serious about this passion, this need to see education as a major priority, and not just a routine service that is somehow like garbage collection, something that one could do less often with no real inconvenience. On the contrary, public education is central to American democracy, to our success as a nation, to the development of citizens who, through the experience of diversity, achieve tolerance and understanding. It ought to be a passion with all of us.

"I don't want to end my comments without saying that yesterday when asked to speak, I spoke for about three minutes and someone said to me, 'you just disproved what everybody has always said about you that you could never talk for less than 10 minutes at a time.' I have given some contrary evidence tonight. I want also to say that I wish Sharon DiFonzo and Cathy Hobbs well. We have had some lively debates, some vigorous disagreements, but we have shared a common purpose, and I have enjoyed working with them even when we have disagreed. And I wish them well.

"I am happy to be here tonight, and grateful to the citizens of Montgomery County and to all of you who came. Thank you very much."

Re: PRESENTATION TO MRS. DiFONZO

Dr. Cheung and Dr. Vance presented Mrs. DiFonzo with an album of photographs from her eight years on the Board of Education.

Re: STATEMENT BY MRS. DiFONZO

Mrs. DiFonzo made the following statement:

"The challenge in writing this speech was not what to say, but rather what not to say. I have been knocking around the school

system now for 23 years, far, far longer than the mere eight I have sat on the Board. So the memories are many; the observations varied, but the time to reflect, short.

"I would like to begin by thanking all those whose have aided and abetted, helped, encouraged, supported, and educated me over the years. I am going to avoid naming names, titles, or offices because surely someone will be overlooked. You all know who you are. Your assistance, your guidance, your patience in helping me to learn and to become a better Board member have been invaluable. I hope you feel as though you have received a positive return on your investment.

"Secondly, I must thank my family. Two of my sons, Danny and David are here, and I would like them to stand up. My husband is in Phoenix as he has been for the past two and a half years, and my youngest son decided that the Maryland game was far more important than a mere official function. So he is off at Maryland cheering for the Terps. My sons first supported my candidacy - Danny, David, and Michael - and then hung in there with me through good times and bad. They knew when to stick around when I needed bolstering and when to vacate the premises rather than have me hand them their heads. Of course my husband Dan who has always been there in spirit, if not in the flesh. Without them, I would not have been able to survive.

"I will miss being a member of the Board, but I won't miss Board meetings especially the ones that run hours and hours over schedule and last interminably into the wee small hours of the morning. I will not miss the daily delivery of red rope folders, but I will miss knowing what is in them. I will miss the excitement and anxiety of never knowing who or what problem is on the other end of a ringing phone. I will not miss the incessant calls and interruptions when some community, cause, or group decides to conduct a telephone campaign. Most of all I will miss the many, many friends I have made, not only in MCPS and the community, but indeed around the country.

"Then there are those little things I will always remember - the bets that were made and usually lost by someone stupid enough to bet with me. My wallet has autograph dollar bills in it from those who wagered and lost. My liquor cabinet is full for the same reason. I will always remember Airlie House, the mouse who shared my accommodations. The poker game with the superintendent, executive staff, and the student Board member all of whom shall go unnamed -- I won that night, too. Harbour Town, the parking garage in Jackson, Mississippi. The Green Parrot, the Solidarity, catering carts clattering around hotel corridors at 3 a.m. Hot tubs and electrical storms. The list goes on and on.

"And then there are those things I can never forget. The night the Board was almost crushed to death right here in this room by an angry, shoving mob of union people. The first death threat made against me. As well as the only times I had to be escorted by armed, uniform Montgomery County police for my own safety and protection.

"Being a Board member in Montgomery County means becoming public property. No hour of the day or night is sacred. I have received phone calls as early as 6 a.m. and as late as 2:30 a.m. There was once one that came at 4 a.m. I still haven't decided whether that one was early or late. No trip to church, the supermarket, the pool, the Kennedy Center, or any social function is safe from someone lobbying. I will never forget some years ago when the Board had before it a recommendation to change the boundaries between Wootton and Richard Montgomery. I was in Hamilton, Bermuda looking at china in one of the large department stores when a woman came up to me and said, 'Excuse me, aren't you Sharon DiFonzo.' I assured her I was so she continued, 'well my name is so-and-so and I am a Ritchie Park parent, and we are very concerned about it.' So Steve and Bea, nowhere is truly safe.

"The mail the Board gets I will miss. It ranges from wonderful to wacky to wild. One letter I will always cherish was from a second grader at New Hampshire Estates Elementary who loved grilled cheese sandwiches and always bought his lunch when grilled cheese sandwiches were on the menu. He was writing to us to complain that the grilled cheese sandwiches weren't grilled, and he informed us he hated plain cheese sandwiches and could we please do something about grilling the grilled cheeses. We never heard from him again, so I guess his problem was solved. Another letter was from a child who was telling us his parents had bought their home in a particular neighborhood so he could go to a particular school and now we were going to change the boundaries. 'Don't do it,' he urged because he really wanted to go to that school. It was signed Jeremy so-and-so, nine months old. Definitely someone who was bound for the gifted and talented program. In the category of you just can't please everybody we once got a letter from a woman in Omaha who was relocating to the area and wanted a letter of guarantee that if she moved into the county her child would never ever under any circumstances have to ride a school bus. She wanted her kid to walk to elementary, middle, and high schools. I have often wondered where in the Washington area she moved. Then just recently we got a letter from a woman who wanted her granddaughter bused. She went on, 'in this day and age no child should have to walk to school.' My favorite of all time came about two weeks ago. Once again the issue was a boundary change and the parent wrote rather irately, 'where do you think you get the authority to tell my child where he will go to school.'

"I will not speak tonight of accomplishments, achievements, or contributions. Those are for others to observe and history to decide. Now it is time to look ahead, and in looking ahead I need to look briefly back. The first decade of my life I spent being a kid. The second decade I spent having and rearing my own kids. The third working as a volunteer with other people's kids and most of the fourth as a Board member also for kids. Now I enter my next decade not knowing what the future has in store. To lay some rumors, fears, or hopes to rest, depending on your point of view, I want to make it perfectly clear that I have no interest in or intent in running for a seat on the County Council. I also know I will not be content to stay home and bake chocolate chip cookies and scrub the kitchen floor. When I shared that with my husband he said, 'hell you never did stay home, make chocolate chip cookies, and scrub the kitchen floor. Why start now?' I am looking forward to having the time once again to entertain, to catch up on my trash novel reading, to indulge my interest in and penchant for crocheting, needlework, crafts, and to travel.

"I would like to leave you with a few thoughts on lessons I have learned, conclusions I have drawn, and observations I have made during my eight years on the Board. Number one, I am convinced that being involved in public education had to have been a lot easier when children were considered blessings and not accomplishments. Two, parents in Montgomery County are constitutionally incapable of telling you what they want until they first tell you what they do. Three, for God so loved the world that he did not send a committee of the whole. Four, having power does not mean having wisdom. Five, having spent 18 months almost non-stop, day in and day out, being preoccupied with the budget is no guarantee that folks will know what EYE stands for or fixed charges are. Six, I have absolutely no patience for picking gnat-shit out of pepper. Seven, a wise woman knows when to lead, when to follow, and when to get the hell out of the way.

"The past eight years have been a roller coaster, but it has been a helluva good ride, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have climbed on board. Someone once said, 'memories were made so that we might have roses in December.' I have enough memories to give me a lifetime of roses. Thank you all, and God bless."

Re: STATEMENT FROM MRS. HOBBS

On behalf of Mrs. Hobbs, Mr. Sims read the following statement:

"In four years of public service on the Montgomery County Board of Education, I have been provided with a once in a lifetime opportunity. It takes the dedication and energy of many people to educate children successfully. Here in Montgomery County we are fortunate to have parents who are actively involved in their

child's education, school employees who touch the lives of children with care and tenderness, business people who want to give public education a helping hand, and students who are eager to learn and want to excel. It takes all of us to help a child succeed.

"I feel very honored to have had the opportunity to be directly involved in decisions affecting public education in this county. I am proud of what this Board has accomplished. I am proud to have been associated with the more than 14,000 school employees who work hard and long hours to see that students receive the supports and encouragement they need to be productive learners.

"Thank you, Tom, Melissa, Mary Lou, Lois, Gail, Beldina, Bev and Roz. Thank you, Paul, Marie, Juanita, Martha, Kathy, and Hazel. Thank you, Phil, Kathy, Hiawatha, Phinnize, Joe, Elfreda, Carole, and Brian. And last, but not least, thank you, Sharon, Blair, Alan, Carol, Fran, Ana, and Jon. Congratulations, Bea and Steve. A new Board brings new direction and new horizons. So here's wishing you rainbows."

Re: REMARKS BY BOARD MEMBERS AND
SUPERINTENDENT

Board members and Dr. Vance welcomed the newly installed Board members and thanking the outgoing members for their years of service.

Re: ADJOURNMENT

The vice president adjourned the meeting at 9:25 p.m. to a reception for new and outgoing Board members.

VICE PRESIDENT

SECRETARY

PLV:mlw