

APPROVED
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Rockville, Maryland
December 2, 1996

The Board of Education of Montgomery County met in special session at the Carver Educational Services Center, Rockville, Maryland, on Monday, December 2, 1996, at 8:15 p.m.

ROLL CALL Present: Ms. Ana Sol Gutiérrez, President
 in the Chair
 Mr. Stephen Abrams
 Dr. Alan Cheung
 Mr. Blair G. Ewing
 Mr. Reginald M. Felton
 Mrs. Beatrice B. Gordon
 Mrs. Nancy J. King
 Ms. Mona M. Signer, Board Member-Elect
 Ms. Rachel A. Prager
 Dr. Paul L. Vance, Secretary/Treasurer

Absent: None

Ms. Molly Ruhl, Clerk of the Montgomery County Circuit Court administered the oath of office to Mr. Ewing, Mrs. Gordon, and Ms. Signer.

Re: **STATEMENT BY MR. EWING**

Mr. Ewing made the following statement:

“It is right, given the season of Thanksgiving, to begin with thanks. To my wife, Marty, I am especially grateful, since she listens to my accounts of the public schools in action and gives me her good advice and wise counsel. Furthermore, she is patient and understanding about the demands this position places on me, on her, and on us. I also want to thank my two sons, both products of MCPS, for their unwavering support for my commitment to service on the Board, and for their youthful efforts not always altogether happily preformed in distributing campaign literature. I am thankful that Wil Friedman, my longtime treasurer and close confidante, has once again served in that role effectively, although this time the work was slight. I am very happy to give my thanks to all those who toyed with the idea of running against me, and dropped the idea. And, I am thankful for the 160,000-plus people who took the trouble to vote for me, even though I had no opponent. I will leave to others speculation as to why other people did not vote for me even though they had the opportunity.

I have now completed two decades on the Board of Education, which is a record in the county. But it is not my longevity that I care about. Rather, I am proud of the accomplishments of this school system over the past 20 years, and pleased that I played a role in many of them. I will not list all of the ones I think are significant, but they certainly add up in my judgement to a very substantial record of accomplishment, not by me, but by the Board, by the superintendent, and by the system as a whole.

We have created and maintained an excellent school system in Montgomery County. By almost any measure, local, state or national, we rank very high. Some judgments about that are made on the basis of objective criteria, some just on the basis of opinion. But some objective data can certainly be cited. At this point, in 1996, over half of our high school students are enrolled in honors or advanced placement courses. Not only are they enrolled, of the thousands of students who took AP tests, 82% received scores of 3 or higher, a remarkable accomplishment. Seventy-two per cent of ninth graders have completed Algebra 1, again a remarkable achievement. Seventy-five per cent of our students took the SAT, and county students obtained an average score of 1088, the highest of any system in Maryland, and among the highest in the nation. The rumors of the decline of the school system are just that rumors. We have done that in a period in which the composition of the student body has changed dramatically. Twenty years ago when I went on the Board, roughly 1 in 20 students was eligible for free and reduced price meals, which is the best measure the system has of student poverty. Today the ratio is 1 in 5, and closer to 1 in 4. Twenty years ago, we had few students whose native language was not English, and today we have thousands. We have more students whose native language is not English than all other jurisdictions in the State put together. Twenty years ago, the populations we called minority students, those other than white, were 12 percent of the student population, today they are 42 percent. Many in the community were sure that as we changed, the challenge that change presented would lead inevitably to steady deterioration in standards, outcomes on tests, and overall quality. The hard evidence is though is that has not happened, but rather that the reverse has happened. We have not merely hold our own, we have made gains.

All of us who are or have been associated with the system can and should take satisfaction, great pride in its accomplishments. But those who see clearly also know that there is much unfinished business, old issues that have still not been addressed, and new issues that urgently must be faced. Improvements, indeed, must continue, not only because they are possible, but more importantly because without continuous Improvement, the system will surely stagnate, and the deterioration that some have predicted was sure to occur will, indeed, come to pass.

The overarching concern for me as I begin this term in office is that on which the recent Future Search Conference focused: How will Montgomery County sustain and enhance the excellence of this system in the years to come?

I am deeply worried by the assumption that too many make that current levels of achievement can be sustained with lower levels of resource investment. I do not believe it. I think we have to continue to be efficient. I think we have to continue to look for savings. But, the factors of student enrollment growth, continuing inflation of all costs, and the requirement for Investment in improvements mean added expenditures for education. Without them we will surely begin to slide down that proverbial slippery slope into mediocrity. I assume, indeed, I know that no one wants that. But I also assume that some people will continue to deceive themselves about what it takes to maintain or enhance excellence and it is the job of the Board to make sure that people do not do that. They are not allowed to deceive themselves.

In response to the challenges we face, I have lots of ideas. I want to simply mention quickly five of them. One is to focus heavily and intensely on the quality of instruction and learning. Although we have done well, there is more to do. Secondly, we need to focus on very high expectations for all students. Thirdly, we need to repair and the enhancement of key managerial processes that have been damaged by budget cuts that make the system work efficiently and effectively. Fourth, I think we need to develop strategies needed to find the resources MCPS must have. And, finally, we have to implement a credible long-term strategic vision that compels broad support because it ties the quality of the education system to the interests of all in the community. I would like to spend a lot of time talking about each of these, but nobody wants to listen to all that tonight. Let me just talk about the first briefly — the quality of instruction and learning.

I have become convinced that a key to improved quality of Instruction and learning is a commitment to the proposition that students need to master content, work to clear standards, and be faced with tough exams. The conventional wisdom in many quarters, not necessarily here, is that skills for learning and content are mutually exclusive, and that skills are more important than content. I believe with E. D. Hirsch, Jr. who just published a second book on this general subject, that there is a core body of knowledge that every student ought to master, and that a high school diploma from any high school in the county should mean that that student has mastered that core body of knowledge. We prescribe that now in math and science to a very large degree. We do that with AP courses, the Blair magnet courses, and the IB courses. We now, in my judgment, need to extend that approach to social studies and to English in the middle and high schools, and to all Instruction in the elementary schools.

The reason for this approach is simple. Students cannot possibly learn to think critically, which we want them to do, unless they have something substantive to think about that they have learned. In this time of very great mobility, every school must offer a core body of knowledge. Otherwise, the mobile or many of them will be lost, and the educationally disadvantaged (the poor) will never pick up the basic skills they need to acquire the knowledge and the skills to master the tools of power and authority in this society. There is a practical reason, as well. There is research, cited in Hirsch's latest book, that shows there is a very high correlation between cultural literacy, that is the mastery of a core body of knowledge, and household income. The higher the level of literacy, the higher the household income. And, I might note by the way in case you wonder about who this guy Hirsch is, he is a professor of English at the University of Virginia. The approach that he suggests has been adopted in Calvert County, Maryland, and after its adoption, scores soared last year on state tests, moving the county from 12th to 6th in the State. There are other arguments to be made for this approach. I simply hope that the Board would give it very full consideration.

The other point I want to speak to just briefly is the repair and enhancement of key managerial processes, I mean by that the decision making about programs both academic and business operations, and also decision making about the people who work in the system.

The decision making about programs involves planning and research as a first step, implementation, evaluation and assessment of lessons learned, and development then of new plans with that becoming a continuous cycle of effort. An explicit commitment to such a process is needed.

There are elements of that in place in Montgomery County Public Schools, but there weaknesses, largely due to lack of staffing in the central office. The weaknesses in planning and research mean that there is enormous stress on the implementers who are not always given carefully developed plans to implement.

As for the decision making about people, there are also weaknesses. These processes involve selection, training, evaluation, retention, promotion, pay and benefits, and the effort to engage employees actively in the improvements of the system. We have difficulties to a greater or lesser degree throughout this whole process, some of which are being addressed now, but many of which still need much attention.

We must find the resources for sustaining and enhancing the quality. It will not happen unless we have more resources. We made a good step forward, in my judgment, with the capital budget that proposes to accelerate modernization and construction very dramatically. I would hope that the community would support that and the Council would adopt that approach.

Finally, I think of all these initiatives as fitting together within the context of a long-range strategic plan, which must begin with a vision that builds on past views about where we are and where we are heading, including in particular the Success for Every Student Plan, but building on that and broadening it. Making it more sweeping and more compelling in its argument for the steps needed to sustain and enhance excellence. It must be substantive. A strategic plan rests on a strategic planning process. The process is very important, but it is no substitute for substance. So, I hope as we move ahead we will avoid being caught in the snare of the joys of the process, and, in fact, focus as well on the substance of what we want to do and accomplish.

At the beginning of each of my six terms on the Board, I have sought to describe what I thought needed to be accomplished over the next four years. As I reviewed that, not all of it ever got done. Nothing happens as fast as I would like, and as many others would like. That's why I'm still here, because there is still so much to do. I look forward to a productive four years, and I look forward to working with my colleagues and people throughout the community in accomplishing still more things for the children of Montgomery County. Thank you."

Re: **STATEMENT BY MRS. GORDON**

The following statement was made by Mrs. Gordon:

“As I begin my second term as a Board member, I share my excitement and my pride with many of you, my family, my parents, my husband, Steve, and my daughters, Christina and Lisa. You have always encouraged and supported me. You taught me the importance of respect, of responsibility, of caring, of trustworthiness, fairness, and citizenship. Indeed, you have taught me that Character Counts! I love all of you. My friends in the Tamarack community, you welcomed me 20 years ago and reinforced the need for good citizenship. My colleagues and friends at Page Elementary demonstrated what it means to be truly caring human beings. The Paint Branch PTA presidents and principals exhibited fairness in dealing with diversity. The members of MCCPTA, MCPS teachers, support employees, and administrators respect individual differences. Business, civic, community members, and the voters of Montgomery County accept the responsibility of citizenship for electing officials who believe in good government. I thank all of you. I have heard your mandate -- and, indeed, character does counts!

The last year has been a whirlwind of activity and emotions, and I would not have gotten through it without the unwavering support of my family and Al Shanefelter, Tom Schmelzer, but most of all Mary Ann Bowen, and Phyllis Feldman. To the hundreds of supporters who worked so diligently on the campaign, you share this victory with me. My opponents in the primary, Claudia Horn, Sharon Constantine, Rob Yost, and Carmen Roman, each of them demonstrated their commitment to the children of Montgomery County. Their campaigns were based on issues and not personal attacks and they acted with respect and responsibility. I hope each of them will remain in support of public education. To Reggie, Nancy, Alan, Ana, Rachel, and Steve, you demonstrated fairness and responsibility throughout the campaign.

Steve, thank you for bringing humor to our often contentious Board meetings. I wish you, Judy, and the girls good luck in the future. Congratulations, Mona! I know you will work as diligently on the Board as you have in MCCPTA and during your campaign. I look forward to continuing to work with my fellow board members, with Dr. Vance, and staff.

Four years ago, I spoke of Mr. Roscoe Nix's challenge "to become the catalyst for radical, fundamental, educational changes that will benefit not only our community but also can become a national model." To become the catalyst for change takes leadership and character. Change is inevitable. Change is often difficult. It leads to uncertainty and some would rather plod along with the way it has been for 20 years than to venture into an arena where failure seems a real possibility and success is only a dream. Some use shrinking resources and changing demographics as excuses to merely stay the same.

Over the last four years we have made great strides in accepting change and, in fact, embracing it. We have not been content with the way it has always been. That surely would have short changed our children. We have begun many initiatives that are radical, fundamental changes, multi-year school and program-based budgets, the new budget review model which involves the broader community in the budget process, long-range and strategic planning which led to a shared vision for MCPS in the year 2020 through the Future Search, the infusion of technology to improve teaching and learning, higher

standards for students and greater accountability to parents and community, and meaningful partnerships with parents, business and other government officials.

Just last week, the Board embarked on the exciting educational opportunity of preferred choice for Paint Branch, Springbrook, and the Northeast high schools. Some have called this a poorly thought through experiment, the worst in 20 years. I believe, those who have vision see it as what Mr. Nix called "radical, fundamental change not only for our community but as a national model." It took leadership for Dr. Vance to recommend it, it took leadership for the Board to adopt it, and it will take leadership to make it work for our students.

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 curiosity to explore and question, the character to make good decisions and wise choices.

We must continue to exhibit the kind of leadership that will be a catalyst for change. We must be willing to make the difficult choices and unpopular decisions. We must be willing to model the integrity and character we want for our students. We must remember that Character Counts! We must be willing to KEEP CHILDREN FIRST. We must change and we will change. For all of the children of Montgomery County, we cannot accept less, and we will not in the future."

Re: **STATEMENT BY MS. SIGNER**

The following statement was made by Ms. Signer:

"I have many people to thank tonight. First, I want to thank Steve Abrams for his four years of service on the Board of Education, and I want to thank his wife, Judy, who Steve has said repeatedly graduates this year from PTA.

Second, I want to thank those of you who worked so hard on my campaign. I couldn't have done it without you! I particularly want to acknowledge two very special women: my campaign chair, Sharon Cox, and my treasurer, Luana Zimmerman. For nearly a year, we laughed and cried together, and mostly we wondered if the campaign would ever come to an end. They were the wind beneath my wings.

I also want to acknowledge all the PTA people in the audience tonight, not just because I count many of you among my friends and not just because so many of you supported my candidacy. I want to thank you for all the hard work you do every day on behalf of Montgomery County's children. I'm proud to be one of you!

And finally, I want to thank my husband, Rob McCann, and our children, Scott and Laura. No one ever had a more supportive family. They worked parade routes, they stuffed and stamped envelopes, and they spent the entire election day at polling places talking to voters. Of course, both kids believe that they are now socially doomed as a result of my election, and Scott in particular has announced that in four years -- just in case I decide

to run for reelection -- he intends to be enrolled at the University of Alaska. Rob's planning to go back to graduate school and join him! Actually, Rob is thrilled with my election. Tonight, he gave me a dozen long-stemmed red roses, and the card said, "Better you than me."

Many of you have heard me talk about the small town where I was raised -- Lakeland, Florida. If you hadn't heard of Lakeland before tonight, you should have because it is justifiably famous for a number of reasons. First of all, and I am not kidding, it's the Citrus Capital of the World! It has also produced a number of very famous people.

There's that well-known former Baltimore Oriole -- Boog Powell. Although Boog is older than I, I knew him because his brother -- Little Boog -- was a classmate of mine. Lakeland also produced the former United States Senator and current Florida Governor -- Lawton Chiles. The Chiles family and mine have been friends for as long as I can remember. I knew Lawton before he ever entered politics. The third famous Lakelander is CBS newscaster Forrest Sawyer, whom we all called by his middle initial Dee. Dee and I were in the same graduating class and I dated his older brother, Gary.

I don't have to tell you who my parents think is the most recently-made-famous Lakelander. They called tonight, and I am supposed to tell you that I owe everything I am tonight to my sainted mother. My campaign produced a great deal of excitement and my election was big news to the hometown folks, many of whom have known me my entire life, which my children are only too happy to point out is almost half a century!

The point of all this is that I was a very lucky child. Growing up in a small town was like having one big family. I was raised in a cocoon of security and love, not unlike Thornton Wilder's, *Our Town*. You and I know, however, that not all children are as fortunate. And so I want to share with you a verse that describes the challenges faced by today's children. It explains why we are here tonight and why I decided to run for the Board of Education. It was written by Ina Hughes:

We pray/accept responsibility for children
 who sneak Popsicles before supper,
 who erase holes in math workbooks,
 who can never find their shoes.

And we pray/accept responsibility for those
 who stare at photographers from behind barbed wire,
 who can't bound down the street in a new pair of sneakers,
 who never "counted potatoes,"
 who were born in places we wouldn't be caught dead,
 who never go to the circus,
 who live in an X-rated world.

We pray/accept responsibility for children
 who bring us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions,

who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money.

And we pray/accept responsibility for those
who never get dessert,
who have no safe blanket to drag behind them,
who watch their parents watch them die,
who can't find any bread to steal,
who don't have any rooms to clean up,
whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser,
and whose monsters are real.

We pray/accept responsibility for children
who spend all their allowance before Tuesday,
who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick at their food,
who like ghost stories,
who shove dirty clothes under the bed and never rinse out the tub,
who get visits from the tooth fairy,
who don't like to be kissed in front of the carpool,
who squirm in church or temple and scream in the phone,
whose tears we sometimes laugh at and whose smiles make us cry.

And we pray/accept responsibility for those
whose nightmares come in the daytime,
who will eat anything,
who have never seen a dentist,
who aren't spoiled by anybody,
who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep,
who live and move, but have no being.

We pray/accept responsibility for children
who want to be carried and for those who must,
for those we never give up on
and for those who don't get a second chance,
for those we smother and for those who will grab the hand
of anyone kind enough to offer it.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to offer my hand to all our children.

Re: **PRESENTATION TO MR. ABRAMS**

Ms. Gutiérrez presented Mr. Abrams with an album of photographs of his four years on the Board of Education.

Re: **STATEMENT BY MR. ABRAMS**

The following statement was made by Mr. Abrams:

“It did not really hit me until about 3 o’clock today that I was really leaving, and I was finally terminating my relationship with Montgomery County Public Schools. It hit me when I got a call from my daughter, Jennifer, saying, “Dad, I cannot access my e-mail on your computer because the modem is not responding.” The reason the modem was not responding was that the Montgomery County public school system in a true act of administrative efficiency had cut off my phone line.

I remember Lakeland, Florida, as the winter home of the Detroit Tigers. Just to let my successor know that she gets a pretty good grade on her remarks, but an incomplete on the full Lakeland description for those of us who were in the past, and hope to be in the future, avid sports fans.

This Saturday I attended a wonderful event, the 10th Reunion of Eastern Middle School’s Communication Arts Magnet Program, that my daughter, Jennifer, attended. I went as her guest, not as a Board member. That event really told me to a great extent why I have had such a passion for Montgomery County Public Schools and particularly our special programs. First, because of observing the joy of the past and present students who have been through that program, but also observing the talent of the Montgomery County Public Schools — our administrators and teachers in putting forward world class programs — made me absolutely delighted to have been a part of what is in my judgment the best public school system in the country.

When I sat here four years ago, I was thinking then — will I be able to do a 45-minute address to match Mr. Ewing’s. I have to commend Mr. Ewing that he cut it down to 25 minutes this year. So, there is progress. On your ninth term, Mr. Ewing, I expect a concise statement from you.

Election day made four women in Montgomery County extraordinarily happy — my opponent who won the seat; my wife, Judy, who got her phone line back; my daughter, Alissa, who said “been there, done that, and besides it now frees her up for politics without having to worry about competing with her father; and my daughter, Jennifer, who was totally relieved that she would not have to go through the same thing her sister went through, i.e., daddy handing her her diploma, particularly in the year that daddy threatened to launch his own beach ball from Richard Montgomery’s platform.

It has been a terrific four years. In fact, for me it has been a terrific 14 years being involved in community service in Montgomery County — 10 on the Rockville City Council and four here. It has given me a great deal more than I have been able to give back. But, it certainly has given me and my family a place in the community. We appreciate that. We appreciate all the experiences we have had and the opportunity our kids have been able to grow up with a same town community atmosphere in a large metropolitan county.

What lessons have I learned? I think there are three of them -- two of them personnel and one of them professional. The first personnel lesson was how to make four women happy which I have already gone into in detail. The second one is to be very, very careful from whom you accept unsolicited contributions to your county executive race. The third one

is just how good this public school system is, and what an effort it is worth to participate and make sure that that excellence comes. It is a resource to this community. It is value to our children. We are still turning out world class students here in Montgomery County despite the resource constraints, despite the demographic changes. We are still the reason people migrate to Montgomery County. I am totally confident that when people come back here four, eight, twelve, and even during Mr. Ewing's forty year, that they will be able to say that same thing.

I want to thank Don Beyers of the *Washington Post* and Barb Goffman and Stephanie Barrett from the *Montgomery Journal* for always providing fair, accurate and detailed coverage of Montgomery County Public Schools. I encourage them to continue doing that. It is important.

What am I going to miss? I am certainly going to miss those new chairs of ours. I looked forward to coming here and using them. I am also going miss the phone calls. In fact, the last four phone calls I received that really set the tone for it. It was after our 3 o'clock in the morning meeting on boundaries and CIP that I got home and turned on my answering machine. The first three messages were platitudes and thanks from the Darnestown community that made me feel sky high and made me consider whether I had a future in politics. Each left their name and phone number, but told me I did not have to return the calls. The fourth was an anonymous call from a Jones Lane parent reaffirming every reason that I should not have been reelected. But, I think that is fitting because it was a boundary dispute that first got me involved in Montgomery County Public Schools and there is no reason why a boundary dispute should not be the final act I participated in.

I remember saying when I was growing up that 50,000 Frenchmen cannot be wrong. I want to thank 100,000 Montgomery County voters that I do not think were wrong either, they just did not prevail. I also want to thank 115,000 Montgomery County voters who are giving me an opportunity to spend more time with my wife and family.

On a serious note, this Board will elect a president next week. I hope I am not being presumptuous by referring to President Felton, but I have a hunch you might be running unopposed. I hope that you are able to continue on with your objective and desire to streamline the processes and time this Board spends. This Board and Rockville were both opportunities for me to participate in my community as a part-time community service elected official. I believe that was what was intended for both the City Council in Rockville as well as the Board of Education in Montgomery County. The time demands that are placed on this Board need to be reviewed very thoroughly. Not so much for the seven people that are sitting up here, but for the need to continue to attract a diversity of skills, opinions, and perspectives in candidates in the future to continue to give the guidance to this school system. The Board of Education is exactly that, it is a board. It is a board of directors. There is a full-time superintendent who has the responsibility for administering the system. I am hopeful that under your leadership, Reggie, that, in fact, that process can be restored and that becomes the hallmark of the Felton Administration.

One final note, we talk about resource constraints in the school system. There is one we overlook — time. In particular, staff time here in the Montgomery County Public School system. I would urge my former colleagues and the new Board to be even cognizant of that. It is not a resource to be wasted. The strength of this school system is its parents, county commitment, but ultimately it is the quality and dedication of the staff of the system both in the classroom and throughout the administration. It is a resource to be used wisely.

Again, I want to thank all of you. I want to thank all of Montgomery County for giving me the privilege of serving. Mona, I wish you all the best in this seat.

Re: **REMARKS BY BOARD MEMBERS**

Board members welcomed the newly installed Board members, and thanked the outgoing member for his years of service.

Re: **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m. to a reception for new and outgoing Board members.

PRESIDENT

SECRETARY

PLV:gr

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SUMMARY SHEET
DECEMBER 2, 1996

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