



Hancock County Board of Education

"Schools: Where Everybody Is Somebody"

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To the Citizens of Hancock County –

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The Hancock County Board of Education is aware that our community, like all of America, is in trying economic times. During the 2008-09 school year alone, the Board experienced – in mid-year – reductions in state funding for education approaching almost \$1,000,000. These cuts followed, quite literally, years of progressive state reductions in support for education. The present school year budget is almost thirty percent (30%) less than it was when this Board was seated in 2003. Despite that, the District's schools are examples of solid schooling in Georgia. Last year, the Hancock County School District was one of only thirty-eight of Georgia's more than one hundred and eighty (180) school districts in which all schools made "Adequate Yearly Progress," and we have recently learned that all the District's schools did again this year. The administrators, faculty, parents and students of Hancock County have done an outstanding job of doing more with less.

In recognition of this hard work, the Board and administration have, whenever possible, attempted to absorb funding cuts without compromising the high level of instruction our children receive and without eliminating instructional programs or jobs. This has been tremendously difficult given that personnel costs constitute over eighty percent (80%) of the School District's budget. Last year, we deeply appreciated the Board's employees voluntarily accepting a furlough, which allowed us to complete the year without having to terminate employees.

In 2003, this Board learned that it was inheriting a \$2.6 million deficit, and we thought repaying this would be our greatest financial challenge. It was not. We begin the present school year with increasingly challenging financial news. First, approximately eighteen percent (18%) of 2009 local school taxes remain unpaid. Approximately forty percent (40%) of the District's budget comes from local property taxation. Virtually every dollar of local tax funding goes to pay locally-supported teachers, support staff, and extra-curricular student programs (like football, basketball and other sports). If everyone paid his or her taxes, the students of Hancock County would receive [5,394,602]. The District's budget is based on collecting ninety-two percent (92%) of all local taxes, or [92% of local taxes projected].

This is a far lesser percentage than many school boards in neighboring counties count on collecting. As of July 2009, the Hancock County Tax Commissioner's Office informs us that only eighty-two to eighty-three percent (85.5%) of county property owners paid their taxes, or [4,612,889]. In response, the Board made very difficult and challenging reductions to our 2009-10 budget.

On July 22, 2009, we received additional challenging news. The District received an emergency phone call from the Governor's Office, in which we learned that – effective immediately – all state funding for schools would be cut another three percent (3%), or approximately another \$150,000 for HCSD. In addition, the state imposed a three (3) day furlough on all school district employees – from bus drivers to the superintendent – and indicated that further furloughs might be coming this year. As a result, the Board must immediately reduce our budget for the current school year even further. These cuts are not easy to bear while keeping the District operational, and are perhaps best demonstrated by our taking the extraordinary step of temporarily closing the Hancock County School District Central Office and relocating all business operations to “spare” spaces in the schools to minimize operational and personnel costs. While this step will save approximately \$100,000 during the 2009-10 school year, it represents essentially the last non-personnel and non-instructional cuts the Board of Education can make.

During this trying time period, we ask that you do everything you can to support the District's employees and students. Please know that every Board employee working for your child's education has taken a significant pay cut. For those of you who have tightened your belts to pay your local school taxes, please know that we, the Board, greatly appreciate your sacrifice and remain pledged to continue being strong stewards of your money. For those of you who are attempting to pay your taxes now, please know that these tax dollars do not go to a giant state bureaucracy – they pay for your child's teachers, his football program, and her Spanish class. Without local support – both financial and non-financial – Hancock County Schools cannot continue to lead our region in student performance.

Despite these challenging times, we continue to be committed to the vision of the Hancock County School District being one of the state's premier public school districts. This is vital to the continuation of this county. When employers are questioned as to why they chose a location to place an industry and jobs, the presence of good schools and a well-educated workforce is always noted among their top considerations. This Board remains pledged to make Hancock County Schools among the best in the State of Georgia. We are well on our way, and must continue to persevere. Nothing less than the future of Hancock County is at stake.

Herbert Monroe, Chairman