

**PRINCIPAL ADVISORY COUNCIL & CONSTRUCTION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FOR DUNWOODY HIGH SCHOOL**

May 15, 2019

VIA EMAIL

Hon. Stan Jester – District 1
DeKalb County Board of Education
1701 Mountain Industrial Blvd.
Stone Mountain, Georgia 30083

Re: 41-Classroom Addition to Dunwoody High School

Dear Mr. Jester:

We are writing to you as the Principal Advisory Council (PAC) and the Construction Advisory Committee (CAC) for Dunwoody High School (DHS).

We have been informed that the e-SPLOST V projects are over budget, among other possible reasons, due to increases in the costs of labor and materials in the Atlanta area. We also understand that the latest projections of DeKalb County School District (DCSD) forecast DHS will have even more students than previously anticipated by prior projections. In light of these population forecasts and cost overruns, we understand that DCSD has returned to the DeKalb County Board of Education for approval of a modified e-SPLOST V project list, including funding for a 41-classroom addition to DHS. For the reasons discussed below, among others, we urge you to support the proposed 41-classroom addition to DHS.

While DHS has been overcrowded for many years and our administration has done a great job of “making it work,” the situation at the high school is reaching a breaking point and will only become worse as the population grows. Among other things, we have forty-three (43) classrooms that are being shared by teachers as well as twelve (12) teachers who float every day and have no permanent classroom either for themselves or to share with other teachers. This situation makes it extremely difficult for teachers to prepare their lessons and labs and to teach our students. In addition:

1. DHS has four (4) lunch periods with more than five hundred (500) students assigned to each period and will have five (5) lunch periods next year;
2. Students have to double up on seats in order to fit in the cafeteria during their lunch periods;
3. Equipment in the kitchen is at the end of its useful life and will need to be replaced;
4. DHS is completely out of office space with some of our administrators and staff currently having to use storage closets for their offices;
5. DHS does not have adequate storage space largely due to the unavoidable use of storage areas as offices;
6. DHS doesn't have enough meeting space for IEP, 504 and student/teacher meetings, a problem that is magnified at DHS in light of our extensive special needs program;

7. DHS already has three (3) modular units outside the school consisting of four classrooms each and we understand that two (2) similarly sized additional modular units will be installed this summer to accommodate growth this coming fall;
8. DHS is woefully short on space and facilities for its student-athletes to train;
9. DHS cheerleaders are forced to practice in the hallway because there is not sufficient space in the gymnasium, which is one of the smallest in DeKalb County;
10. DHS band is forced to practice in the hallway because we lack adequate space for them to practice;
11. DHS does not have a chorus or drama room;
12. The drama and chorus teachers use the concession stand as their shared office;
13. The condition of our practice/athletic field is atrocious. Over the last few years, we've had three (3) students tear their anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) due to unsafe conditions on that field;
14. The DHS student population is too large to fit in the gymnasium or auditorium and, therefore, the only place large enough to hold a pep rally or school-wide event is outside on the athletic field;
15. The existing design of DHS creates a heavy concentration of activity on one side of the building with much less activity in other areas. This results in an inefficient flow and unnecessary overcrowding of certain hallways and stairwells between classes and other high-traffic times and poses a significant danger in the event of a fire, fight or other emergency.

DHS is a neighborhood school shoehorned on 29 acres and built to house a maximum of 1,509 students. Despite those space and population limitations, DHS has 2,098 students during the current 2018-2019 school year, which means that it is now almost 600 students (40%) over capacity. Indeed, DHS already exceeds DCSD's previous projections for the 2022 school year. Based on DCSD's most recent (*i.e.*, November 29, 2018) projections, the high school is expected to house 2,348 students by the 2021 school year, 2,311 students by 2023 and 2,363 students by 2024. Assuming that those projections are accurate (rather than underestimated like many past projections), DHS will be more than 800 students (almost 54%) over capacity in 2023. Since construction of the 41-classroom addition at DHS is expected to be complete by the fall of 2022, that addition will provide much needed relief in the relatively near future and is not an option but a necessity.

As pertains solely to DHS, it appears that there are very limited options available to address our existing overcrowding problem and the additional overcrowding anticipated in the near future. As you know, the purpose of the PAC "is to bring parents, school employees, students and community members together to create a better understanding of and mutual respect for each other's perspectives and share ideas for increasing student achievement and performance." Accordingly, the PAC is little more than a liaison between DHS and various interest groups that can voice its ideas, concerns and recommendations. Similarly, the purpose of the CAC "is to increase stakeholder and community engagement in the design, planning, and construction phases of significant capital improvement projects" such as the addition to DHS. Neither the PAC nor the CAC have any power whatsoever to "decide" anything and neither has any legal authority to enforce its recommendations. That being the case, in evaluating options and reaching our conclusion to support the proposed 41-classroom addition, we have considered, among other things, a number of possible solutions discussed in the community, our understanding of whether or not

those solutions actually are in prospect, the time constraints we see based on current and projected student population versus the time we believe it would take to implement a particular solution, our perception of the political will for a particular solution, and our understanding (based on input that we have heard from others and our understanding of the results of meetings and surveys taken a number of years ago) of the wishes of our community. Among the spectrum of solutions we see or have heard as possible remedies are (i) redistricting of all of DeKalb County, (ii) redistricting Region 1, (iii) construction of a new high school in Region 1 and associated redistricting, (iv) making DHS cluster elementary schools grades K-4, creating a grade 5-6 academy, making Peachtree Charter Middle School (PCMS) grades 7-9 and making DHS grades 10-12, (v) construction of an addition to DHS, and (vi) some combination of (i)-(v).

Before discussing our views with respect to each of these six enumerated potential remedies, please understand that we believe that the population of the northern part of DeKalb County will continue to grow. Indeed, our observation of the extent and frequency of ongoing and currently planned construction in northern DeKalb County (*e.g.*, Brookhaven, Chamblee, Doraville, Dunwoody, etc.) and the metropolitan Atlanta area causes us to believe that even the latest DCSD projections will fall short of actual future enrollment. Consequently, we believe, long-term, it will be necessary to build a new high school in Region 1 or to redistrict the entire county, or that some solution beyond the contemplated addition to DHS will be required. We also believe that any further expansion of DHS beyond the 41 classrooms now proposed would be impossible and reckless in light of the fact that DHS is constrained by its 29 acre campus, which already is too small for the current enrollment of 2,098 students.

As to the two redistricting scenarios, we do not believe the political will currently exists at DCSD or the DeKalb County Board of Education to undertake and complete countywide redistricting within a timeframe sufficient to provide DHS with necessary relief. Of course, if DCSD and the Board were willing to do so, we recognize that immediate, limited redistricting within Region 1 could help relieve some of the overcrowding at DHS while our addition is under construction and might allow for an addition that is smaller and less expensive than the 41 proposed classrooms. However, we do not believe limited redistricting will entirely resolve DHS overcrowding and we feel an immediate addition of some size is absolutely necessary irrespective of any limited redistricting within Region 1. Moreover, when the option of redistricting previously was considered by our community, we understand the consensus favored having local children, particularly those that live within the boundaries of the City of Dunwoody, remain at DHS.

Concerning construction of a new high school in Region 1, we understand that DCSD does not yet own any land for such a project. Moreover, we are not aware that DCSD has the funding or bond approval to purchase such land and construct a new school. In addition, even if DCSD were to obtain approval for the acquisition of land and construction of a new Region 1 high school, our belief is the process to obtain such funding, then to find land and either negotiate a purchase with one or more willing sellers or complete judicial proceedings to condemn it from one or more unwilling sellers, then to design and construct such a new school and redistrict students to attend it, would take much longer than the projected time to complete (fall 2022) an addition at DHS. If such a new Region 1 high school were planned in lieu of (rather than in concert with) our DHS addition, we are concerned DHS will progressively get more and more overcrowded throughout what we anticipate will be about a decade-long process for building a new school. Accordingly, while we believe that such a new high school ultimately might be required, we do not see it as a viable substitute for an addition to DHS but rather as a parallel remedy to accommodate long-term growth.

The prospect of making Dunwoody cluster elementary schools grades K-4, creating a grade 5-6 academy, making Peachtree Charter Middle School grades 7-9 and making DHS grades 10-12 has some surface appeal, but we are concerned it is not a viable solution or cannot be accomplished within a

reasonable time frame. Among other things, the elementary schools in the DHS cluster are overcrowded and are projected to be even more overcrowded even after Austin Elementary School (Austin ES) is opened at its new location. Repurposing DHS cluster elementary schools as K-4 presumably would help relieve such elementary school overcrowding. However, even if an agreement could be reached with the City of Dunwoody (which now owns the old Austin ES land and facility), we understand extensive work would be required to renovate the old Austin ES building. Moreover, due to traffic and other concerns, we believe the City of Dunwoody and its residents might object to having two schools (*i.e.*, old and new Austin ES) in such close proximity. Further, we understand that the old Austin ES facility has a capacity of only 588 students. While we have not drilled into the elementary school numbers in great detail, we anticipate that a 5th – 6th grade academy would have to house almost double that capacity. We also have heard suggestions that such a 5th – 6th grade academy could be constructed on the site of the old Chamblee Middle School. While that certainly seems like a possibility since DCSD already owns that land, we are not aware any such project is being considered by DCSD or the Board or if funding exists for construction of a new school. If it is and does, please let us know. Preempting location, funding and construction challenges related to this option, we also are concerned that this alternative would create other issues. For example, even assuming the PCMS facility meets State and other guidelines to house 9th graders, we understand the administrators and/or teachers at a 7th – 9th grade PCMS would need to be appropriately certified for both middle and high school. In addition, a number of the 9th graders at DHS take 10th grade courses and we question whether and how that opportunity would remain available. Also, we question whether 9th graders at PCMS would have to use a block schedule in order to seamlessly transfer into DHS and we don't know whether it is viable for 7th - 8th graders to be on a year-long schedule while 9th graders under the same roof are on a block schedule. While it is not perfect, we believe the block schedule is beneficial to DHS students and their college admissions and would not want that jeopardized. In addition, 9th graders frequently are involved with sports, band and other extracurricular activities at DHS so, among other considerations, the beginning and end of the school day for 9th grade may need to coincide with that for DHS. Consequently, having 9th grade at PCMS instead of DHS would present both instructional and logistical challenges. While some of those challenges (*e.g.*, a bus or two for after-school transportation to DHS) might be easier to overcome, others (*e.g.*, instructional and certification issues, allowing 9th graders to take 10th grade classes, and issues related to busing if the 9th grade school day has to coincide with DHS) seem like they would be more difficult to overcome. In any event, we find it difficult to imagine that facilities for this option could be constructed and the other issues overcome and solutions implemented by fall of 2022, when the addition to DHS is scheduled to be completed. Thus, it seems construction of an addition at DHS has a greater chance of relieving DHS overcrowding than does this alternative.

As long as the DeKalb County Board of Education promptly approves the funding and scope, it is clear to our councils an addition at DHS has the best chance of providing overcrowding relief in the shortest time possible. Under the e-SPLOST V project timeline, the DHS addition is scheduled to be completed in September 2022. Frankly, we ask that it be completed by June 2022 so it can be used for the entire 2022-2023 school year. Also, all indications received from direct questions and communication with DCSD officials regarding the expansion indicate that this addition will address not just capacity, but also will address many long-standing issues with the function and flow of the school. Further, DCSD officials have said they will look to our principal and CAC to inform them as to the types of classrooms and facilities that are needed and they will give significant weight to those recommendations. We also understand there is no other way to address/fund these types of issues outside of an e-SPLOST investment. To the extent, if any, an addition is coupled with immediate (as in now), limited Region 1 redistricting, we see that as relevant only to the size of the addition (*e.g.*, the 41 classrooms now proposed, versus the 26 classrooms previously planned, versus some number of classrooms in between), not to whether a substantial addition is necessary and should be constructed at this time. To be clear, we firmly believe DHS is in need of an immediate addition no matter what is discussed or decided as far as

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other alternatives and, if DCSD and the Board are unwilling to implement an immediate (as in now – for the 2019-2020 school year), limited redistricting of Region 1 that would justify a smaller addition, then a 41-classroom addition is a better alternative than a smaller addition and the pie-in-the-sky prospect of future redistricting, future construction of a new high school or other solutions that cannot or will not be implemented as quickly.

We understand DCSD and the DeKalb County Board of Education have as their paramount concern the education of all DCSD children. The situation in which all of us now find ourselves is not ideal. Nevertheless, we have to face reality as it exists today. As the DHS PAC and CAC, we are looking for a solution that best serves the needs and education of DHS students, that can be completed in relatively timely fashion, and that actually is in prospect. We encourage DCSD and the Board to look for long-term solutions (including those described above) to a Region 1 population growth reality that we believe will not go away anytime soon and will not be completely resolved by a DHS addition. In light of the current and projected overcrowding and the inadequacy of existing facilities at DHS, and since we are not aware of any approved redistricting that will go into effect this coming 2019-2020 school year, we believe an immediate 41-classroom addition to DHS is in the best interest of the students and our school community and we urge you to support it now, even while you simultaneously consider other solutions for the long-term.

Sincerely,

DHS PAC – Priscilla Cole, Dave Levy, Bob Fiscella, Randi Siegel, Mary K. Morris, Lisa May, Ebony Greene & Kevin Dankosky

DHS CAC – Priscilla Cole, Dave Levy, Kelly Clinch, Randi Siegel, Louise Headland & Chad Griffith

cc: Dr. R. Stephen Green (via email)
Mr. Daniel Drake (via email)
Dr. Sherry Johnson (via email)
Dr. Michael A. Erwin, Board Chair (via email)
Mr. Marshall D. Orson, Board Vice Chair (via email)
Ms. Allyson Gevertz (via email)
Mrs. Vicki B. Turner (via email)
Mr. Dijon DaCosta (via email)
Dr. Joyce Morley (via email)