

Report of the Commission on Holmes-Durant Consolidated School District Structure

December 17, 2015

Report of the Commission on Holmes-Durant School District Structure

PREAMBLE:

House Bill 572 (Exhibit A), as enacted by the 2015 Session of the Mississippi Legislature, established the Commission on Holmes-Durant School District Structure to make recommendations to the 2016 Legislature regarding the method for consolidating Holmes county into one school district with one local school board.

Specifically, House Bill 572 tasked the Commission to “hold hearings and meet as necessary and develop a report to the Legislature, the Governor, and the State Board of Education on or before January 1, 2016, with recommendations to accomplish the following:

- a) Review the current structure of school districts and the location of schools in Durant, Mississippi, and Holmes County, Mississippi, and recommend how they can be consolidated into one (1) school district in order to improve both the quality of education and the efficiency at which it is delivered.
- b) Review the capital facility needs of both school districts and recommend methods of financing necessary improvements, including the possibility of pledging Mississippi Adequate Education Program funds for capital improvement purposes.
- c) Detail in the report how best to implement consolidation and make any other recommendations on how to maximize education quality in Durant and Holmes County while eliminating duplicative and wasteful administrative spending.

The Commission shall have the authority to raise and to expend nonstate funds. The State Department of Education shall provide staff and such other support as the Commission deems appropriate. After submitting its report on or before January 1, 2016, the Commission shall be dissolved.”

House Bill 572 defined the membership of the Commission. The individuals meeting the prescribed membership include the following:

- a) Mike Kent, Chairman of the Commission
- b) Dean and Rayford Horton, Holmes County School District Board members
- c) Johnson and Rena Pritchard, Durant Public School District Board members
- d) Powell Rucker, Superintendent of Holmes County School District and Edwin Robinson, Superintendent of Durant Public School District
- e) Tasha Davis, Mayor of the City of Durant
- f) James Young, President of the Holmes County Board of Supervisors
- g) Sarita Jackson, Parent of a Durant Public School District student

II. MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission held its first meeting on May 26, 2015, at the Mississippi Department of Education in Jackson, Mississippi. All of the duly appointed members, with the exception of

Superintendent Powell Rucker, appeared at this meeting along with several interested observers (Exhibit B).

The meeting followed the printed agenda (Exhibit C) and the minutes of the meeting are included in this report (Exhibit D). At this meeting, Chairman Mike Kent received correspondence from multiple Commission members. These letters, primarily from Durant area Commission members, expressed opposition to the proposed consolidation. (Exhibit E). In spite of that, the Commission, as a whole, agreed to continue meeting and to fulfill the requirements of House Bill 572.

Chairman Mike Kent received a second round of letters dated June 17, 2015 (Exhibit F). These letters more strongly voiced opposition to consolidation. These letters also challenged the need for any further action by the Commission.

The Commission held a second meeting on June 29, 2015, at the Mississippi Department of Education in Jackson, Mississippi. Commission members Tremaine Johnson and James Young did not attend. All other Commission members attended this meeting along with six (6) interested observers, including Senator Kenny Wayne Jones (Exhibit G).

Due to contention amongst Commission members, Chairman Kent deviated from the prepared agenda (Exhibit H) to address whether the Commission should continue to function as required by the legislation. The Commission members from the Durant area reiterated their vehement opposition to consolidation. They stated that consolidation offers no advantages to the Durant area and places a transportation burden on their residents. They voiced their belief that the Durant Public Schools were superior to the Holmes County District¹, and the loss of their school would have a devastating economic impact on the city of Durant. Chairman Kent explained that House Bill 572 requires public hearings and that MDE would conduct those hearings with or without the involvement of the entire Commission. After discussion, the Commission set dates and locations for two public hearings in Holmes County (Exhibit I).

III. PUBLIC HEARINGS

On August 17, 2015, The Commission on Holmes-Durant School District Structure conducted the first public hearing, at Durant High School, Durant, Mississippi. More than 125 people attended this hearing. (Exhibits J). The hearing followed the printed agenda (Exhibit K). Two citizens registered to speak (Exhibits L), both of whom expressed opposition to consolidation. MDE employed a court reporter to transcribe the proceedings (Exhibits M).

On August 20, 2015, the Commission held the second public hearing at Holmes Central High School in Lexington, Mississippi. The same agenda and pamphlet (Exhibits K) were handed out. Approximately 25 citizens attended this hearing, with 19 registering to speak (Exhibits N). The vast majority of comments were negative regarding consolidation; however, two public comments suggested that Holmes County could reap benefits if "it were handled correctly." A transcript of the August 20, 2015 proceeding is attached as (Exhibit O).

¹ Both Holmes County School District and Durant Public School District are rated "D."

IV. CAPITAL FACILITY NEEDS

According to lines 55 – 58 of House Bill 572, the Commission is required to “review the capital facility needs of both school districts and recommend methods of financing necessary improvements.”

The Commission discussed this task at the May 26th and June 17th meetings and decided to seek assistance from the School of Architecture at Mississippi State University. However, the School of Architecture could not meet the Commission’s timeline requirements. MDE subsequently employed Bailey Architectural Services to conduct the facilities survey (Exhibit P). Bailey Architectural Services conducted a rather exhaustive survey of the six (6) facilities located in the two existing districts.² Two of the school facilities in Holmes County are fairly new and will require relatively little in the way of repairs and/or upgrades. The remaining four buildings are older (40-50 years old), and need far more investment.

Any efforts to address construction, repair, and renovations will be hampered by three overriding factors:

1. Holmes County is generally an economically deprived area. The value of a mil in a newly Consolidated Holmes-Durant District would only be \$101,000. Under Miss. Code Ann. § 37-59-5, the newly consolidated district’s bonding capacity would be limited to approximately \$15,000,00.00.
2. Durant Public School District has been fairly conservative with administrative expenditures. Assuming the dissolution of the Durant administration and no growth in the Holmes County administration, there is likely only an annual savings of approximately \$300,000.
3. A newly consolidated district will struggle to reach consensus on priorities. Regionalism will play a huge role in how the district utilizes very limited resources.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Two distinct factions emerged within the Commission on Holmes-Durant School District Structure.

Commission members representing the Durant Public School District are firmly opposed to any school consolidation. They refuse to find any advantages for the citizenry of Durant and remain convinced the Durant children have nothing to gain from consolidation.

Commission members representing the Holmes County School District express some concern over consolidation, most notably over the fact that additional high school students from Durant might over crowd the current facility at Holmes Central High School. A secondary concern was that a Holmes-Durant consolidation would be coming on the heels of an internal consolidation of Holmes County’s three high schools into one Holmes County Central High School. *If* the Legislature would provide the necessary funds to construct a new high school, the Holmes County District appears in favor of consolidation.

² Five of the six facilities are located in Holmes County School District; one facility is located in Durant Public School District.

Recognizing that the Commission would be unable to reach consensus on the issue Commission Chairman Mike Kent asked each group to prepare a position paper. (Exhibit Q and F).

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Should the Mississippi Legislature decide to consolidate the Holmes County School District and the Durant Public School District, the Commission agreed on the following recommendations³:

1. The new Consolidated School District Board should be **ELECTED**
2. The existing county Board of Supervisor district lines to be **CONGRUENT** with the new Consolidated School District Board lines.
3. The new Superintendent for the Consolidated School District should be by county-wide **ELECTION**.

³ Based on experience with prior consolidations, the Mississippi Department of Education, by and through Chairman Mike Kent, offers the following recommendations: 1) The new Consolidated School District Board should be **ELECTED**; 2) The existing county Board of Supervisor district lines to be **CONGRUENT** with the new Consolidated School District Board lines; 3) The new Superintendent for the new Consolidated School District should be **APPOINTED** by the new consolidated district Board ; 4) The newly Consolidated School District Board shall conduct a legitimate search for a new superintendent. The Board shall employ a firm with experience in conducting school superintendent searches and MDE shall monitor the process; 5) The MDE will offer a suggested format for the transition of control from the current school boards to the newly elected Consolidated School District Board. This transition plan will place special emphasis on employment of school level personnel as well as a template for the new Consolidated District's control office structure. In addition, MDE will offer guidance on the merger of the two existing budgets, payroll structures, and other financial issues. The MDE will coordinate meetings with the county tax collector.

By: Representative Barker

To: Education

HOUSE BILL NO. 572
(As Sent to Governor)

1 AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A COMMISSION ON HOLMES-DURANT
2 CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT STRUCTURE TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO
3 THE 2016 REGULAR SESSION OF THE LEGISLATURE REGARDING THE METHOD
4 FOR CONSOLIDATING THE COUNTY INTO ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT WITH ONE
5 LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD; TO BRING FORWARD SECTION 37-7-103, MISSISSIPPI
6 CODE OF 1972, FOR PURPOSE OF POSSIBLE AMENDMENTS; TO AMEND SECTION
7 37-7-104.3, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO PROVIDE THAT THE SPECIAL
8 AD VALOREM TAXES LEVIED BY THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF OKTIBBEHA
9 COUNTY TO PAY THE PRINCIPAL AND INTEREST ON CERTAIN NOTES AND
10 BONDS ISSUED AFTER JULY 1, 2015, FOR EQUIPMENT AND SCHOOL FACILITY
11 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS IN THE FORMER OKTIBBEHA COUNTY SCHOOL
12 DISTRICT SHALL BE ON ALL TAXABLE PROPERTY OF THE NEW
13 STARKVILLE-OKTIBBEHA CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT; AND FOR RELATED
14 PURPOSES.

15 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

16 SECTION 1. (1) There is hereby created and established an
17 advisory council to be known as the Commission on Holmes-Durant
18 Consolidated School District Structure. It shall be the
19 responsibility of the Commission on Holmes-Durant Consolidated
20 School District Structure to review the current structure of the
21 school districts and schools in Durant, Mississippi, and in Holmes
22 County, Mississippi, and make recommendations on future actions of
23 the provision and transition of service of the newly consolidated
24 school district in order to improve both the quality of education



and the efficiency with which it is delivered. The commission shall be composed of ten (10) members as follows:

(a) The State Superintendent of Education, or his designee, who shall serve as Chairman of the Commission;

(b) Two (2) representatives of the Holmes County School District appointed by the Board of Education of the Holmes County School District and who may be members of the board;

(c) Two (2) representatives of the Durant Public School District to be appointed by the State Superintendent of Education who may be members of the school board;

(d) The Superintendents of Schools of the Holmes County School District and the Durant Public School District;

(e) The Mayor of the City of Durant, or his designee;

(f) One (1) member of the Holmes County Board of Supervisors; and

(g) One (1) member who shall be a parent of a student enrolled in the Durant Public School District to be appointed by the Mayor of Durant.

The Commission on Holmes-Durant Consolidated School District Structure shall meet within thirty (30) days of passage of this act upon the call of the State Superintendent of Education and shall hold hearings and meet as necessary and develop a report to the Legislature, the Governor and the State Board of Education on or before January 1, 2016, with recommendations to accomplish the following:



50 (a) Review the current structure of school districts
51 and the location of schools in Durant, Mississippi, and Holmes
52 County, Mississippi, and recommend how they can be consolidated
53 into one (1) school district in order to improve both the quality
54 of education and the efficiency at which it is delivered.

55 (b) Review the capital facility needs of both school
56 districts and recommend methods of financing necessary
57 improvements, including the possibility of pledging Mississippi
58 Adequate Education Program funds for capital improvement purposes.

59 (c) Detail in the report how best to implement
60 consolidation and make any other recommendations on how to
61 maximize education quality in Durant and Holmes County while
62 eliminating duplicative and wasteful administrative spending.

63 The commission shall have the authority to raise and to
64 expend nonstate funds. The State Department of Education shall
65 provide staff and such other support as the commission deems
66 appropriate. After submitting its report on or before January 1,
67 2016, the commission shall be dissolved.

68 **SECTION 2.** Section 37-7-103, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
69 brought forward as follows:

70 37-7-103. From and after July 1, 1987, the school board of
71 any school district shall have full jurisdiction, power and
72 authority, at any regular meeting thereof or at any special
73 meeting called for that purpose, to abolish such existing
74 district, or to reorganize, change or alter the boundaries of any



such district. In addition thereto, with the consent of the school board of the school district involved, the school board may add to such school district any part of the school district adjoining same, and with the consent of the school board of the school district involved, may detach territory from such school district and annex same to an adjoining district. Provided, however, that the consent of the school board of the school districts involved in implementing the provisions of **Section 37-7-104 or Section 37-7-104.2** or Section 37-7-104.3 shall not be required for the administrative consolidation of such school districts pursuant to the order of the State Board of Education.

SECTION 3. Section 37-7-104.3, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

37-7-104.3. (1) In Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, in which are located, as of January 1, 2013, two (2) school districts, there shall be an administrative consolidation of all of those school districts in the county into one (1) new countywide municipal separate school district to be designated as Starkville-Oktibbeha Consolidated School District which shall consist of the territory of the former Oktibbeha County School District and the Starkville School District, effective on July 1, 2015. Until June 30, 2015, preceding the effective date of the required administrative consolidation of school districts in the county, the Oktibbeha County School District shall remain in conservatorship, under the authority and control of the





MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Ensuring a bright future for every child

sign in
sheet -

Commission on Holmes/Durant Consolidated School District Structure

May 26, 2015

2:00 p.m. Suite 102

Name (please print)

District/Entity/Office

TASHA B DAVIS
Debra PRITCHARD
Santa Glover-Jackson
Maggie Prosser
James Young
Bryant Clark
RAYFORD HORTON
Termain Johnson
Debra Young
Debra Young
Kathi Wilson
Meredith Skyles
Louise S Tate
Jan Sellers
Jessie Williams
Christian Sturgis
Sharon Walters
Louise Wingo

City of Durant
DURANT Public
Durant Public
City of Durant
Superior Dist. 2 Holmes Co.
MS House of Reps Dist 47
Holmes Co. Board of Education
Durant Public School
Keyes Bryson & PIERA
Holmes County School District
Holmes County
Durant
Lexington Holmes School Bd
Lexington
Durant
Durant
Durant

EXHIBIT B



Commission on Holmes/Durant Consolidated School District Structure

May 26, 2015

2:00 p.m. Suite 102

Name (please print)

District/Entity/Office

William Dean
Ellen Reddy
Janice Harper
Lashia White

Holmes Co.
Holmes Co.



AGENDA

Commission on Holmes/Durant Consolidated School District Structure

May 26, 2015

Suite 102

- I. Introductions
- II. Review House Bill 572
- III. Typical HOT TOPICS
 - 1. Governance
 - 2. Location of central office, closing of buildings, closing schools, grade re-configuration
 - 3. Selection of superintendent, other staffing, personnel issues
 - 4. Funding, debt service
 - 5. Student transportation
- IV. How to Proceed. Action Items
 - 1. Public hearings (dates, locations,)
 - 2. Superintendents provide organizational structure, facility needs
 - 3.
 - 4.

Commission on Holmes/Durant Consolidated School District Structure
May 26, 2015
Mississippi Department of Education
Suite 102, 2:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Members Present:

Mike Kent, Interim Deputy Superintendent
Dr. Bill Welch, Director of Conservatorship and Safe and Orderly Schools

Guests:

William Dean, Jr., Holmes County Schools
James Young, Holmes County Board of Supervisors
Mayor Tasha Davis, Durant MS
Sarita Jackson, Parent Durant MS
Rena Pritchard, Durant Schools
Superintendent Louise Sanders-Tate, Durant Schools
Kathi Wilson Assistant Superintendent Holmes Co., Designee for Supt. Powell Rucker,
Holmes County Schools
Tremaine Johnson, Durant Schools
Rayford Horton, Holmes County Schools
Special Guest – Representative Bryant Clark

Staff:

Ms. Raina Lee, Assistant Attorney General
Joseph Runnels, Assistant Attorney General
Beebe Garrard, Assistant Attorney General
Heather Deaton, Assistant Attorney General
Erin Meyer, Assistant Attorney General
Delisa Jones, Office of Chief Operations
Jonathan Sanders, OTSS – Recorded Session

Welcome and Introductions – Mike Kent

Mr. Kent welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced himself as serving as State Superintendent Wright's designee chairperson. He then introduced the MDE Staff along with the invited Guest. He had the guest introduce those that were attending from their district areas.

Mr. Kent gave the purpose of the invited meeting as to get to know one another, the key components and the importance of working together. He gave insight on gaining perspective and

fulfilling the responsibilities of the law and gave pertinent points which were highlighted in handout House Bill 572.

Mr. Kent made a comment that Supt. Rucker had a last minute emergency and was unable to attend. Assistant Superintendent Kathi Wilson was attending in his place. He noted that substitutes for specific people on the commission needed to be discussed – the commission does not need different people attending the meetings.

Mr. Kent emphasized the following points:

1. The Commission is an advisory council with 3 specific responsibilities.
House Bill 572, page 2, a, b & c
2. The legislature is not required to adopt the Commission's report.
3. The Commission is required to hold "hearings" and develop a report that is due by January 1, 2016
4. MDE staff will seek an engineer or architect who can conduct an objective and unbiased review of the capitol facility needs of the two districts
5. HB 572 emphasizes efficiency and the elimination of duplication and wasteful spending
6. MDE staff advised the Commission that the following types are typical "HOT ISSUES" when considering consolidation
 - a. Governance – what does the board look like, how are they selected and how many, etc.
 - b. Selection of Superintendent and other staffing and personnel issues
 - c. Location of new central office, closing schools? grade reconfiguration
 - d. debt service, funding

The Commission engaged in thoughtful discussion for two hours and arrived at the following conclusions.

- I. Commission member spoke on the prospect of consolidation. Each member voiced absolute opposition to it.
- II. Commission members agreed to work collaboratively to write a report that would put the school children of Holmes County in the best possible scenario should consolidation occur.

in spite of their opposition,

The two superintendents were asked to bring copies of their organizational structure to the next meeting

The commission agreed to meet again on Monday, June 29, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. at MDE.

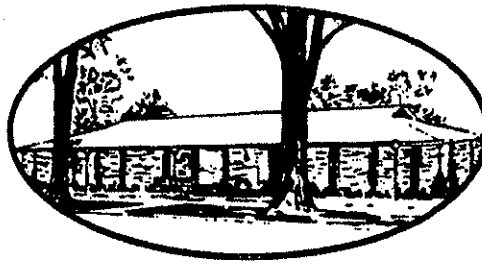
Phone: (662) 653-3221
Fax: (662) 653-6847

Tasha Davis
Mayor

Ursula Perry
City Clerk

Shannon Gallagher
Court Clerk

CITY OF DURANT



P. O. Box 272 • Durant, MS 39063-0272
Email: cityclerk@cityofdurant.org

Alderpersons
Ronnie Gladney
Linda McDonald
JoNell Payton
Leatha (Bo) Patterson
Dr. Henry Robinson, Jr.

John Haynes
Police Chief

Kelly Boyd
Fire Chief

May 26, 2015

Mr. Mike Kent, Chairman
Commission on Holmes-Durant
Consolidated School District Structure
Mississippi Department of Education
Central High School Building
350 North West Street
Jackson, Mississippi 39201

Dear Chairman Kent:

I am the Mayor of the City of Durant and pursuant to House Bill No. 572 I have been appointed to serve on the Commission on Holmes-Durant Consolidated School District Structure established by House Bill No. 572.

It is my recommendation that the best way to improve the quality of education and the efficiency with which it is delivered of the school districts in Holmes County and the City of Durant, Mississippi, is to NOT consolidate those school districts.

Respectfully,


TASHA DAVIS, MAYOR

EXHIBIT E

Mr. Mike Kent, Chairman
Commission on Holmes-Durant
Consolidated School District Structure
Mississippi Department of Education
Central High School Building
350 North West Street
Jackson, Mississippi 39201

May 26, 2015

Dear Chairman Kent:

I am the parent of a student enrolled in the Durant Public School District and pursuant to House Bill No. 572, I have been appointed by the Mayor of the City of Durant to serve on the Commission for Holmes-Durant Consolidated School District Structure.

It is my recommendation that the best way to improve the quality of education and the efficiency in which it is delivered by the school districts in Holmes County and the City of Durant, Mississippi, is to NOT consolidate these two school districts.

Sincerely yours,


Sarita Glover-Jackson, DNP, FNP-BC



Durant Public School District

Developing Performing Succeeding

Louise Sanders-Cate, Superintendent

Board of Trustees:
Louise Winters, President
Rena Pritchard, Vice President
Tremain Johnson, Secretary
Stacy Hightower, Member
LaTonya Gladney, Member
Ben Piazza, Board Attorney

May 26, 2015

Mr. Mike Kent, Chairman
Commission on Holmes-Durant
Consolidated School District Structure
Mississippi Department of Education
Central High School Building
350 North West Street
Jackson, Mississippi 39201

Dear Chairman Kent:

We, Rena' Pritchard and Tremain Johnson, are members of the Durant Public School District Board of Trustees and we have been appointed by Dr. Carey M. Wright, State Superintendent of Education, as representatives of the Durant Public School District to serve on the Commission on Holmes-Durant Consolidated School District Structure established by House Bill No. 572.

It is our recommendation that the best way to improve the quality of education and the efficiency with which it is delivered of the school districts in Holmes County and the City of Durant, Mississippi, is to NOT consolidate those school districts.

Respectfully,


RENA' PRITCHARD


TREMAIN JOHNSON

"Failure is not an Option"



Durant Public School District

Developing Performing Succeeding

Louise Sanders-Tate, Superintendent

Board of Trustees:
Louise Winters, President
Rena Pritchard, Vice President
Tremain Johnson, Secretary
LaTonya Smith- Gladney
Stacy Hightower
Ben Piazza, Board Attorney

May 26, 2015

Mr. Mike Kent, Chairman
Commission on Holmes-Durant
Consolidated School District Structure
Mississippi Department of Education
Central High School Building
350 North West Street
Jackson, Mississippi 39201

Dear Chairman Kent:

I am the Superintendent of the Durant Public School District and pursuant to House Bill No. 572 I have been appointed to serve on the Commission on Holmes-Durant Consolidated School District Structure established by House Bill No. 572.

It is my recommendation that the best way to improve the quality of education and the efficiency with which it is delivered of the school districts in Holmes County and the City of Durant, Mississippi, is to NOT consolidate those school districts.

Respectfully,

LOUISE SANDERS-TATE
SUPERINTENDENT

"Failure is not an Option"

Board of Supervisors Holmes County, Mississippi

May 26, 2015

James Young
President

Leonard "Hamp" Hampton
District One

Debra Mabry
District Three

Larry Davis
Vice President

Willie Townsend
District Five

Bryant Clark
Special Counsel to Board

MS Department of Education
P. O. Box 771
Jackson, MS. 39205

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Holmes County Commission on Consolidation of
Holmes County School District and Durant Separate School
District

This letter is to advise you of the Holmes County Board of
Supervisors opposition to the consolidation of the districts at
this time.


We appose this consolidation for the following reasons:

1. We do not know what additional tax burden would be put
on the citizens of Holmes County. Currently, Durant has a
separate tax levy for its district.
2. We do not have county schools that can adequately
accommodate an additional 500 students.
3. Adequate due diligence has not been done to make an
informed recommendation at this time.

We want to do whatever is in the best interest of the students
and tax paying citizens of Holmes County.

Thanks for your consideration of these concerns.

Sincerely,


James Young
President

Henry Luckett
Clerk of the Board

Joe McCraney
Comptroller

Charlie M. Joiner
County Administrator

Willie E. March
Sheriff

Katherine B. Riley
Board Attorney



Durant Public School District

Developing Performing Succeeding

Louise Sanders-Tate, Superintendent

Board of Trustees:

Louise Winters, President
Rena Pritchard, Vice President
Tremain Johnson, Secretary
LaTonya Smith- Gladney
Stacy Hightower
Ben Piazza, Board Attorney

June 17, 2015

Mr. Mike Kent, Chairman
Commission on Holmes-Durant
Consolidated School District Structure
Mississippi Department of Education
Central High School Building
350 North West Street
Jackson, Mississippi 39201

Dear Chairman Kent:

We the undersigned majority members of the Commission on Holmes-Durant Consolidated School District Structure have reviewed the current structure of the school districts and schools in Durant, Mississippi, and Holmes County, Mississippi, as required by House Bill No. 572. Our recommendations on future actions of the provision and transition of service in order to improve both the quality of education and the efficiency with which it is delivered in those schools is that there should be no consolidation of the Durant Public School District and the Holmes County School District.

Although we made it clear at the Commission meeting on May 26, 2015, both verbally and in writing that we do not support consolidation, you as the Chairman repeatedly expressed your opinion that the Commission should, in addition to holding hearings, expend extensive time and effort addressing structure and location of schools, facility needs and how best to implement consolidation as referenced in House Bill No. 572. We do not agree that this is necessary or advisable to do so. Consolidation will not improve the quality or efficiency of education. There are no funds available from MAEP or any other sources for facility needs, and there is no evidence of wasteful duplicative or wasteful administrative spending in Durant Public School District.

As you are aware, the Holmes County School District representatives on the Commission have also expressed their opposition to any consolidation with the Durant Public School District. Their reasons may be different from the undersigned as they are concerned that consolidation would result in difficulties similar to those endured in the recent merger of their district high schools.

We do not support consolidation because we believe that today and historically the Durant Public School District has outperformed the Holmes County School District. This can be specifically shown by the respective districts' results in the recent MKAS 3rd grade tests. In addition, the City of Durant has supported and is willing to continue to support the Durant Public School District by levying the necessary millage for its continued success.

"Failure is not an Option"

5 West Madison St. Durant MS 39063 Ph: 662-653-3175 Fax: 662-653-6151 www.durant.k12.ms.us

EXHIBIT F

The facts are that all members of the Commission, except for you, expressly do not want consolidation of the two school districts and that the report of the Commission can and should be written expressing these findings as soon as a hearing can be held in the respective school districts.

Respectfully submitted by:

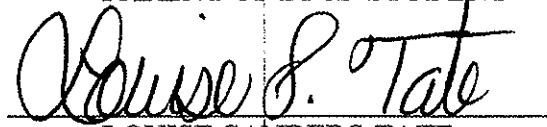

TREMAIN JOHNSON
DPSD BOARD MEMBER

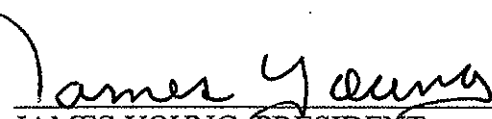

RENA PRITCHARD
DPSD BOARD MEMBER


TASHA DAVIS, MAYOR
CITY OF DURANT


DR. SARITA GLOVER-JACKSON
PARENT OF DPSD STUDENT


EDWIN M. ROBINSON
DPSD SUPERINTENDENT-ELECT


LOUISE SANDERS-TATE
DPSD SUPERINTENDENT


JAMES YOUNG, PRESIDENT
HOLMES COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

P.S. Please see the following attachments.

- Historical test data for Durant Public School District and Holmes County School District.
- Letter from the Mayor of Durant MS

Phone: (662) 653-3221
Fax: (662) 653-6847

Tasha Davis
Mayor

Ursula Perry
City Clerk

Shannon Gallagher
Court Clerk

CITY OF DURANT



P. O. Box 272 • Durant, MS 39063-0272
Email: cityclerk@cityofdurant.org

Alderpersons
Ronnie Gladney
Linda McDonald
JoNell Payton
Leatha (Bo) Patterson
Dr. Henry Robinson, Jr.

John Haynes
Police Chief

Kelly Boyd
Fire Chief

Wednesday, June 17, 2015

Mr. Mike Kent, Chairman
Commission on Holmes-Durant
Consolidated School District Structure
Mississippi Department of Education
Central High School Building
350 North West Street
Jackson, Mississippi 39201

Dear Chairman Kent,

I am the Mayor of the City of Durant and pursuant to House Bill No. 572 I have been appointed to serve on the Commission on Holmes-Durant Consolidated School District Structure established by House Bill No. 572.

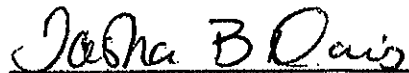
It is my recommendation that the best way to improve the quality of education for the students in Holmes County and the city of Durant is to **NOT** consolidate those school districts. I have arrived at this conclusion based on the following reasons:

- Nearly 50 percent of the faculty and staff of Durant Public School District live in the city of Durant and consolidation does not guarantee that DPSD will remain an operational school; therefore, the employment of these persons cannot be guaranteed
- If the faculty and staff of Durant Public School District are relieve of their current jobs as educators, the city of Durant will no longer receive their tax dollars; thus the tax base of the city of Durant will be affected
- The city of the Durant is financially operational because of the electrical system of which Durant Public School District supplies a substantial quantity of funds

- The city of Durant will be dissolved, in a sense, with the absence of a school due to the lack of jobs
- The city will be deprived of the ability to attract industry without a school

Overall, it is readily transparent that the consolidation outlined in House Bill 572 will be detrimental to the city of Durant. Thus, it is my conviction along with the board of aldermen that consolidation of Holmes County School District and Durant Public School District is unnecessary and to the detriment of our community.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tasha B Davis". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

TASHA DAVIS, MAYOR



MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Ensuring a bright future for every child

Commission on Holmes/Durant Consolidated School District Structure

June 29, 2015

2:00 p.m. Suite 212

Name (please print)

District/Entity/Office

Rayford Horton

Holmes Co.

Tasha B Davis

Mayor City of Durant

Bena' Pritchard

DPS School Board

William Dean

Holmes County School

Anta Danner Jackson

DPS School Parent

Janice Harper

Holmes County

Francine Jefferson

Holmes County

Powell Tucker

Holmes County Super

Edwin M. Robinson

DPD

Louise S Tate

DPD

Commission on Holmes-Durant Consolidated School District Structure

June 29, 2015

2:00 p.m.

Suite 212

Agenda

- I. Commission Responsibilities:
 1. Shall hold hearings
 2. Review the current structure
 3. Make recommendations on how to best implement consolidation
 4. Review the capital facility needs and recommend methods of financing necessary improvements
- II. Review of Current Structure and Location and Condition of Schools
- III. Capital Facility Needs and Financing
- IV. Public Hearings – Recommendations:
 1. Set times / place
 2. Structure of the meeting
 3. Topics
 - a. governance
 - b. selection of superintendent

Commission on Holmes-Durant School, District Structure
June 29, 2015
Minutes of Meeting

The Commission on Holmes-Durant School District Structure met for the Second Time on June 29, 2015 in room 212 at MDE Headquarters in Jackson, MS.

Chairman Mike Kent, began the meeting by reading letters he had received earlier in the day from commission members representing the Durant Public School District. These letters (attachment #?) expressed vehement opposition to the notion of consolidation.

Newly appointed Durant Superintendent Edwin Robinson described the work of the Commission as futile. Senator Kenny Wayne Jones suggested that the Commission should pose a query to the legislature as to why Durant and Holmes were under consideration for consolidation. It was the general consensus of the Durant delegates that the Commission should disband without further action.

Chairman Kent reminded everyone of the language of the law. He also stated that he and MDE staff would go forward with public hearings and a report to the legislature regardless of participation from other commission members.

Holmes County Superintendent Powell Rucker argued that this was opportunity to perhaps gain some concessions from lawmakers if consolidation occurred. He went on to enumerate several ie

- Reverse referendum
- Increased bonding capacity
- “seed money” for a new high school
- Funds for additional losses

After considerable discussion the Commission agreed to move forward with public hearings and set those as follows:

- Durant – August 17
- Lexington – August 20

Commission adjourned



Durant Public School District

Motto: "Challenging Performing Succeeding"

Aleen Benson, Principal
Eric Sumrall, Assistant Principal

Secretary:
Tanya Wright

Counselor:
Elizabeth Terrell

Curriculum Specialist
Dr. Wendy Hubbard

Commission on Holmes-Durant School Consolidation

Public Hearing Sign Sheet

August 17, 2015

(Please Print)

Name	Name
Joseph A. Rumbles	James J. Wiley Jr.
Reford W. Hunter	Glennadine Anderson
Clayton M. [unclear]	Diana Blightower
Walter [unclear]	Wayne D. White
Nash [unclear]	Deborah Samms
Eric Sumrall	Jonell Taylor
Norma Butler	Eric [unclear]
Dr. Wendy Hubbard	Wendi Ditchard
Phyllis Day	Josh B. Davis
Kimberly Williams	Kyle Davis
Monty J. Price	Forrest [unclear]
Catherine [unclear]	Myra [unclear]
Merion [unclear]	Patricia [unclear]
Austin Samos	Marsha [unclear]
Shantoshie Lewis	Marky D. Oliver
Sammy [unclear]	Annette [unclear]
Paul [unclear]	Linda March
Don [unclear]	Aminda [unclear]
Public [unclear]	Stacy [unclear]
Mary [unclear]	Charles [unclear]
Erma [unclear]	Theresa [unclear]
Delinda [unclear]	Charles [unclear]
Brittany [unclear]	Henry [unclear]
Amelia [unclear]	Barbara [unclear]
Ray [unclear]	Barbara [unclear]
Allen [unclear]	James [unclear]
Wesley [unclear]	John [unclear]
Theresa [unclear]	Marjorie [unclear]
Mary [unclear]	Margaret [unclear]
Lisa [unclear]	Billy [unclear]
John [unclear]	Shirley [unclear]
John [unclear]	Wanda [unclear]
John [unclear]	Wanda [unclear]

"Challenging Performing Succeeding"

Durant Public School District

Motto: "Challenging Performing Succeeding"

Aleen Benson, Principal
Eric Sumrall, Assistant Principal

Secretary:
Tanya Wright

Counselor:
Elizabeth Terrell

Curriculum Specialist
Dr. Wendy Hubbard

Commission on Holmes-Durant School Consolidation

Public Hearing Sign Sheet

August 17, 2015

(Please Print)

Name	Name
Elaine R. Huelbert	Ed Williams
Shanetta Campbell	Max
Linda Sallis	Ray Raul
Shantika Sallis	Mike Thomas
Steve Powell	James Young
Sylvia Ware	Eric Martin
Dorise Winters	Lee Harmon
James C. Harris	Al McCashell
Carole Webb	Shirley A. Moore
Elizabeth Under	Conor Day
Polisa Worthington	Eddie Stewart
Waverly Smith	Josh Smith
Alma Secombe	Francis
Alma H. Summers	Simone Meets
Ebony Hester	Allye Bous
Rev. Charles J. Jones	Wendy Childers
George H. H. Gladney	Shirley D. Jones
Terrell Johnson	
Theresa Jones	
Tiffany Martin	
Ellen Redd	
Bella Page	
Adriana Millwood	
Barbara Blackmon	
Beverly Clark	
Freda Jones	
Shirley Jones	
Shirley Jones	
Tiffany Wally	
Drenda Nisley	
Mary Patterson	
Lanana Nash	

"Challenging Performing Succeeding"

Motto: "Challenging Performing Succeeding"

Secretary:
Tanya Wright

Counselor:
Elizabeth Terrell

Aleen Benson, Principal
Eric Sumrall, Assistant Principal

Curriculum Specialist
Dr. Wendy Hubbard

Commission on Holmes-Durant School Consolidation

Public Hearing Sign Sheet

August 17, 2015

(Please Print)

[illegible]

“Challenging Performing Succeeding”



Commission on Holmes-Durant School Consolidation

Public Hearings – August 17, 2015 – Durant, MS
August 20, 2015 - Lexington, MS

AGENDA

- I. Introductions and Overview HB572
Mike Kent – Mississippi Department of Education
Joseph Runnels – Special Assistant Attorney General
- II. Statement of Position by Commission
 - A. Durant (Presenter's Name)_____
 - B. Holmes County (Presenter's Name)_____
 - C. Mayor of Durant – Tasha Davis
- III. Typical Hot Button Issues
- IV. Public Comment – You must preregister in order to make a comment and must adhere to time limit.

Holmes County State Legislators

Rep. Bryant W. Clark
Mississippi House of Representatives

Rep. Jason White
Mississippi House of Representatives

Sen. Barbara Blackmon
Mississippi State Senate

Sen. David L. Jordan
Mississippi State Senate

Commission on Holmes - Durant School District Structure

Members (prescribed by law)

Tasha Davis, Mayor of Durant

Rayford Horton

Tremain Johnson

Rena Pritchard

Sarita Jackson

James Young

William Dean

Edwin Robinson, Superintendent, Durant Schools

Powell Rucker, Superintendent, Holmes County Schools

Mike Kent, Chairman
Miss. Dept. of Education

August 17 & 20, 2015

Commission on
Holmes - Durant
School District
Structure

***If Consolidation
Happens,***

***What do We Want it
To Look Like?***

Mississippi Department of Education Public Hearing Procedures, Protocols and Etiquette

This public hearing is only for the review of MS Code 37-7-104.3, the creation of an Advisory Council published as the *Commission on Holmes-Durant Consolidated School District Structure*. The purpose of the Commission is to review the current school and district structure of Durant Public School District (2620) and Holmes County School District (2600) and make recommendations to the feasibility of a newly formed consolidated school district. The Commission will be composed of ten (10) members and within thirty (30) days of passage of House Bill 572 will hold public hearings and develop a report to the Mississippi State Legislature.

This hearing allows the public to speak in favor or against a consolidation. The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) is not the final decision maker, but rather is facilitating this hearing and providing feedback to the *Commission on Holmes-Durant School District Structure* who will create a report to be submitted to the State Legislature, the Governor, and the State Board of Education (SBE). The purpose of the public hearing is for the Commission to gather information to assist them in formulating their recommendations. The hearing is not a debate or a question and answer session with the audience. Copies of the agenda and a summary of public are available in the foyer.

The Public Hearing Procedure: The Chair will introduce the item on the agenda. The public hearing will be opened and the Chair will present on the MS Code 37-7-104.3

The Chair will request input from proponents. Those whose names have been submitted previously will speak first in the order listed on the enclosed participant list. Other individuals who wish to speak, but whose names were not previously submitted, must sign the public testimony roster found in the entrance foyer. Please step forward to the podium and state your name and if applicable, any organization you represent for the record before stating your testimony.

The Chair will ask the public for any clarification of statements or questions. Commission members (or MDE staff representing the CSA) may ask questions of proponents and opponents.

The Chair will close the public hearing.

Hearing Tips, Protocols and Etiquette:

- Please speak clearly. State your name and organization you represent for the record;
- Speak only when recognized by the Chair;
- Focus your testimony on the matter at hand, state only the relevant facts and opinions;
- Avoid repetitive testimony. If another speaker has made similar points, please make note of it in the record and state that you concur with the previous speaker;
- Please be prepared to limit your comments to three (3) minutes per speaker per item. Because of the large group expected to be present, the Chair may reduce the time per speaker;
- Speaking time may not be deferred to another witness;
- Do not speak in the Commission unless you step forward to the front of the room to the podium;
- Exhibits (photographs, letters, etc.) become part of the permanent record and cannot be returned;
- Silence all cell phones.

Hearings are conducted in a courtroom-like environment and audience conduct shall be in accordance with courtroom etiquette. Clapping, cheering, speaking out of order or disorderly conduct are not appropriate and are grounds for removal from the hearing room by order of the Chair.

Agenda

I. Introductions and Overview MS CODE 37-7-104.3

Mike Kent – Mississippi Department of Education
Joseph Runnels – Special Assistant Attorney General

Commission is required by law "to hold hearings and meet as necessary in order to develop a report to the legislature, the Governor, and the State Board of Education with recommendations on the following:

- A. "review structure and recommend how they can be consolidated to improve quality and efficiency,
- B. "review capital facility needs and make recommendations to address them,
- C. "detail how best to implement consolidation."

II. Statement of Position by Commission Members

III. Typical Hot Button Issues

- A. Governance - how will the NEW board be selected; appointed or elected?
- B. Board member districts; same as Board of Supervisors districts?
- C. Superintendent; appointed or elected?

IV. Public Comment – You must preregister in order to make a comment and must adhere to time limit.

In order for the MDE to maintain an accurate record of the public hearing and for the courtesy of those attending this meeting, please silence all cell phones.



MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF
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PUBLIC HEARING

Sign-in Sheet for Public Comment

Propose Consolidation of Durant Public School District &

Holmes County School District

August 17 & 20, 2015

Name

Signature

Current School District

Please check ☒

Holmes Durant

Lynise White
David Creamer Jr.

EXHIBIT L

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PUBLIC HEARING
DURANT, MISSISSIPPI

held at Durant High School,
Durant, Mississippi
on Monday, August 17, 2015,
beginning at approximately 6:00 p.m.

Angela Dawn Dillard, CSR
Certified Shorthand Reporter, #1763

ORIGINAL

A P P E A R A N C E S

Mike Kent - Department of Education
Joseph Runnels - Special Asst. Attorney General
James Thompson - Department of Education

Tremain Johnson - President
Rena Pritchard - Vice President
Tasha Davis - Mayor of Durant
Powell Rucker - Superintendent Holmes County
School District
Edwin Robinson - Superintendent Durant Public
School District
William Dean - Holmes County School District
Sarita Jackson - Parent of student in Durant
Public School District

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1 MR. ROBINSON: MR. ROBINSON: Good
2 evening. I'm Edwin Robinson Superintendent of
3 Durant Public School District. And the purpose
4 of this meeting tonight is to outline in terms
5 of House Bill 572 the procedures for the
6 Commission on the consolidation of Holmes
7 County and Durant Public School District or the
8 proposed consolidation of those two school
9 districts.

10 Joining me at the table we have our
11 Commission members and we also have individuals
12 from the Mississippi Department of Education,
13 Mr. Mike Kent. And at this time I will turn it
14 over to Mr. Kent who will facilitate the
15 discussion and give all of the components of
16 House Bill 572. Thank you.

17 MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Robinson.
18 Good evening.

19 AUDIENCE: Good evening.

20 MR. KENT: Y'all are a very polite
21 audience. I appreciate you being here. I
22 appreciate your -- the interest you have in
23 your school district.

24 I also would like to be very clear
25 about the purpose of this meeting. This

1 meeting really has nothing to do about whether
2 or not consolidation occurs. We don't -- we
3 don't have any say in it at all. Now,
4 certainly the Commission could recommend
5 against it, but the decision on consolidation
6 will be made where?

7 AUDIENCE: With the state.

8 MR. KENT: In the Legislature, okay?
9 The Legislature goes in session in January and
10 that's where the decision will be made. This
11 Commission's purpose is what I have up here.

12 If the Legislature consolidates the
13 two school districts then what do we want it to
14 look like. This meeting is to gather input
15 from you and to make recommendations that if
16 the two school districts are consolidated how
17 do you want to select your school board
18 members.

19 Do you want to elect them or would you
20 want the board of supervisors to appoint them?
21 Your superintendent, would you want to elect
22 your superintendent or would you want the new
23 school board to appoint the superintendent.

24 School board member district lines,
25 would you want new district lines or would you

1 want your school board members to come from the
2 supervisor districts that are already in place?

3 Those are the kinds of topics that we
4 need to think about tonight. If it happens
5 what do we want it to look like. Now, I'll
6 beat that to death tonight, please excuse me if
7 I say that over and over and over, but I'm
8 going to try to keep us on point.

9 We're here tonight for possibly two
10 hours. We have a court reporter hired and she
11 is taking a transcript of this meeting. And so
12 we have two hours of time to work with.

13 Let me begin by saying this. There
14 are two sign-up sheets back here in the back.
15 One is just a record of who is here. The other
16 one is a sign-up for public comment. If you
17 wish to comment on this topic then you'll need
18 to go back and sign up on the comment sheet.
19 So if you're interested in doing that please do
20 that now so that when we get to it we'll be
21 ready to roll.

22 Okay. You have or should have an
23 agenda in your hand that is exactly like what's
24 up on the screen, and you're looking at my
25 notes and I'll be working off this document.

1 First of all, introductions. Again,
2 my name is Mike Kent. I am a retired
3 superintendent who does contract work with the
4 State Department of Education. I have been
5 involved in some of the other consolidations so
6 I have some experience with this.

7 I'm also accompanied tonight by
8 Dr. Bill Welch. Dr. Welch, if you'd stand.
9 Dr. Welch is employed by the State Department
10 of Ed. He has also worked with the
11 consolidations in the Sunflower County and
12 Starkville/Oktibbeha.

13 James Thompson is part of our team
14 tonight.

15 Theresa Jones is right here. Theresa
16 is from MDE.

17 And then Joseph Runnels is here.
18 Joseph is actually a Special Assistant Attorney
19 General who is assigned to the State Department
20 of Education, so he is our legal expert
21 tonight.

22 Let me introduce the members of the
23 Holmes/Durant Commission on School District
24 Structure. Some of these folks are here, some
25 of them are not. Rayford Horton is on that

1 Commission. I don't believe Mr. Horton is
2 here.

3 Mayor Tasha Davis is on the
4 Commission.

5 Tremain Johnson. Is Mr. Johnson here?
6 I don't believe.

7 Rena Pritchard, Durant Schools.

8 Sarita Jackson is over here.

9 James Young who is a Supervisor in
10 Holmes County is on the Commission.

11 William Dean from the Holmes County
12 School District is on the Commission.

13 Mr. Edwin Robinson who is
14 Superintendent of Durant Schools.

15 And Mr. Powell Rucker, Superintendent
16 of Holmes County School District.

17 And you might ask yourself, well, how
18 did these people get on this Commission. The
19 Commission was prescribed by law. It was
20 actually in part of House Bill 572. As you'll
21 see, most of these people hold some
22 distinction. So the Mayor of Durant was part
23 of this Commission. Regardless of who it was,
24 the Mayor was going to be on this Commission.

25 If you would look at Roman Numeral I

1 and you will see there that the Commission is
2 required by law, and then there are quotation
3 marks, to hold hearings and meet as necessary
4 in order to develop a report to the
5 Legislature, the Governor and the State Board
6 of Education with recommendations on the
7 following.

8 So we're required to do a report that
9 we have to turn in prior to January 1. That
10 report details three things. A, review the
11 structures and recommend how they can be
12 consolidated to improve quality and efficiency.
13 Review the structure of the two districts and
14 how they could be consolidated to improve
15 quality and efficiency.

16 The second thing is to review the
17 capital facility needs and make recommendations
18 to address them. In other words, buildings.
19 What buildings need to be done?

20 C, detail how best to implement
21 consolidation.

22 So this is the thing -- the Committee,
23 whether they want to or not, is required to
24 address these three things. The report that we
25 turn in will have to address these three

1 things.

2 How do you do sir?

3 MR. JOHNSON: All right.

4 MR. KENT: Good, glad you're here.

5 Okay. In just a few minutes you're
6 going to hear a statement of position from some
7 members of the Commission, and we'll come back
8 to that in just a few minutes.

9 Roman Numeral III, typical hot button
10 issues in consolidation. I've already talked
11 about this just a little bit. If you
12 consolidate you're going to have a new school
13 board. How are you going -- how is that new
14 board going to be selected? Will it be
15 appointed by the board of supervisors? Will it
16 be elected? These are the kinds of
17 recommendations that we need from you folks.

18 Another hot button issue is the
19 superintendent. How will that superintendent
20 be selected? Appointed or elected?

21 Board member district lines, are you
22 going to use the supervisor lines or are you
23 going to draw new board member district lines?

24 And then one that I didn't put on here
25 but is always a big issue is the location of

1 the central office. Obviously, if you
2 consolidate you're going to go from two central
3 offices and two superintendents to one central
4 office and one superintendent. And where would
5 that central office be located? So that's
6 always a hot issue.

7 And then we'll end the evening with
8 public comment. And again, as I said before,
9 if you want to make public comment tonight,
10 please make sure that you have signed up on the
11 appropriate document back here and then we'll
12 take you in the order that you have signed up.

13 Let me remind you that we will have
14 another hearing Thursday night in Lexington
15 6 p.m. at the Holmes Central High School. And
16 so if you would like to come and be with us
17 again on Thursday night that's fine.

18 This is my e-mail address. If there
19 are comments that you would like to make, if
20 you get home and think about something, this is
21 my e-mail address and any comments that you
22 make will be included in the report.

23 Okay, I think at this time it's time
24 for me to yield the floor to some of the
25 Commission members who are going to give you

1 the position of -- that they think is the
2 appropriate position moving forward. They'll
3 speak for a few minutes. When they get through
4 we'll move into the public comment portion of
5 the meeting.

6 Joseph, have I left anything out?

7 MR. RUNNELS: Other than that they can
8 also mail comments to you at this address right
9 here.

10 MR. KENT: Yeah, good point. In case
11 you do not have access to e-mail, then
12 obviously this is the regular post office
13 address and if you'll just send it attention to
14 Mike Kent, I'll make sure it's included in the
15 report.

16 So without further ado, I think it's
17 time for us to have the statement of position
18 by the various Commission members. And who
19 wants to go first?

20 MR. ROBINSON: I will.

21 MR. KENT: Okay.

22 MR. ROBINSON: At this juncture I'm
23 going to deliver to you the position statement
24 of Durant Public School District. This
25 document that I'm about to read to you was

1 signed by all of our board members, former
2 Superintendent Louise Sanders-Tate and all of
3 the Commission members that represent Durant
4 Public School District including Tremain
5 Johnson, our Board President; Ms. Rena
6 Pritchard, our Vice President; Ms. Tasha Davis,
7 our Mayor; Ms. Sarita Glover-Jackson, our
8 parent of a Durant Public School District
9 student; and Mr. James Young, our Supervisor;
10 along with myself Edwin Robinson.

11 This is the letter submitted to
12 Chairman Kent. We the undersigned majority
13 members of the Commission on Holmes/Durant
14 Consolidated School District Structuring have
15 reviewed the current structure of the school
16 districts and schools in Durant, Mississippi
17 and Holmes County as required by House Bill
18 572.

19 Our recommendations on future actions
20 of the provision in transition of service in
21 order to improve both the quality of education
22 and the efficiency with which it is delivered
23 in those schools is that there should be no
24 consolidation of the Durant Public School
25 District and Holmes County School District.

1 Although, we made it clear at the
2 Commission meeting on May 26, 2015, both
3 verbally and in writing that we do not support
4 consolidation, you as the chairman, repeatedly
5 expressed your opinion that the Commission
6 should, in addition to holding hearings, expend
7 extensive time and effort addressing structure
8 and location of schools, facility needs, and
9 how best to implement consolidation as
10 referenced in House Bill 572.

11 We do not agree that this is necessary
12 or advisable to do so. Consolidation will not
13 improve the quality or efficiency of education.
14 There are no funds available from MAEP or any
15 other sources for facility needs, and there is
16 no evidence of wasteful or duplicative or
17 wasteful administrative spending in Durant
18 Public School District.

19 As you are aware, the Holmes County
20 School District representatives on the
21 Commission have also expressed their opposition
22 to any consolidation with the Durant Public
23 School District. Their reasons may be
24 different from the undersigned as they're
25 concerned that consolidation would result in

1 difficulties similar to those endured in the
2 recent merger of their district high schools.

3 We do not support consolidation
4 because we believe that today and historically,
5 the Durant Public School has outperformed the
6 Holmes County School District. This can be
7 specifically shown by the respective district's
8 results in the recent MCAS third grade tests.

9 In addition, the City of Durant has
10 supported and is willing to continue to support
11 the Durant Public School District by levying
12 the necessary millage for its continued
13 success.

14 The facts are that all members of the
15 Commission, except for you, expressly do not
16 want consolidation of the two school districts
17 and that the report of the Commission can and
18 should be written expressing these findings as
19 soon as a hearing can be held in the respective
20 school districts. Respectfully Submitted by
21 Tremain Johnson, Rena Pritchard, Tasha Davis,
22 Sarita Glover-Jackson, Edwin Robinson, Louise
23 Tate and James Young.

24 And the attachments to this letter
25 include historical test data for Durant Public

1 School District and Holmes County School
2 District, and the letter from the Mayor of
3 Durant, Mississippi. At this time we will have
4 an additional position statement from Mayor
5 Davis.

6 MAYOR DAVIS: Good evening everyone.

7 AUDIENCE: Good evening.

8 MAYOR DAVIS: Again, as the
9 Superintendent just expressed, this is a letter
10 that we did write to Chairman Kent to let him
11 know on our position of the consolidation bill.

12 Dear Chairman Kent, I am the Mayor of
13 the City of Durant and pursuant to House Bill
14 572 I have been appointed to serve on the
15 Commission on Holmes/Durant Consolidated School
16 District Structure established by House Bill
17 number 572.

18 It is my recommendation that the best
19 way to improve the quality of education for the
20 students in Holmes County and the City of
21 Durant is to not consolidate those school
22 districts.

23 I have arrived at this conclusion
24 based on the following reasons. Nearly 50
25 percent of the faculty and staff of Durant

1 Public School District live in the City of
2 Durant and consolidation does not guarantee
3 that Durant Public School District will remain
4 an operational school. Therefore, the
5 employment of these persons can not be
6 guaranteed. If the faculty and staff of Durant
7 Public School District are relieved of their
8 current jobs as educators, the City of Durant
9 will no longer receive their tax dollars; thus,
10 the tax base of the City of Durant will be
11 effected.

12 The City of Durant is financially
13 operational because of the electrical system of
14 which Durant Public School District supplies a
15 substantial quality of funds. The City of
16 Durant will be dissolved in a sense with the
17 absence of a school due to lack of jobs. The
18 City will be deprived of the ability to attract
19 industry without a school.

20 Overall, it is readily transparent
21 that the consolidation outlined in House Bill
22 572 will be detrimental to the City of Durant;
23 thus, it is my conviction along with the Board
24 of Alderman that the consolidation of Holmes
25 County School District and Durant Public School

1 District is unnecessary and to the detriment of
2 our community. Respectfully, Tasha B. Davis,
3 Mayor for the City of Durant.

4 MR. RUCKER: On behalf of the Holmes
5 County School District and our President
6 Mr. Horton, our other board member Elder Dean,
7 to the public in general, to Chairman Kent. On
8 the behalf of the Holmes County School
9 District, we have worked several years to
10 structure our schools so that they can be
11 successful.

12 We believe that the consolidation is
13 not in the best interest of the boys and girls
14 of Holmes County because of the work that we've
15 done. But since it's apparent that we have no
16 control of this, is that it would be our best
17 interest to talk about the things that really
18 would help Holmes County move forward. And so
19 therefore these are our recommendations.

20 First of all, we believe that it
21 would be best that we get released of all
22 accountability standards for three years and
23 continued technical support from the Department
24 of Education if they're going to consolidate
25 us, and so that would give us an opportunity to

1 do the things that we need to do.

2 Also, we believe that from the savings
3 of merging the districts that we should receive
4 some of those resources from those savings.

5 And so therefore, the state should come in and
6 help us build a central high school for our
7 students so they'll have a conducive place to
8 go to. And so we would look to try to get some
9 of those savings from that area.

10 Also, we believe that there should be
11 a pledge of funds over a period of time from
12 the consolidation, whereas they will come in
13 and say they're going to give us so much money
14 every year that would help us through this
15 merger that will improve the education of the
16 boys and girls here in Holmes County.

17 Also, we believe that it would be to
18 our advantage that they would allow us to run a
19 reverse referendum here in Holmes County so
20 that we can get a part of the funds that we
21 need to improve education here in Holmes County
22 because without funding you can't do anything.

23 Also, we believe that we should be
24 given another five percent of funding authority
25 here in Holmes County that would increase us to

1 20 percent. Right now the state requires only
2 -- you can only get 15 percent, so we're asking
3 for 20 percent funding authority. This will
4 give you more funding to give our kids what
5 they need so that they can compete with all the
6 children across the state of Mississippi.

7 Also, we're requesting the Department
8 of Education to give us support in the
9 financial part of it. If you're going to merge
10 us you should support us in merging all the
11 financial records, the fees and everything. So
12 there should not be a legal cost to this county
13 in merging these items together. And so
14 therefore we're asking for that support.

15 Also, we're asking that on our high
16 school side the -- for the Institution of
17 Higher Learning to come in, work with us, and
18 provide high school graduation and career
19 planning to ensure that we can improve the
20 graduation rate and improve the life of the
21 boys and girls here in Holmes County if this
22 merger -- the position of consolidation
23 continues.

24 Also, we're asking that if this
25 consolidation is going to be done, there should

1 be a transportation fleet provided for the
2 children here in Durant. We're asking that
3 buses be provided for those students to
4 transport those students so there will not be a
5 cost to anyone inside of this county.

6 Also, we're asking for technology
7 help, and support in career and college
8 readiness standards from the Department of
9 Education so that we can improve those areas
10 because technology is a driving force in
11 education now and we have to consider those
12 areas also.

13 Also, we're requesting that the lines
14 for the Board of Education be consistent or
15 parallel with the Board of Supervisors because
16 those lines are already established and
17 therefore would not be a cost to the district
18 so that we can save on those dollars there, so
19 we won't have to be looking for dollars inside
20 of our district.

21 Finally, we believe that if these
22 things are provided to the Holmes County School
23 District that this support will help improve
24 the lives of the boys and girls here in Holmes
25 County. This is being submitted by President

1 Rayford Horton, Board Member William Dean, Jr.,
2 and Powell Rucker, Superintendent on this
3 Commission. Thank you.

4 MR. KENT: Thank you, Powell.

5 Okay. So you have heard positions.
6 This Commission has met twice, they've already
7 spent roughly five or six hours in deliberation
8 on this topic. And so there has been a good
9 bit of debate about how this should occur,
10 where it's going, et cetera, et cetera.

11 And I think you've heard the general
12 tenor or the general philosophy of the
13 Commission. I won't put words in their mouth,
14 you heard it directly from them.

15 So I think our next step is, again,
16 staying with the theme of if consolidation
17 occurs, and we've already heard that most
18 people are not in favor of consolidation.
19 We've already heard that. But if it does
20 occur, if the Legislature forces it upon you,
21 then what do we want it to look like.

22 And in Roman Numeral III I've outlined
23 some of those hot button issues that we've
24 already talked about here. Mr. Rucker
25 mentioned the issue of school board member

1 district lines. He has recommended that you
2 use the supervisor lines because they're
3 already there, you don't have the cost of
4 redrawing any lines, and most of you know where
5 those are, so there would be some familiarity
6 with them.

7 And then, of course, the issue of the
8 selection of both board members, appointed
9 versus elected. Superintendent, appointed
10 versus elected, et cetera, et cetera.

11 We are to the point to where we're
12 ready to take public comment. Again, if you
13 will notice, on the left-hand side of your
14 program, these are guidelines adopted by the
15 state government on public hearings. And so
16 what we've done is we have allotted three
17 minutes for someone that would like to make a
18 public comment, and we will time your comment.
19 Mr. Welch will be timing your comment and he'll
20 let you know when you're close to the end.

21 And so what we want to do is everyone
22 that would like to comment will need to sign
23 in, and then we'll take you in the order that
24 you have signed to make comment. I think we've
25 got it.

1 Okay. The first person is Louise
2 Winter. Is that right?

3 MS. WINTER: That's me. Yes, sir.
4 Good evening.

5 AUDIENCE: Good evening.

6 MS. WINTER: Like he said, I am Louise
7 Winter. I am a member of the Durant Public
8 School Board, and I do have a comment that I
9 did here and this would be that you said how
10 we'd like to select a superintendent. So I
11 would like to make a comment on that if that's
12 okay. And that would be, I would think the
13 superintendent at the present time should be
14 the one whose school district is highly
15 performing, with the highest performance. Now,
16 that's my comment on that.

17 But I have a question also, and I
18 would like to ask you Mr. Kent, can you explain
19 how did this consolidation Senate Bill come
20 about?

21 MR. KENT: Why don't you go ahead and
22 when you finish I'll respond.

23 MS. WINTER: Also, I would like to say
24 this, I believe that the school board members
25 should be elected because I do believe, you

1 know, there are too many problems occurring
2 with appointed school board members. And I do
3 believe that if you elect school board members
4 that way the community would have an input.
5 And so I really feel that school board members
6 should be elected. Okay, that's it. Thank
7 you.

8 MR. KENT: Thank you, ma'am.

9 In response to Ms. Winter's question,
10 and Ms. Winter, I'll repeat your question.

11 MS. WINTER: Yes, sir.

12 MR. KENT: And hopefully I'll get this
13 right. Your question to me was, what is the
14 origin of this issue? Where did this all
15 begin?

16 MS. WINTER: Yes, sir.

17 MR. KENT: Okay. It begins with House
18 Bill 572 in your state Legislature. It
19 originated in the House of Representatives, and
20 the Bill was introduced by Representative Toby
21 Barker. And Mr. Barker is from the Brookhaven
22 area.

23 Our next registered commenter is
24 Mr. David, and I can't --

25 MR. CREAMER: Creamer.

1 MR. KENT: -- Creamer, I'm sorry, sir.

2 MR. CREAMER: Thank you. I'm a member
3 of Durant. I've been a worker at the Holmes
4 County Schools. Now, several years ago it was
5 changed. People in this area here could not
6 vote for the superintendent of the Holmes
7 County Public Schools, that was changed. Now,
8 it says if we consolidate, so somewhere in the
9 line that has to be changed so that the people
10 on this side of the town can vote for the
11 superintendent.

12 Now, you're going to consolidate the
13 schools, or we say that we going to
14 consolidate, that's the main thing there, but
15 it says let's appoint somebody. You mean to
16 tell me we're going to get everybody together
17 and take their voice away and appoint a
18 superintendent. That's the way that most
19 school systems are going now.

20 Taxes, money has been -- taxes have
21 been increased to support the school. Now, I'd
22 like to know where would that tax money go?
23 Thank you.

24 MR. KENT: Folks we only had two
25 registered commenters. What I would like to do

1 before we conclude the program tonight is --
2 and I think all of the information that has
3 been given tonight, again, we have a court
4 reporter here, so all of that -- a transcript
5 will be made and all of the comments and input
6 will go into that report.

7 I think it's helpful perhaps, there --
8 I've given you two major issues. One is the
9 selection of board members, school board
10 members, and one is selection of
11 superintendents. If I may, I'd like to ask for
12 a show of hands, and we will include this in
13 the report, how many of you would prefer to
14 elect your board members if consolidation
15 occurs and a new board is created? How many
16 would prefer to elect that board? Would y'all
17 agree that that is the majority?

18 AUDIENCE: Yes.

19 MR. KENT: I think so. If you would
20 just record that a majority prefer election.

21 Let's talk about the superintendent
22 for a moment. How many of you would prefer
23 election of the superintendent? Now, the other
24 option is for the school board to appoint the
25 superintendent. That's what occurs in Durant.

1 Holmes County has an elected superintendent.
2 So if you have a consolidated district, how
3 many of you would prefer an elected
4 superintendent? I believe that's a majority.

5 How many of you would prefer
6 appointing the superintendent? Okay. So let
7 the record show that a majority prefer election
8 of the superintendent.

9 Ladies and gentlemen, we appreciate
10 your attention. Mayor and Commission Members,
11 do we have any final comments?

12 MAYOR DAVIS: I would like to see how
13 many would not like -- would like the school
14 districts maintained since we showing hands.

15 MR. KENT: Sure. Sure. Mayor Davis
16 would like, for the record, a show of hands for
17 those who would like to maintain the Durant
18 Public School District, no consolidation.
19 Okay, vast majority.

20 Yeah, and the record will reflect
21 that. Again, thank you for coming out. We
22 appreciate your attention. You've been a great
23 audience. And, again, if you have information
24 you would like for me to have, my e-mail
25 address and my regular post office address is

1 up here.

2 Senator Blackmon and Brian Clark. If
3 you would, Senator -- newly elected Senator
4 Barbara Blackmon.

5 SENATOR BLACKMON: I want to thank you
6 all so much.

7 MR. KENT: Representative Brian Clark.
8 Thank y'all for coming out tonight and
9 participating. I think these folks will tell
10 you that they're going to represent your wishes
11 to the best of your ability. They will also
12 tell you that there are two-hundred and about
13 25 folks down there, and so it's a -- almost
14 everything is an uphill battle. So good luck
15 and thank you again for coming out tonight.

16 We are concluded.

17
18 (Hearing concluded at 6:37 p.m.)
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25

1 REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

2 I, Dawn Dillard, CSR Number 1763,
3 Certified Reporter, certify:

4 That the foregoing proceedings were
5 taken before me at the time and place therein set
6 forth, at which time the witness was put under
7 oath by me;

8 That the testimony by the witness, the
9 questions propounded, and all objections and
10 statements made at the time of the examination
11 were recorded stenographically by me and were
12 thereafter transcribed;

13 That the foregoing is a true and correct
14 transcript of my shorthand notes so taken.

15 I further certify that I am not a
16 relative or employee of any attorney of the
17 parties, nor financially interested in the
18 action.

19 I declare under penalty of perjury under
20 the laws of Mississippi that the foregoing is
21 true and correct.

22 Dated this the 25 day of

23 Sept, 2015.
24 Dawn Dillard

25 DAWN DILLARD, CSR 1763



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PUBLIC HEARING

Sign-in Sheet for Public Comment

Propose Consolidation of Durant Public School District &

Holmes County School District

August 17 & 20, 2015

Current School District

Please check ☒

Holmes

Durant

Name

Signature

Erica Allen

Erica Allen

Lammy Trotter

Lammy Trotter

Alexandria Trotter

Alexandria Trotter

Leroy Johnson

Leroy Johnson

Tiffany Walsh

Tiffany Walsh

Marshall English

Marshall English

Ellen Reddy

Ellen Reddy

Janice Harper

Janice Harper

EXHIBIT N

August 20



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Holmes

Signature

Name

Durant

Doretha Sammes

Doretha Sammes

DPS

Faye D. White

Faye D. White

DPS

Ladonna Smith - Gladney

Ladonna Smith - Gladney

DPS

Linda Hightower

Linda Hightower

DPS

Traneen Gray

Traneen Gray

DPS

Isaac Gray

Isaac Gray

DPS

Linda Saffis

Linda Saffis

☒

Elaine Hutto

Elaine Hutto

DPS

Annie Palmer

ANNIE PALMER

DPS

August 17 & 20



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Name

Signature

Current School District

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Holmes

Durant

James S. Wiley Jr.
James S. Wiley Jr.
(Kerry Ford)

J. M. W.

James S. Wiley Jr.

DHS

DHS

COMMISSION ON HOLMES-DURANT
SCHOOL DISTRICT STRUCTURE

IF CONSOLIDATION HAPPENS,
WHAT DO WE WANT IT TO LOOK LIKE?

DATE: AUGUST 20, 2015
LOCATION: HOLMES COUNTY CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL
9479 BROZVILLE ROAD
LEXINGTON, MISSISSIPPI
TIME: 6:00 P.M.

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A P P E A R A N C E S

MIKE KENT, CHAIRMAN, MS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

JAMES THOMPSON

KEN STAMPS

JOSEPH RUNNELS

DR. BILL WELCH

POWELL RUCKER

EDWIN ROBINSON

WILLIAM DEAN

JAMES YOUNG

SARITA JACKSON

RENE PRITCHARD

TASHA DAVIS

TREMAIN JOHNSON

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1 MR. MIKE KENT: Thank you for being
2 here tonight. We appreciate it. This
3 particular meeting is prescribed by law.
4 House Bill 572, which was signed into law by
5 Governor Bryant, requires that this
6 Commission hold public hearings and meet as
7 necessary to create a report to the
8 Legislature.

9 Keep in mind that as far as
10 consolidation is concerned, this Commission
11 has no authority to decide whether or not
12 consolidation occurs. Let's just get that
13 out of the way right off the bat. Where
14 will that decision be made? State
15 Legislature, that's exactly right. This
16 particular Commission was formed to make
17 recommendations so that if consolidation
18 occurs what do the citizens of Holmes County
19 want it to look like. So that is the goal
20 of this particular Commission.

21 Let me begin tonight by introducing
22 myself. My name is Mike Kent. I'm a former
23 school superintendent and I do contract work
24 for the Mississippi Department of Ed. I've
25 been involved in several of the school

1 consolidations that have occurred recently.
2 Our team tonight is James Thompson back in
3 the back. Ken Stamps, over here. Joseph
4 Runnels. Joseph is a Special Assistant
5 Attorney General assigned to the Department
6 of Ed. And Dr. Bill Welch is my colleague.
7 Dr. Welch has also been deeply involved in
8 the consolidations in Sunflower County,
9 Starkville/Oktibbeha and some of the others
10 as well.

11 At this time I'd like for the members
12 of the Commission to introduce themselves.
13 I'm going to pass the microphone down. Let
14 me just say this, the Commission was
15 prescribed by law. Certain individuals, for
16 instance, members of certain Boards of
17 Education, members of the Board of
18 Supervisors, the mayor of Durant, this was
19 prescribed by law. So without further
20 adieu, let me see if we can pass this down
21 and let these folks introduce themselves.

22 MR. EDWIN ROBINSON: Thank you, Mike.
23 My name is Edwin Robinson. I'm the
24 superintendent of Durant Public School
25 District.

1 MR. JAMES YOUNG: James Young,
2 President, Holmes County Board of
3 Supervisors.

4 MR. POWELL RUCKER: Powell Rucker,
5 Superintendent of Holmes County School
6 District.

7 MR. WILLIAM DEAN, JR.: William Dean,
8 Jr., Board member, Holmes County Schools.

9 MS. TASHA DAVIS: Good evening,
10 everyone. I am Tasha Davis, Mayor for the
11 big city of Durant.

12 MS. RENA PRITCHARD: My name is Rena
13 Pritchard and I'm the Vice President of the
14 School Board for Durant Public Schools.

15 MS. SARITA GLOVER-JACKSON: My name is
16 Sarita Glover-Jackson, Durant Public School
17 parent.

18 MR. MIKE KENT: There are a couple of
19 folks that are not here. I don't believe
20 Mr. Tremain Johnson is here. He may come in
21 later. He represents the Durant Schools.
22 Let's see. Did I miss anybody? Rayford
23 Horton. Rayford Horton representing Holmes
24 County School District is not here yet so he
25 may come in later.

1 Again, a ten-member Commission whose
2 job it is to meet and make recommendations
3 that if consolidation occurs what do we want
4 it to look like.

5 If you would, look at your program and
6 under Roman Numeral I after the
7 Introductions, you'll see there that the
8 Commission is required by law, and I quote,
9 "to hold hearings and meet as necessary in
10 order to develop a report to the
11 Legislature, the Governor, and the State
12 Board of Education with recommendations on
13 the following:" Now, there's three specific
14 things that this Board is supposed to
15 address. It is supposed to, "review
16 structure and recommend how these two school
17 districts can be consolidated to improve
18 quality and efficiency." Second, "review
19 capital facility needs and make
20 recommendations to address them." In other
21 words, the buildings. Are there buildings
22 that need to be built or refurbished or
23 rehabilitated. Thirdly, simply, "detail how
24 best to implement consolidation."

25 Now, this Commission has met twice

1 already, and there's been a good bit of
2 discussion about this and probably been some
3 discussion among you all. So there are
4 differences of opinion on the Commission as
5 it relates to consolidation. And in just a
6 few minutes we will have three statements of
7 position as it relates to consolidation, but
8 I want to come back to that in just a
9 second.

10 Look at the Typical Hot Button Issues
11 if you would. Things that this Commission
12 should be thinking about is, if
13 consolidation occurs what about the
14 governments. What will the new board look
15 like. How will that board be selected.
16 Will it be an elected board because there
17 will be a new board now. Will it be elected
18 or will it be appointed by the board of
19 supervisors.

20 The other issue is, for those board
21 members will you use the supervisor lines
22 that are already in place or would you draw
23 new district lines for the board members.

24 Another big hot issue that always comes
25 up is the selection of the superintendent.

1 Would he be appointed by the new school
2 board or would he be elected by the people.

3 Another issue that I didn't write down
4 here, but the location of the central office
5 is always a big debate. And, of course,
6 that's typically decided by the new board.
7 So governance of this district, this new
8 district if it's created, is a huge issue.
9 Who is going to lead you and how are you
10 going to select those people?

11 After we go back up and get the
12 statement of position by the various
13 Commission members, when they get through,
14 we'll come back and we'll take public
15 comment if you have registered. And we'll
16 take you in the order that you have
17 registered. So if you wish to make a public
18 comment if you'll get back here and see Ken
19 in that blue blazer he'll take care of you
20 and get you registered.

21 So without further adieu, what I'd like
22 to do is pass the microphone to -- I'm going
23 to begin, I think, tonight with Mr. Rucker,
24 Superintendent here in Holmes County. He
25 will give you the statement of position from

1 the Holmes County folks. And then we'll
2 move down and hear from the folks from
3 Durant and then after that public comment.

4 MR. POWELL RUCKER: Thank you, Mike.
5 First of all, let me say good evening to
6 everyone and welcome out to the Holmes
7 County School District. To our Board
8 members, Mr. Dean, and to the Superintendent
9 of Durant and to the Board members of
10 Durant, let me welcome you again.

11 The Holmes County School District on
12 behalf of our Board, we have worked several
13 years to structure our schools for success
14 in Holmes County; therefore, we believe that
15 consolidation is not the best interest of
16 the boys and girls of Holmes County.

17 Since it is apparent, though, that
18 consolidation with Durant will occur, it is
19 our best interest to recommend solutions to
20 a successful consolidation of the two
21 districts. And these are our
22 recommendations. Relief from all
23 accountabilities for three years and
24 continued support from the Mississippi
25 Department of Education regarding

1 accreditation standards or academic
2 improvements.

3 Also, from the savings on district
4 merger, the consolidation, the resources, we
5 believe that the resources should be shared
6 across this district. So what we're asking
7 is that we get more funding there. Also, we
8 believe that the state should pledge funds
9 to this new district so that we can do the
10 things that we need to do following the
11 consolidation.

12 Next we believe that this district
13 should be given the authority to run a
14 reverse referendum in this county. Next we
15 believe that we should be able to increase
16 our funding authority to 20 percent. Right
17 now we're at 15 percent. We also request
18 the Mississippi Department of Education to
19 provide assistance in the merging of a
20 financial transition of the districts. We
21 also request the Mississippi Department of
22 Education to be instrumental in the
23 development of a partnership with the
24 Institution of Higher Learning to improve
25 high school graduation rates and career

1 planning.

2 Also, we believe that we should get
3 state support to purchase a fleet of buses
4 to transport the 580 students from Durant
5 Public Schools. And so we're talking about
6 possibly 90 buses. Also, we believe that we
7 should receive assistance from the
8 Mississippi Department of Education to
9 implement technology innovation at base
10 schools, in addition also career and
11 technical education course offerings to
12 support the Mississippi College and Career
13 Readiness Standards.

14 We request that the structure of the
15 school board is in line to be parallel with
16 the Holmes County Board of Supervisors. We
17 also request that the Board of Education be
18 elected. And also we added another item
19 that based on public opinion of our last
20 meeting is that according to public opinion
21 that they wanted the superintendent to be
22 elected. So coming back together again we
23 said that we would go along with that also
24 because we wanted to do exactly what the
25 public wanted us to do.

1 So those recommendations are our
2 recommendations of the Holmes County School
3 District and we believe that if these
4 recommendations are granted that the school
5 district will be on a path to success.
6 Thank you.

7 MR. EDWIN ROBINSON: Good evening. I
8 will present to you the position statement
9 for Durant Public School District. Our
10 statement is a function of a letter that was
11 drafted to Mr. Mike Kent, the chairman of
12 our Commission, concerning the consolidated
13 school district structure. So I will read
14 to you this letter and provide to you
15 additional information that is the outgrowth
16 of our meeting held on Monday as cited by
17 Superintendent Powell Rucker.

18 And our letter reads: Dear Chairman
19 Kent, We the undersigned majority members of
20 the Commission on Holmes-Durant Consolidated
21 School District Structure have reviewed the
22 current structure of the school districts
23 and schools in Durant, Mississippi, and
24 Holmes County, Mississippi, as required by
25 House Bill 572. Our recommendations on

1 future actions of the provision and
2 transition of service in order to improve
3 both the quality of education and the
4 efficiency with which it is delivered in
5 those schools is that there should be no
6 consolidation of the Durant Public School
7 District and the Holmes County School
8 District. Although we made it clear at the
9 Commission meeting on May 26th, 2015, both
10 verbally and in writing that we do not
11 support consolidation, you, as the chairman,
12 repeatedly expressed your opinion that the
13 Commission should, in addition to holding
14 hearings expend extensive time and effort
15 addressing structure and location of
16 schools, facility needs and how best to
17 implement consolidation as referenced in
18 House Bill 572. We do not agree that this
19 is necessary or advisable to do so.
20 Consolidation will not improve the quality
21 or efficiency of education. There are no
22 funds available from MAEP or any other
23 sources for facility needs. And there is no
24 evidence of wasteful duplicative or wasteful
25 administrative spending in Durant Public

1 School District.

2 As you are aware, the Holmes County
3 School District representatives on the
4 Commission have also expressed their
5 opposition to any consolidation with the
6 Durant Public School District. Their
7 reasons may be different from the
8 undersigned, as they are concerned that a
9 consolidation will result in difficulties
10 similar to those endured in the recent
11 merger of their district high schools. We
12 do not support consolidation because we
13 believe that today and historically the
14 Durant Public School District has
15 outperformed the Holmes County School
16 District. This can be specifically shown by
17 the respective districts' results on the
18 recent MCAS third grade test. In addition,
19 the City of Durant has supported and is
20 willing to continue to support the Durant
21 Public School District by levying the
22 necessary millage for its continued success.

23 The facts are that all members of the
24 Commission, except for you, expressly do not
25 want consolidation of the two school

1 districts and that the report of the
2 Commission can and should be written
3 expressing these findings as soon as a
4 hearing can be held in the respective school
5 districts.

6 I would also like to add, based on
7 public opinion at a recent town hall
8 meeting, it is the opinion of the citizens
9 of Durant Public School District and the
10 City of Durant that if consolidation were to
11 occur that the superintendent be appointed
12 by the board. This is respectfully
13 submitted by Tremain Johnson, our School
14 Board President, Ms. Rena Pritchard, our
15 Vice President of the Board, Ms. Tasha
16 Davis, our Mayor, Dr. Sarita Glover-Jackson,
17 a parent of a DPSD student, myself, Edwin
18 Robinson, and our former superintendent,
19 Louise Sanders-Tate, along with James Young,
20 our supervisor represented here at the
21 table.

22 Attachments to this letter include
23 historical test data for Durant Public
24 School District and Holmes County School
25 District, which outlines that Durant Public

1 School District has historically
2 outperformed Holmes County School District,
3 and a letter from the mayor of Durant, Ms.
4 Tasha Davis. That is our position.

5 MS. TASHA DAVIS: Good evening,
6 everyone. I do have a letter, as I have
7 read, but I'm going to kind of summarize it
8 because I see a lot of faces that I did see
9 the other night. Contrary to what some
10 think, I don't think that it will occur
11 because there is a higher being than those
12 people down there. So we're going to
13 continue to press on. They did suggest that
14 we do this and we did what was suggested,
15 but we're going to press on and do what they
16 ask us to do. But my letter stated some
17 reasons on why we should not consolidate
18 because they might not have had all of the
19 information.

20 Nearly 50 percent of the faculty and
21 staff reside in the City of Durant. That's
22 our tax base. Without that, where would
23 they go. Where would the tax moneys go.
24 We're losing that tax money. Those people
25 buy houses, they buy groceries. They buy

1 gas. We need that. We need our Durant
2 Public School doors to stay open.

3 If the faculty and staff of Durant
4 Public School District are relieved of their
5 current jobs as educators, the City of
6 Durant will no longer receive their tax
7 dollars, thus, the tax base of the City of
8 Durant will be affected. The City of Durant
9 is financially operational because of the
10 electrical system in which Durant Public
11 School District supplies a substantial
12 quantity of funds. The City of Durant will
13 be dissolved in a sense with the absence of
14 a school due to the lack of jobs. The city
15 will be deprived of the ability to attract
16 any industry without a school in its
17 district. No one wants to move where there
18 is no school, no one. And we have to be
19 realistic about that.

20 Overall, it is readily transparent that
21 the consolidation outlined in House Bill 572
22 will be detrimental to the City of Durant.
23 Basically we're going to dry up and not
24 exist if this happens. Thus, it is my
25 conviction, along with the Board of

1 Alderman, that consolidation of the Holmes
2 County School District and Durant Public
3 School District is unnecessary and to the
4 detriment of our community.

5 And that is basically the letter that
6 we sent out to Chairman Mike Kent for him to
7 put in with everyone else's letter that was
8 sent out. So we are requesting that they
9 not consolidate based on a lot of things
10 that I just listed here. Thank you.

11 MR. MIKE KENT: Ken, do we have some
12 folks registered?

13 MR. KEN STAMPS: We do.

14 MR. MIKE KENT: Okay. We have a full
15 slate of folks who have registered to speak.
16 Who is the timekeeper tonight?

17 DR. BILL WELCH: I got it.

18 MR. MIKE KENT: Okay. Dr. Welch will
19 be the timekeeper. We'll allot three
20 minutes. He will give you some kind of sign
21 when you're getting close to three minutes
22 and then will stop you when you reach your
23 three-minute time limit.

24 If I could, could Darnetha James -- I
25 hope I've got that right -- would you come

1 up, please, ma'am. And then Faye White, if
2 you would be ready. And, for the record,
3 when you begin if you would just state your
4 name so that the court reporter can get it.

5 MS. DARNETHA JAMES: Good evening. I'm
6 Darnetha James, Durant Public Schools. I
7 just have two quick questions for Mr. Kent
8 and I have a statement. Okay. The first
9 question is, I thought our school was under
10 desegregation order from back in the
11 sixties. What about that?

12 And the second question is, how can
13 consolidation benefit our children as far as
14 their education?

15 MR. MIKE KENT: Okay.

16 MS. DARNETHA JAMES: And the third
17 thing, the statement is, I just wanted to
18 let everyone know, most, 95 percent of the
19 residents of Durant, the parents and the
20 students, they're not for consolidation at
21 all. Did you get those questions? The
22 first one was, I thought our school was
23 under desegregation order from back in the
24 sixties. I believe that's right because I
25 went to school back there in the sixties.

1 MR. MIKE KENT: Keep in mind that
2 consolidation, the notion of consolidation,
3 did not originate within the Mississippi
4 Department of Education. So I can't answer
5 those questions. I can tell you that other
6 school districts that have been consolidated
7 have been under standing desegregation
8 orders. So a deseg order will not stop a
9 state-ordered consolidation. So that's the
10 best answer I can give you on that one.

11 Our next one, Ms. White, Faye D. White,
12 if you would come up, please, ma'am. And
13 then LaTonya Smith Gladney is next.

14 BOARD MEMBER: Did you answer the other
15 question?

16 MR. MIKE KENT: Okay. I answered about
17 deseg. What was the other one?

18 MS. DARNETHA JAMES: How can
19 consolidation benefit our children's
20 education? How is it beneficial to our
21 children's education?

22 MR. MIKE KENT: Well, consolidation is
23 really a -- I mean, we could spend hours
24 talking about how consolidation can be a
25 better thing. I think the folks in Holmes

1 County who have consolidated their three
2 high schools have probably -- or merged
3 their three high schools -- could probably
4 give you some responses to how that can
5 better -- there is an economy of scale. As
6 you get a little bit bigger you can do more
7 things. So that's a really, really long
8 answer. And, you know, I don't know that
9 it's really my job to defend consolidation.
10 I think it's your job to investigate it and
11 decide, you know, whether you're for it or
12 against it and then try to put pressure on
13 your legislators to make it happen the way
14 you want it to happen.

15 MS. FAYE WHITE: Hello. My name is
16 Faye White. I'm from Durant Public Schools.
17 I have some of the similar questions that
18 everyone else has. If you all can't answer
19 us, why are we standing up here asking these
20 questions? We need to talk to the ones that
21 will answer. I mean, what would happen to
22 our children and the parents of these
23 children in Durant if they have to get up at
24 3 or 4 in the morning and some of those
25 parents go to their jobs at that time of

1 morning. What would happen to their
2 children. I have grandchildren at Durant
3 Public Schools.

4 MR. MIKE KENT: I'm going to do my best
5 to try to answer some of these things. Does
6 that conclude your question?

7 MS. FAYE WHITE: Yes.

8 MR. MIKE KENT: Okay. This is an
9 administrative consolidation. There is
10 nothing -- none of the consolidations that
11 have occurred so far have ordered the
12 closing of any schools. It has simply gone
13 from two superintendents in two central
14 offices to one superintendent, one central
15 office, one school board. So there is no --
16 I would not anticipate that if the
17 Legislature passes a consolidation bill that
18 they would order the closing of any school.

19 What they would do is order the
20 selection of a new board and that would
21 create the need for a new superintendent and
22 then the new board would make decisions
23 about closing schools, bus routes, all of
24 that. That's why the hot button issues, why
25 are we here, we need to be talking about how

1 are we going to select that board, if it
2 happens, because that board is the one
3 that's going to make huge decisions if it
4 happens.

5 Our next is Ms. Gladney. If you'd come
6 up, please, ma'am. And I believe Ms.
7 Hightower is next.

8 MS. LATONYA SMITH GLADNEY: Good
9 evening. My name is LaTonya Smith Gladney.
10 I have four questions for you. My first
11 question is: Why should we, Durant Public
12 Schools, consolidate with a district whose
13 test scores are lower than ours? Second
14 question: If the schools are consolidated,
15 where will the tax money go? Third
16 question: How did House Bill 572 get
17 started? We understand the language of
18 House Bill 572, but why was it proposed for
19 Holmes and Durant? My last question is: If
20 the legislators will make the decision on
21 consolidation or not, why is it that Mr.
22 Rucker's letters state that, since it is
23 apparent that the consolidation will occur
24 between Holmes and Durant? Why does his
25 letter state that if the decision hasn't

1 been made yet? Does our opinion count if
2 he's already said it like that?

3 MR. MIKE KENT: Why should we
4 consolidate with a district whose test
5 scores are lower than ours? You're really
6 posing the question to the wrong person. I
7 did not write the consolidation bill. So
8 this should be posed to the folks who will
9 make that decision.

10 Okay. If the schools are consolidated,
11 where will the tax money go? Tax money
12 would go to the new consolidated board, so
13 the new consolidated board will make
14 decisions about how to spend the money.

15 How did House Bill 572 get started?
16 572 was authored by Toby Barker. Mr. Barker
17 is a member of the Mississippi House of
18 Representatives from the Brookhaven area.

19 Why was it proposed for Holmes and
20 Durant? I can't answer that. I have heard
21 the term low-hanging fruit in the
22 Legislature, meaning that there are certain
23 school districts that are ripe for
24 consolidation. Typically they are
25 relatively small and they are not very high

1 performing. In this case you have Durant,
2 which is less than 600 students and both
3 Durant and the Holmes County School
4 District, I think, are at D level on their
5 accreditation scores.

6 And then, finally, why does Mr.
7 Rucker's letter read -- uses the term, since
8 it is apparent that consolidation will occur
9 between Holmes and Durant. I think if
10 you'll read House Bill 572, the Legislature
11 created a Commission and ordered the
12 Commission to do a report outlining on how
13 best to consolidate. It's apparent to me
14 that they created this Commission with
15 something in mind and it's pretty obvious.
16 Thank you, ma'am.

17 The next speaker I believe, would that
18 be Ms. Hightower, Linda Hightower? And then
19 Ms. Gray, I believe, Trenise Gray.

20 MS. LINDA HIGHTOWER: Hi. My name is
21 Linda Hightower and I've got a question.
22 Can they assure us that the high school will
23 stay open? Can they assure that the high
24 school will stay open?

25 MR. MIKE KENT: Is that your question?

1 MS. LINDA HIGHTOWER: That's my
2 question. And the next one is, can you tell
3 me three benefits of consolidation because I
4 can't see it right now.

5 MR. MIKE KENT: Okay. Can they assure
6 us the high school will stay open? They
7 being who?

8 MS. LINDA HIGHTOWER: The state.

9 MR. MIKE KENT: Again, see, I can't
10 assure you of anything because I won't write
11 the bill. I'm not involved in that process.
12 So these are the questions that you need to
13 be asking your legislators. Again, every
14 one of these consolidation bills that we've
15 seen, none of them have ordered the closing
16 of any schools. It has just simply gone
17 from multiple superintendents and multiple
18 boards to one board, one superintendent.

19 And what was the other one?

20 MS. LINDA HIGHTOWER: Name three
21 benefits of consolidation.

22 MR. MIKE KENT: Again, I think I've
23 already answered that and I'm not going to
24 answer it again. So here is my answer:
25 There is an economy of scale in school

1 districts. Typically a high school with 600
2 students or more can offer more courses,
3 more advanced courses, and do more things
4 with their curriculum, more positive things
5 than a smaller high school. As high schools
6 go down in size, they typically have fewer
7 course offerings. So that will be the one
8 example I'll give you. There are others and
9 I would invite you to do your research on
10 it.

11 I'm not here -- it's not my job to
12 promote consolidation. I don't have a part
13 in the decision. I'm not here to sell it;
14 I'm not here to fight it. I'm just here to
15 help conduct the meeting. Thank you, ma'am.
16 Ms. Gray.

17 MS. TRENISE GRAY: Good evening. Since
18 it's pretty pointless to ask questions, I'm
19 just here as an active parent and a citizen
20 of Durant, and I'm not for consolidation.

21 MR. MIKE KENT: Mr. Gray.

22 MR. ISAAC GRAY: Good evening. Isaac
23 Gray is my name. I just want to make a
24 point of, I'm not with consolidating for
25 Durant Schools. My biggest situation I was

1 discussing with my wife was, what about a
2 state of emergency. Everybody that lives in
3 Durant doesn't own a vehicle. So if an
4 emergency happened over here, how would they
5 come and see about their child. You know,
6 it's convenient for the community to look
7 out for one another over in Durant for their
8 kids. You know, if something happened we
9 could get to them. But if a state of
10 emergency happens, everybody don't have a
11 vehicle so how would they be able to help
12 the situation out. Or if a child gets sick,
13 you know, the parent can't come get them,
14 they're at work or whatever. By the school
15 being in their own neighborhood, a neighbor
16 could come and check on them or a cousin or
17 they can walk to school and get their child.
18 So I'm not with consolidating. Thank you.

19 MR. MIKE KENT: Linda Sallis, please,
20 followed by Eloise Luckett, I believe it is.

21 MS. LINDA SALLIS: Hello. My name is
22 Linda Sallis. Most of what I had to ask has
23 already been asked, but I do want to go on
24 record. At the meeting in Durant the
25 question was asked about the tax dollars,

1 what would be done with the tax dollars and
2 how did we get to this point. My question
3 to you: The person that brought up the
4 bill, is he or she white or black? But you
5 can answer that for me.

6 MR. MIKE KENT: Yes, ma'am.

7 MS. LINDA SALLIS: Because I really
8 would like to know that one.

9 And my other question is to my
10 superintendent. Every time you call a
11 community meeting it always be, like today,
12 we have a pep rally. You need to be over
13 there at that pep rally welcoming the kids
14 back to the school and telling the team good
15 luck. Before when we had community meetings
16 it was during graduation and you did not
17 show up at graduation. Being a
18 superintendent, you should be at every
19 graduation, every graduation. Like calling
20 a community meeting on graduation day
21 because that's where parents are going to
22 be. Parents are going to be with their
23 kids. I'm going to follow mines.

24 And for your question about if
25 something happened over here, I went to my

1 superintendent, he said my way to Tchula. I
2 told him I didn't have no gas to go to
3 Tchula, but if something happened to my
4 child he better get back this way. So thank
5 you. But I do want you to answer my
6 question, black or white, because all over
7 here is black.

8 MR. MIKE KENT: Yes, ma'am. I believe
9 Mr. Barker is white. Would it be -- is that
10 Eloise? And then Annie Palmer, I believe
11 you're next.

12 MS. ELOISE LUCKETT: Good evening. I'm
13 a parent, I'm a grandparent of Durant High.
14 I have grandchildren at Durant High School.
15 I have a question for you, Mr. Kent. If you
16 cannot answer any of our questions, you need
17 to bring the legislator to us where we can
18 ask these questions cause right at this
19 point now our children -- we're not
20 interested in consolidation at all because
21 it's going to be too early in the morning
22 for our children to be bussed to a different
23 school. I works in the morning time. My
24 daughters work. All of my children works.
25 There is going to be an issue with that.

1 And I think right at this point we don't
2 need no consolidation with Durant Public
3 Schools.

4 And I need you to answer my question
5 about this legislator. Since you can't
6 answer any question that we ask, anyone in
7 this building asks you, you need to bring
8 the legislator to us so we can sit down and
9 get this problem resolved.

10 MR. MIKE KENT: Ms. Palmer, I believe
11 you're up. Followed by -- Erica Allen's
12 name has been scratched out. Is Ms. Allen
13 still here? Does she wish to speak? No?
14 Then Ms. Tammy Trotter, I believe.

15 MS. ANNIE PALMER: Good evening,
16 everyone. I'm Annie Palmer from Durant
17 Public School. I'm a grandparent there. My
18 question to you, Mr. Kent, is: What benefit
19 would it be for my child, my grandchildren,
20 to be bussed to school when now they can
21 walk to school because Mr. Rucker did say
22 that there will be need for buses. So why
23 would I -- my tax dollars be used to buy a
24 bus when my grandkids can walk to school.
25 That's my question.

1 MR. MIKE KENT: Are there any others?

2 MS. ANNIE PALMER: I'm through. That's
3 it.

4 MR. MIKE KENT: Again, my job is to
5 conduct this meeting. My job is not to have
6 these answers. If consolidation occurs,
7 then obviously you would be asking your new
8 school board those questions. Ms. Trotter,
9 followed by Alexandria Trotter.

10 MS. TAMMY TROTTER: Good evening,
11 everyone. My name is Tammy Trotter and I am
12 a parent. I have seven children at Durant
13 Public School, and I am not for
14 consolidation. The third grade test, I had
15 one in third grade last year, he did beyond
16 proficiency. I have one in third grade now,
17 he can read the Bible so I know he's going
18 to do beyond proficiency also.

19 My kids get up, walk to school, and
20 they're at school on time. I don't believe
21 that they're going to be able to get up at a
22 different time trying to get to school, way
23 early trying to get on the bus and all of
24 that. I have ones that play sports and if
25 they go to another school they're not going

1 to be able to play sports because it's going
2 to be too much confusion. So I'm not for
3 consolidation.

4 MS. ALEXANDRIA TROTTER: Hello,
5 everyone. My name is Alexandria Trotter and
6 I'm for the Durant Public School District.
7 And I do not agree with the consolidation
8 because if we play basketball, I love to
9 play basketball, and there would not be any
10 basketball or no football team for me to
11 play basketball. And that would take away
12 some of the consequence that the parents
13 have for their kids to play sports. They
14 say your grades have to be an A or a B and
15 that will take away less consequences for
16 the parents to have for their kids to play
17 basketball or football.

18 We wake up around 6:30 to be at school
19 at 7:20 or 7:15 or something like that. And
20 there's seven of us, it's hard for us all to
21 get up on time and get to school and be
22 ready and be prepared. So I do not agree
23 with the consolidation. So I would like to
24 fight for Durant Public School doors to stay
25 open for elementary, junior high and high

1 school. Thank you for your time.

2 MR. MIKE KENT: Durant Public Schools
3 did a good job with her, didn't they? Leroy
4 Johnson followed by Tiffany Walsh and then
5 followed by Marsha English.

6 MR. LEROY JOHNSON: My name is Leroy
7 Johnson. I'm the Executive Director of
8 Southern Echo so I'm speaking from an
9 organizational standpoint and also a parent
10 here in Holmes County and also speaking in
11 memory of my wife who was on the board here
12 for 13 years of the Holmes County School
13 Board.

14 I will start by saying, What lies in
15 our power to do also lies in our power not
16 to do, by Aristotle. And my father was
17 James Johnson that was as smart as Aristotle
18 said, There is no right way to do wrong.
19 The Mississippi Legislature called Holmes
20 County low-hanging fruit. So I'm not saying
21 that from what Mr. Kent said, I'm saying
22 that from what Leroy Johnson heard them say.
23 But our children are not low hanging. And
24 so this Legislature needs to do some things
25 if it wants to make a difference in Holmes

1 County School District.

2 First of all, the Katrina in the room
3 is race and class. And the Legislature made
4 these decisions around race and class.
5 That's why we became low-hanging fruit. The
6 Legislature also spent money laying out from
7 specific experts about school consolidation.
8 Those experts told them that forced
9 consolidation doesn't work. So if you spent
10 all this money and you brought all of these
11 experts in and these experts told you that
12 forced consolidation doesn't work then why
13 are you trying to force it. If it doesn't
14 fit, don't force it.

15 What the Legislature needs to do: One,
16 fully fund MAEP; two, raise the five percent
17 bump to 114 percent of base student cost;
18 three, have Holmes County and specific
19 geographic based scholarships for students
20 who will teach in these areas, designate 25
21 percent of best-performing teachers from
22 across the state for five-year admissions in
23 Holmes County, which attach a \$10,000 bonus
24 for them for each year; four, raise teacher
25 pay to the Southeast average; five, give

1 MSU, Mississippi Valley State University,
2 Jackson State University and Holmes
3 Community College extra funds to work
4 specifically with academic improvements and
5 teacher improvements in Holmes County; six,
6 provide \$1 million a year for parent
7 training and engaging in P-16 Council for a
8 healthy school and healthy communities;
9 seven, this is for Rucker, a new central
10 high school paid for by state funds; and
11 number eight, for the new superintendent who
12 is elected, for her to be able to stay in
13 office for four years and after those four
14 years to have an appointed superintendent
15 and an elected board because I want my
16 superintendent to be not politics but
17 capacity.

18 And so I say again what my daddy said,
19 there is no right way to do wrong.

20 MR. MIKE KENT: Ms. Tiffany Walsh
21 followed by Marshall English followed by
22 Ellen Reddy.

23 MS. TIFFANY WALSH: Hello. My name is
24 Tiffany Walsh and I'm a parent of a child
25 who attends Durant. I oppose the

1 consolidation. And as Mayor Tasha says, a
2 lot of jobs will be lost for the citizens of
3 Durant. It will also affect the citizens
4 that live in Durant who work outside of
5 Durant. It will be hard for us to get our
6 kids to school and pick them up in the
7 evening time. If it's about the kids, did
8 they even consider how the kids felt. And I
9 have no suggestions on how the board or how
10 the consolidation would look like because
11 that's what it says up here. It says, If
12 the consolidation happens, what do we want
13 it to look like? I don't have no
14 suggestions on that. I don't know how it's
15 going to look. And can Toby Barker or
16 whoever that initiated the consolidation
17 attend the next meeting?

18 MR. MIKE KENT: The question was asked
19 about Mr. Barker attending the next meeting.
20 We only have two public meetings scheduled.
21 Mr. Barker is in the Legislature. He has an
22 address. You can certainly, you know, send
23 things to his legislative address.

24 MS. ELLEN REDDY: Good evening. My
25 name is Ellen Reddy. I'm the Executive

1 Director for Nollie Jenkins Family Center
2 located in Durant, Mississippi. I am also
3 an advocate in this community. I've worked
4 around public education reform for about 20
5 years here. I'm also the sister to Leroy
6 Johnson's wife who was on the Holmes County
7 School Board.

8 My comments are in relationship to the
9 three points that the Commission has been
10 charged with. First, I want to say, in
11 order to improve the quality and efficiency
12 of education in Durant and the Holmes County
13 School District requires visionary
14 leadership. With that said, it is our
15 strong belief as an organization that the
16 only way we can achieve quality education
17 outcomes is through a knowledgeable and
18 proactive elected school board and an
19 appointed superintendent. As Mr. Johnson
20 said, I would really like to see our
21 superintendent elect provide the leadership
22 over the next four years and then we switch
23 to an appointed superintendent. With an
24 appointed superintendent, the school board
25 is able to reach beyond the local community

1 and/or state to employ a manager with the
2 necessary skills to achieve education
3 outcomes for our children.

4 Note, I want to make a special note.
5 The appointment of a superintendent should
6 not be a superintendent who has not
7 demonstrated consistent successfully
8 performing school districts. The school
9 board needs to be knowledgeable and willing
10 to perform their roles as policymakers, be
11 willing to evaluate the superintendent and
12 the performance of the school district based
13 on stated goals and objectives.

14 The school board education district,
15 then, will be consistent with the board of
16 supervisors' lines. In addition, then the
17 citizens of Durant can run to be a member of
18 the Holmes County School Board and vote in
19 school board elections.

20 Second, I think our students, whether
21 they're in Durant Public School or the
22 Holmes County School District, need and
23 deserve a premiere high school. With the
24 exception of SV Marshall and William Dean
25 Elementary, we have not had a high school to

1 be built in this county since the late
2 sixties. And correct me if I'm wrong.
3 Currently our high schools cannot
4 accommodate all of Holmes County students.
5 We lack lockers for students' coats and
6 books. Our classrooms are overcrowded. We
7 lack adequate facilities for boys and girls
8 to participate in sports. We offer limited
9 advancement placement courses, subjects, and
10 extracurricular activities. We have a
11 shortage of teachers in math, science, and
12 special ed. And certainly we do not have
13 the facilities of a 5A school district.
14 However, the building of a new high school
15 requires visionary leadership and a
16 strategic plan that engages and values all
17 sectors of the community.

18 So the decision to build a new school
19 is strategic and thoughtful and takes into
20 account that while we are in an impoverished
21 community or county, there is nothing more
22 important than our young people and we are
23 willing to make the necessary sacrifices as
24 citizens when we feel that we can be a part
25 of those discussions. The community needs

1 additional dialogue and information to
2 respond to some questions.

3 And I will close by saying, finally, we
4 vehemently disagree with Superintendent
5 Rucker that Mississippi Department of
6 Education should exempt the district from
7 the accountability standards for three years
8 if we were to consolidate. Historically
9 each time there have been changes, whether
10 state or local, we want to be exempt. If
11 we're using data to make the decisions and
12 evaluate, we then can make decisions about
13 what's in the best interest of our children.
14 Thank you.

15 MR. MIKE KENT: Janice Harper is our
16 final commenter.

17 MS. JANICE HARPER: Good evening,
18 everyone. I've listened to and heard a lot
19 of things being said. I missed the Durant
20 meeting because I had to be somewhere else,
21 but I've been at the Commission meetings.
22 And I just want to suggest that there are
23 what we call P-16 Community Engagement
24 Councils inside of our school district. It
25 can be used as a structured mechanism to

1 help strategically right now implement and
2 develop a plan, since it's sounding as if
3 the two districts are going to be
4 consolidated. These P-16 Community Council
5 Engagements, they are Mississippi legislated
6 that was enacted by the Children First Act
7 of 2009. There's accountability standard
8 that's attached to it, and they are assigned
9 to all schools that are ranked less than
10 successful. And we all know, predominantly
11 black schools, what our ranking has been,
12 from a D to an F to a D.

13 So I've heard a lot about Durant
14 outdoing Holmes County. I've seen some of
15 those stats. There is really no comparison
16 because the district is smaller than Holmes
17 county, but what I'm hearing is that this is
18 a possibility that is going to occur. We
19 don't know this but I hear Mike Kent from
20 the MDE, Mississippi Department of
21 Education, also talking about that it's his
22 duty just to conduct this meeting and that
23 it's up to the Commission to put a plan
24 together. They have stated their letters
25 and that they are against consolidation.

1 I've heard from Durant members, Lexington
2 members, that we're against this
3 consolidation, but what I'm hearing is that
4 more than a letter is what needed to go to
5 our representatives. There needs to be a
6 plan. And when I talk plan, we're talking
7 about plan, a piece of paper, something in
8 black and white, just like what I'm reading
9 off from. The P-16 Council is a group that
10 is assigned -- they're in the district now.
11 I don't know about in Durant but they're in
12 Holmes County that can actually be utilized
13 to help implement and develop such a plan,
14 as to answer that question, what do we want
15 it to look like if it should happen.

16 So we can't just -- I hear you, that we
17 don't want it, but it sounds like it may
18 happen. So if it should happen, we need to
19 address this. So that's what I'm speaking
20 to. Let's address that question. Use the
21 P-16 Council inside of the district that are
22 mandated by the state in order to bring this
23 forward to help with these plans.

24 I'm not against a high school, a new
25 high school in the district. If you're

1 going to consolidate, let's put it in the
2 plan to the state, to Toby Barker. If we've
3 all got to come together, we want a fleet of
4 busses. We want this, we want that. Just
5 name it out. We've got to lay it out. I
6 understand and I hear about the conflict
7 that it will cause, but if we don't say what
8 we want if it happens then they're going to
9 give us what they want to give us, which is
10 strictly the consolidation.

11 MS. MARSHAY ENGLISH: Hello. My name
12 is Marshay English and I'm against the
13 consolidation. I don't feel we should
14 combine because the fact is, it's going to
15 be too many children in one school and it
16 would be a lot of confusion. I mean, it's
17 just too many combined together. I love
18 sports. I power lift, I run track, I play
19 basketball. My academics come first and I
20 feel that it's just too many of us, there
21 would be too much confusion and we won't be
22 able to get our lesson and get what we need
23 to learn. I am a sophomore trying to get my
24 electives so I can graduate. I passed my
25 state test that I already took and I don't

1 want to have to go through and have to redo
2 things that I done already did. So I'm
3 against the consolidation. I want to stay
4 in Durant High.

5 MR. MIKE KENT: Okay. Mr. James Wiley,
6 Sr. And then our final one is Terry Floyd.

7 MR. JAMES WILEY, SR.: My name is James
8 Wiley from the city of Durant and I'm
9 positively opposed to consolidation. I had
10 questions from the information I had
11 received previously. I thought I was going
12 to have a lot of questions, but thanks to
13 the opposition they have covered everything
14 that I was going to say.

15 But perhaps, Mr. Kent, you can tell me,
16 in view of all of this opposition, why are
17 we here?

18 MR. MIKE KENT: I think I've already
19 answered that one time. We are required by
20 law, this Commission requires us to create a
21 report to the Legislature. So that
22 responsibility will fall directly on the
23 Mississippi Department of Ed that I work
24 for, Mr. Welch works for, all of our team.
25 So we're going to do a report. The report

1 will reflect what has occurred in these
2 meetings.

3 Our final speaker is Mr. Floyd, I
4 believe, and we'll be concluded.

5 MR. TERRY FLOYD: Good evening. My
6 name is Terry Floyd. I'm the class of 1987
7 Durant High School. I'm the father of a
8 class of 2011 graduate and a current parent
9 of two current students. And basically what
10 I've got to say is, I've got a statement and
11 a rhetorical question, just something that
12 makes you think, that it doesn't necessarily
13 require an answer. I kind of want to
14 piggyback off of what Mayor Davis said. One
15 of the legacies of Durant High, the City of
16 Durant, is the fact that we have proven that
17 locally controlled neighborhood schools
18 work. And that's what we believe in. We
19 believe in locally controlled neighborhood
20 schools.

21 Now, when I say this, you know, if it's
22 truly about the children we need to have a
23 little thick skin. This is not anything
24 against the current superintendent of Holmes
25 County School System, Mr. Rucker. But if

1 it's truly about the kids I've got this
2 rhetorical question. How in the world would
3 it benefit the children of the City of
4 Durant to merge with a school system that
5 has a elementary school that has the worst
6 third grade scores in the state of
7 Mississippi. Those are the verifiable
8 facts.

9 And if you want to compare and contrast
10 something to that, if you look at our
11 neighboring county, you've got Long Creek
12 Elementary School, same socioeconomic
13 dynamics, geographical, I think they're
14 maybe about 15 miles apart, and they have
15 some of the highest test scores in the state
16 of Mississippi.

17 So I just want you to think. I know
18 it's politics and all of that, but if it's
19 truly about the children how would it
20 benefit the children of Durant to merge with
21 a school system that has an elementary
22 school that has the lowest third grade test
23 scores in the state of Mississippi. And
24 those are the verifiable facts. Thank you.

25 MR. MIKE KENT: First of all, thank you

1 for coming out tonight. I'll remind you
2 that we do have a court reporter here
3 tonight. She will create a transcript of
4 this meeting, everything that was said. And
5 that transcript, along with the transcript
6 from Monday night's meeting, will be part of
7 the report that's submitted to the
8 Legislature. Again, thank you for coming
9 out tonight and we're concluded.

10 (CONCLUDED AT APPROXIMATELY 7:30 P.M.)
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1 CERTIFICATE

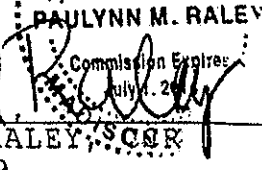
2 I, PAULYNN M. RALEY, Court Reporter and
3 Notary Public, Madison County, Mississippi,
4 hereby certify that the foregoing pages, and
5 including this page, contain a full, true and
6 correct transcript of the testimony of the
7 witness as taken by me by means of Stenograph
8 machine at the time and place heretofore stated
9 in the aforementioned matter and later reduced to
10 transcript form by me to the best of my skill and
11 ability.

12 I further certify that I placed the
13 witness under oath to truthfully answer all
14 questions in this matter under the authority
15 vested in me by the State of Mississippi.

16 I further certify that I am not related
17 to or in any way associated with any of the
18 parties to said cause of action, or their
19 counsel, and that I am not interested in the
20 event hereof.

21 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set
22 my hand this the 9 day of Sept

23 
24 PAULYNN M. RALEY, SCOR
25 #1239



COMMISSION ON HOLMES-DURANT
SCHOOL DISTRICT STRUCTURE

IF CONSOLIDATION HAPPENS,
WHAT DO WE WANT IT TO LOOK LIKE?

DATE: AUGUST 20, 2015
LOCATION: HOLMES COUNTY CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL
9479 BROZVILLE ROAD
LEXINGTON, MISSISSIPPI
TIME: 6:00 P.M.

ASPIRE REPORTING, LLC
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1 A P P E A R A N C E S

2

3 MIKE KENT, CHAIRMAN, MS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

4 JAMES THOMPSON

5 KEN STAMPS

6 JOSEPH RUNNELS

7 DR. BILL WELCH

8

9 FOWELL RUCKER

10 EDWIN ROBINSON

11 WILLIAM DEAN

12 JAMES YOUNG

13 SARITA JACKSON

14 RENE PRITCHARD

15 TASHA DAVIS

16 TREMAIN JOHNSON

9 Keep in mind that as far as
10 consolidation is concerned, this Commission
11 has no authority to decide whether or not
12 consolidation occurs. Let's just get that
13 out of the way right off the bat. Where
14 will that decision be made? State
15 Legislature, that's exactly right. This
16 particular Commission was formed to make
17 recommendations so that if consolidation
18 occurs what do the citizens of Holmes County
19 want it to look like. So that is the goal
20 of this particular Commission.

21 Let me begin tonight by introducing
22 myself. My name is Mike Kent. I'm a former
23 school superintendent and I do contract work
24 for the Mississippi Department of Ed. I've
25 been involved in several of the school

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1 consolidations that have occurred recently.
2 Our team tonight is James Thompson back in
3 the back. Ken Stamps, over here. Joseph
4 Runnels. Joseph is a Special Assistant
5 Attorney General assigned to the Department
6 of Ed. And Dr. Bill Welch is my colleague.
7 Dr. Welch has also been deeply involved in
8 the consolidations in Sunflower County,
9 Starkville/Oktibbeha and some of the others
10 as well.

11 At this time I'd like for the members
12 of the Commission to introduce themselves.
13 I'm going to pass the microphone down. Let
14 me just say this, the Commission was
15 prescribed by law. Certain individuals, for
16 instance, members of certain Boards of
17 Education, members of the Board of
18 Supervisors, the mayor of Durant, this was
19 prescribed by law. So without further
20 adieu, let me see if we can pass this down
21 and let these folks introduce themselves.

22 MR. EDWIN ROBINSON: Thank you, Mike.
23 My name is Edwin Robinson. I'm the
24 superintendent of Durant Public School
25 District.

<p style="text-align: right;">Page 6</p> <p>1 MR. JAMES YOUNG: James Young, 2 President, Holmes County Board of 3 Supervisors. 4 MR. POWELL RUCKER: Powell Rucker, 5 Superintendent of Holmes County School 6 District. 7 MR. WILLIAM DEAN, JR.: William Dean, 8 Jr., Board member, Holmes County Schools. 9 MS. TASHA DAVIS: Good evening, 10 everyone. I am Tasha Davis, Mayor for the 11 big city of Durant. 12 MS. RENA PRITCHARD: My name is Rena 13 Pritchard and I'm the Vice President of the 14 School Board for Durant Public Schools. 15 MS. SARITA GLOVER-JACKSON: My name is 16 Sarita Glover-Jackson, Durant Public School 17 parent. 18 MR. MIKE KENT: There are a couple of 19 folks that are not here. I don't believe 20 Mr. Tremain Johnson is here. He may come in 21 later. He represents the Durant Schools. 22 Let's see. Did I miss anybody? Rayford 23 Horton. Rayford Horton representing Holmes 24 County School District is not here yet so he 25 may come in later.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Page 8</p> <p>1 already, and there's been a good bit of 2 discussion about this and probably been some 3 discussion among you all. So there are 4 differences of opinion on the Commission as 5 it relates to consolidation. And in just a 6 few minutes we will have three statements of 7 position as it relates to consolidation, but 8 I want to come back to that in just a 9 second. 10 Look at the Typical Hot Button Issues 11 if you would. Things that this Commission 12 should be thinking about is, if 13 consolidation occurs what about the 14 governments. What will the new board look 15 like. How will that board be selected. 16 Will it be an elected board because there 17 will be a new board now. Will it be elected 18 or will it be appointed by the board of 19 supervisors. 20 The other issue is, for those board 21 members will you use the supervisor lines 22 that are already in place or would you draw 23 new district lines for the board members. 24 Another big hot issue that always comes 25 up is the selection of the superintendent.</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Page 7</p> <p>1 Again, a ten-member Commission whose 2 job it is to meet and make recommendations 3 that if consolidation occurs what do we want 4 it to look like. 5 If you would, look at your program and 6 under Roman Numeral I after the 7 Introductions, you'll see there that the 8 Commission is required by law, and I quote, 9 "to hold hearings and meet as necessary in 10 order to develop a report to the 11 Legislature, the Governor, and the State 12 Board of Education with recommendations on 13 the following:" Now, there's three specific 14 things that this Board is supposed to 15 address. It is supposed to, "review 16 structure and recommend how these two school 17 districts can be consolidated to improve 18 quality and efficiency." Second, "review 19 capital facility needs and make 20 recommendations to address them." In other 21 words, the buildings. Are there buildings 22 that need to be built or refurbished or 23 rehabilitated. Thirdly, simply, "detail how 24 best to implement consolidation." 25 Now, this Commission has met twice</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Page 9</p> <p>1 Would he be appointed by the new school 2 board or would he be elected by the people. 3 Another issue that I didn't write down 4 here, but the location of the central office 5 is always a big debate. And, of course, 6 that's typically decided by the new board. 7 So governance of this district, this new 8 district if it's created, is a huge issue. 9 Who is going to lead you and how are you 10 going to select those people? 11 After we go back up and get the 12 statement of position by the various 13 Commission members, when they get through, 14 we'll come back and we'll take public 15 comment if you have registered. And we'll 16 take you in the order that you have 17 registered. So if you wish to make a public 18 comment if you'll get back here and see Ken 19 in that blue blazer he'll take care of you 20 and get you registered. 21 So without further adieu, what I'd like 22 to do is pass the microphone to -- I'm going 23 to begin, I think, tonight with Mr. Rucker, 24 Superintendent here in Holmes County. He 25 will give you the statement of position from</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">Page 10</p> <p>1 the Holmes County folks. And then we'll 2 move down and hear from the folks from 3 Durant and then after that public comment. 4 MR. POWELL RUCKER: Thank you, Mike. 5 First of all, let me say good evening to 6 everyone and welcome out to the Holmes 7 County School District. To our Board 8 members, Mr. Dean, and to the Superintendent 9 of Durant and to the Board members of 10 Durant, let me welcome you again. 11 The Holmes County School District on 12 behalf of our Board, we have worked several 13 years to structure our schools for success 14 in Holmes County; therefore, we believe that 15 consolidation is not the best interest of 16 the boys and girls of Holmes County. 17 Since it is apparent, though, that 18 consolidation with Durant will occur, it is 19 our best interest to recommend solutions to 20 a successful consolidation of the two 21 districts. And these are our 22 recommendations. Relief from all 23 accountabilities for three years and 24 continued support from the Mississippi 25 Department of Education regarding</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Page 12</p> <p>1 planning. 2 Also, we believe that we should get 3 state support to purchase a fleet of buses 4 to transport the 580 students from Durant 5 Public Schools. And so we're talking about 6 possibly 90 buses. Also, we believe that we 7 should receive assistance from the 8 Mississippi Department of Education to 9 implement technology innovation at base 10 schools, in addition also career and 11 technical education course offerings to 12 support the Mississippi College and Career 13 Readiness Standards. 14 We request that the structure of the 15 school board is in line to be parallel with 16 the Holmes County Board of Supervisors. We 17 also request that the Board of Education be 18 elected. And also we added another item 19 that based on public opinion of our last 20 meeting is that according to public opinion 21 that they wanted the superintendent to be 22 elected. So coming back together again we 23 said that we would go along with that also 24 because we wanted to do exactly what the 25 public wanted us to do.</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Page 11</p> <p>1 accreditation standards or academic 2 improvements. 3 Also, from the savings on district 4 merger, the consolidation, the resources, we 5 believe that the resources should be shared 6 across this district. So what we're asking 7 is that we get more funding there. Also, we 8 believe that the state should pledge funds 9 to this new district so that we can do the 10 things that we need to do following the 11 consolidation. 12 Next we believe that this district 13 should be given the authority to run a 14 reverse referendum in this county. Next we 15 believe that we should be able to increase 16 our funding authority to 20 percent. Right 17 now we're at 15 percent. We also request 18 the Mississippi Department of Education to 19 provide assistance in the merging of a 20 financial transition of the districts. We 21 also request the Mississippi Department of 22 Education to be instrumental in the 23 development of a partnership with the 24 Institution of Higher Learning to improve 25 high school graduation rates and career</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Page 13</p> <p>1 So those recommendations are our 2 recommendations of the Holmes County School 3 District and we believe that if these 4 recommendations are granted that the school 5 district will be on a path to success. 6 Thank you. 7 MR. EDWIN ROBINSON: Good evening. I 8 will present to you the position statement 9 for Durant Public School District. Our 10 statement is a function of a letter that was 11 drafted to Mr. Mike Kent, the chairman of 12 our Commission, concerning the consolidated 13 school district structure. So I will read 14 to you this letter and provide to you 15 additional information that is the outgrowth 16 of our meeting held on Monday as cited by 17 Superintendent Powell Rucker. 18 And our letter reads: Dear Chairman 19 Kent, We the undersigned majority members of 20 the Commission on Holmes-Durant Consolidated 21 School District Structure have reviewed the 22 current structure of the school districts 23 and schools in Durant, Mississippi, and 24 Holmes County, Mississippi, as required by 25 House Bill 572. Our recommendations on</p>

1 future actions of the provision and
 2 transition of service in order to improve
 3 both the quality of education and the
 4 efficiency with which it is delivered in
 5 those schools is that there should be no
 6 consolidation of the Durant Public School
 7 District and the Holmes County School
 8 District. Although we made it clear at the
 9 Commission meeting on May 26th, 2015, both
 10 verbally and in writing that we do not
 11 support consolidation, you, as the chairman,
 12 repeatedly expressed your opinion that the
 13 Commission should, in addition to holding
 14 hearings expend extensive time and effort
 15 addressing structure and location of
 16 schools, facility needs and how best to
 17 implement consolidation as referenced in
 18 House Bill 572. We do not agree that this
 19 is necessary or advisable to do so.
 20 Consolidation will not improve the quality
 21 or efficiency of education. There are no
 22 funds available from MAEP or any other
 23 sources for facility needs. And there is no
 24 evidence of wasteful duplicative or wasteful
 25 administrative spending in Durant Public

1 School District.
 2 As you are aware, the Holmes County
 3 School District representatives on the
 4 Commission have also expressed their
 5 opposition to any consolidation with the
 6 Durant Public School District. Their
 7 reasons may be different from the
 8 undersigned, as they are concerned that a
 9 consolidation will result in difficulties
 10 similar to those endured in the recent
 11 merger of their district high schools. We
 12 do not support consolidation because we
 13 believe that today and historically the
 14 Durant Public School District has
 15 outperformed the Holmes County School
 16 District. This can be specifically shown by
 17 the respective districts' results on the
 18 recent MCAS third grade test. In addition,
 19 the City of Durant has supported and is
 20 willing to continue to support the Durant
 21 Public School District by levying the
 22 necessary millage for its continued success.
 23 The facts are that all members of the
 24 Commission, except for you, expressly do not
 25 want consolidation of the two school

1 districts and that the report of the
 2 Commission can and should be written
 3 expressing these findings as soon as a
 4 hearing can be held in the respective school
 5 districts.
 6 I would also like to add, based on
 7 public opinion at a recent town hall
 8 meeting, it is the opinion of the citizens
 9 of Durant Public School District and the
 10 City of Durant that if consolidation were to
 11 occur that the superintendent be appointed
 12 by the board. This is respectfully
 13 submitted by Tremain Johnson, our School
 14 Board President, Ms. Rena Pritchard, our
 15 Vice President of the Board, Ms. Tasha
 16 Davis, our Mayor, Dr. Sarita Glover-Jackson,
 17 a parent of a DPSD student, myself, Edwin
 18 Robinson, and our former superintendent,
 19 Louise Sanders-Tate, along with James Young,
 20 our supervisor represented here at the
 21 table.
 22 Attachments to this letter include
 23 historical test data for Durant Public
 24 School District and Holmes County School
 25 District, which outlines that Durant Public

1 School District has historically
 2 outperformed Holmes County School District,
 3 and a letter from the mayor of Durant, Ms.
 4 Tasha Davis. That is our position.
 5 MS. TASHA DAVIS: Good evening,
 6 everyone. I do have a letter, as I have
 7 read, but I'm going to kind of summarize it
 8 because I see a lot of faces that I did see
 9 the other night. Contrary to what some
 10 think, I don't think that it will occur
 11 because there is a higher being than those
 12 people down there. So we're going to
 13 continue to press on. They did suggest that
 14 we do this and we did what was suggested,
 15 but we're going to press on and do what they
 16 ask us to do. But my letter stated some
 17 reasons on why we should not consolidate
 18 because they might not have had all of the
 19 information.
 20 Nearly 50 percent of the faculty and
 21 staff reside in the City of Durant. That's
 22 our tax base. Without that, where would
 23 they go. Where would the tax moneys go.
 24 We're losing that tax money. Those people
 25 buy houses, they buy groceries. They buy

1 gas. We need that. We need our Durant
 2 Public School doors to stay open.
 3 If the faculty and staff of Durant
 4 Public School District are relieved of their
 5 current jobs as educators, the City of
 6 Durant will no longer receive their tax
 7 dollars, thus, the tax base of the City of
 8 Durant will be affected. The City of Durant
 9 is financially operational because of the
 10 electrical system in which Durant Public
 11 School District supplies a substantial
 12 quantity of funds. The City of Durant will
 13 be dissolved in a sense with the absence of
 14 a school due to the lack of jobs. The city
 15 will be deprived of the ability to attract
 16 any industry without a school in its
 17 district. No one wants to move where there
 18 is no school, no one. And we have to be
 19 realistic about that.
 20 Overall, it is readily transparent that
 21 the consolidation outlined in House Bill 572
 22 will be detrimental to the City of Durant.
 23 Basically we're going to dry up and not
 24 exist if this happens. Thus, it is my
 25 conviction, along with the Board of

1 Alderman, that consolidation of the Holmes
 2 County School District and Durant Public
 3 School District is unnecessary and to the
 4 detriment of our community.
 5 And that is basically the letter that
 6 we sent out to Chairman Mike Kent for him to
 7 put in with everyone else's letter that was
 8 sent out. So we are requesting that they
 9 not consolidate based on a lot of things
 10 that I just listed here. Thank you.
 11 MR. MIKE KENT: Ken, do we have some
 12 folks registered?
 13 MR. KEN STAMPS: We do.
 14 MR. MIKE KENT: Okay. We have a full
 15 slate of folks who have registered to speak.
 16 Who is the timekeeper tonight?
 17 DR. BILL WELCH: I got it.
 18 MR. MIKE KENT: Okay. Dr. Welch will
 19 be the timekeeper. We'll allot three
 20 minutes. He will give you some kind of sign
 21 when you're getting close to three minutes
 22 and then will stop you when you reach your
 23 three-minute time limit.
 24 If I could, could Darnetha James -- I
 25 hope I've got that right -- would you come

1 up, please, ma'am. And then Faye White, if
 2 you would be ready. And, for the record,
 3 when you begin if you would just state your
 4 name so that the court reporter can get it.
 5 MS. DARNETHA JAMES: Good evening. I'm
 6 Darnetha James, Durant Public Schools. I
 7 just have two quick questions for Mr. Kent
 8 and I have a statement. Okay. The first
 9 question is, I thought our school was under
 10 desegregation order from back in the
 11 sixties. What about that?
 12 And the second question is, how can
 13 consolidation benefit our children as far as
 14 their education?
 15 MR. MIKE KENT: Okay.
 16 MS. DARNETHA JAMES: And the third
 17 thing, the statement is, I just wanted to
 18 let everyone know, most, 95 percent of the
 19 residents of Durant, the parents and the
 20 students, they're not for consolidation at
 21 all. Did you get those questions? The
 22 first one was, I thought our school was
 23 under desegregation order from back in the
 24 sixties. I believe that's right because I
 25 went to school back there in the sixties.

1 MR. MIKE KENT: Keep in mind that
 2 consolidation, the notion of consolidation,
 3 did not originate within the Mississippi
 4 Department of Education. So I can't answer
 5 those questions. I can tell you that other
 6 school districts that have been consolidated
 7 have been under standing desegregation
 8 orders. So a deseg order will not stop a
 9 state-ordered consolidation. So that's the
 10 best answer I can give you on that one.
 11 Our next one, Ms. White, Faye D. White,
 12 if you would come up, please, ma'am. And
 13 then LaTonya Smith Gladney is next.
 14 BOARD MEMBER: Did you answer the other
 15 question?
 16 MR. MIKE KENT: Okay. I answered about
 17 deseg. What was the other one?
 18 MS. DARNETHA JAMES: How can
 19 consolidation benefit our children's
 20 education? How is it beneficial to our
 21 children's education?
 22 MR. MIKE KENT: Well, consolidation is
 23 really a -- I mean, we could spend hours
 24 talking about how consolidation can be a
 25 better thing. I think the folks in Holmes

<p style="text-align: right;">Page 22</p> <p>1 County who have consolidated their three 2 high schools have probably -- or merged 3 their three high schools -- could probably 4 give you some responses to how that can 5 better -- there is an economy of scale. As 6 you get a little bit bigger you can do more 7 things. So that's a really, really long 8 answer. And, you know, I don't know that 9 it's really my job to defend consolidation. 10 I think it's your job to investigate it and 11 decide, you know, whether you're for it or 12 against it and then try to put pressure on 13 your legislators to make it happen the way 14 you want it to happen. 15 MS. FAYE WHITE: Hello. My name is 16 Faye White. I'm from Durant Public Schools. 17 I have some of the similar questions that 18 everyone else has. If you all can't answer 19 us, why are we standing up here asking these 20 questions? We need to talk to the ones that 21 will answer. I mean, what would happen to 22 our children and the parents of these 23 children in Durant if they have to get up at 24 3 or 4 in the morning and some of those 25 parents go to their jobs at that time of</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Page 24</p> <p>1 are we going to select that board, if it 2 happens, because that board is the one 3 that's going to make huge decisions if it 4 happens. 5 Our next is Ms. Gladney. If you'd come 6 up, please, ma'am. And I believe Ms. 7 Hightower is next. 8 MS. LATONYA SMITH GLADNEY: Good 9 evening. My name is LaTonya Smith Gladney. 10 I have four questions for you. My first 11 question is: Why should we, Durant Public 12 Schools, consolidate with a district whose 13 test scores are lower than ours? Second 14 question: If the schools are consolidated, 15 where will the tax money go? Third 16 question: How did House Bill 572 get 17 started? We understand the language of 18 House Bill 572, but why was it proposed for 19 Holmes and Durant? My last question is: If 20 the legislators will make the decision on 21 consolidation or not, why is it that Mr. 22 Rucker's letters state that, since it is 23 apparent that the consolidation will occur 24 between Holmes and Durant? Why does his 25 letter state that if the decision hasn't</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Page 23</p> <p>1 morning. What would happen to their 2 children. I have grandchildren at Durant 3 Public Schools. 4 MR. MIKE KENT: I'm going to do my best 5 to try to answer some of these things. Does 6 that conclude your question? 7 MS. FAYE WHITE: Yes. 8 MR. MIKE KENT: Okay. This is an 9 administrative consolidation. There is 10 nothing -- none of the consolidations that 11 have occurred so far have ordered the 12 closing of any schools. It has simply gone 13 from two superintendents in two central 14 offices to one superintendent, one central 15 office, one school board. So there is no -- 16 I would not anticipate that if the 17 Legislature passes a consolidation bill that 18 they would order the closing of any school. 19 What they would do is order the 20 selection of a new board and that would 21 create the need for a new superintendent and 22 then the new board would make decisions 23 about closing schools, bus routes, all of 24 that. That's why the hot button issues, why 25 are we here, we need to be talking about how</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Page 25</p> <p>1 been made yet? Does our opinion count if 2 he's already said it like that? 3 MR. MIKE KENT: Why should we 4 consolidate with a district whose test 5 scores are lower than ours? You're really 6 posing the question to the wrong person. I 7 did not write the consolidation bill. So 8 this should be posed to the folks who will 9 make that decision. 10 Okay. If the schools are consolidated, 11 where will the tax money go? Tax money 12 would go to the new consolidated board, so 13 the new consolidated board will make 14 decisions about how to spend the money. 15 How did House Bill 572 get started? 16 572 was authored by Toby Barker. Mr. Barker 17 is a member of the Mississippi House of 18 Representatives from the Brookhaven area. 19 Why was it proposed for Holmes and 20 Durant? I can't answer that. I have heard 21 the term low-hanging fruit in the 22 Legislature, meaning that there are certain 23 school districts that are ripe for 24 consolidation. Typically they are 25 relatively small and they are not very high</p>

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1 performing. In this case you have Durant,
 2 which is less than 600 students and both
 3 Durant and the Holmes County School
 4 District, I think, are at D level on their
 5 accreditation scores.
 6 And then, finally, why does Mr.
 7 Rucker's letter read -- uses the term, since
 8 it is apparent that consolidation will occur
 9 between Holmes and Durant. I think if
 10 you'll read House Bill 572, the Legislature
 11 created a Commission and ordered the
 12 Commission to do a report outlining on how
 13 best to consolidate. It's apparent to me
 14 that they created this Commission with
 15 something in mind and it's pretty obvious.
 16 Thank you, ma'am.
 17 The next speaker I believe, would that
 18 be Ms. Hightower, Linda Hightower? And then
 19 Ms. Gray, I believe, Trenise Gray.
 20 MS. LINDA HIGHTOWER: Hi. My name is
 21 Linda Hightower and I've got a question.
 22 Can they assure us that the high school will
 23 stay open? Can they assure that the high
 24 school will stay open?
 25 MR. MIKE KENT: Is that your question?

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1 MS. LINDA HIGHTOWER: That's my
 2 question. And the next one is, can you tell
 3 me three benefits of consolidation because I
 4 can't see it right now.
 5 MR. MIKE KENT: Okay. Can they assure
 6 us the high school will stay open? They
 7 being who?
 8 MS. LINDA HIGHTOWER: The state.
 9 MR. MIKE KENT: Again, see, I can't
 10 assure you of anything because I won't write
 11 the bill. I'm not involved in that process.
 12 So these are the questions that you need to
 13 be asking your legislators. Again, every
 14 one of these consolidation bills that we've
 15 seen, none of them have ordered the closing
 16 of any schools. It has just simply gone
 17 from multiple superintendents and multiple
 18 boards to one board, one superintendent.
 19 And what was the other one?
 20 MS. LINDA HIGHTOWER: Name three
 21 benefits of consolidation.
 22 MR. MIKE KENT: Again, I think I've
 23 already answered that and I'm not going to
 24 answer it again. So here is my answer:
 25 There is an economy of scale in school

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1 districts. Typically a high school with 600
 2 students or more can offer more courses,
 3 more advanced courses, and do more things
 4 with their curriculum, more positive things
 5 than a smaller high school. As high schools
 6 go down in size, they typically have fewer
 7 course offerings. So that will be the one
 8 example I'll give you. There are others and
 9 I would invite you to do your research on
 10 it.
 11 I'm not here -- it's not my job to
 12 promote consolidation. I don't have a part
 13 in the decision. I'm not here to sell it;
 14 I'm not here to fight it. I'm just here to
 15 help conduct the meeting. Thank you, ma'am.
 16 Ms. Gray.
 17 MS. TRENISE GRAY: Good evening. Since
 18 it's pretty pointless to ask questions, I'm
 19 just here as an active parent and a citizen
 20 of Durant, and I'm not for consolidation.
 21 MR. MIKE KENT: Mr. Gray.
 22 MR. ISAAC GRAY: Good evening. Isaac
 23 Gray is my name. I just want to make a
 24 point of, I'm not with consolidating for
 25 Durant Schools. My biggest situation I was

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1 discussing with my wife was, what about a
 2 state of emergency. Everybody that lives in
 3 Durant doesn't own a vehicle. So if an
 4 emergency happened over here, how would they
 5 come and see about their child. You know,
 6 it's convenient for the community to look
 7 out for one another over in Durant for their
 8 kids. You know, if something happened we
 9 could get to them. But if a state of
 10 emergency happens, everybody don't have a
 11 vehicle so how would they be able to help
 12 the situation out. Or if a child gets sick,
 13 you know, the parent can't come get them,
 14 they're at work or whatever. By the school
 15 being in their own neighborhood, a neighbor
 16 could come and check on them or a cousin or
 17 they can walk to school and get their child.
 18 So I'm not with consolidating. Thank you.
 19 MR. MIKE KENT: Linda Sallis, please,
 20 followed by Eloise Luckett, I believe it is.
 21 MS. LINDA SALLIS: Hello. My name is
 22 Linda Sallis. Most of what I had to ask has
 23 already been asked, but I do want to go on
 24 record. At the meeting in Durant the
 25 question was asked about the tax dollars,

1 what would be done with the tax dollars and
2 how did we get to this point. My question
3 to you: The person that brought up the
4 bill, is he or she white or black? But you
5 can answer that for me.

6 MR. MIKE KENT: Yes, ma'am.

7 MS. LINDA SALLIS: Because I really
8 would like to know that one.

9 And my other question is to my
10 superintendent. Every time you call a
11 community meeting it always be, like today,
12 we have a pep rally. You need to be over
13 there at that pep rally welcoming the kids
14 back to the school and telling the team good
15 luck. Before when we had community meetings
16 it was during graduation and you did not
17 show up at graduation. Being a
18 superintendent, you should be at every
19 graduation, every graduation. Like calling
20 a community meeting on graduation day
21 because that's where parents are going to
22 be. Parents are going to be with their
23 kids. I'm going to follow mines.
24 And for your question about if
25 something happened over here, I went to my

1 superintendent, he said my way to Tchula. I
2 told him I didn't have no gas to go to
3 Tchula, but if something happened to my
4 child he better get back this way. So thank
5 you. But I do want you to answer my
6 question, black or white, because all over
7 here is black.

8 MR. MIKE KENT: Yes, ma'am. I believe
9 Mr. Barker is white. Would it be -- is that
10 Eloise? And then Annie Palmer, I believe
11 you're next.

12 MS. ELOISE LUCKETT: Good evening. I'm
13 a parent, I'm a grandparent of Durant High.
14 I have grandchildren at Durant High School.
15 I have a question for you, Mr. Kent. If you
16 cannot answer any of our questions, you need
17 to bring the legislator to us where we can
18 ask these questions cause right at this
19 point now our children -- we're not
20 interested in consolidation at all because
21 it's going to be too early in the morning
22 for our children to be bussed to a different
23 school. I works in the morning time. My
24 daughters work. All of my children works.
25 There is going to be an issue with that.

1 And I think right at this point we don't
2 need no consolidation with Durant Public
3 Schools.

4 And I need you to answer my question
5 about this legislator. Since you can't
6 answer any question that we ask, anyone in
7 this building asks you, you need to bring
8 the legislator to us so we can sit down and
9 get this problem resolved.

10 MR. MIKE KENT: Ms. Palmer, I believe
11 you're up. Followed by -- Erica Allen's
12 name has been scratched out. Is Ms. Allen
13 still here? Does she wish to speak? No?
14 Then Ms. Tammy Trotter, I believe.

15 MS. ANNIE PALMER: Good evening,
16 everyone. I'm Annie Palmer from Durant
17 Public School. I'm a grandparent there. My
18 question to you, Mr. Kent, is: What benefit
19 would it be for my child, my grandchildren,
20 to be bussed to school when now they can
21 walk to school because Mr. Rucker did say
22 that there will be need for buses. So why
23 would I -- my tax dollars be used to buy a
24 bus when my grandkids can walk to school.
25 That's my question.

1 MR. MIKE KENT: Are there any others?

2 MS. ANNIE PALMER: I'm through. That's
3 it.

4 MR. MIKE KENT: Again, my job is to
5 conduct this meeting. My job is not to have
6 these answers. If consolidation occurs,
7 then obviously you would be asking your new
8 school board those questions. Ms. Trotter,
9 followed by Alexandria Trotter.

10 MS. TAMMY TROTTER: Good evening,
11 everyone. My name is Tammy Trotter and I am
12 a parent. I have seven children at Durant
13 Public School, and I am not for
14 consolidation. The third grade test, I had
15 one in third grade last year, he did beyond
16 proficiency. I have one in third grade now,
17 he can read the Bible so I know he's going
18 to do beyond proficiency also.

19 My kids get up, walk to school, and
20 they're at school on time. I don't believe
21 that they're going to be able to get up at a
22 different time trying to get to school, way
23 early trying to get on the bus and all of
24 that. I have ones that play sports and if
25 they go to another school they're not going

1 to be able to play sports because it's going
 2 to be too much confusion. So I'm not for
 3 consolidation.
 4 MS. ALEXANDRIA TROTTER: Hello,
 5 everyone. My name is Alexandria Trotter and
 6 I'm for the Durant Public School District.
 7 And I do not agree with the consolidation
 8 because if we play basketball, I love to
 9 play basketball, and there would not be any
 10 basketball or no football team for me to
 11 play basketball. And that would take away
 12 some of the consequence that the parents
 13 have for their kids to play sports. They
 14 say your grades have to be an A or a B and
 15 that will take away less consequences for
 16 the parents to have for their kids to play
 17 basketball or football.
 18 We wake up around 6:30 to be at school
 19 at 7:20 or 7:15 or something like that. And
 20 there's seven of us, it's hard for us all to
 21 get up on time and get to school and be
 22 ready and be prepared. So I do not agree
 23 with the consolidation. So I would like to
 24 fight for Durant Public School doors to stay
 25 open for elementary, junior high and high

1 school. Thank you for your time.
 2 MR. MIKE KENT: Durant Public Schools
 3 did a good job with her, didn't they? Leroy
 4 Johnson followed by Tiffany Walsh and then
 5 followed by Marsha English.
 6 MR. LEROY JOHNSON: My name is Leroy
 7 Johnson. I'm the Executive Director of
 8 Southern Echo so I'm speaking from an
 9 organizational standpoint and also a parent
 10 here in Holmes County and also speaking in
 11 memory of my wife who was on the board here
 12 for 13 years of the Holmes County School
 13 Board.
 14 I will start by saying, What lies in
 15 our power to do also lies in our power not
 16 to do, by Aristotle. And my father was
 17 James Johnson that was as smart as Aristotle
 18 said, There is no right way to do wrong.
 19 The Mississippi Legislature called Holmes
 20 County low-hanging fruit. So I'm not saying
 21 that from what Mr. Kent said, I'm saying
 22 that from what Leroy Johnson heard them say.
 23 But our children are not low hanging. And
 24 so this Legislature needs to do some things
 25 if it wants to make a difference in Holmes

1 County School District.
 2 First of all, the Katrina in the room
 3 is race and class. And the Legislature made
 4 these decisions around race and class.
 5 That's why we became low-hanging fruit. The
 6 Legislature also spent money laying out from
 7 specific experts about school consolidation.
 8 Those experts told them that forced
 9 consolidation doesn't work. So if you spent
 10 all this money and you brought all of these
 11 experts in and these experts told you that
 12 forced consolidation doesn't work then why
 13 are you trying to force it. If it doesn't
 14 fit, don't force it.
 15 What the Legislature needs to do: One,
 16 fully fund MAEP; two, raise the five percent
 17 bump to 114 percent of base student cost;
 18 three, have Holmes County and specific
 19 geographic based scholarships for students
 20 who will teach in these areas, designate 25
 21 percent of best-performing teachers from
 22 across the state for five-year admissions in
 23 Holmes County, which attach a \$10,000 bonus
 24 for them for each year; four, raise teacher
 25 pay to the Southeast average; five, give

1 MSU, Mississippi Valley State University,
 2 Jackson State University and Holmes
 3 Community College extra funds to work
 4 specifically with academic improvements and
 5 teacher improvements in Holmes County; six,
 6 provide \$1 million a year for parent
 7 training and engaging in P-16 Council for a
 8 healthy school and healthy communities;
 9 seven, this is for Rucker, a new central
 10 high school paid for by state funds; and
 11 number eight, for the new superintendent who
 12 is elected, for her to be able to stay in
 13 office for four years and after those four
 14 years to have an appointed superintendent
 15 and an elected board because I want my
 16 superintendent to be not politics but
 17 capacity.

18 And so I say again what my daddy said,
 19 there is no right way to do wrong.

20 MR. MIKE KENT: Ms. Tiffany Walsh
 21 followed by Marshall English followed by
 22 Ellen Reddy.

23 MS. TIFFANY WALSH: Hello. My name is
 24 Tiffany Walsh and I'm a parent of a child
 25 who attends Durant. I oppose the

1 consolidation. And as Mayor Tasha says, a
 2 lot of jobs will be lost for the citizens of
 3 Durant. It will also affect the citizens
 4 that live in Durant who work outside of
 5 Durant. It will be hard for us to get our
 6 kids to school and pick them up in the
 7 evening time. If it's about the kids, did
 8 they even consider how the kids felt. And I
 9 have no suggestions on how the board or how
 10 the consolidation would look like because
 11 that's what it says up here. It says, If
 12 the consolidation happens, what do we want
 13 it to look like? I don't have no
 14 suggestions on that. I don't know how it's
 15 going to look. And can Toby Barker or
 16 whoever that initiated the consolidation
 17 attend the next meeting?

18 MR. MIKE KENT: The question was asked
 19 about Mr. Barker attending the next meeting.
 20 We only have two public meetings scheduled.
 21 Mr. Barker is in the Legislature. He has an
 22 address. You can certainly, you know, send
 23 things to his legislative address.

24 MS. ELLEN REDDY: Good evening. My
 25 name is Ellen Reddy. I'm the Executive

1 Director for Nollie Jenkins Family Center
 2 located in Durant, Mississippi. I am also
 3 an advocate in this community. I've worked
 4 around public education reform for about 20
 5 years here. I'm also the sister to Leroy
 6 Johnson's wife who was on the Holmes County
 7 School Board.

8 My comments are in relationship to the
 9 three points that the Commission has been
 10 charged with. First, I want to say, in
 11 order to improve the quality and efficiency
 12 of education in Durant and the Holmes County
 13 School District requires visionary
 14 leadership. With that said, it is our
 15 strong belief as an organization that the
 16 only way we can achieve quality education
 17 outcomes is through a knowledgeable and
 18 proactive elected school board and an
 19 appointed superintendent. As Mr. Johnson
 20 said, I would really like to see our
 21 superintendent elect provide the leadership
 22 over the next four years and then we switch
 23 to an appointed superintendent. With an
 24 appointed superintendent, the school board
 25 is able to reach beyond the local community

1 and/or state to employ a manager with the
 2 necessary skills to achieve education
 3 outcomes for our children.
 4 Note, I want to make a special note.
 5 The appointment of a superintendent should
 6 not be a superintendent who has not
 7 demonstrated consistent successfully
 8 performing school districts. The school
 9 board needs to be knowledgeable and willing
 10 to perform their roles as policymakers, be
 11 willing to evaluate the superintendent and
 12 the performance of the school district based
 13 on stated goals and objectives.

14 The school board education district,
 15 then, will be consistent with the board of
 16 supervisors' lines. In addition, then the
 17 citizens of Durant can run to be a member of
 18 the Holmes County School Board and vote in
 19 school board elections.

20 Second, I think our students, whether
 21 they're in Durant Public School or the
 22 Holmes County School District, need and
 23 deserve a premiere high school. With the
 24 exception of SV Marshall and William Dean
 25 Elementary, we have not had a high school to

1 be built in this county since the late
 2 sixties. And correct me if I'm wrong.
 3 Currently our high schools cannot
 4 accommodate all of Holmes County students.
 5 We lack lockers for students' coats and
 6 books. Our classrooms are overcrowded. We
 7 lack adequate facilities for boys and girls
 8 to participate in sports. We offer limited
 9 advancement placement courses, subjects, and
 10 extracurricular activities. We have a
 11 shortage of teachers in math, science, and
 12 special ed. And certainly we do not have
 13 the facilities of a 5A school district.
 14 However, the building of a new high school
 15 requires visionary leadership and a
 16 strategic plan that engages and values all
 17 sectors of the community.

18 So the decision to build a new school
 19 is strategic and thoughtful and takes into
 20 account that while we are in an impoverished
 21 community or county, there is nothing more
 22 important than our young people and we are
 23 willing to make the necessary sacrifices as
 24 citizens when we feel that we can be a part
 25 of those discussions. The community needs

1 additional dialogue and information to
 2 respond to some questions.
 3 And I will close by saying, finally, we
 4 vehemently disagree with Superintendent
 5 Rucker that Mississippi Department of
 6 Education should exempt the district from
 7 the accountability standards for three years
 8 if we were to consolidate. Historically
 9 each time there have been changes, whether
 10 state or local, we want to be exempt. If
 11 we're using data to make the decisions and
 12 evaluate, we then can make decisions about
 13 what's in the best interest of our children.
 14 Thank you.

15 MR. MIKE KENT: Janice Harper is our
 16 final commenter.

17 MS. JANICE HARPER: Good evening,
 18 everyone. I've listened to and heard a lot
 19 of things being said. I missed the Durant
 20 meeting because I had to be somewhere else,
 21 but I've been at the Commission meetings.
 22 And I just want to suggest that there are
 23 what we call P-16 Community Engagement
 24 Councils inside of our school district. It
 25 can be used as a structured mechanism to

1 help strategically right now implement and
 2 develop a plan, since it's sounding as if
 3 the two districts are going to be
 4 consolidated. These P-16 Community Council
 5 Engagements, they are Mississippi legislated
 6 that was enacted by the Children First Act
 7 of 2009. There's accountability standard
 8 that's attached to it, and they are assigned
 9 to all schools that are ranked less than
 10 successful. And we all know, predominantly
 11 black schools, what our ranking has been,
 12 from a D to an F to a D.

13 So I've heard a lot about Durant
 14 outdoing Holmes County. I've seen some of
 15 those stats. There is really no comparison
 16 because the district is smaller than Holmes
 17 county, but what I'm hearing is that this is
 18 a possibility that is going to occur. We
 19 don't know this but I hear Mike Kent from
 20 the MDE, Mississippi Department of
 21 Education, also talking about that it's his
 22 duty just to conduct this meeting and that
 23 it's up to the Commission to put a plan
 24 together. They have stated their letters
 25 and that they are against consolidation.

1 I've heard from Durant members, Lexington
 2 members, that we're against this
 3 consolidation, but what I'm hearing is that
 4 more than a letter is what needed to go to
 5 our representatives. There needs to be a
 6 plan. And when I talk plan, we're talking
 7 about plan, a piece of paper, something in
 8 black and white, just like what I'm reading
 9 off from. The P-16 Council is a group that
 10 is assigned -- they're in the district now.
 11 I don't know about in Durant but they're in
 12 Holmes County that can actually be utilized
 13 to help implement and develop such a plan,
 14 as to answer that question, what do we want
 15 it to look like if it should happen.

16 So we can't just -- I hear you, that we
 17 don't want it, but it sounds like it may
 18 happen. So if it should happen, we need to
 19 address this. So that's what I'm speaking
 20 to. Let's address that question. Use the
 21 P-16 Council inside of the district that are
 22 mandated by the state in order to bring this
 23 forward to help with these plans.

24 I'm not against a high school, a new
 25 high school in the district. If you're

1 going to consolidate, let's put it in the
 2 plan to the state, to Toby Barker. If we've
 3 all got to come together, we want a fleet of
 4 busses. We want this, we want that. Just
 5 name it out. We've got to lay it out. I
 6 understand and I hear about the conflict
 7 that it will cause, but if we don't say what
 8 we want if it happens then they're going to
 9 give us what they want to give us, which is
 10 strictly the consolidation.

11 MS. MARSHAY ENGLISH: Hello. My name
 12 is Marshay English and I'm against the
 13 consolidation. I don't feel we should
 14 combine because the fact is, it's going to
 15 be too many children in one school and it
 16 would be a lot of confusion. I mean, it's
 17 just too many combined together. I love
 18 sports. I power lift, I run track, I play
 19 basketball. My academics come first and I
 20 feel that it's just too many of us, there
 21 would be too much confusion and we won't be
 22 able to get our lesson and get what we need
 23 to learn. I am a sophomore trying to get my
 24 electives so I can graduate. I passed my
 25 state test that I already took and I don't

1 want to have to go through and have to redo
2 things that I done already did. So I'm
3 against the consolidation. I want to stay
4 in Durant High.

5 MR. MIKE KENT: Okay. Mr. James Wiley,
6 Sr. And then our final one is Terry Floyd.

7 MR. JAMES WILEY, SR.: My name is James
8 Wiley from the city of Durant and I'm
9 positively opposed to consolidation. I had
10 questions from the information I had
11 received previously. I thought I was going
12 to have a lot of questions, but thanks to
13 the opposition they have covered everything
14 that I was going to say.

15 But perhaps, Mr. Kent, you can tell me,
16 in view of all of this opposition, why are
17 we here?

18 MR. MIKE KENT: I think I've already
19 answered that one time. We are required by
20 law, this Commission requires us to create a
21 report to the Legislature. So that
22 responsibility will fall directly on the
23 Mississippi Department of Ed that I work
24 for, Mr. Welch works for, all of our team.
25 So we're going to do a report. The report

1 will reflect what has occurred in these
2 meetings.

3 Our final speaker is Mr. Floyd, I
4 believe, and we'll be concluded.

5 MR. TERRY FLOYD: Good evening. My
6 name is Terry Floyd. I'm the class of 1987
7 Durant High School. I'm the father of a
8 class of 2011 graduate and a current parent
9 of two current students. And basically what
10 I've got to say is, I've got a statement and
11 a rhetorical question, just something that
12 makes you think, that it doesn't necessarily
13 require an answer. I kind of want to
14 piggyback off of what Mayor Davis said. One
15 of the legacies of Durant High, the City of
16 Durant, is the fact that we have proven that
17 locally controlled neighborhood schools
18 work. And that's what we believe in. We
19 believe in locally controlled neighborhood
20 schools.

21 Now, when I say this, you know, if it's
22 truly about the children we need to have a
23 little thick skin. This is not anything
24 against the current superintendent of Holmes
25 County School System, Mr. Rucker. But if

1 it's truly about the kids I've got this
2 rhetorical question. How in the world would
3 it benefit the children of the City of
4 Durant to merge with a school system that
5 has a elementary school that has the worst
6 third grade scores in the state of
7 Mississippi. Those are the verifiable
8 facts.

9 And if you want to compare and contrast
10 something to that, if you look at our
11 neighboring county, you've got Long Creek
12 Elementary School, same socioeconomic
13 dynamics, geographical, I think they're
14 maybe about 15 miles apart, and they have
15 some of the highest test scores in the state
16 of Mississippi.

17 So I just want you to think. I know
18 it's politics and all of that, but if it's
19 truly about the children how would it
20 benefit the children of Durant to merge with
21 a school system that has an elementary
22 school that has the lowest third grade test
23 scores in the state of Mississippi. And
24 those are the verifiable facts. Thank you.

25 MR. MIKE KENT: First of all, thank you

1 for coming out tonight. I'll remind you
2 that we do have a court reporter here
3 tonight. She will create a transcript of
4 this meeting, everything that was said. And
5 that transcript, along with the transcript
6 from Monday night's meeting, will be part of
7 the report that's submitted to the
8 Legislature. Again, thank you for coming
9 out tonight and we're concluded.

10 (CONCLUDED AT APPROXIMATELY 7:30 P.M.)

1 CERTIFICATE

2 I, PAULYNN M. RALEY, Court Reporter and
3 ary Public, Madison County, Mississippi,
4 eby certify that the foregoing pages, and
5 luding this page, contain a full, true and
6 rect transcript of the proceedings as taken by
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15 nt hereof.

16 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set
17 hand this the 9th day of September, 2015.

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PAULYNN M. RALEY, CCR
#1239

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