

Statement by School Board on HHS2

January 16, 2018

The Harrisonburg City Council and School Board have been discussing the worsening high school overcrowding problem for years. These discussions have produced a detailed proposal to build a second high school. This proposal was presented to Council in early December of last year.

The School Board comes before you today to urge Council to schedule the vote on the HHS2 proposal on January 23.

For students now attending an overcrowded high school, two issues are paramount: safety and learning. A crowded HHS has become an overcrowded one, now 33% over capacity. This impacts students and learning, stresses teachers and services, and causes extensive wear and tear on the facility.

We know that every student has the right to the attention, the support, and the opportunities needed to safely learn in order to move on from high school to the workplace, to additional workforce training, or to college.

And so we ask City Council to schedule the vote on the HHS2 proposal on January 23.

Some council members have expressed concern about the School Board's responsibility to deal with the effects of overcrowding on the students already in the system.

We have nearly 1800 students in a building that should hold no more than 1350, and we know more are coming.

The problem is overcrowding. The permanent solution is a second high school, and the city council vote is the next step needed to make this happen. Short-term solutions will be partial, incremental, expensive, and temporary. We are working to implement short-term fixes while we seek a permanent solution, but both efforts must go forward at the same time.

We fundamentally understand the responsibility we have for our children. Our teachers are doing everything they possibly can for our kids given the current circumstances at the high school. We reject the notion that they are not, or that they will not, continue to do so even as the overcrowding worsens. Delaying the decision on the permanent solution currently before council – the HHS2 proposal - spreads and deepens the short-term effects of overcrowding over more students for even longer periods of time.

Now, City Council has informed us that, at this point, they need no additional information from the School Board or from HCPS staff.

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And so it is time for Council to act. Act with the urgency a teacher feels as she tries to get to her next class on time, navigating a loaded cart through clogged halls. Act with the urgency a student feels when trying get from a trailer back through security into the building just to get to the bathroom, or to their class in a downpour or freezing weather. Act with the urgency that a staff member feels when trying to find any private space at all in the building to counsel a student in crisis.

And act with the urgency a middle school parent feels when contemplating what their 6th or 7th or 8th grader will feel like in a couple of years at HHS.

For the sake of the children, parents, staff, and citizens of the city you serve, schedule the vote on Jan. 23.

Thank you.