

July 14, 2011

Kathy Rogers, Chairperson & Board Members
Henry County School Board

Good morning

I am Rick Horton residing with my family in the Iriswood magisterial district of Henry County. I make a living as a small businessman which requires some traveling. As a former educator and former employee in the local textile industry, I have had to change my career goals to adjust to the prevailing economic conditions.

I believe in the future of Henry County. As evidence, this morning I stand before you to offer the following proposal on behalf of the Taxpayer Association of Martinsville and Henry County which endeavors to offer guidance on innovative improvements in governmental operations.

Given the leadership by the Henry County School Board in launching a 2010 study of consolidating the school systems of Martinsville City and Henry County,

Given that the consolidation study process was halted by a governing body without considering available data,

Given that decision, both school boards then directed their superintendents to look for protocols of efficiency between the two operations,

Given that the county school enrollment has dropped from 9,167 in 1995 to 7,701 students in 2005 to a projected 6,879 in 2015,

Given that the utilization of classroom space capacity at Magna Vista High School is 91 %, Bassett High is at 67 %, and Laurel Park Middle is using 63 % of its available space,

Given that the total kindergarten enrollment is forecast to drop from 643 in the current year 2011-12 to 513 students in 2015-16 which is a 20 % drop; not 10 % but a 20 % reduction in state aid in this grade level alone over the course of five years.

Given that Roanoke City created a template for privatizing student transportation in 2009,

Given that Roanoke City incurred over \$ 250,000 savings in its first year of a privatized school bus system with Krapf Bus Company (<http://www.krapfbus.com>),

Given that Krapf purchased all of Roanoke's current buses, agreed to a progressive bus replacement schedule and leased its transportation garage for \$ 60,000 per year,

Given that Roanoke City recently decided to privatize its two dozen school buses,

Given that the Henry County School Board privatized the operation of its school custodial staff for the 2010-2011 school year,

Given that Martinsville city is geographically located in the center of Henry County,

Given the financial impact of the spike in fuel costs on the taxpayers of Martinsville and Henry County,

Given the pending loss of over 600 jobs at Star Tek despite an almost equal number added in the last 12 months,

Given that Krapf has responded favorably to our inquiry about a professional study of a prospective merged transportation system,

Given the prospect of a merged school bus transportation system would anticipate reduced costs in administrative, driver personnel and efficiencies in transportation of special need students,

Given that real savings may exist upon staggering the starting times of all schools,

Given that any overall savings under a merged system could benefit the instructional (aka teachers salaries) side of a school budget,

Given that Krapf has forwarded to us (attached) a document of requested information that only the transportation administrators in each school division can complete to launch a study,

Given that Krapf has offered to do this study at no charge,

In the middle of a devastating economic recession, we believe that the economic “conditions on the ground” calls for innovation. While political risks may be present, we believe that the potential reward outweighs potential risk and could be transformative. As columnist Thomas Friedman opined in 2009, “we might be able to stimulate our way back to stability, but we can only *invent* our way back to prosperity.”

In light of your past support for a study of a consolidated school system, we implore you, again, to take the road less traveled, to seek out new paradigms and take the purported action in your school division mission statement when you assert that “creativity is nurtured, technology and innovation are embraced”,

Now therefore we, the Taxpayer Association of Martinsville and Henry County, do hereby urge you to consent to a joint feasibility study with Martinsville City Schools towards the goal of privatizing both local school bus transportation systems.

Thank you for your time this morning and for all that you do for education of Henry County students.

Taxpayer Association of Martinsville and Henry County

- Certain information credited to Henry County Schools budget documents and The Roanoke Times