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CENTRAL OFFICE REVIEW FOR RESULTS AND EQUITY

Response ~ June 22, 2005 ~ Dr. Jesse B. Register

I would like to thank Marla Ucelli, Pia Durkin and Debi King for their work and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform for its investment in the future of public education in Hamilton County. Our school system will be even better because of this effort.

One of the positive stories that we need to better communicate is the impact respected local and national organizations have had in partnering with Hamilton County to improve public education. I think it is safe to say that there is no school system in the country our size that has benefited more from private sector support than Hamilton County.

I would also like to thank Mayor Ramsey, the members of the CORRE Advisory Group, the CORRE implementation team and many others who participated in the study. Thank you for your time and commitment to public education in Hamilton County.

Finally, thanks to each one of you here today who are giving your time to listen and to learn about the kind of school system we have today, and how we can continue to improve in the future. Public schools are a vital part of economic health of our community. If you have never visited a school, I extend an invitation for you to visit a school this fall and see what is going on in our classrooms. Call me, I will go with you.

Over the next day and a half, principals, administrators, central office staff and school leaders will join with the Board of Education and dig into this report with the Annenberg team. We will see how to build on the positive, and look for ways to improve. The Board will engage in a longer and more detailed discussion tomorrow night.

As educators, we welcome the chance to learn something new. As a Board and school administration, we embrace the idea that continuing the improvement we have made over the past eight years means continually re-evaluating what we do and how we do it.

This study is a fresh analysis on the effectiveness of the Central Office and its ability to support higher academic performance in our schools. There is clarity here on issues such as the definition of a central office that can be used statewide to improve the accountability measures so important in today's public education Debate.

Since Mayor Ramsey's Education Summit, the school system has welcomed an ongoing public dialogue about public education in Hamilton County. Today's report adds valuable information, and as a community, we should use it as we move forward.

After reading the CORRE study, I would like to share three issues that captured my attention.

First is recognition of the "academic focus and service orientation" of the members of the system's central office. That description of the central office team is an affirmation for a group of people often caught in the middle of public debate, but a group of dedicated employees with the resolve to stay focused on doing their part to see that what goes on in classrooms brings about positive, academic results.

Second is "enhancing communication." The Board and I are in complete agreement that this must occur. As I look back, I realize we made a mistake five years ago by not putting more resources into communications. In order to build stronger relationships with all of our constituents, we must place a priority on telling our story and successes to our constituents as well as DO a better job of sharing information with the public. As the years passed, it became more and more difficult to address the issue as we remained focused on putting resources into classrooms.

Six months ago, we began internally to strengthen our communications strategies in everything we do, and share the facts about the system's improvement and stewardship as we engaged parents, teachers, opinion leaders and the media. We know we have a school system that can demonstrate improvement and vision – which can play a pivotal role in the community's economic development initiatives.

This fall, we will restructure some positions internally and concentrate existing resources on a stronger communications department that will focus on addressing many issues raised in today's report. Broadening access to information, identifying common ground for all public school stakeholders, and effectively communicating the achievements and needs of the district are all

critical. We will not be able to do all we need to do, but we are committed to taking important first steps.

Finally, some interviewed for this report mentioned and described the 1997 merger as the watershed event for public education in Hamilton County. The report talks about perceptions, issues and challenges faced since merger, and there were many difficult changes required. As a community, we continue to debate attitudes and beliefs that the unification of two very different school systems brings into view...rural, urban and suburban, city and county, black and white, rich and poor.

Often, this debate manifests itself when we talk about schools. As a school system, we have done everything possible to move past merger and toward a system of good schools for all young people in Hamilton County. For more than three years, we have seen test scores and other accountability results begin a strong, upward trend. As I think back to the late 1990s, it was often said that overall test scores would be the last thing to change. We are seeing that change. Our challenge now is to sustain and further improve our academic achievements.

From my view, the school system began to rightly close the book on merger when Mayor Ramsey initiated his Education Summit. The objective of the Summit was to move our community forward and envision the future of education in Hamilton County. To do our part, the school system had to have a single focus: To provide the best education possible for every child. Today's report is another tool to use as we chart a course of continuing improvement that brings our community the kind of school system every person in this room wants to have.

There is a great deal of information to review in this report, and that is what the School Board, administrators, principals and leadership teams will do in the coming weeks. We will develop actions plans where needed and work with the CORRE team and the Annenberg Institute to implement those plans in a timely manner. We are eagerly planning for the upcoming school year, and much of what we have learned today and the plans we develop can have an impact as school opens.

Again, thank you to the Annenberg Institute for this work, and thank you for being here today.