

Dear Members of the Board:

The Montgomery County schools are an important and vital component of working and living here. We appreciate and value the quality schools that you, the school board, district administrators, and especially our dedicated teachers, have built over the years. We are fortunate to have excellent, highly respected schools. They are essential to our special Southwest Virginia quality of life. Indeed, the schools for many years have been a key factor in the Virginia Tech employment recruitment formula. The schools are fundamentally linked to our ability to attract world-class faculty to our region.

We are beginning to see evidence that the current situation concerning the future of the Blacksburg High School may be having a deleterious effect on perceptions about the county's commitment to top-quality schools. Some of our faculty members have expressed these concerns to me, to our chief academic officer, and to our deans. We already have lost a senior executive candidate we recruited. We also know of a senior distinguished academic leader within the university who has accepted a recruitment interview at another school. Losing this individual would be a serious concern. It is troubling that this person did so in part because of the school situation.

We are particularly worried about what we don't know. How many more candidates simply will not bother to apply? Hiring at Virginia Tech is a decentralized process; we don't have a pipeline to the candidates. But we are hearing lots of discussion, and the perceptions could cast doubts and do damage to our reputation for excellence.

We are also aware of prospective business owners and entrepreneurs who had considered the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center, but now have second thoughts or crossed us off their lists.

It is not our place to advise you on taxation policy, the shape or form of the schools, or the decision itself. But it is incumbent upon us to convey our real and serious concerns about emerging perceptions toward Montgomery County schools. We believe you would want to know. Most importantly, there was no process afforded us or the citizens of the community – thousands of whom are employed at Virginia Tech – to have our voices heard.

Accordingly, we ask that you reopen your fact gathering and decision making process to fully vet citizen concerns, restore confidence in the process, and fully understand the implications on company or university employment, business recruitment, and our quality of life. The decisions you make about the schools in the county significantly affect our ability to attract and retain employees, and we sincerely ask that you fully explore all the available options.

Sincerely and respectfully submitted,

Charles W. Steger

President

