



Hoven School District No. 53-2



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Advocates
for Education

PO Box 128
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December 12, 2024

Dear Gettysburg School Board, Gettysburg Co-op Committee, Administration & patrons,

After careful consideration of input from students, staff, community and discussions among our school board and leadership team, we must respectfully decline your proposals as presented. While we share your commitment to supporting our students and feel there was value in our partnership, we have significant concerns regarding numerous components of the proposed changes to the co-op agreement.

Key Concerns:

1. **Impact on Student Experience:**

Requiring all practices, games, and activities to be held exclusively at Gettysburg presents logistical challenges and additional strain/exhaustion for our students and drivers. This shift could lead to reduced participation and feelings of exclusion among Hoven students and their families, diminishing the co-op's purpose of fostering unity and opportunity.

2. **Equity in Decision-Making:**

The proposal to transfer all decision-making authority to Gettysburg undermines the cooperative spirit that has been central to our partnership's success. Effective collaborations rely on shared governance and mutual respect, which this proposal does not uphold.

3. **Financial Contributions Without Representation:**

Maintaining our 1/3 financial contribution while having no influence over decisions or events creates an imbalance that we find unacceptable. Fair partnerships require both shared financial responsibility and representation in decision-making processes.

4. **Community Impact:**

The proposed changes have raised concerns among our students, staff and community, who view this shift as a huge step in marginalizing Hoven. We cannot support an agreement that may jeopardize student morale, community trust, our school, and our community.

Our Position

Hoven has valued the Potter County Sports Co-op as a vital opportunity for both schools to provide enriching athletic experiences. However, we believe any co-op agreement must:

- Maintain shared decision-making authority.
- Distribute practices, games, and activities equitably between the two schools.
- Ensure financial contributions reflect the benefits received and the responsibilities assumed by each school.

While we previously stated that we were not interested in consolidation at this time, we also expressed a willingness to explore cost-sharing opportunities and maintain open lines of communication going forward. The fact that Gettysburg was prepared to disseminate a message to coaches, staff and patrons that included a claim that Hoven stated we have no intentions of consolidation within the next 5-10 years—despite our multiple assertions that we never made

that comment—has eroded our trust. In addition, learning that your planning committee shared with your school board and published in the approved October 14, 2024, Gettysburg School Board minutes a statement that was never made by us - “Our committee also asked if they would have any interest in a consolidation in the future and they stated they didn’t think that would be in their 5-10 year plan” – was very disheartening. We recognize and appreciate that a special board meeting was held to correct the error, but it does not change the fact that our repeated assertions that a timeline was never discussed and that we never made that statement were never once believed until we unequivocally proved it. On top of that, we tried providing ideas and suggestions for different ways we could help your situation, but those were completely dismissed. Ultimately, the apology letter that still included an ultimatum did not convey to us a genuine commitment to communicating and collaborating for a common goal.

Furthermore, despite agreement at the planning committee meeting to keep lines of communication open going forward, at no point was it communicated to us that not being interested in consolidation at this time would impact our sports co-op, let alone result in such an extreme proposal from Gettysburg. The abruptness and nature of this shift have created significant concerns about a possible future partnership. Moreover, Gettysburg has neither presented any numbers, data, or evidence to demonstrate to Hoven the necessity of consolidation for Gettysburg nor a timeframe or timeline illustrating when Gettysburg needs to be entering into a consolidation. You have also not established any reason why such a move would be a fiscally responsible decision for Hoven to enter into such an agreement.

Nevertheless, we carefully considered your request to make a consolidation exploration commitment and share the cost of hiring a professional to lead the process. However, presenting us with a sports co-op proposal relinquishing 100% control, mandating all practices, games, and activities be held in Gettysburg, along with this being the second time these terms have been proposed by Gettysburg, conveys to us that your ultimate priorities are exclusively for your school and community’s benefit rather than a commitment to open communication, equity in decision making and supporting the survival of our school and community as well.

Providing us with no timeline, data or evidence for consolidation, insistence we stated something we never said, disregarding our responses and ideas, and overall lack of communication has made it extremely difficult for us to see viability or benefits of making a commitment to continuing conversations regarding consolidation. Furthermore, it has eroded any confidence in Gettysburg upholding a commitment to maintain a school or any activities in Hoven, even if such an arrangement were to be initially agreed upon in a consolidation.

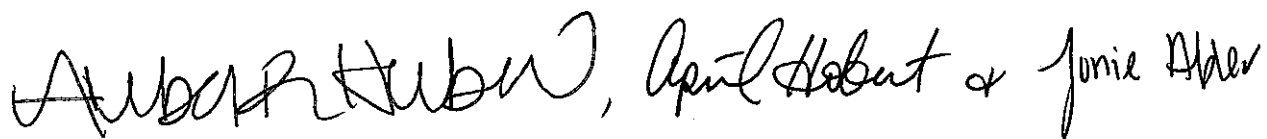
Please take a step back and put yourselves in our shoes for one minute. Our school district is financially stable with our opt out and our enrollment numbers are growing, meaning families are trusting we have a viable community in which to raise their kids. We did not get to this point of financial stability within our school district overnight. We have made budget cuts within the last several years and we have always put finances as a front-line item. We have cautiously given small raises to our valued staff members knowing finances will be tight going forward when we know they deserve more. Our forefathers also worked hard to pass an opt out almost 20 years ago which has helped support our school for years and will be needed to continue to support our school. While we ask for a certain amount from the opt out, we historically did not always take the full amount that we could have. While we could have added on additional gym space and amenities to our school when we rebuilt from the fire, we did not. We had and have a financial responsibility to uphold for our taxpayers.

While your district’s financial jeopardy is concerning to us, we have offered to assist in ways that did not involve consolidation. Consolidation to you is keeping your school and community

viable, which is so important to you and us alike. But not at the cost of potentially losing our own school and community in the years to come. If we consolidate, we lose control of what is ours and what we have worked years to build. In turn, we will inherit much debt and less members on a consolidated school board. This means we will again not have equal say in decisions affecting our district and children. We see you proposing to have all control of the sports co-op - twice now. Would we be wrong to not think you want all control of a consolidation someday as well?

Trust, friendship, and partnership have been tattered. You have put us in a position where we had no choice but to accept your proposal to dissolve the co-op because we cannot commit to consolidation unless we are in a position warranting a need for it for the sake of everyone in our community but especially for our children. We have valued the partnership and opportunity the Potter County Sports Co-op provided so many students from both districts over the years and were truly disappointed with the proposals that were given to our district and the way in which we got to this point. Ultimately, we feel irreparable damage has been made to the relationship and partnership between our two school districts at this time. Given these circumstances and based on the input from our students, staff, and community, we are not interested in continuing conversations related to consolidation at this time.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Aubrey Huber, April Hobart & Jonie Alder". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Hoven School District Board of Education, CEO & Athletic Director