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SBE Office:
Martez Hill
Executive Director

October 7, 2013

Halifax Board of Education
9525 Highway 301 South
Halifax, NC 27839

Dear Chairperson Hunter and Halifax County School Board Members:

The State Board of Education (SBE) has instructed me to write you this letter to express grave concerns about issues that have been recently brought to our attention. As you are aware, in 2009, after years of poor academic performance reports in Halifax County Schools (HCS), the HCS Board of Education agreed to comply with a Court Order in which you would:

Fully cooperate with the State Board of Education and its designees to improve educational opportunities for students enrolled in Halifax County public schools consistent with the Halifax County Board of Education's statutory obligation to provide an adequate school system, provide all Halifax County public school students with the equal opportunity to obtain a sound basic education, and to independently exercise its judicial functions; [and appear] and testify at any future hearings in this case regarding any member's reasons for not taking action or voting against any proposals endorsed by the State Board of Education or its designees[.]

Consent Order, Hoke County Board of Education et. al. v. State of North Carolina and the State Board of Education, 95 CVS 1158, April 29, 2009. This Court Order was designed to enable HCS to implement a comprehensive, SBE-approved Plan to increase student performance. Under the Court Order, the SBE has authorized financial assistance, extensive professional development opportunities, instructional coaching for teachers and administrators, remediation for students and numerous other efforts to increase academic achievement. The SBE has entrusted only the most capable and experienced staff to assist HCS under the Court Order. When we make recommendations and provide you with advice, it is in the best interests of the success for the children of HCS.

The SBE is aware some members of the HCS board have been disruptive, uncooperative and obstructionist in their interactions with SBE designees and certain HCS staff. These members have created an environment that is not conducive to delivering quality instruction and negatively impacts increased student achievement in contravention of the Court's Order. In particular, it is reported that individual HCS Board members are: (1) driving away effective administrators and teachers; (2) attempting to suspend the HCS Superintendent's power to transfer within the district independent of board approval; (3)

NORTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

requesting monthly the resignation of the Board Chair and Superintendent; (4) pressuring to rehire former principals as principal or assistant principal who were non-renewed for low performance; (5) threatening or bullying district and building administrators to influence personnel actions; (6) proposing illegal and discriminatory personnel actions; (7) assuming inappropriate roles in organizing employee groups; and (8) revisiting issues after the HCS Board vote has been taken, impeding progress. In addition, it is reported that the HCS Board rehired a continually low performing principal in a central office role against recommendation of the SBE designee and the HCS Superintendent who counseled the HCS Board to eliminate the position due to budget constraints. It is clear that these actions have undermined the SBE efforts to assist you in providing every child in your district the opportunity for a sound, basic education in North Carolina.

Further, the SBE is concerned that a majority of the HCS Board is inclined to reject specific directives that disregard recommendations by the HCS Superintendent and the SBE's designees regarding the length of employment for teacher assistants. The SBE was informed that the HCS Board intends to consider extending fulltime employment for all teacher assistants. That action is against recommendations of the SBE designees working in HCS as well as the HCS Superintendent. Even more troubling is that this action is being considered after having been explicitly admonished by Dr. June Atkinson not to do so in her letter to you dated 30 September 2013. The SBE reiterates that the actions the HCS Board contemplates clearly jeopardize its financial status after only recently recovering from its indebtedness. Once again, the HCS Board is explicitly advised not to take such action. A failure to heed this advice suggests a desire by your board not to cooperate with the SBE and will be reported to the Court consistent with the Court Order.

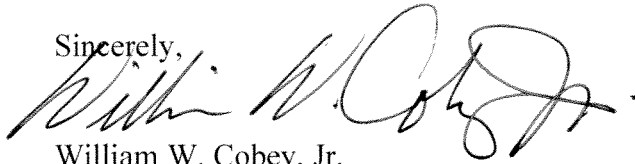
It has been suggested that some members of the HCS Board might feel that the current SBE members are not committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Court Order. Let me assure you that notion is absolutely false. To further illustrate our resolve, the SBE has instructed the Board's legal counsel to begin the process of evidence gathering in anticipation of requesting the intervention of the courts should it become necessary. This includes the compilation of the requisite documents, including affidavits, depositions and other records supporting any interference with or resistance to the cooperation that is expected of you under the Court Order. We have also instructed our legal counsel to work with staff of both boards to be prepared to fully respond to the specifics in the Court's 16 September 2013 Notice of Hearing in the matter. If necessary, the SBE intends to direct its legal counsel to move the Court to broaden the authority of the SBE under the Court Order to ensure the desired educational outcomes for your students despite actions to the contrary.

Consistent with our duties under the Court Order and in order to ensure accurate accounts of discussions among your board members during deliberations on matters coming before it, we are directing your board to begin audio recording your meetings, both open and closed sessions. For tonight's meeting we have secured the services of a court reporter to perform these recordings, but expect the HCS board to handle this in the future.

The SBE is not interested in continuing to have to admonish the HCS board to conduct

their business in the best interests of the children in HCS. We trust that this message is clear and received in the spirit with which it is intended.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William W. Cobey, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

William W. Cobey, Jr.
Chairman, NC State Board of Education

CC: Honorable Howard E. Manning, Jr., Wake County Superior Court
Members of the State Board of Education
June Atkinson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Larry Armstrong, Halifax County Schools Board Attorney
Laura E. Crumpler, Special Deputy Attorney General
Dr. Pat Ashley, NC DPI Director of District and School Transformation
Vanessa Jeter, NC DPI Director of Communications