

## Letter to the Editor – Hanson School

Written by Brandi Gunkel and Gwen Kik  
Friday, 10 September 2010 06:00

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Dear iSurf Editors,

The following are statements given by Brandi Gunkel and myself (Gwen Kik) at the Hopkins County Board of Education meeting on September 7, 2010.

Our group began as a means of representing parents, teachers and staff at Hanson who are concerned that our school has been overlooked for new construction. Later, we discovered that the new Technical Center would be built instead.

After weeks of investigation, and tips from throughout the county, we have uncovered larger concerns that we feel are shared by many in Hopkins County – concerns regarding the true priorities of the Board of Education and the current Administration. In the weeks to come, we will be happy to share with iSurf the results of our inquiry, as well as original documents that we have uncovered in the process.

Thank you for the opportunity to make public our findings.

Sincerely, Gwen Kik

We welcome members online: [F.A.N.S. \(For a New School\) of Hanson on Facebook](#) .

FANS Primary Question: Why build the Tech Center instead of current schools in need of repair?

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FANS Goal: A new elementary school for Hanson Elementary in the Hanson area.

### Community Input by Brandi Gunkel:

I appreciate the fact that Hanson School has had a cleaning. But I find it interesting that it happened the very next day after the last school board meeting. Why has Hanson School been neglected for so many years? You say you had no idea about the state of the building. Maybe no one called Mr. Hoskins because Hanson School isn't even listed on your [website](#), under ANY of the board members' names! We brought this to Mr. Hoskins' attention 2 weeks ago & it still hasn't been updated.

Has Hanson School fallen to the wayside?

I also find it interesting that the letter sent home from school last Friday from Mr. Wells said that the Health Department came in to report no mold found in the school. Could it be because all the ceiling tiles were replaced BEFORE they showed up? Yes!

And News14, The Messenger & ISurf were refused entrance into the building two weeks ago. But when the molded tiles were removed & the air conditioner coils were cleaned, you invited News14 in to make it look like everything is wonderful. Just a few "cosmetic" changes are needed. Well, it's not wonderful. It's not even good!

It's sad & pathetic to get a report from a child (not mine I might add) that a lizard has already been spotted in the hallway. I guess your pest control company only checked for bats! We have learned that really, the primary pest control over the mice & lizards is the teachers. They put down sticky strips & dispose of the animals themselves. Teachers are taking time away from the students to be the "pest control" over Hanson School. This is unacceptable!

What's even worse is knowing about the [sewage system](#) backing up at least 6 times last year alone, and raw sewage running down into the driveway & parking lot where the children walk through to get to the playground. They have to be told to please stop stomping in it. The children just think it's water!

Other reports show [three repeated requests](#) for profuse leaking in the primary hall where teachers have slipped & fallen.

Apparently this time there wasn't a trash can placed in the middle of the hall to catch the water. I have seen the trash cans many times myself!

Now about the mold issue. I know from looking at the [Health Department reports](#) that in Room #1, recently mold was treated & stain kill painted over the bottom shelf. And in several rooms, they stated "conditions favorable for mold". This is from soaked carpets due to the air conditioning system and humidity in the rooms.

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Dehumidifiers are placed in some rooms and emptied by teachers 2-3 times a day. Again, taking time away from the instruction of the students. These issues are uncalled for and this is unfair to the staff, students and parent volunteers to have to deal with this on a daily basis--month after month, year after year.

After looking through the maintenance reports I see repetitive requests. It doesn't make sense to me that your maintenance department comes in to fix a problem, closes it out, and marks it complete all in the same day. Then, a few days later, it is submitted again because it wasn't handled the first time. Some requests are even safety issues, like the front door not locking properly.

Is your maintenance department really this good? To be coming on the same day, having the right part on hand, and able to fix it the same day? Three to four times a week just for Hanson? I'm not counting any of the other facilities.

I believe the truth is still untold to the media, the staff and parents of Hanson School.

As I mentioned before, I appreciate the cleaning up at Hanson, but this is merely a short term fix. The mold will be back on the new ceiling tiles in a few short months. The mice and lizards will continue to run throughout the ceilings and classrooms, disrupting the teachers' instruction, and pipes will continue to leak and flood the hallways, offices and classrooms, causing more molded carpets.

I am asking you to make not just Hanson, but other Hopkins County Schools that are in need, a priority rather than new programs in new facilities. We are asking for a new school building in Hanson, Kentucky. And we believe that if your priority truly is the children in this school, you have the ability to make this happen!

### **Community Input by Gwen Kik:**

I'd like to start by thanking you, the School Board members, for your service. I truly believe that you are here because you want to make a difference in the lives of the children of Hopkins County. My concern is whether or not you are being given all the information you need to make informed decisions.

You know, Brandi and I didn't know what we were getting into when we started this. We thought we were asking a simple question: When were we going to get our new school? We didn't realize how complicated the answer might become.

One of the things I have learned is that the local Board of Education has autonomy. It is the responsibility of the five board members to “ [hold the system accountable](#) .”

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There is no outside or higher authority to come in and do that. If the Board Members just go along with their leadership without question, then it is left to the tax-payers (parents) and the media to ask the difficult questions.

The Board of Education in Hopkins County also controls an enormous budget -- \$74 million dollars last year. That's larger than the county budget or the city of Madisonville. Forgive us for asking so many questions, but it's our money that you are spending, and it seems with little accountability. It is offensive to me that while we have wet carpets and hot temperatures at Hanson School - [a breeding ground for mold](#) - while our janitor has an old lawnmower we inherited when Nebo School closed...we hear rumors that we are paying for members of this administration to have iPhones and iPads, and then those rumors are confirmed.

Who knows best the conditions at Hanson? The teachers, the staff, the children and the parents who volunteer. The teachers and staff are afraid to come before this Board with their concerns. They are afraid for their jobs. The children can't be put in this position. So it's left to us, the parents, and frankly, it feels as though we are working against a machine, with this administration trying to prove us wrong at every turn.

With a little investigation we have found some interesting information: The facts on the ground at Hanson Elementary and the facts on the ground in Frankfort are vastly different than the 'facts' on the ground here on Seminary Street.

For instance, at the last board meeting we were told by you that it would cost at least \$15 million to build a new school for Hanson. I have spoken with the Facility Division at the Kentucky Department of Education and they tell me that bids are currently very competitive, and are [coming in around \\$153 per square foot](#), placing the price for Hanson right around \$10 million. Prices that have been thrown around for Hanson are the MAXIMUM construction costs, not the minimum needed.

We were told at the last board meeting that some of you had never heard the phrase, "Hanson's next on the list (for new construction)," but if you read the [Facility Planning Meeting](#) notes from 2007, you can plainly see that upon adjournment, "great support was shown for the new facility plan, especially the building of a new school for Hanson Elementary."

Perhaps most surprising was our discovery that Hanson School and it's surrounding property ARE NOT in the flood plain. I have had several on the board tell me that this was the reason the current property was not appropriate. But a quick look at the [FEMA maps online](#) [enter 131 Eastlawn Rd., Hanson, KY 42413], with confirmation from the State Facility Division shows that the current land is perfectly adequate.

It is a shame that in 2007, when this administration says it was looking to rebuild Hanson, NOT ONE person in this building or on this board bothered to check the flood plain maps to verify this information. Had one person checked the map, we could have started building and by now would have our new school.

So, we ask again: Why the Tech Center instead of Hanson - or better yet - Why the Tech

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Center before the immediate and pressing daily needs of ANY SCHOOL in this county? Why the misinformation about the flood plain? Why the misinformation given to the press regarding the state of the building at Hanson when the [minutes in 2007](#) show that the building is overpopulated, outdated and in need of repair? Why say the property donated from Jackie French may not be appropriate when you have not even been shown the land? When [facility law](#) reveals NO good reason that it would not be acceptable?

We have several options available to us right now: to build Hanson on the current property (around 15 acres), to build Hanson at no charge to the tax-payers on the land donated by [Jackie French](#), or to purchase land from Dennis Scott, whom I mentioned had land available last time, and who has not been contacted by anyone since the last meeting.

Forgive us if your words mean very little when we have heard for years that Hanson was next on the list, and yet your actions show otherwise. We will believe your words when ground is being broken for our school. Until then, we will keep coming back, like the mold on our ceiling tiles.

You know, the Facility Planning Committee is one of the few times that the will of the people is taken into consideration regarding the construction of educational facilities. That committee in 2007 chose Hanson as it's top priority. While the Board has a legal right to place the Tech Center first, what about ethically? morally?

Our search has led us to larger questions that must be answered:

- Does the will of the people matter?
- Does the Right to Freedom of Speech matter for teachers?
- Does accountability in government matter?
- Does the expenditure of \$74 million need oversight?

Yes, yes, yes, and YES! This has gone on too long without accountability, using fear and intimidation to promote personal agendas. Now, you have the opportunity to make things right.

*You have the opportunity to lead, to put the children of Hopkins County first in priority, and to put adult agendas last.*

Information provided to iSurf News by Brandi Gunkel and Gwen Kik.  
Posted by Karen Klay Orange - iSurf News