

11/25/2013



Testimony to the Pittsburgh School Board and to Dr. Linda Lane

So far the discussion about the proposed Woolslair closure has been about the Pittsburgh Public School's fiscal challenges, but as a group of community organizations and parents in the East End, we would like to reframe the conversation to also focus on ensuring that we have thriving, stable schools of first choice in our neighborhood. We understand the seriousness of the financial issues confronting the district and the need to cut costs, but we also know these decisions are about our students, our families, and the future of our communities. If we want to have strong neighborhoods, we need a plan for great public schools that meet the needs of our current families and that will attract new families to raise children in our area. I'm speaking before you today because we're asking the district to work with our parents and community groups to develop such a plan.

Our project, PEP Rally, is a partnership of community organizations in the East End focused on engaging parents around our neighborhood public schools. We're working together with parents and with Woolslair, Arsenal Elementary, and Arsenal Middle School to strengthen these schools and make them more attractive through community-supported initiatives that meet the needs of students and parents. We're willing to do the hard work to figure out what a plan for attractive public schools in our area might look like. We're asking for a commitment from the district to assign top-level staff to work with us on this plan and to consider this plan before closing any schools in our neighborhood.

Additionally, we respectfully request the following from the district:

- Parents and the community need information about what the suggested transition of Woolslair students to Arsenal Elementary will be like, especially as it relates to class sizes, staffing, transportation, and the resources that will be available for the transition and for Arsenal Elementary. Parents and the community can't be expected to make decisions if they don't know what's being offered.
- Parents and the community need to see the larger plan for the district that's guiding this decision, and how the proposed Woolslair closure fits into that plan. A regional look at schools must occur around enrollment issues, equity, special programming, school configuration, and feeder patterns. We do not want our families to be in this position in another few years, and we need a long-term vision for stability in our schools.
- The community must be a part of the conversation regarding what happens to the Woolslair building if the district ultimately closes the school.

We recognize the district's need to grapple with the budget issues, but the discussion can't be about cost alone. We believe in the potential of our public schools and the ability of parents, community groups, and Pittsburgh Public Schools to work together to create a plan for thriving, stable schools of first choice in our neighborhood. The future of our children and our neighborhoods deserves nothing less.

Respectfully submitted,

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