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Push Back

continued **▲** from front

to positive trends in Marshall and Benson that would be derailed by the plan. They also fear how the loss of the schools would affect the vitality of the surrounding neighborhoods, as well as the community-oriented atmosphere that alumni and students say has catapulted so many graduates on to great things.

Miké and Robin Lashbaugh, two generations of Benson alumni wearing the school's bright orange t-shirts, said that turning the school into a two-year program would deprive students of an invaluable experience. They also said that students with a Benson diploma have a leg up in the job market, coming to employers with technical skills.

"For you to shut down something like this would be huge," added Andre Jamison, a 1990 alumni.

Supporters of Marshall stood in the parking lot holding a banner that read, "Stop Bullying Marshall."

"We're the least priority," said Christina Armstrong, who graduated from the southeast school in 2009.

Benson supporters marched from the northeast Portland school to district headquarters in north Portland waving signs protesting the superintendent's plan.

Lead by John Slaughter, an alumni of Benson who now runs its mentoring program, marchers stopped at the entrance of the district headquarters, quickly filling up all space in the parking lot.

With a backward Benson cap covering his dreadlocks and wearing bright orange Nike sneakers, Slaughter climbed on the shoulders

of a taller participant to shout to the crowd that there wasn't enough room in the building and that everyone needed to remain respectful to get their voices heard.

"Save our school!" he hollered.

"Benson Tech!" the crowd responded.

"We are here!" yelled Slaughter.

"Hear our voice!" was the response, followed by, "Four year school!"

Inside, the school board was hearing from the valedictorians of each high school, which included Jenna Osterman of Benson who told the board that, "Benson has given me the confidence and experience I will need to excel in college."

During the public comment period, a handful of students gave impassioned pleas to keep their schools as is.

"Why are we closing the shining star?" questioned one Benson student. "It should be a model for every other school."

A Marshall student said that before attending his school he would have never had the confidence to speak in front of the school board, but gained it from the supportive environment he found at Marshall.

"People say Marshall is not the best school, but I wouldn't have gone anywhere else for the life of me," he said.

Superintendent Carole Smith listened attentively, and thanked the students at the end of the comment period.

"I will just say, I've been impressed by the passion and eloquence you represent your school," she said.

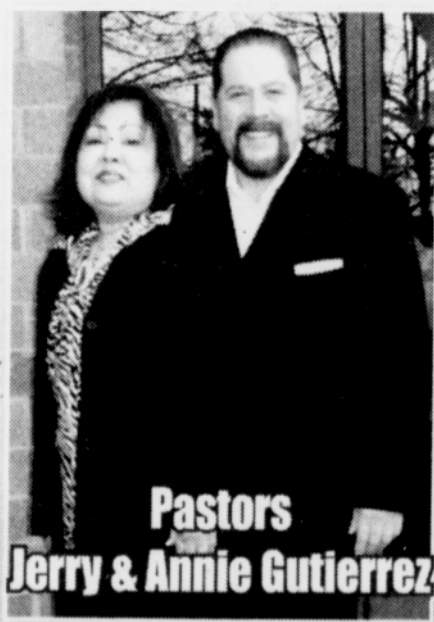
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