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'City of Roses'



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PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Harriet Tubman Young Women's Leadership Academy Principal Bonnie Hobson outside her school office on Monday. Hobson said she was stunned by a Portland School District proposal to close her school serving middle and high school girls.



High Emotions on Schools

Parents and educators speak out against cuts and closures

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Opinions and emotions are running high this week over the potential closure of Humboldt Elementary School, and the all-girls Harriet Tubman Young Women's Leadership Academy.

Both schools are in north Portland and serve Portland's African-

American community and other minorities. They would cease operations at the end of the school year as part of a budget proposed last week by School Superintendent Carole Smith.

Hundreds gathered at Cleveland High School Monday night to comment on the plans, which also eliminate a \$27.5 million budget gap by

laying off 110 teachers and 34 administrative positions, throughout the district.

Parents from the Young Women's Leadership Academy and Humboldt School asked Smith and the school board to keep the schools open for the good of kids who are largely children of color and from low-income households.

The prospect of closing the all-girls school was especially difficult for parents, educators and members of the community who felt the academy was not given enough support to grow its enrollment after just five years in existence.

"The news came as a shock to me," said Young Women's Leader-

ship Academy principal Bonnie Hobson. "Because we had a conversation earlier in the year to get enrollment up, and we did a good job."

According to Hobson, both parents and students alike don't want to see the school close its doors.

"It is heartbreaking," she said. "I feel like we have missed an opportunity to support a one of a kind public institution for girls and to grow young women leaders in areas where women are not represented."

Jyothi Pulla, a parent of twin girls who are currently seniors at the academy, agreed.

She said the potential closure of her daughters' school would be a wrong choice for the future of the community.

Pulla, who has been a volunteer at Tubman for four years, said the low enrollment is not a result of a lack of interest in the program, but rather a lack of school district sup-

port.

"Nobody likes to close schools," she said. "But this school is different. If they close this school there are no other public all-girls schools in Portland, in all of Oregon, and in the entire Pacific Northwest."

Although she understands the number of students is smaller than most public schools, she attributes the low level of enrollment to the perpetual threats, every year, of closure from the school board.

"No parent wants to enroll their child in a school with an uncertain future," she said.

Pulla said, however, the students at Tubman are receiving a good education in a positive environment unlike any other in the city.

"But every time they say this school is closing, we have to drop everything we are doing," she said. "Because this is a Title I school,

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