

High Emotions on Schools

continued ▲ from front

every year we have been getting letters saying this is a failing school, and you need to transfer your child out. But I never did because I really believe in this school."

According to Pulla, the closure of Tubman is not a matter of saving funds. "It is not a cost saving measure," she said. "So if it is not, then what is it?"

According to Portland Public Schools, enrollment at both Humboldt and the Young Women's Leadership Academy cannot support access to core academic offerings without a subsidy of teaching positions, which the school district can no longer afford.

Pulla said, however, enrollment is low because the school is still new, and many residents throughout the city have yet to learn about what many call a "hidden gem."

"She (Superintendent Smith) said it is an issue of enrollment, but we have 220 kids," she said. "And we don't have the history, the community support or a champion in the district like other schools."

Pulla compared Tubman to be like that of a planted seed.

"If it grows, it will provide shade to the entire community," she said. "They say they are pouring so much water and money, but if you keep digging the ground underneath, how can you grow roots?"

Every year kids come and go, and we can't build a community, she said. "The community needs to step up. This school is unique not just because it's an all-girls school, but it is an all-girls school focused on math, science and leadership."

Although Pulla said she is proud of her girls, both who will attend college next year once they receive their high school diplomas, she said it is unfair that other young women might not have access to the same quality of education like her daughter's received at Harriett Tubman.

"There are several reasons why this closure is different from other schools," she said. "This school isn't even five years old."

At first glance, Tubman doesn't appear like most public schools in Portland.

Inside the main building, where the all-girls student environment prepares young women to seek careers in math and science, images of Harriet Tubman decorate the walls, next to hung slogans, which read "Change Starts with a Girl."

Students are required to come to school every day in uniform, which consists of a white polo shirt for middle school or a yellow polo shirt for high school, and navy blue, khaki or black bottoms.

At Tubman, which has several

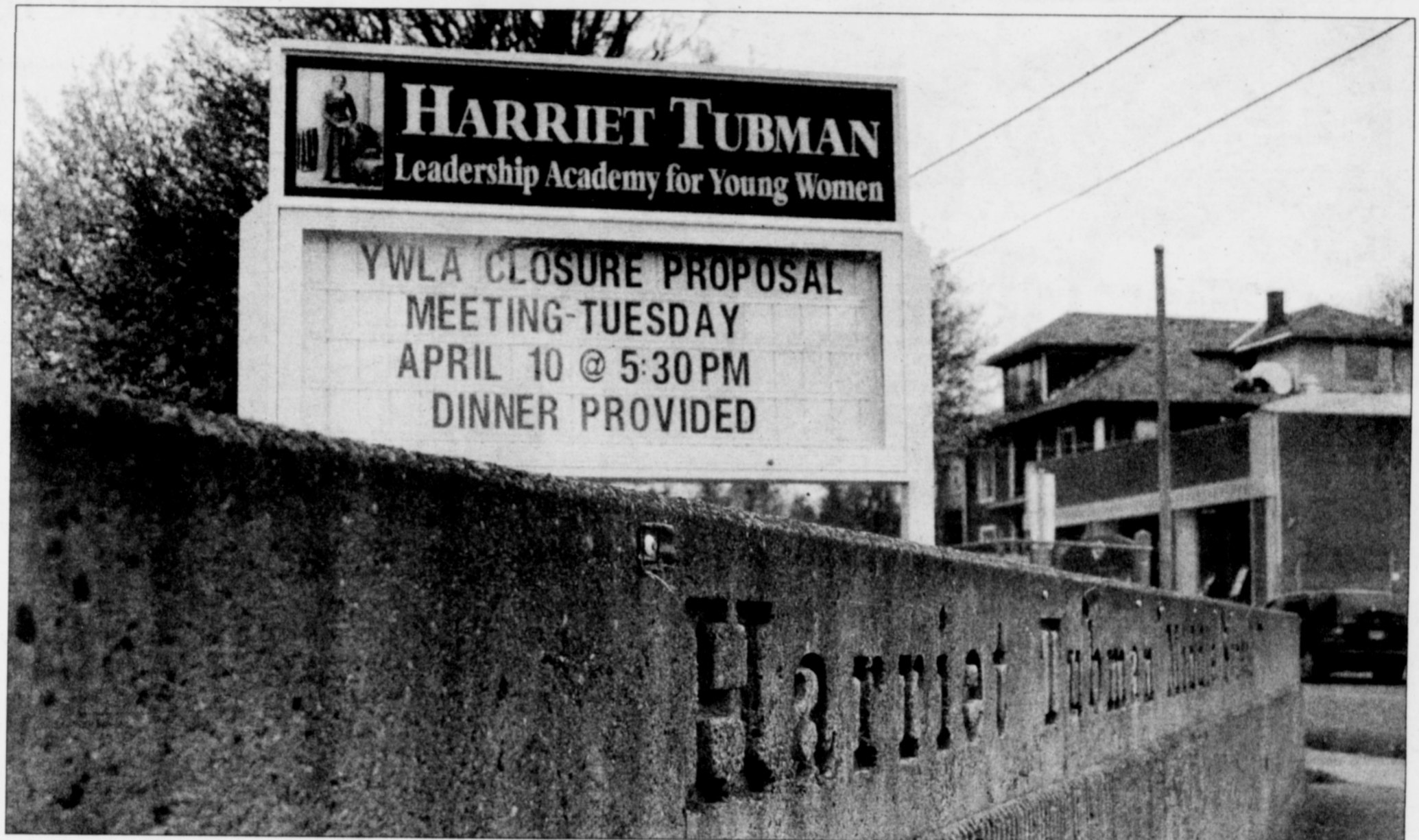


PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Emotions are running high at Harriet Tubman Young Women's Leadership Academy over a school district proposal to close the school because of low enrollment. Critics of the plan say the lack of students was not a result of a lack of interest in the program, but by constant threats of closures in the past.

community partners, including Intel, Project Lead the Way, Youth Employment Institute, PSU and Oregon Tradeswomen, students are exposed to college level academics, small personalized learning environments, a four-year engineering pathway program, a media lab and full library.

"I am proud of our school and so very proud of our girls," said YWLA Principal Bonnie Hobson on the school's website. "I am also deeply grateful for the support of their families. We have built a unique community that has served so many girls so well."

There is such untapped potential in these girls, said Hobson. "I've seen so much growth in just the short time I have been here."

According to Pauline Celino, who works in the main office at Tubman, Hobson is a wonderful administrator, who cares deeply for academics and the well being of the girls and the staff.

"My heart is attached to this school," she said. "But life is what it is, and it is a difficult economic time."

I have tremendous respect for Portland Public Schools and the decisions they have to make for the well-being of the entirety of the organization, said Celino. "But it's hard, and I think a lot of the staff feels the same way."

According to Pulla, more than 40 percent of the students at Tubman are African American young women. She said, however, the Af-

rican American community has not shown ownership like they have with Jefferson or Roosevelt. "But this school will be an asset to the community, the city and in the long-run, it will benefit the economy of this county," she said.

In spite of the lack of support the school has received from the surrounding community, Pulla said they have maintained the numbers. "The students here are very talented girls with high aspirations," she said. "And this school is different. The girls come from all over the district."

Hobson said even parents of incoming students have been calling the office to see if there is any way to help the school remain open.

According to Pulla, only two percent of girls who graduate from boys and girls schools pursue a career in the sciences and math.

She said, however, 13 percent in all-girls schools go onto math and science careers.

Both of Pulla's daughters are going on to study engineering in college, which was inspired by their experiences at Tubman, where they both became interested in the field.

When Pulla moved with her family to Oregon, she said they initially planned to live in Beaverton because a real estate agent warned her of the Portland public school system.

She said, however, when she heard of Tubman, the plans for her daughter's education changed.

That same year, Pulla and her family bought a home within the

county, and enrolled them in the academic program. "This school draws people to the city," she said. "You can't just look at the current numbers."

She said one student felt the potential closure of the school was the board's way of saying the school has failed. "But we haven't failed," she said. "So why would you close a school that is successful?"

"They haven't done this to other schools without giving it time to grow first," she said. "We want to show our protest, because we have not been heard," she said.

The Board of Education will hold another public meeting on the bud-

get on Wednesday, April 11 at 6 p.m. at Roosevelt High School, 6491 N. Central St. On Thursday, April 12, Superintendent Smith and school board members take feedback specifically on her recommendation to close the Harriet Tubman Leadership Academy for Young Women and consolidate Humboldt PK-8 School at Boise-Eliot PK-8 School. The meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. at Humboldt School, 4915 N. Gantenbein Ave.

"Tubman has the potential to be, if they will only let it be," said Pulla.

Hobson agreed. "We want people to know that we matter," she said.

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