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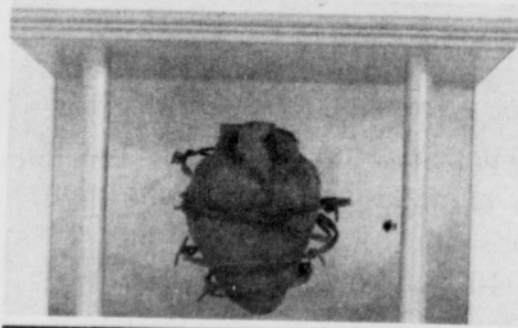
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LOCAL NEWS



PHOTO BY CARI HACHMANN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A packed crowd of community residents fill the cafeteria at Jefferson High School Saturday to protest and give input to plans to close more elementary schools in the cluster of schools that traditionally have fed into Jefferson.

Voices against Closures

Neighbors rally for Woodlawn, Vernon schools

By CARI HACHMANN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A crowd of some 200 residents gathered for a protest and meeting at Jefferson High School Saturday to give feedback to a plan to close and merge several elementary schools in order to boost instructional offerings in remaining schools that feed into Jefferson.

Opposition was loud against the proposals that could see Vernon or Woodlawn elementary schools shuttered, as well as the possible reconfiguration of Ockley Green into a middle school after a one-year closure and possible merger of King and Chief Joseph schools.

Last year, the Portland School District closed Humboldt and Tubman in the Jefferson cluster.

"We think that's the wrong approach to fixing our school system," said Mary Van Zandt and Mike Horner, who live in the neighborhood, but do not have kids that attend the schools slated for closure.

Both were part of a crowd of frustrated, but non-violent protesters rallying outside before the meeting. Words like minority, institutional racism, segregation, unequal system and gentrification opened the conversation to deeper lying issues the north and northeast Portland community has expressed for decades.

"Stop racist school closures," signs read. "We want equity," read others. "Don't close our schools."

Adam Sanchez, a former Jefferson High School and current Madison High School teacher who is also an activist for social justice in education, also spoke, "If you're a poor, student of color you get singled-out, targeted, punished and your

school gets closed," he said. Sanchez listed aloud the high percentages of minority populations at Vernon, Woodlawn and Ockley Green, all among options for closure. "Portland Public Schools has closed more schools in the Jefferson Cluster than all other school districts combined," he said, "We are here to ask why?"

Lauren Andronici, mother of an interracial family, said she moved to northeast Portland so that her children could go to a school close to home.

Now, a resident of four years, she watches middle-class neighbors move in and instead of sending their kids to local, neighborhood schools, they send them off to more affluent schools, while her kids' schools are left behind with low enrollment and fewer resources. "The money follows the students," she said.

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Mayor Cuts Summer Youth Program

Mayor Charlie Hales has cut \$395,000 for summer youth internships in an effort to help balance a \$25 million city budget shortfall.

Hales earlier reduced his own office's budget, cutting his staff from 25 to 14 employees, saving \$600,000 to help soften the blow.

The latest cuts go to non-profit, Worksystems, Inc., eliminating support for a summer work experience program that served a large percentage of minority and disadvantaged

students through subsidized placements in the private and government sectors.

Parkrose High School senior Tria Mcferson said without the enriching and constructive work experience she gained through Worksystems' Summer Youth Connect; her life would have been different.

She credits the program for her success, including an opportunity earlier this month to travel to

Washington D.C. and sit next to President Barack Obama at his inauguration.

The Mayor's chief of staff, Gail Shibley, said Hales knows the value of summer internships and has great respect for Worksystems, Inc.

"These budget decisions simply reflect the tough fiscal reality we face, and the mayor is committed to leading by example as the council begins crafting next year's budget," she said.