

September, 2011

To the East Metro Integration District 6067 School Board,

I'm writing this letter to you as a concerned 9th grader at Crosswinds. I've been at EMID schools since kindergarten, and since Harambee was Tri-district, and it's come to my attention that the board is considering closing these wonderful schools. I think that would be a huge mistake.

Last year as I was starting 8th grade I decided I would look around at other high schools in my area. The experience of looking at other high-schools really changed how I thought of EMID schools. I've always thought of them as the norm because I hadn't been anywhere else. But looking at schools like Central, North, Avalon, Great River and Cretin-Derham Hall made me realize how unique EMID schools are. The student population is really diverse, and they don't split into groups like they do at Central and North. The diversity has led me to learn so much about other cultures than just my own, European background.

Not only are EMID schools culturally diverse but they're safe. As an openly gay student at Crosswinds, I can vouch for its safety. When I first came out I was really worried about bullying, even though I hadn't seen any of it around. However, I now know I couldn't have been at a better school. I however, would be very worried for my safety at a school like Central or North. Crosswinds is also one of the only schools where the majority of kids participated in the Day Of Silence, a day where students stay silent to raise awareness of GLBT bullying. The EMID schools are some of the safest schools I've heard of.

Not only are EMID schools diverse and safe, the education is top-notch. Each of the students embody one if not more of the seven IB learner profiles (inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, reflective). Each of the students fully embody our C.A.R.E.S. values, which stands for Cooperation, Assertiveness, Responsibility, Empathy and Self-control. This allows for a safe learning environment where kids are encourage to push to meet their goals and to reach heights they never thought were possible. Crosswinds also has very strong programs for kids who have learning disabilities and for kids who are "gifted."

Crosswinds also is very student involved. A group of students from each house (Sun-6th grade, Sol-7th grade, Earth-8th grade and Aquarius-9th&10th grade) convenes and creates a Constitution. This constitution is a way for each student's voice to be heard in the rules of the school. The group of representatives from each house also works together to create Spirit weeks and make assemblies more student involved. We also have an after school informal site council in which students are invited to join in. At site council they can voice their opinions on polices and other more official school activities.

Crosswinds school also has a VERY strong arts program. The arts program includes various levels of visual arts, band, orchestra and theater. The Advanced orchestra last year went on a trip to New York City to compete in the Big Apple Classic. Not only did they win first in the orchestra section, but they also won in the overall competition. They have also performed in such venues as Minnesota's Orchestra Hall. This upcoming May both band and orchestra will be traveling to Chicago to compete against other groups. The visual arts programs have created and nurtured some very amazing artists who have entered pieces in competitions and won. The Theater program went through a bit of shake-up recently as the drama teacher changed. However they still managed to create an amazing performance of The Wiz which allowed a lot of students to really showcase their talents as singers, actors and actresses.

I can also tell you this district saves lives. I can say for sure that 15 kids have been in a tough place at Crosswinds and because of our Arts opportunities and our amazing, caring, teachers and staff, they decided not to commit suicide. This number includes some of my closest friends.

EMID schools are also much more than just a school. They are a family, the teachers teach because it's their passion and they want to see their "kids" do well in the future. My friends are my brothers and sisters not just my peers, and I know that every high-school student knows every other high-school student. The teachers aren't just teachers for many of the students, they are like second parents. I'm nine days into my high school education at Crosswinds and already I feel comfortable talking about anything with any of the teachers. Closing these schools would be dismantling a very amazing, special and supportive family -- something some kids can't get at home.

I would now like to invite you to come and observe a day at Crosswinds. Then go look at a school in your home district. I challenge you to say that EMID isn't special, that EMID doesn't have elements that can't be found anywhere else. EMID schools are unique. One of the things I have been most disappointed by is your lack of communication with students during this very important time at Crosswinds and Harambee. I know that you have been in contact with parents, interviewing and surveying them, but not once have you talked to a student except at your latest community input session, and that's just disappointing. I as a student would have been happy to talk about my experiences, but I guess that student opinions are just not important enough for you to seek them out.

Finally, I would just like to add that by closing the schools I do not believe that you are acting in ANYBODY'S best interest. These schools are something unique and special that needs to be preserved.

Thank you,

Nate Celeste
Current Crosswind's 9th grader