

21 September 2011

Dear School Board Members:

My name is Tracy Reitmann, from Cottage Grove, and I'm the mother of a brand new 6th grade student, just entering his middle school years. We were not one of the students who came from Harambee, we did not make the decision lightly to sign up for Crosswinds, and we've been more than a little shocked to learn just a few days before school started that his first year might be his last year of his first year of middle school at Crosswinds. When he was in 3rd grade I started looking at the middle school he would funnel into -- looking at it from all angles (I've worked for a research company for a number of years in addition to law firms for the last 30 years). After deciding it wasn't a school I thought he would excel in or would be a good fit either educationally or culturally, I spent the rest of the year looking for options in my area, or if I would have to uproot altogether, moving away from neighborhood friends to an entirely different city.

Then I came upon Crosswinds from a referral of a cub scout mother in our Cub Scout Pack. I checked into it and was shocked - it looked like it had everything we needed or wanted (including getting him into an IB program at an early age, which was something I was really interested in). The arts program was amazing - my son plays the piano (4 years) and will soon have to be taking lessons from someone at MacPhail because his local teacher can't keep up with him, the violin (3 years) and percussion (1 year), in addition to being strong in math and science. I checked how the school rated with others in the state for basic skills, the diversification of students, and the array of classes (I was thrilled that there was actually a school in my area that was teaching children things about their world, IN their world using the land surrounding the building). I lived a third of my adult life in Northern California and I have wished I could afford to raise my son there with the education system they offer -- Crosswinds reminded me a lot of their schools and how wonderful they are. It also reminded me of the diversification of California, something I've always made important in my son's life as I've raised him.

Last fall, when my son entered 4th grade, I brought him to Crosswinds for a private tour of the school so we both could see it. We had been discussing it all summer -- his opinion was obviously important because I wanted to know if it would matter to him, if he left the school all his friends were going to go to. We showed up for our appointment and the lady from the office showed us around the 6th and 7th grade towers, and the rest of the main school (gym, band room, etc.) explaining how history of Crosswinds and how they operated. We left and I told my son to take time to think about it. I was still thrilled but I needed him to process it and make up his own mind. For the next month he asked questions about a few friends he had in school (he only ever had 2 or 3 friends in school) and the classes he would get to take (the after school chess got him really excited - he loves chess and his grade school was too small to offer it after school -- we tried and no one else would ever sign up). Soon after that he said he wanted to go to Crosswinds and not the school everyone else was going to. HIS reasons were different than mine -- he said he wanted the year-round school

because he was bored in the summer which really surprised me but he is a single child of a single parent. He also said he really liked that he would be able to play in the orchestra every day instead of just a few days a week or after school, and that they were "really into science and math." The last reason caught me off guard. He said ever since first grade he had been teased in school, every day, by many of the other students and that they even had a nasty nickname that they called him when teachers were not around -- something he had never told me (it was a personal habit he had a hard time breaking, which he finally did in 4th grade but it was too late, the damage had been done). He's not an outspoken child and would rather keep things to himself. He said Crosswinds was perfect, he really liked the school plus it would give him a fresh start because he could start over and make new friends.

So the decision was made. And we were both thrilled, for different and similar reasons at the same time. If you close Crosswinds there's no option for me (and I can't believe I'm the only parent in this situation). Being a single parent in today's economy I have transportation issues and funding issues which severely limit my choices of schools and made my choice rather simple - Crosswinds or the public school he would naturally funnel into, which in his case he will more than likely be teased/bullied even worse now that he's missed the first year, a very IMPORTANT year, of middle school where the pecking order and the cliques have already been established. Try to imagine how much of an education in that kind of environment a soft-spoken boy who's being bullied and teased like my son, and others like him, who USED to be at Crosswinds, will get. Given the right environment, the right technique of teaching, anyone can excel, and Crosswinds offers that niche for those who don't necessarily fit inside a nice tidy box. Crosswinds is the only school of its kind in this area. If you close this school you forever close the door on giving all these children, and future children, a chance at an education they wouldn't get at a regular public school, where they might fail and not rise to become the best they could be in life. Crosswinds is the only school to offer the integration, the unique class curriculum, the smaller class size where students, like my son, would thrive with education instead of being buried in a crowd feeling lost and ridiculed and would struggle every day he was in class, not to mention the only school around with a year-round curriculum - I've always felt Crosswinds was a trailblazer in that regard and that others might follow in its footsteps, given enough time.

My son is OUR future...not just mine, but ours. ALL the children are our future and that's something that should be kept in mind. If you vote to close Crosswinds my belief in the educational system in this area will be lost forever. As a mother I need to look after our future and MY job is to try my damndest to make sure he has the best education he can get for all our sake. I bought a house and settled in South Washington County because this is a great place to raise kids, or so I thought, at least until they get through grade school.

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