

Testimony of Susan Conbere  
Parent, Parkland Middle School

October 11, 2007

Dr. Weast and Members of the Board:

I am a parent of a 7th grader at Parkland Middle School, and I am here this evening to ask you to continue fully funding our middle school magnet programs.

I'm a member of our PTA Executive Board and editor of our school newsletter. I attend the monthly meetings with the Parkland Partners. I can tell you first hand what an amazing school this is.

I chose Parkland for my son because he has a passion for science. He wasn't accepted when he first applied, and I appealed to get him in. It was the best decision I have ever made for my child's education.

Many things make Parkland special:

- First is the excitement when you walk in the door. There's an energy there I've never felt in any other school. Kids want to be there and they're excited to learn. Here is what one parent e-mailed me the other day: "I'm planning to attend the forum with my daughter. She is a 6<sup>th</sup> grader, who is very excited about the curriculum at Parkland. She tells me every day that the school hours go by so quickly, which has never been the case before."
- Second is our parents. I hear from parents all the time how grateful they are for this school—for the curriculum, the staff, the teachers, and the new building. In addition, 250 parents who do not live in the Parkland school district carpool so that their children can have this education, some from as far as Gaithersburg and Damascus. We are all very committed.
- Third is the tremendous work the school does to help all kids meet their potential. Parkland has a Power Period, when kids develop their English skills or do extra reading or math based on their abilities. They have double math classes to help struggling children succeed. They have 6<sup>th</sup> grade algebra and 8<sup>th</sup> grade physics, and children can choose up to three science classes a semester, including robotics, astronomy, and aerospace. Where else are you going to find opportunities like that?

Educators around the nation ask themselves what to do with middle schools: they just need to look to our 3 schools to find the answers. They are a model of equity in education. This is middle school reform at its very best.

You didn't put these schools in Potomac or Chevy Chase; you put them in areas with high concentrations of lower-income students, where the need for inspiring education is so great. At

Parkland, 52% receive reduced-fee lunches, 45% are Hispanic, and 16% are in ESOL classes. Despite these and other challenges, Parkland made AYP this year.

These programs have been an enormous success for children who are academically challenged, but they're also an enormous source of inspiration for children who love to learn. I can't thank you enough for the opportunity to send my son to Parkland. For any child with a love of science and a thirst for knowledge, Parkland is the place to be.

Please continue to fully fund our magnet schools. Without complete support, we'll lose staff, we'll lose classes, and we'll lose the beauty of our tremendously challenging and diverse curriculum. That is the heart and soul of Parkland—what makes our school so effective and so engaging. Please don't make us give up all that we have gained over the last two years.

I would like to close with a quote from a parent who e-mailed me this week:

“My son is a 6<sup>th</sup> grader this year – I have never seen him so excited by school – the additional science curriculum gets him up every morning... A school that can make children want to get up at 6:30 every morning is a school worth funding...”

Thank you.