

The Rise, Fall , and (Hopefully) Rise Again of Cooper Elementary School, Seattle

My name is Joy Anderson. I am the parent of a Cooper Elementary School kindergarten student and a member of the Cooper PTA. This is the **TRUE** story of how on January 29, 2009, the Seattle School District circumvented logic and the law by voting to dissolve a successful Elementary School program and disperse and disenfranchise its children in order to give a beautiful, state of the art building to a more affluent school, predominately White School, Pathfinder Alternative School #4. The District and the School Board pitted school against school in order to accommodate the demands of the Pathfinder and Arbor Heights communities. Three Cooper parents, on behalf of the Cooper Community, have filed suit against the District for this wrongful closure, and on June 12, 2009, at 10:30 am, we have faith that the King County Superior Court will overturn the District's egregious decision to close Cooper.

Here is a brief and relevant history of Cooper School.

The settlement of Cooper School area began in 1885, when logging was the main industry in the area. By 1903, after rumors that a steel mill would be built nearby, there was a small real estate boom and indeed, in March 1905, a steel mill was built in what was now called "Humphrey Settlement." A one room school was built on the mill's property and became "Youngstown School" (named for Youngstown, Ohio). When 70 children enrolled, the teacher, Miss Martha Anderson, not anticipating such "high" enrollment, appealed to the superintendent , who hired another teacher for the second class.

By 1908, population dictated that a bigger school be built. By 1917, a newer brick school was constructed on the Delridge /Genesee site. This school was built by the Delridge Community FOR the Delridge Community. The demographic was mostly people of color and immigrants. It was in 1929 that a big brick facility was built to serve the community. Seattle's first African American teacher, Thelma Dewitty was assigned to teach 2nd grade at Cooper in 1947. Cooper school continued to educate the children of the community until it was closed in 1988 and the children were temporarily relocated to the Louisa Boren building on Delridge. The original Cooper Building (Youngstown) could not be sold until the District promised to build another school for the community. That building was eventually sold to the DNDA (Delridge Neighborhood development Association) and is now the Youngstown Cultural Center. The District did indeed begin construction on another school for the community.

The new Cooper Elementary School was built atop Pigeon Point and opened in 1999. The community children moved into this building with full enrollment. This new facility cost about \$22 million to build. This school is beautiful and state of the art, with a full view of Mount Rainier. The campus is not only surrounded by lush wetlands and public park property but also houses a bald eagle's nest. We love our beautiful campus, and the children are thriving here. Test scores are climbing. We have many successful programs, not to mention a successful Autism Program. We also have a thriving international student body, including Native American, Asian, Hispanic, as well as a robust Somali population. We are quite proud of our diversity.

In the fall of 2008, the District alleged it was having budget problems, and in order to close a \$34 million budget shortfall, made the decision to shutter various schools throughout the district. On November 28, 2008, the District mailed its "Preliminary Capacity Management & Building Closure Recommendations" document to all parents, recommending the closure of various building, but in

particular interest to us, this document recommended closing The Genesee Hill Building, which houses Pathfinder (Alternative School #4), and moving it into the Arbor Heights Elementary Building. Cooper is in the North Cluster and Arbor Heights in the South Cluster. Pathfinder is an all-city draw, but a majority of its students (more than half, about 202) live in the South Cluster, while only 63 live in the North Cluster - a good fit for Pathfinder because Arbor Heights was under enrolled and is in the South cluster where most of Pathfinder's students live. Arbor Heights also has rolling lawns and a peaceful, campus-like feel, much like Cooper.

At this time the superintendent, Dr. Goodloe-Johnson made a preliminary recommendation on November 25, 2009 as to why Cooper was NOT a good idea for closure:

“If 65 Cooper students were assigned to West Seattle Elementary that would leave 56 Cooper students who live in the West Seattle North cluster without a building in their cluster. Students are guaranteed a seat in an elementary school in their cluster. The decision to relocate Pathfinder K-8 to Cooper would result in students being mandatorily assigned outside of their cluster, which would violate the student assignment plan.

In addition, this would result in significant transportation costs and time for students on buses, because students would be transported from the north end of West Seattle to the south end.

Because the plan would violate the student current student assignment plan we cannot make the recommendation of Pathfinder K-8 to Cooper”

It appeared as if someone might be advocating for us at last! Cooper was doing well. We were the model for Title I, urban elementary schools. Test scores were improving, we had excess capacity for the overflow of the North Cluster, and our enrollment was rising (even after the District had redrawn our reference area to include Harbor Island and the Golf Course, where there are no houses.)

And HERE is where the story twists and turns like a prime time drama...

The Arbor Heights PTSA rallied. Its members collectively screamed, yelled, protested, and immediately mobilized with web-presence, signs, t-shirts, and the “H*ll no, we won't go!” mantra. Somehow, they were on the inside track with the West Seattle School Board Representative, Steve Sundquist. We are not quite sure how they did it, but they managed to quietly get themselves off the closure list in just 2 weeks. However, at least one disgusted member of the AH community had the integrity to enlighten us with some of the e-mails from the Arbor Heights PTSA.

First of all, AH received a call from Patrick Johnson, alerting them that they were on the closure list, even before the capacity management document was mailed. Cooper never received such consideration. There is more...

Here are excerpts from the e-mails from the co-President of the Arbor Heights PTSA, Eric W., to the AH community:

“I see Pathfinder as a valuable program and the school district wants at least one alternative in West Seattle. That being said, replacing the AH program with the Pathfinder Program is NOT a good idea. I spent the day crunching number (sic) reading reports, and attending the meeting with Steve Sundquist. So far we have hatched several plans BUT we are planning to work with the Pathfinder PTSA and other schools to form a unified front.

...The plans center around either A) keeping Pathfinder where it is for a year or two, and then moving them to Cooper or moving Pathfinder to Cooper immediately and closing Cooper with no warning. This is where we NEED the cooperation with Pathfinder if we wish to be successful..

..."Even if Cooper closes, we will have excess space in the south end. So we will have to make the case that Roxhill closes as well."

In another email:

If we want to keep Arbor Heights open, we need to give them a sacrificial lamb. If we move Pathfinder to Cooper in 2010, the district will claim that there is no savings there and even if it were the better option, they need the money today and the move is on. We have to serve them Roxhill on a plate to reduce the overcapacity in the south end.."

Lets just destroy everyone in our path to ensure our survival! Do I really WANT you people teaching my children?

I don't understand why a school board member would let the Arbor Heights PTSA be so involved in the closure process and other school board business? How did this PTSA get so much power? We speculate more of that demographic may have voted for the West Seattle Rep board member than did OUR demographic, but we are just speculating.

Another fact that you should know. Steve Sundquist, Cooper's "supposed" West Seattle Representative- well, his children attend Pathfinder. His school board predecessor, Irene Stuart, was also a Pathfinder parent.

Therefore, at the beginning of December, Cooper was swiftly, and "without warning" put on the closure list. A new capacity management document was not mailed to Cooper parents. Our PTA did NOT get a heads-up phone call from Patrick Johnson. Sundquist could "hatch plans" with the Arbor Heights PTSA, but wouldn't return phone calls to us. WE COULDN'T GET SUNDQUIST TO REPRESENT US! The District called our principal to let her know we were on the closure list.

Then, Seattle School District broke state law by not following a 1983 state law (RCW 28 A 335 020) which states there are certain procedures that must be followed in order to close a school, which includes public participation and a series of separate hearings for each school, and the completion of a demographic study. To determine the harm it might do to the student population. At that point the District began referring to Cooper as a "program," not school, thereby beginning to use its strategy to circumvent the lengthy public closure process. Cooper was denied due process.

The School Board then made its own problems by changing its own policies after it had begun the closure process! We believe this was all cynically calculated to reduce public participation, thereby rendering Cooper School powerless to involve itself in the process and properly represent and defend itself against the impending closure of its school.

Here is how THAT happened. First of all, the District tried to change the process after the process had BEGUN. They simply altered the language from the closure of "schools" to the closure of "buildings." A school is not just a building, but an organic whole of students, parents, teachers, programs, and

energy, there to educate children. So to cast into the wind all of our multicultural students, teachers, parents, OUR SCHOOL -without due process- was against the law. This is how Cooper got on the closure list. We know for a fact that the board decided on December 9, 2008 to simply change the student assignment plan:

“Given the Board's decision to lift the restrictions of the Student Assignment Plan to allow for the assignment of Cooper students to West Seattle North or South, moving Pathfinder to Cooper may be included in the Final Recommendation.”

Other interesting things we discovered about Pathfinder...

We SUSPECT that Pathfinder has wanted the Cooper building since the building was opened in 1999. To build a facility similar to Cooper in that wetland /park environment would probably cost about \$75 million dollars today.

- Prior to 2006, as far back as 2002, 3 years after Cooper moved to its current location, there was a recommendation to merge the Cooper and Pathfinder programs into the Cooper Bldg. Cooper fought that proposal and prevailed.

In October, 2006 when the District tried to close Cooper (for the second time) and relocate the Pathfinder Program in the building, Cooper was told that if it increased test scores and enrollment, we would not be considered for closure in the future. Yet here we are again. And why? We did everything right,-we increased test scores, increased enrollment, and were doing well.

Pathfinder was offered other building options, including Louisa Boren and Fairmount Park (“We can't put our portables on the wetlands, they will sink”). Their other arguments...

- core spaces too small for Pathfinder K-8 population (lunchroom, gym, library), and/or lack of space for possible portables for adequate capacity (Fairmount Park is partially situated on a wetlands which precluded moving portables on the premises), and/or
- too many building condition problems to work well without substantial influx of money from the district., and/or some nervousness about whether District “promises” would be fulfilled with regard to help in fixing up these buildings, based on past experiences.

Pathfinder was offered the vacant High Point Elementary, but I suspect, (and this is hearsay) that they balked at being in “that neighborhood” (near a low-income housing development). “Not an appropriate location for the Pathfinder Program.” They complained for hours at a community meeting about the problems of the Boren building. I am puzzled as to why the District protects Pathfinder so much and gives them the option to choose or deny a building. If they are a public school, they should have to abide by the rules of the system, like all other schools in the District do.

We also suspect, and I don't have the hard statistics yet, (just a casual conversation with an ethnicity studies major from the University of Washington) that Cooper Elementary may have more documentable Native American students than Pathfinder. Pathfinder, which touts a “Native American Philosophy and approach to learning” (or whatever Causcasions think that is...) The Ivy League Dartmouth College in Hanover New Hampshire was founded in 1769 with a charter "for the education and instruction of Youth of the Indian Tribes in this Land ... and also of English Youth and any others” Dartmouth had to drop it's school mascot in the 1970's which was, unfortunately, the Dartmouth “Indians”, because it was found exploitive and demeaning to those Native Americans that they had

originally intended to educate. Now they advocate for other schools to drop the Indian mascot names, and are debating whether or not their sports teams should even play opposing teams WITH exploitive Indian mascot names. I feel that Pathfinder, though they probably mean well, in theory, is doing the same thing. They have Indian names for programs and advertise this Native American approach to learning, yet their students are predominantly white middle class. Why is this mostly Caucasian school exploiting a native American philosophy? I think Pathfinder should have to drop the Native American rhetoric if they can't actually serve more of the population they say they are there to educate. (Someone told me they have a tee pee in their lobby, and no Pacific Northwest Native Americans ever lived in tee pees.)

I also very much appreciate the irony that a school which espouses a Native American philosophy and agenda would actually "appropriate" a building from a school full of children of color, and kick them out into the unknown. Maybe putting our disadvantaged kids, our immigrants, our Somali kids, into portables is the School District's idea of putting US on the reservation! I am annoyed at the sense of entitlement this community seems to harbor towards us. They will have what they want at ANY the cost -even the cost of the common good of rest of the children of West Seattle.

Pathfinder's student body will not fit into the Cooper Building!

Pathfinder is a K-8. Cooper is a K-5. There are about 400 students at Pathfinder and they want to grow. Pathfinder is "allowing" the Autism "Program" to stay in the building, eliminating 4 classrooms for use by Pathfinder, about 100 seats. (They had no choice but, I'm sure that the Autism Community would have been up in arms and sued them immediately.) They also can't use the YMCA's preschool because of an "open kitchen situation", thus eliminating more capacity. Pathfinder is bringing their portables, and since Cooper is ALSO surrounded by wetlands, (like Fairmount Park) the only place they can put their portables is on the playground. Great fun for the kids to play around at recess. I'm sure that looking at the portables will be aesthetically pleasant for the Pigeon Point Community.

Therefore Pathfinder kept vying for- and obtained a state of the art building overlooking Seattle surrounded by a greenbelt. Never mind that the school had current occupants, deserving in their own right to keep their building and be educated in peace, and not caring that they are taking the only elementary school left with any capacity, or that the rest of the children in West Seattle North will now have to sit in portables. **Three times Pathfinder has tried to get this building!** Thanks to the Seattle School District and the Board, they got it! Now, we don't doubt that Pathfinder deserves its own facility, but...

THEY JUST DON'T DESERVE IT ON THE BACKS OF OUR CHILDREN!

So, on December 9, 2008, Cooper was put on the recommendation for school closure. However, in order to avoid the legal process of school closure (one month of posting meeting dates in local papers, a series of public hearings), the District changed the verbiage of the closure process and deemed Cooper Elementary School a "Program" instead of a "School." The District proposed to call the school closures "building closures" and since they weren't closing Cooper Elementary "BUILDING," just the "program," our children were evicted from the building, and now being forced to attend and be bussed to schools outside their cluster, remember, at considerable extra time on buses and expense. Why was the District in such a hurry? We were not entitled to representation or due process. If we had been afforded hearings, many facts about Cooper would have come to light and the District would never

have closed Cooper Elementary.

REASONS:

There will be NO MORE capacity in the North Cluster!

The plan to close this school DOES have an adverse effect on all of the students who attend Cooper Elementary, not to mention the rest of West Seattle North. Cooper had the only excess capacity in the North Cluster, about 100 extra seats at the time of closure, and this is partly why we were targeted for closure. Schmitz Park, Alki Elementary, and Lafayette all were full in 2008 and had wait lists. Since there was no where else to put North Cluster kids, the District's bright idea was to split our 300 kids 3 ways, and assign them to the South Cluster schools- Highland Park, Gatewood, Arbor Heights. (The very school that threw us under the bus to save itself!)

Now that the closure is in full swing, after this enrollment period, the District discovered it had 400 EXTRA KINDERGARDENERS alone in the district! Remember, West Seattle North Cluster DOES NOT HAVE ENOUGH SEATS FOR ITS OWN CHILDREN!!! In fact, 85 of OUR children lack a desk to sit in within West Seattle North Cluster The already over-capacity Schmitz Park, Lafayette, and Alki have to add **TWO PORTABLES EACH** at their sites just to accommodate the extra children!!! Since small children are hardly put into portables because portables lack bathroom facilities, the older children, the established ones, the status quo children who were there before, will be the ones in the portables. I think West Seattle are in for a rude awakening! The “excess” children (those who won't fit into those extra portables) will be bussed to the South Cluster, which is a very long bus ride for those who can even GET a bus. There is no transportation supplied to you if your child attends a school outside his or her cluster!

- Furthermore, you new parents in this cluster with preschoolers probably will not get into your neighborhood schools and will be bussed 1 hour away to the South cluster because there ARE NO SEATS! If Cooper is allowed to stay open these children can attend Cooper and be taught in CLASSROOMS, (no need for portables) since we already have the capacity to take these children and ease the impending overcrowding at these schools.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE DISTRICT'S CLOSURE ACTIONS

Other schools in West Seattle are already earmarking materials from the Cooper Inventory for use at their schools.

- The principals of Gatewood, Pathfinder and Arbor Heights have contacted Cooper's principal requesting various equipment (PE, computers and monitors, computer server), furniture and multi-cultural books, etc. Cooper's staff has been sent these schools' demands, placing undue stress on the staff during this trying time. Our children are being taught in classrooms filled with moving boxes because the district is trying to close us QUICKLY, as we are trying to undo this. On June 8th 2009, other schools get to “pick” through our library and put their choices on temporary bookshelves to be shrink wrapped and held. Our children will be able to see the books, but cannot use them. Why can't they wait until the end of the school year so the children aren't subjected to any more unnecessary stress? The morale is horrible, the teachers are depressed and angry (rightly so) and the kids are becoming increasingly unmanageable due to the thoughtless way in which this closure was being managed, -with no

respect shown to our community WHATSOEVER!

Cooper teachers were promised that they could “follow the children to their new schools” (A quote from Carla Santorno-I heard the words fly out of her mouth at a Cooper Community meeting!)

- Instead of taking whole classrooms of our students and reassigning them with a Cooper teacher, our children have been scattered to the remaining West Seattle Elementary Schools and our teachers had to apply for jobs within the district, some were laid-off. Teachers are constantly absent because they are applying and interviewing for new jobs. This is disruptive for these kids who need CONTINUITY! The District lied to our teachers in this respect and let our kids down.

The YMCA Before-and-After School Childcare Program is being discontinued at Cooper for 2009 – 2010

- The schools to which Cooper children were reassigned by the District do not do not offer this service, which is convenient and essential daycare. This effectively causes our working families to lose needed childcare.

The Free CLC Tutoring Program was eliminated.

- The Community Learning Center (CLC) Tutoring Program governed by the YMCA, City of Seattle and Seattle School District has been moved to West Seattle Elementary. No Cooper children were assigned to West Seattle Elementary. This program provided after school tutoring, homework support and social enrichment services to students grades 2 – 5, 50% of which were from bilingual families. This program seeks out students struggling academically and invites them to join the program in order to strengthen reading, writing, math skills and science comprehension regardless of social standing and ethnic background. It is our understanding the City and the District agreed to move this program Prior to the vote on 1/29/09.

Pathfinder has already been allowed to hold proprietary planning meetings while Cooper is still in session.

- The District has let Pathfinder staff to come into the building, perform walk-throughs of classrooms, and hold weekend planning sessions. The District has let Pathfinder’s design team come in and begin measuring for the structural changes and obtain building permits. Once Cooper’s staff is out of the building on 6/25/09, they will begin altering Cooper to change it to a K-8. We think they should have to wait until the end of the school year to do any of this.
- Cooper students will lose their family support workers and bi-lingual aides

The District has assigned the displaced Cooper students to schools that do not provide family support workers (an integral part of the success of our bilingual and migrant families), instructional aides for our Vietnamese, Latino, Somali, Chinese, Mandarin and Cambodian students, translators for all of our students assigned to their schools, multi-cultural books or the knowledge to appropriately service the displaced diverse Cooper students. Our school further supports our Korean, Filipino, Eritrean and Iraqi students, neither of which Gatewood, Arbor Heights, or Highland Park, Schmitz Park, Lafayette, or Alki Elementary Schools can

accommodate. All of Cooper's students are provided the same educational advantages of students in which English is the first language. Moreover, families are concerned about keeping their children in the schools to which the District assigned them. In particular, their new schools will be ill-equipped to service their children and their families. Some Somali families are considering home-schooling if they cannot remain at Cooper.

By the way, the third phase of Highpoint Housing Development will be finished this summer. It was projected that about 100 Somali families were moving into the community. In reality it will be about a thousand. When these children register for school this summer, I wonder where else the District will find to put more portables?

The grant supported Buddy Program in the Autism Curriculum will be discontinued.

- This program currently partners Cooper students with autism with Cooper's general education students in order to help students with autism build relationships with the peers in general education. General education students who have attended Cooper in grades 2-4 embody the spirit of Cooper and the compassion necessary to successfully build a partnership with our autism students. This promotes a continuum of stability which is so important in the success of the students in the autism program. The autism program also receives certain monies for being in a Title I School. We are not sure if this program will be able to keep its funding if Cooper becomes Pathfinder. Pathfinder is too affluent to be considered a Title I school. We are afraid that the Autism Program might be on borrowed time.

Physical logistics of the Autism program will be reworked, to the detriment of the students

- In speaking of continuity, Pathfinder's vision for facilities use has noted that they will consider placing the autism classrooms as needed to optimal locations to serve kids. The current location IS the optimal location for the autism program students and was chosen to allow for the daily needs of those students as recommended by the autism staff.

The District has **APPROVED** the remodeling of Cooper to accommodate Pathfinder's K-8 program.

- Construction is to take place after Cooper is officially closed on 6/25/09. The school will be remodeled to include lockers, science labs, document cameras, ceiling mount projectors, and bathrooms to accommodate grades 6-8. Pathfinder's Design team also wants the District to purchase \$3000 smart boards for each classroom (about 24 boards I think), and wants to keep Cooper's expensive server to run them. The remodel, which will no doubt be expensive, will no longer accommodate the elementary school students for which the school was originally built. Pathfinder was allotted hundreds of thousands of dollars to remodel the Genesee Hill site before the closure vote. This money was quietly retracted after the closure vote. The District is not saving money by accommodating all of Pathfinder's demands. Their whole rationale for closing schools was to save money, yet they are spending thousands to accommodate Pathfinder! We would like the District to make public the amount of money it intends to spend to A) relocate and bus all West Seattle children all over the clusters, and B) "improve a perfectly good state of the art 10 year old school to make it acceptable to the Pathfinder community.
- **CITIZENS OF WEST SEATTLE SHOULD DEMAND THAT THE DISTRICT MAKE PUBLIC ALL ACCOUNTING RECORDS PERTAINING TO THIS MOVE AND CLOSURE !!!**

Lastly, Cooper has the ONLY free all-day kindergarten in the North cluster!

It is our feeling that the District never paid much attention to the Cooper School, perhaps other than to regret that it had built us such a nice building. I think it quietly waited for this school to fail. In the last 2 years Cooper has had a principal inappropriate for its demographic who had all kinds of interpersonal issues with her staff. Complaints from staff members of colors were rampant. We have the best staff ever, and this school succeeded despite its former reputation from the Boren building and the administration with whom it had to contend. The teachers and staff made our school succeed! I think under constituent pressure, the District grew tired of waiting for this school to fail so they could allocate the property to “more upscale and appropriate” school. They just lowered the hammer on us, depending on their belief that Cooper would not and could not defend itself.

We are not only defending ourselves, **BUT THE COOPER CHILDREN**. We are **FURIOUS!** West Seattle does not deserve this! Our children shouldn't be the human sacrifice so that the “more important” program (who already had a campus) with the more valuable children can succeed. We will not be used in this way, and we are tired of the District exploiting us!

Cooper Elementary is the model for successful elementary schools everywhere. Jonathan Kozol, renowned author, (“The Shame of a Nation”), educator, and advocate of inner city and urban schools, visited Cooper earlier this decade and complemented Cooper, saying it was about time a school like this was built for inner city youth. He will be disgusted when he finds out what happened at the end of this decade. Cooper is a success! Still, our low income school of color has been abandoned, disrespected, and discarded., and disbanded? **AND WHY?**

Seattle should be ashamed of itself! ASHAMED ASHAMED!

That we have allowed something like this to happen in the 21st century is unconscionable. We Seattlites think we are so educated, tech savvy. Seattle, so literate, so progressive, so hip, so liberal, one of the best places to live in the entire United States. **SO WHAT!** Apparently, if you are a person of color, it doesn't matter. Wait, does my calendar say 1971?

The liberal elite is fine to share a tiny bit of their abundance, but when they feel they aren't getting “theirs.” or when someone else may be getting something better than what they perceive they should have, watch out! God forbid people of color might have something that is a little better than what they have. In our community we call it “Great White Entitlement. In times of panic, their overblown sense of entitlement makes them take, take, take. Where is the justice? My child is **NOT** paying for this philosophy or their mistakes. Next it will be your children who are victimized.

Please help us any way you can to overturn the school boards horrible decision to close Cooper Elementary. West Seattle Clusters will be destroyed. We are going to Court June 12, 2009 at 10:30 am in King County Court. Hundreds of the Cooper Community will be there. Please do what you can. Write the Superintendent, Maria Goodloe-Johnson, and members of the school board. Or just donate to legal fund, as we have a hefty legal bill **Cooper Elementary PTA, 1901 SW Genesee St, Seattle WA 98106.**

Thanks for your support! Joy Anderson joyousanderson@msn.com
Please email me for documents or if you'd like more information. I'm happy to talk to you!