



CITY OF ORLANDO

Office of
Commissioner Patty Sheehan
Orlando City Council, District 4

February 4, 2009

To Concerned Parents of District 4 Children and the Orange County School Board:

I have received many calls and e-mails regarding concerns over the possibility of closing community schools. In light of the fact that more and more consideration is being given for neighborhood school closures, I feel it is imperative that I reiterate my concerns and pledge my support for keeping Orange County elementary schools located within our neighborhoods. In 2006, the School Board heard a staff proposal to close/merger some of the smaller elementary schools. Of the 21 schools listed, 16 serve City of Orlando residents. The schools of concern to District 4 of the City of Orlando include Lake Como Elementary, Ferncreek Elementary, Hillcrest Elementary, and Dover Shores Elementary. Now, with the tightening of belts and fewer dollars flowing from Tallahassee, it is disheartening that these considerations are back on the budget chopping block.

As an elected leader, I understand the tough decisions which must be made to balance budgets due to the devastating impacts of Amendment 1 and other economic circumstances. We are all feeling the weight of the Recession and trying to provide superior service to those we serve with less revenue and more cuts under consideration and, unfortunately, inevitable. We read every day about the thousands of jobs being lost and the budgets of local governments dwindling with more cuts on the way. However, I cannot stress enough how devastating the closure of these community schools would be to our neighborhoods, parents and, especially, the children.

I have been a champion for our kids walking to schools safely, even facing up to residents who valued their landscaping over the City of Orlando's School Safety Sidewalk program. When the children of Reeves Terrace lost their bus service, I partnered with local businesses to provide each child a new bike to ride to school. I feel very strongly about supporting good education and the public school system. But as a concerned resident and community leader, I cannot sit idly by and watch our schools close after the tremendous investment Orlando residents have made in them. Over and over again, I have heard my constituents say they want neighborhood schools where they can be actively involved in their children's education by volunteering and attending school functions. I support our community schools as an important piece of the fabric that binds our community together. And, in the uncertain times of today, a united community is what we need now more than ever.

With best regards,

Patty Sheehan
Commissioner, District 4
Orlando City Council

PS/cs

Cc: Orange County School Board Members
Ron Blocker, Orange County Schools Superintendent
District 4 Neighborhood Association Presidents
District 4 School Principals