



# HESNA

Historic East Side Neighborhood Association

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Ypsilanti Public Schools  
School Board of Education  
1885 Packard Rd.  
Ypsilanti, MI 48197

To The YPSD Board of Trustees:

The Board of the Historic Eastside Neighborhood Association (HESNA) wishes to formally protest the possible closure of Ypsilanti Public Schools, described as a key feature of the District's Deficit Elimination Plan (DEP). While we argue that any public school closures will have a negative impact on the entire District, we are particularly alarmed that Adams Elementary, located at our neighborhood's east-most border at the intersection of Oak & Prospect, may be one of the Elementary Schools that is slated for closure.

Adams Elementary's central location on the border between the neighborhoods of East Prospect Park, Prospect Park, Miles, and the Historic Eastside makes it an essential community anchor and resource for hundreds of Ypsilanti residents. Whether as The Prospect School (created in the early 1900's) or as the Olive M. Adams Academy of Science & Technology, an educational facility has stood in that location longer than most of the homes that surround it. As a result, it has shaped the development and character of our community in a vital and positive way. When, in the 1980's, the Adams School was renovated, it coincided with our neighborhood's designation as a Historic District and ushered in a major urban renaissance from Depot Town to the City's Eastern border.

Since a thriving public educational institution is a key component of any healthy urban area, it is not surprising that the neighborhood's fortunes have closely paralleled the School's. As has been repeatedly demonstrated both within our own City and across the United States, the closure of a school building leaves a devastating hole in the communities it serves by transforming a neighborhood asset into a source of community blight. A shuttered public school also sends a strong message to prospective residents, telling them in no uncertain terms that ours is a community that does not value and cannot support quality education for our children. As a gateway landmark for four large neighborhoods, were Adams to become vacant or under-used, it would be a powerful drag on property values, thereby not only discouraging growth, but actively hastening current residents to relocate to areas that are more welcoming and better served by a local public school.

In recent years, Adams Elementary has been a strong partner in helping to enhance and improve Prospect Park, another great community resource. Together with the Friends of Prospect Park, various neighborhood associations and organizations like the YMCA, Adams has helped to re-mulch the play area, create a native plants garden in Luna Lake, and keep the park safe and clean. Were Adams Elementary to be closed, the vacant building could become a target for crime and vandalism, reversing much of what has been accomplished through the dedicated efforts of community residents. No school children on the playground and fewer users in the Park would create an environment that is more conducive to delinquent and criminal behavior, thereby triggering the often-seen and hard-to-reverse spiral of disuse, neglect and decline that is the bane of city parks everywhere.

Given the current economic recession, it is likely that a vacant school building would remain empty for many years – more than enough time for all of the negative outcomes predicted above to come true. When we are already struggling with so many hardships (cuts to basic city services, huge declines in property values, increases in crime), the closure of Adams Elementary would likely be a mortal blow to the beleaguered communities that it now serves.

It seems counterintuitive that our response to declining enrollment should be to discard the unique and practical assets in which we, as parents and taxpayers, have invested. We are currently in the fortunate position of having newly-renovated, state-of-the-art neighborhood schools with small class size and excellent teachers. The District's plan to eliminate schools is not a long-



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term solution, but a temporary measure of questionable value in helping to resolve the current budget difficulties. Although the District projects that the closure of an elementary school will save approximately 1% of the total annual budget, many studies indicate that even this modest savings may be a vast over-estimation. The Rural School and Community Trust cites a 1984 study that demonstrates that “closing schools reduces per-pupil cost very little, if at all.” They continue by saying that of the 49 districts surveyed, only four were able to report actual savings, six concluded the closures had no cost impacts, and two reported actual cost increases<sup>1</sup>. Although this study focuses on the cost to the school district itself, if the larger cost to the community is factored in, the loss becomes much greater. The same report states that the socio-economic impact of schools on communities is significant, and school closures reduce the fiscal capacity of local communities to provide support for education. Some of the key indicators that they cite are as follows:

- Sixty percent of the communities with schools saw population growth from 1990 to 2000; only 46 percent of those without schools grew.
- Average housing values in the communities with schools are 25 percent higher than in those without schools.
- Communities with schools enjoy higher per capita incomes, a more equal distribution of income, less per capita income from public assistance, less poverty and less child poverty.
- Communities with schools have more professional, managerial, and executive workers; more households with self-employment income; [and] 57 percent higher per capita income from self-employment.

How tragic for all of us if we allow the intended school closures to erode the fabric of our community only to find that the intended “savings” are never realized. Our schools and communities cannot survive without one another. We strongly urge the School Board and the Administration of the Ypsilanti Public School District to work with residents and Parent Teacher Organizations to explore other alternative solutions to the current funding crisis.

Sincerely,

Rachel E. Blistein, Co-Chair  
The Historic Eastside Neighborhood Association

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<sup>1</sup> The Rural School & Community Trust; The Fiscal Impacts of School Consolidation: Research Based Conclusions; June 1, 2003