

Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Hearing Testimonies Submitted Not Read
July 21, 2025

Erin Ruggiero

Dear Members of the PPS Board,

I am a PPS parent, lifelong educator, and I proudly serve on the Board of Directors for the National Education Association. As a veteran in this profession, I cannot stay silent when I see a plan so fundamentally flawed—one that threatens to weaken PPS, divert public funds to charter schools, and ignore the deep needs of our most vulnerable students.

We owe every single child in this district a world-class education. That means making *every* school exceptional—not shutting down the ones that are working. This plan does the opposite. It dismantles success and leaves entire parts of our city—especially the north and south regions—without meaningful investment or opportunity. These are the very areas where our students are most in need of support, where schools face the greatest academic and behavioral challenges. This is not equity. This is abandonment.

Let me be clear: this district is full of incredible educators who are already achieving powerful results, often against great odds. You don't need to outsource innovation—you need to listen to the people in your classrooms and communities. If we take the time to slow down, make informed, collaborative decisions, and implement a strategic, inclusive plan, there is tremendous potential ahead.

We should be learning from large, urban districts that are seeing real success—not plugging in small-scale models like the Ron Clark Academy, which are simply not designed for a district of our size and scope. To suggest otherwise is not only unrealistic—it's dismissive of the extraordinary work happening in our schools every day.

Additionally, your educational plan is basic at best and offers no promise of growth. We should be working for academic and behavioral intervention as early as possible. Instead of focusing on more of the same to boost lagging test scores, consider real answers—what we fundamentally know is best for children to learn, grow, and create. Less screen time, more physical education, meaningful PBIS intervention, and daily immersion in the arts are the bridges to equity that are missing in many of our buildings. If you simply look to the programs where our students are thriving, the answer is simple. What we see happening at CAPA, SciTech, and the Pittsburgh Gifted Center should be making its way to every building. Instead you plan to close doors and offer a plan that is basic and cheapens education.



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I urge you: vote **no** on this plan.

And as we move forward, know that I am more than willing to participate in this process, offering ideas both from my 25 years in the classroom and from my experiences and training as an NEA director. Our students deserve better. Let's rise to the challenge—together.

Sincerely,

Erin Ruggiero

Mt. Washington

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Anthony Posa

To whom it may concern,

The decision to move Mrs. Mcnamara out of South Brook is not what is best for the students who attend the school. Our school is scheduled to be closed at the end of this school year and there really is not a good reason to bring in a new principal who is unfamiliar with the community, the students, the staff, or the physical building in general.

Mrs. Mcnamara has built trust in our school that will fall apart if she is taken away. The students, the parents, and the staff of South Brook have spent the last 12 years following her and have all grown to trust her and follow her lead in running the school. She empowers the staff to do the best they can and gives whatever support is needed to help the teachers teach the students.

The great relationship between the principal and the staff is something that most other buildings do not get to have. This positive relationship is seen by our students and makes them want to be a positive part of the school community. When teachers feel comfortable enough to teach the way that they want, then the students pick up on that and feel a lot more comfortable in the school. Everyone knows that the students will learn a lot more if they feel comfortable in their school.

South Brook is scheduled to close at the end of this year and this is causing a huge amount of anxiety and stress for the students, parents, and staff of our school. This is going to be a very difficult year for everyone at our school because of the school shutting down and one thing that we should not need to worry about is who is going to be our principal. A new principal is going to add a lot more unneeded worry to the students/staff that already don't know where they will be at the following year.

Over the last 12 years, Mrs. Mcnamara has been more than just a principal to the staff/students of our school. Personally, I would not be the teacher that I am today without her. Instead of being nervous or timid to try different things or strategies, she encourages teachers to push themselves and try things that they would not normally do. This is something that separates her from the other leaders. The staff at our school feel like she has our backs and that is the most important thing that a principal can do, is to just have the teacher's backs.

Mrs. Mcnamara is more than just a principal to myself and the rest of the staff at South Brook. She is a good role model, mentor, and friend to us. It would be a huge blow to the mental well being of everyone at South Brook to lose our leader for the last year of teaching there.

Please don't do that. It is NOT in the best interest of our students learning. That's easy to see.

Thank you for listening and understanding,



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Tony Posa

South Brook Middle School

Math ITL

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Lori Geche

Testimony to Keep Principal McNamara at South Brook

My name is Lori Geche and I am the 8th Grade Science Teacher at South Brook Middle School. I am writing this in support of maintaining our current principal, Mrs. Jennifer McNamara, at South Brook Middle School for our final year of operation.

The focus of my testimony will center on her support of the Student Envoy/ Student Council Group that Mrs. McNamara has supported throughout my career at South Brook Middle School. I have been a teacher at South Brook for over 10 years and have watched this Program expand and evolve. When I first took over the Student Council advisor position approximately ten years ago, it was a very small group of students with intermittent adult direction. With the support of Mrs. McNamara, this group has evolved into a larger group of devoted students who are now also part of the Student Envoy District program. Without the support and encouragement of Mrs. McNamara. Any new idea or initiative that the students or myself present to her, Mrs. McNamara will help to bring the idea to fruition. Her support of the program is endless.

I will start by highlighting just a few of the activities this group has completed in the last 10 years of my time with them:

Fundraiser Penny Drive in which we raised over 1500 dollars in honor of a teacher struggling with Leukemia.

Participation in multiple animal drive donation collections for local animal shelters. Items were not only collected, but students were able to deliver and participate in educational field trips hosted by the shelters.

The hosting of multiple food drives in which food items were collected and delivered to the local Brookline Food Pantry.

The hosting of multiple Bake Sales to benefit the student body in a variety of different ways.

The planning and hosting of various Fun Days for the Students run by Student Council/Envoy members in which students that were demonstrating the 5 Secrets were invited to attend. Some of these events included: Ice Cone Socials, Free Cell Phone Periods, Bingo Days, Game Days, etc. These types of events reinforced positive relationships among students and helped to increase school morale.

The creation of a partnership with our "Sister School" – Pioneer. Student Envoys would volunteer on a regular basis to assist Pioneer students with a variety of daily activities. I will include a testimony from one of our students to support the importance of this relationship between South Brook and Pioneer. This young lady, who recently lost her mother, wrote this speech to read at the Pioneer Graduation Ceremony. The students also chose to donate the funds from their most recent Candy Sale as a gift to the Pioneer Students and their Garden.

"My name is _____. I am a current 7th grade South Brook student. I came to work with Pioneer half-way through the year when I was approached by Mrs. Geche. These amazing kids at Pioneer brought me so much joy and happiness this year. They have showed me their compassion and their hearts are filled with pure love. I am so happy for everyone here and am thankful that I had the chance to work

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with them. What they really showed me this year is that they are strong, loving, talented kids who are going to make it far in life. No matter how I was feeling that day; somehow I was always able to have a smile with them and I always walked out with a big smile on my face. I really thank all of you wonderful, bright, young boys and girls. As we were helping you all, actually you were helping all of us. Congrats on taking your next step to success. Thank you for letting us be part of your journey.”

Please keep in mind, that Mrs. McNamara was crucial in supporting this partnership with Pioneer and in supporting the other wonderful things that the Student Envoy group did to establish a positive and nurturing environment in our Middle School. Without her full support and flexibility, these types of activities would not have been possible.

In closing, as a National Board Certified Science Teacher, Mrs. McNamara has been nothing but supportive of our Science Program Needs. Often, I have requested supplies that are not part of our curriculum, but I have felt that will benefit the learning needs of our students. Mrs. McNamara always finds a way to budget for these requests. She is willing and works diligently to find a way to benefit our students. Her confidence in my teaching abilities has made me become a better teacher throughout my years at South Brook Middle School. It would be detrimental to remove her from South Brook especially as we enter our final year together as a staff. This is a time when we need to come together as a team and make it the most productive year ever. Our students and community deserve it.

I hope that you consider the accomplishments of Mrs. McNamara and the requests that her current staff is addressing. We are all devastated that our School is closing. We have put our hearts and souls into our teaching each and every day, and we truly care about our students here at South Brook Middle School. Please take this into consideration and allow us to end our final year at South Brook as a Team.

Thank you,

Lori Geche

8th Grade Science Teacher

NBCT