

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:

1. Fundraiser Penny Drive in which we raised over 1500 dollars in honor of a teacher struggling with Leukemia.
2. 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.
3. The hosting of multiple food drives in which food items were collected and delivered to the local Brookline Food Pantry.
4. The hosting of multiple Bake Sales to benefit the student body in a variety of different ways.
5. 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.
6. 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

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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 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



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8th Grade Science Teacher

NBCT

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Crystal Horzempa

Hello, my name is Crystal Horzempa and I am a school psychologist for PPS. One of my school assignments is Pittsburgh South Brook. I speak up on behalf of Mrs. McNamara because she has been notified that she will not be returning to Pittsburgh South Brook 6-8 as the principal for its final year of existence. This is devastating to hear. While I am not sure of the master plan behind this move, I just wanted to share that she has been a powerful force at South Brook. She never stops moving!! I am only at South Brook one day a week, but when I am there, she is working with students, parents, and staff. She goes above and beyond for the South Brook community. Her building has created a room where students can get clothing and food. Her building has created a "chill room" where students can go when they need a break. Her private bathroom in her office is open to any student who needs it. Her room is also open to students who need to talk with her or when they just need a break. Her building has created a school store and monthly rewards. She even lets the students earn rewards such as being "principal for the day" where she shadows them and gives them this impactful leadership position. They have school dances, school trips, and Mrs. McNamara even got duct taped to the wall this year in order to help raise money for the student council. This school has numerous clubs, special clubs on district half days where the students can pick a fun activity, and they even welcome outside agencies in to conduct groups with the students (i.e., grief, anger, etc.). As a PPS school psychologist for over 20 years, I have met many principals, and Mrs. McNamara is one of the most involved and inspiring principals. While many of the activities in the school may have been created by various staff members, she is encouraging them and welcoming them to better the school community. Because she cares, her staff cares. Mrs. McNamara's love for her school and desire to improve it in turn inspires her staff with the same energy. She never stops holding the students, staff, and parents to high expectations. While holding them to these high expectations, she is there supporting them instead of hiding in her office. Even when she is pulled in a bunch of different directions, she seems to be in multiple places at once. She even grabs me when I walk into the door to advocate for students who she thinks need enrichment and/or learning support.

Mrs. McNamara has had such a positive impact on South Brook! I think it would be traumatizing for the staff and students to pull her from them in a year that will just be a year of last moments. This is a year when students and staff will wonder where they will be in the fall of 2026. She needs to be there for all of the last moments and to be able to support staff and students in this final phase. I think this will be a tough year for the students at South Brook and they will be returning this fall expecting to see her at the front door greeting them. She is well loved and respected at South Brook! I respect her and I believe she needs to finish what she has started instead of having a brand new principal come in and make changes in a South Brook's final year in existence. Again, as a 20+ year PPS employee I have watched new principals come into a building and create many shake ups. A closing building does not deserve an unstable year.

Please consider keeping Mrs. McNamara at South Brook for the 2025-2026.

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Tony 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,

Tony Posa
South Brook Middle School
Math ITL



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William Wolfe
Morrow Testimony

Greetings,

I am writing this email as a testimony to keep Mrs. McNamara at South Brook Middle School for this final year. She hired me at South Brook 12 years ago and in that time she has been an excellent administrator. She has been an even more excellent human being. She shows great love and compassion to the teachers and the students most of all. She always has the best interest of the people she works with in mind.

The South Brook community, students and staff, were looking forward to one last year together. If it is at all possible, I would hope that this last year together would still be possible. I understand that things change. That decisions are made for a reason. But if Mrs. McNamara wants to finish out the last year of South Brook Middle School, I would hope that she could get the opportunity for the whole school community.

Thank you and God bless,

William Wolfe



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Lynnette J Yancey

Dear PPS Board:

Please keep Mrs. McNamara at South Brook. Mrs. McNamara is the hardest, most efficient principal/worker. She takes multitasking to the next level. She knows and LOVES every student in the building and strives to help them achieve their best. She leads by example doing every job, task, and undertaking with a smile on her face. She encourages the staff to take academic/instructional chances and ensures that we have the necessary training, time, and materials. Jen has personally helped me through the hardest times of my life because she is an incredible, selfless, irreplaceable person. Allow her to stay at South Brook to assist the students and the staff through these uncharted waters.

Lynnette Yancey

ELA teacher

Pittsburgh South Brook