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Germantown community cries foul over plan for high school

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Abstract (summary)

"Some people feel done dirty by the district," [Joe Corrigan] said. "They feel like something was taken from them, and they don't understand why the school district would take away something and give it to somebody who could pay to keep it open. Why can't it be our kids?"

"I think there's an understandable inability to separate the decision to close Germantown High School and the very circumstantial decision to move into Germantown High School," Corrigan said.

Vera Peeples-Primus, president of Germantown High School Alumni Association, questions the SRC's motive in shuttering the school. She said that the school was closed because it was underpopulated, needed repairs and students weren't performing well enough.

Full Text

A top executive for Camelot Schools boarded a cross-country flight to Philadelphia so he could personally attend Wednesday's public meeting about consolidating its three alternative education schools under the roof of Germantown High School.

The sprawling complex in North Philadelphia held its last graduation ceremony last month. Its doors were closed permanently and emotions within the community apparently are still running hot.

Dozens of residents showed up at Janes United Methodist Memorial Church on Wednesday to ask questions about the alternative education programs run by the Texas-based Camelot Schools LLC, which was initially hired by the School District of Philadelphia in 2004 to operate a school for students who were transferred after being expelled for conduct violations. That program was later lauded by the district as a model.

Joe Corrigan, spokesman for Councilwoman Cindy Bass, said most residents who attended the two-hour meeting were trying to make sense of the SRC's decision to shutter their neighborhood school only to have another school program, within two months, present plans to lease a portion of the building.

The two actions were unrelated, but didn't sit well with many residents, said Corrigan, speaking for Bass, who represents the 8th District, which includes the Germantown area.

"Some people feel done dirty by the district," Corrigan said. "They feel like something was taken from them, and they don't understand why the school district would take away something and give it to somebody who could pay to keep it open. Why can't it be our kids?"

"I think there's an understandable inability to separate the decision to close Germantown High School and the very circumstantial decision to move into Germantown High School," Corrigan said.

SRC spokesman Fernando Gallard has said that Camelot Schools would be required to discuss its relocation plans with the community before the state-appointed panel would consider leasing the building.

Camelot CEO Todd Brock said Wednesday that the company could no longer afford to operate three schools in three separate buildings. In response to funding cuts from the federal, state and local governments, there was a corresponding reduction in the amount Camelot Schools received from the school district.

The school district is in the midst of shutting down 24 school buildings as part of its facilities master plan. The School Reform Commission in February projected savings of up to $24.5 million annually from closures after paying first-year costs associated with school reconfigurations and building renovations.

Vera Peeples-Primus, president of Germantown High School Alumni Association, questions the SRC's motive in shuttering the school. She said that the school was closed because it was underpopulated, needed repairs and students weren't performing well enough.

"Camelot deals with underperforming students. The building would still be underpopulated, and the building still needs repair. That makes no sense," Peeples-Primus said.

In addition, Peeples-Primus said that Germantown High School was approved for continuation of a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Labor because it was on the right track and making progress in key areas as a Promise Academy. Students were meeting standards, the school saw improvement in its graduation rate and was removed from the list of most dangerous schools.

"The math doesn't add up," she said.

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