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3831 Newark Street, NW Washington DC 20016

BZA
2003 SEP 16 PM 7:52

Geoff Griffis, Chairman
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW
Second Floor
Washington DC 20001

Re: BZA Application No. 16970

September 15, 2003

Dear Chairman Griffis,

I have been following the NCRC case with great interest. I enclose an article that appeared on September 3, 2003, in The Northwest Current. As you can see, the article describes the predicament facing the parents, students, and administrators at Hearst Elementary School - a public school located not far from Cleveland Park.

In a nutshell, Hearst must add more special education children and, due to space constraints, the overall academic program will lose a room for art classes and Before/After School activities. "The [school system's] special ed folks who met with us said, basically, that all of that can happen in the hallway...which is really appalling," said the PTA's vice president, according to the article. At NCRC, too, they are no strangers to conducting core operations in hallways due to lack of appropriate spaces.

I know that you have heard testimony from NCRC about its enrollment growth during the 1990-91 school year, when it added 17 children in its so-called Bunny Early Intervention program. This step was taken as part of NCRC's ongoing commitment to a Mission of diversity and inclusion - in this case, in the form of including a diverse population with special needs. As Hearst is discovering, serving a special needs community places significant demands on the institution, the school community, and the facility. NCRC's desire to expand is not frivolous; facing the same plight as the Hearst community, NCRC is attempting to tackle the problem headlong through a reasonable and balanced expansion proposal - and not at the expense of the children whom the school serves.

Educating children is a shared responsibility of all of the District's citizens, whether the classroom is in a public school or a private school. I urge the BZA to support NCRC in its efforts to remain true to its vital Mission.

Sincerely,

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Danielle Aguilar

BZA
Case No. 16970
Exhibit No. 229

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16970
EXHIBIT NO.229

Wednesday, September 3, 2003

THE NOR

Displacement at Hearst stirs parental angst

By BETH COPE
Current Staff Writer

Parents gathered in front of Hearst Elementary School Friday morning to protest the addition of a class of special education students who will be housed in a room that has been used for art classes and a before- and after-school program.

Members of the Hearst School PTA say the students — six autistic children who live in the District — would be welcome at Hearst if it had space for them. As it is, the Northwest Cleveland Park building for grades pre-kindergarten to third has no cafeteria or gym.

"Other schools, like Murch, have ample amounts of extra classrooms," said Nicole Lawrence, co-chair of the PTA. "They have a band room. Hearst doesn't even have a cafeteria."

The room in question, the school's only multipurpose area aside from the library, is used for all art classes and for the before- and after-school programs, which serves at least 70 students, according to a PTA member.

"The [school system's] special ed folks who met with us said, basically, that all of that can happen in the hallway ... which is really appalling," said Sarah Browning, vice president of the PTA.

D.C. Public Schools officials say they are simply responding to city

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HEARST

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wide calls for the school system to make more space for special education students, large numbers of whom have been attending private schools on the city's dollars.

"We have children who live in Northwest Washington, D.C., who are D.C. residents, who have disabilities and we are finding places in D.C. for all our kids," said Kay Bryant, chief of special education reform.

"We were ordered to do it, we are required to do it and we are doing it," he said.

Bryant said that there are new students in classes in between 40 to 50 city schools — including Janney, Key and Lafayette elementary schools in Ward 3 — and "throughout the city, this is the only school where we're having a problem."

Parents at Hearst say the problem is not only space, but also notice, or lack thereof. Browning said they were told of the new class three weeks before school opened.

Bryant said that school system officials visited all potential sites in the spring, notifying some principals that they might receive new students. He said Hearst's principal expressed no concerns.

Soon after, an associate superintendent confirmed the addition with those principals who would, in fact, gain new students, he said.

"We said to the principal: 'We're coming here,'" he said of Hearst.

But parents say the first they heard of the new students was at a July local school restructuring team meeting, when then-principal Betty Shamwell said that they might have this class.

Since then, Shamwell has retired and Bernarda Talley has taken over as principal. Parents say she is not involved in the fight, because she is new to the school.

When parents found out the class was definite — in early August — they were angry.

"Teachers haven't been trained, parents haven't been prepared ... [and] the art teacher feels very strongly that she can't run her programs without the room," Browning said Friday.

On Monday, PTA treasurer J.C. Blount said that the art teacher w stay at the school, but that "s showed me her space, and it liter ly looks like a 6-by-10 space."

Blount said that some parer worried that if they raised co plaints, it could be "construed th we don't want special needs kid But she stressed that the scho would welcome such students if were given sufficient space a time to prepare.

Bryant said that he has comm ted to work with the school systen facilities division on getting demountable classroom for Hear He also had people working ov time to clean the room over t weekend.

Tuesday morning, a substitu teacher and an aide were in t room, but no students had y arrived, according to Lawrence. S said a permanent teacher has not been hired.

"I'm really not pleased w DCPS, their procedures and the w they go about handling program she said. "We should have found last school year — and it shou have been before spring or su mer."

FAX TRANSMISSION

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FROM: Danielle Aguilar
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