

Parents Launch #RenovateOrr Campaign for Building Modernization, Offer Press Tours

*Modernization Delayed Eight Years; Police Representative Deems Current School
Layout Unsafe*

Date: March 11, 2014

Fairlawn, Ward 8, Washington, D.C.—The Benjamin Orr Elementary School community is upping the ante in their campaign for a full-scale building modernization to begin in FY14. Starting this spring and continuing through the school year and DC election season, the #RenovateOrr campaign will make the rounds at DC Council hearings, in the media, and to DC Public Schools (DCPS) decision-makers, until an RFP is issued and plans are finalized.

The Orr ES community has been waiting eight years for its \$14 million renovation, as slated in DCPS's Master Facilities Plan. Parents and school leaders have engaged DCPS for years to break ground on the modernization and they will not wait patiently any longer.

Recent actions by Orr parents and stakeholders include:

- Launching the “For the Love of Orr” Facebook page and #RenovateOrr modernization campaign
- Touring schools modernized by DCPS to gather ideas for Orr’s renovation
- School walk-through to identify problem areas (e.g., safety issues, the removal of all pre-K classroom sinks, crumbling ceiling tiles, and poor natural light)
- Successful campaign to have the pre-K sinks reinstalled
- Engaging community groups and leaders, including the Ward 8 Education Council, the DC Fiscal Policy Institute, and Trayon White (then-member of the DC State Board of Education)

In the coming weeks, Orr parents and stakeholders are scheduled to meet with DC Councilmember and chair of the education committee, David Catania (I). Parents will also testify at upcoming Council hearings on DCPS and the Department of General Services to promote the #RenovateOrr campaign.

Safety is chief among the reasons to modernize Orr Elementary. Exactly one-year after the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting in Newtown, Orr failed an intruder/lockdown drill. Because of the school’s open-classroom architecture (in which there are no walls separating classrooms), Orr’s teachers and 346 pre-K through fifth grade students could do little more than huddle and flatten themselves against the outer walls in plain sight of a police officer simulating a dangerous intrusion.

Other issues include too many entrances to the building to effectively monitor, and an asphalt-and-iron playground that regularly causes injuries. The playground is also accessible to almost anyone walking past. The building has poor ventilation in a school where many children have asthma and breathing problems, and no outward- or street-facing windows to provide fresh air or natural light. The heating system is not electric, plaster is falling in instruction areas, and the carpet has not been replaced in decades. The furniture and much of school’s technology are outdated.

Orr was built in 1974 as an open floor plan school—in which there are no walls separating classrooms and hallways. Teachers, students, and parents at Orr find that it

creates an ineffective learning environment. Furthermore, students receive special education services in a room that amounts to a decorated storage space with vaulted doors.

On Wednesday, March 26 at 4 p.m., parents will lead a tour of the school for press and community members interested in seeing the school's conditions.

The #RenovateOrr campaign stems from a deep affection the parents, students, teachers, and community feel for Orr Elementary. It is time the building better facilitated and reflected the talent and potential within its walls.

For more information on the #RenovateOrr campaign contact:

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[Click here](http://on.fb.me/1hRLaF2) [<http://on.fb.me/1hRLaF2>] for a photographic school walk-through.