

1 Declaration of June Tolbert

2 I, June Tolbert, hereby declare:

3 1. I am a teacher at the Helms Middle School in San Pablo,
4 California, which is part of the West Contra Costa County Unified
5 School District. If called to testify I could and would do so
6 competently as follows:

7 2. I am writing this declaration to explain how there are a
8 number of unsafe and unhealthful conditions at Helms School -
9 conditions that no student should have to cope with -- as well as
10 a lack of certain basics that are essential to any student's
11 education.

12 3. I have been a teacher for twelve years and have taught at
13 Helms for nine years. I teach a mixed class of 6th, 7th and 8th
14 graders for whom English is a second language.

15 4. The most glaring deficiency at Helms is that the school
16 library is only open two days a week. The library is closed
17 Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesday this semester because Helms shares
18 a librarian with another middle school in the district. In the
19 fall semester, the library was open three days a week, while it was
20 open two days a week at the other school. The library is also only
21 open for about 10-15 minutes before the start of school and after
22 classes are over.

23 5. The limited access to the library makes it very difficult
24 to give students projects that require them to do research. It is
25 hard to use class time to take the class down to the library to
26 work on a project because the library is open only Thursday and
27 Friday. And, even if I use class time to take them down to the
28 library to start a project, it is nearly impossible for students
to finish the project because they have only a few minutes to use

1 the library after classes.

2 6. Having students do independent projects is a tremendously
3 valuable learning experience because it teaches them essential
4 skills, such as how to do research, and enables them to think
5 independently and pursue their own particular interests. I find
6 that when a student can choose a particular book or subject to do
7 a report on, the student tends to pick something that engages him
8 or her in learning more than if the student simply does a project
9 from the same class text as everyone else. When students are
10 engaged, they learn so much more. Because library access is so
11 restricted at Helms, my students lose out on these valuable
12 opportunities.

13 7. The students at Helms are from primarily lower
14 socioeconomic backgrounds and many of their parents do not speak
15 English. They tend not to have access to a variety of books that
16 are written in English at their homes. These students are the
17 ones who would benefit most from being able to use the library, yet
18 at Helms they have little opportunity to do so.

19 8. The physical condition of the school is a disaster, which
20 makes it unsightly and unsafe for everyone at the school. There
21 are terrible problems with leaks in the main building as well as in
22 other buildings on the campus. These problems have existed for
23 years. When it rains, the floors in the main hallway are either
24 very wet, or there are 5-6 wastebaskets in various places to catch
25 the falling water. During the last El Nino year, the leaks in the
26 hallway where my old classroom is were so bad that the whole
27 hallway was flooded with about 1/4 inch of water. I saw students
28 run and slide through the water, which created a real risk that

1 students would fall and hurt themselves badly.

2 9. Because of the flooding, the custodian often vacuumed the
3 floor outside my classroom with a water vacuum. The vacuum was
4 very noisy, and the noise came through the windows in my classroom
5 that faced onto the hall making it hard to hear. The noise was
6 very distracting to the students.

7 10. The walls and ceilings throughout the school are stained
8 with water marks, giving the whole school a decrepit feeling.

9 11. The floor tiles at the front of the main building are
10 cracked and broken. I am pretty certain that the tiles contain
11 asbestos, but nothing has been done to repair or remove them.

12 12. Part of the wall of the hallway outside my present
13 classroom is made of glass bricks. Unfortunately, some of those
14 bricks have been broken for 8 or 9 years, leaving jagged exposed
15 edges that students could cut themselves on. These bricks are an
16 obvious hazard, but they have not been repaired or replaced.

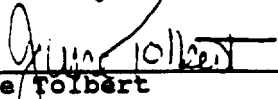
17 13. It is very common that repairs take a long time to get
18 done, if they are done at all. For example, the water fountains do
19 not drain well and sometimes are completely clogged. When that
20 happens, water ends up all over the floor, creating a hazard. When
21 the fountains get clogged, it takes weeks and sometimes months
22 before they are fixed.

23 14. Many students tell me that the student bathrooms are
24 filthy. They have water and urine on the floor and graffiti on the
25 walls. Some of my students have told me that the bathrooms are so
26 foul that they do not use them.

27 15. Overall, Helms is run down and in disrepair. It is an
28 unpleasant and unsafe environment for children to try to obtain an

1 education. I fear that because the school is so neglected, our
2 students feel the same way.

3 I swear under penalty of perjury of the laws of the State of
4 California and the United States that the foregoing is true and
5 correct. Executed by me this 2 day of May 2000 in Greenbrae,
6 California.

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9 June Tolbert
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