

Jayne Berkaw Comments to AAPS Board – November 8, 2006

My name is Jayne Berkaw and I am a Huron parent and recent past president of the Huron PTSO. I am here with Linda Hibbs to advocate for district support of Challenge Day in our middle and high schools.

In the two years my husband and I were PTSO Co-Presidents, we became sensitized to a wide range of important issues affecting our young people and schools, but what frustrated us most was, and is, the expanding gap not only in our students' achievement, but in their respect and tolerance for other people. Those who have attended a Challenge Day, both students and adults alike, agree that these one-day workshops successfully address the issues of violence, racism, teasing, stereotypes, tobacco, drugs and alcohol within the context of teen life and set the tone for positive change.

These programs are heart opening, educational, transformational, *and fun*. They promote self-acceptance and respect for others, ignite participants' passions and inspire them to be leaders of change. There is a real sense of determination, hope and energy that flows into the kids during the sessions and bursts forth with them when they leave. They are motivated to find new ways to contribute to the creation of a positive school environment.

We need your support to continue offering Challenge Day so that all of our students can catch this amazing spirit. Then, we need to empower them to **Be** the Change with a plan that weaves Challenge Day principles into our schools. This must include bottom-up activities that are student led and run, for example a Be the Change Club, which we have at Huron. In addition, it needs top-down support with activities implemented by our administrators, counselors and teachers. Challenge Day makes volumes of material available to support these climate-building programs within the school. At Huron, a group of administrators, teachers, counselors and parent volunteers is currently discussing these and other ways to improve our learning environment and make our school safer.

Dr. Roberts and the Board have already been invited to attend our December 11 Challenge Day, and we hope you'll take us up on that

offer. For the adult facilitators, the impact is profound. As our tenth grade class administrator, Jennifer Hein, mentioned recently, teachers who serve as facilitators are typically moved to express reconnecting with why they went into teaching to begin with. As a parent, you will see your child's world through new eyes and hug them ever tighter, while you learn things about yourself that can literally change your life. We hope you'll join us.

Thank you.