

Testimony by Rep. Denny Heck
Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
April 4, 2014

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and members of the subcommittee, for the opportunity to testify before you today.

I'm sure many of you have seen some of the heartwarming video clips when our soldiers return home and surprise their family members. Sometimes a kid is at school and their mom or dad walks in. The kid freezes, their jaw drops open, and then they quickly sprint into their mom or dad's arms. They are precious moments captured after months of sacrifice and resilience.

As you know, military bases become the home for ambitious, promising students whose parents dedicate their lives to serving their country. There are about 80,000 students who attend public schools on military installations. Ninety-four percent of these students are the children of service members.

We can all agree that when service members visit these schools, they should walk into state-of-the-art, secure institutions where their child is thriving. While important progress in this area has been made, some schools remain in great need of safety, capacity and technology upgrades.

Unfortunately, a 2011 analysis by the DOD's Office of Economic Adjustment found that 33 public schools on military installations across the country were classified as being in poor condition. Some of these schools had crumbling walls, chipped floors and cracked ceilings. Some schools were too small, with makeshift classrooms in hallways and supply closets. Faulty ventilation units, corroded pipes, the list goes on and on.

This subcommittee generously stepped in and provided funding to replace the schools on this list. These schools have welcomed students back to new and improved learning centers, while others are in the process of being replaced. This was all thanks to the hard work of you and your former subcommittee colleague, Congressman Norm Dicks.

But now due to sequestration cuts, the funding that the subcommittee provided will now only cover 28 of the 33 schools. I represent the Congressional district that includes Joint Base Lewis-McChord, one of the largest military installations in the United States. Unfortunately, Evergreen Elementary on JBLM is one of the schools that will now go without funding. Evergreen happens to be a school recognized in the military community for its attention to students with special needs in education. In fact, many soldiers request a compassionate assignment at JBLM so their child with special needs can attend Evergreen.

As the husband of a devoted educator, I know teachers and staff work day-in and day-out so that students are making strides in the environment that they have. If the teachers and staff could physically build their own new school buildings, they would. They are that dedicated.

Mr. Chairman, this subcommittee was instrumental in making a difference to thousands of other public school students on military installations across the country by implementing this project. What I am

asking for today is to complete what began in 2011, and fix the remaining school buildings originally identified as no longer sustainable.

I respectfully request that the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee include the language from Section 8108 of Fiscal Year 2013 defense appropriations bill.

Section 8108 calls on the DOD to construct, renovate, repair, or expand the public schools on military installations that remain in need of updates, including Evergreen Elementary.

I love seeing the smiles on those kids' faces when their parents return safely home to surprise them. Now I want those service members to be amazed and equally surprised when they see the investment the DOD has made in the well-being of their kids.

Thank you.