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Meredith Clark: Pick a reason — any reason — to care about Digital Harmony

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The Digital Harmony program at Nims Middle School is being crippled by the recession.

There are a number of reasons why this might matter to you. Empathy is one. Goodwill is another. You can care out of love and altruism for incoming sixth-graders who need the resources (a new computer, Internet service and learning-development software) in order to reach the goal of turning Nims into an A school.

If social science returns are your thing, think of supporting our community's Digital Harmony program in terms of creating an "outlier." Author Malcolm Gladwell's based his book on "the story of success," theorizing that inherent talent, birth order, scholastic opportunity and parental involvement alone do not create the kind of individual who achieves the extraordinary. It is a culmination of these things. Heavy on some factors, lighter on others, the influence of community, exposure and opportunity is key to cultivating excellence and growth in our students.

In its first year, the Digital Harmony program did just that. Through a rocket-blast launch and the support of partners including the city of Tallahassee, Comcast, Dell, Mainline Information Systems, members of the TalTech alliance and Florida A&M University, the program helped students raise their reading scores on the FCAT, an integral component in lifting the school grade from F to C status.

But in this, it's third year, Hewlett-Packard (the city's new computer vendor) and FAMU, two of the major sponsors, are severely limited in their contributions. HP can donate only 50 computers whereas Dell was able to give 100 new units last year, and sell the program another 100 units at half-price.

This year more than 200 students in the Nims neighborhood school on Orange Avenue are depending on this community to deliver when no one else can.

They are not petitioning the government — they need a real stimulus. They need more people like those who have sent checks from \$18 to \$700. They'll get one from me. I'd like to see the leader of my alma mater, President Ammons — if he chooses to keep his well-earned six-figure bonus — give some of it to the program.

This is not the last you will hear about Digital Harmony. Until August, or until the program reaches its goal, I will continue to advocate for this program, which can make a tangible difference in this south-side school. I see this program as a marker of social change: how government, civic and community partnerships can cooperatively inject a positive stimulus into a problem and attain a favorable outcome.

There are plenty of reasons you should care enough to act, financially or physically, in support of Digital Harmony. You can add getting me to (temporarily) shut up about it to that list.

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