

## **Summary of April 29<sup>th</sup> and May 2<sup>nd</sup> High School Design Meetings**

On Wednesday evening, April 29<sup>th</sup> and Saturday morning, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, Portland Public Schools held the second and third community meetings to discuss and get feedback on the three “Big Ideas for Better High Schools.”

Parents, students, staff and community members from across the city were invited to attend the meetings. In all, approximately 200 people attended the meetings, which were put on with support from a Gates Foundation grant.

The following comments and questions were raised during the “reporting back” session of each meeting after the groups discussed each model in depth:

### **April 29<sup>th</sup>, Franklin High School**

#### **Comments:**

- Strong neighborhood schools are valued for their ability offer lots of options to every student and promote lifelong learning
- The district needs to be up front with the community if school closures are going to occur
- Academies and small learning communities are great learning environments for students, especially for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students
- Special focus programs have relevancy to real world
- Need to think about the system as a whole, from K-12, not just high school
- Equity of access is paramount, but having the same programs does not necessarily equate to equity
- Change is urgent, but stability is needed to give changes a chance to work
- The correlation between “whiteness and success” is apparent, diversity and equity are critical
- The district needs to do a better job with what we have
- The engagement process should not end with the community meetings
- Need to connect between the Big Ideas and the core issues we are trying to fix in our current system
- Special focus campuses may force students to make a choice about a pathway too early in life

#### **Questions:**

- How are each of the models linked to research and what’s working?

- What is the transition going to be like for students as we reform our current system?
- How will the new system work with the K-8 system?
- How are we meeting the needs of students with special needs?
- How will we fund this?
- How do we support teachers through this process?
- What is the timeline?

## **May 2<sup>nd</sup>, Madison High School**

### **Comments:**

- Special focus campuses may be too limiting for students
- Large neighborhood schools with equity and lots of options are appealing
- Choice is an adult construct
- Focus on diversity without forcing it
- Transfers should be limited
- Relationships are key to student success
- Build upon what's working in schools now
- Equity and equal course offerings are needed across the board
- There is concern about accessibility of magnet options
- Clarity and access to information is critical in helping parents and students make decisions
- Equity does not mean equal, it could mean sacrifice for some, but in the end there should be full course offerings at every high school
- Increasing travel time is challenging for parents and students
- A long-term commitment by the district and the community is the only way to achieve equity
- Need to balance innovation with the stability and strength of neighborhood schools
- Listen to parents and students first
- There is no one-size-fits-all plan
- Need to balance neighborhood and choice
  
- Focus on the transition from middle school to high school
- Stable funding is necessary to implement any changes

## **Questions:**

- How would the regions be defined? Who makes the decisions?
- What does implementation look like?
- How do we support better teaching?

## **GENERAL MEETING FEEDBACK**

At the end of the meeting, each participant was given an open-ended meeting evaluation form. At each meeting, about half of the evaluation forms were submitted. Following are summarized comments and illustrative quotes from these evaluations:

- Participants expressed satisfaction with the overall format and materials:
  - The event was well-organized
  - Participants liked having well-prepared facilitators at every table to support the discussion
  - Materials and videos helped clarify the complex ideas
  - The facilitators and emcee were respectful of participants' time
- Suggested improvements include:
  - Mix up the tables so people get different perspectives and are not always sitting with people they know
  - More feedback is needed from students and more meetings should be organized specifically for students to weigh in
  - There should be more discussion of funding, resources, facilities and viability around each model
  - Board members, public officials and others should engage in the conversations
  - More meetings in different formats are needed to continue the discussion and reach out to those who have not been involved
  - Need to include how the models will affect teachers
  - Would like a summary of how high schools are working now to put the discussion into perspective
  - Might need more time for discussion in the future
  - Need clarification on how the information will be used to make a decision
- Again, as in the first meeting, participants called for PPS to reach out to all parents and students in the district with specific attention to families of color and low-income families.

*"Bravo. I got more out of this than I thought I would. This was a great way to focus on core issues. My only wish was that this had been more publicized in advance to get more parent involvement."*

*"I envisioned an environment like I had seen on the news: loud, passionate, almost feuding. This was not like that at all; it was passionate, but educational."*

*"I felt like I was heard."*

*"I thought it addressed or raised ideas and concerns in a real way."*

*"The process brought people together to share what mattered to them. I appreciated hearing other points of view and working toward a common understanding of the situation we face."*

*"What didn't work for me was that I came in with a lot of questions about how these options might be implemented and I still don't know the answers to those questions, which makes it difficult for me as a parent to buy-in to any option."*

*"What a well run meeting! Thank you for the opportunity. To hear these voices makes me proud to be a part of the learning community."*

*"I was truly bedazzled by the wonderful format of this meeting, yet I believe a call for student participation in this is a must."*