



PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Vicki L. Phillips
Superintendent

April 4, 2006

Dear Portland Public School Parent:

Portland Public Schools' new five-year strategic plan contains a promise to make sure we offer a world-class education to every student, in every school across Portland, and to sustain hope and confidence in our public schools.

To deliver on that promise, we must face our current reality head on: Our schools have fewer students and fewer dollars than they did in the past. To provide the best possible education for our children, we must balance the budget and manage our schools more effectively.

Today, I have made a series of proposals that I believe would allow us to offer strong and stable schools into the future. These proposals, which now go out for community review, will then go to the School Board for consideration.

I am writing to you because one of these proposals could affect your student's school, and we would like to hear your thoughts and suggestions on how to improve the proposal and how to move forward if the School Board approves the proposals in May.

- Some of our middle schools would phase out over the next two years, with the elementary schools that feed into them building, one grade at a time, to serve kids from kindergarten through eighth grade.
- In several neighborhoods, we now have fewer families than in the past and fewer students in the schools. In areas where we don't expect more students to move in, we would close one of the existing school buildings as the remaining schools moved to K-8.
- Some attendance boundaries would shift, to balance the numbers of students in neighboring schools.

I propose to begin some changes next school year, but many proposals would phase in over the next two or three years, allowing time for the community to shape the decisions and the way we carry them out.

This is how my proposal might affect the schools in your neighborhood.

I am asking the community to develop a proposal around schools located in and around the Sellwood-Moreland neighborhoods, including four elementary schools, Sellwood Middle School and Winterhaven, a focus option K-8 school.

I want to spur a community discussion of how to create strong schools in the area, each with enough students and teachers to support a strong curriculum. Another goal is for the community to develop a

plan to consolidate programs into five of the six currently operating buildings (several of the current school buildings would require significant and expensive upgrades to keep operating into the future).

Options could include maintaining the current K-5 and middle school configuration but redrawing boundaries to move from four elementary schools to three. The community may also explore the option of transitioning some schools to a K-8 model. The school district's area director and school principals will work with the school communities (including the school Site Councils and PTAs) and a community-based facilitator to develop a proposal to me in fall 2006. I will then forward my recommendations to the School Board for a vote, with implementation of the plan to start in fall 2007.

I believe there are good reasons for Portland Public Schools to make these changes, in your neighborhood and in others across the district. Schools of kindergarten through eighth grade offer several advantages over traditional middle schools: Students face fewer transitions, parents stay involved in their schools, and teachers and principals really know the students and can better support them in their learning. In addition, several studies indicate that for many groups of students who have not done well in traditional middle schools, K-8 schools can increase their academic success.

Portland once was a school district of K-8 schools; in some neighborhoods, I believe, it's time to go back to that model. (More information about the proposals to reconfigure our schools is available at the Portland Public Schools website at www.pps.k12.or.us.)

If the School Board does approve changes to schools, they could affect students' elementary and middle school options next fall. If the School Board approves the changes, Portland Public Schools will open the School Choice application for two weeks in May to allow families to revise or to file new transfer applications. Students already in a school, whether they live in the neighborhood or have transferred in, would continue in that school to the highest grade offered. Any boundary changes proposed would affect only new students at the school, most commonly incoming kindergarteners.

Through my discussions with parents, community members, teachers and other school district staff, I have come to believe that we can best meet our goals if we are willing to work together to change our schools for the better. Thousands of Portlanders have offered their priorities, advice, encouragement and concerns. I encourage you all to offer further comments on the proposal, and on the best way to carry out any changes the School Board might approve. Over the next month, school district staff will visit your neighborhood to answer questions and to hear your thoughts. The School Board also will hold hearings around the city. We will share the dates and locations of the meetings as soon as they are confirmed.

In addition, you can share your comments, ideas and suggestions by writing to me or to the School Board, at 501 N. Dixon Street, Portland, OR 97227 or via e-mail at Superintendent@pps.k12.or.us or SchoolBoard@pps.k12.or.us.

Please share your ideas, join the planning and the conversation as we work together to provide the strongest schools possible for our students and our future.

Sincerely,



Vicki Phillips
Superintendent

ENGLISH

This information is very important. If you are unable to read it, please have someone explain it to you in a language you understand. Portland Public Schools will make Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Russian translated versions available shortly. Please call 503.916.3427 if you do not receive or are unable to locate a translated copy.

英文版

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Español

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