



## **Portland Public Schools**

### **High School System Design and School Choice**

#### **Questions and answers**

**January 2010**

Portland Public Schools is moving forward with a new design for its High School System, which will begin taking effect in 2011. Following are answers to questions that families and students may have as they consider their options for high school next year.

#### **What is Portland Public Schools considering for high schools?**

Over the last year and a half, with input from students, families, teachers, principals and community members, PPS has developed a model for a new high school system. The foundation of the system would be six or seven community high schools, all with roughly the same number of students (between 1,200 and 1,350) and with strong and broad course offerings. Students could also attend a focus school — open to students districtwide — that goes in depth into one interest area or learning approach. Charter and alternative schools will continue to provide education options in the new system, as well. This is the proposal; further community feedback will shape the final recommendations and Portland School Board decisions.

#### **What specific changes does that mean for each school?**

PPS now has nine neighborhood campuses. Shifting to six or seven community schools means some current campuses and schools would close or be transformed into focus schools. Community schools would offer a consistent and strong core program, with equity of opportunity for students no matter where they live. Under the model, transfer choices would be limited to focus schools, and not from one community school to another.

#### **When will families know how the high schools are changing?**

The decisions — which could affect every existing high school campus — will not be made until later this spring. No major changes are planned for next year. Most implementation will begin in September 2011.

#### **Can a student still transfer for the 2011-11 school year?**

Yes. However, we are making adjustments to help set the stage for more significant reform to the School Choice lottery for the 2011-12 school year. All neighborhood schools will have fewer transfer slots available than in past years. Focus high schools such as Benson and the Harriet Tubman Leadership Academy for Young Women will have the same number of transfer spaces as last year, but students must meet requirements at those schools to have their applications entered into the lottery.

#### **How does the lottery system under the No Child Left Behind act work this year?**

That federal law is still in effect, and for the 2010-11 school year requires PPS to offer the highest lottery priority to transfer to another neighborhood school for students who would be assigned to Jefferson High School (including the Young Women's Academy), the Roosevelt Campus or BizTech High on the Marshall Campus. Students with transfer priority under NCLB are receiving information packets in the mail.

#### **What about language immersion programs, and the ACCESS program?**

As in past years, current language immersion and ACCESS (TAG) program students may enter the continuation high school for their program without going through the School Choice lottery. If those students wish to return to their neighborhood schools, they must fill out a School Choice application,

and they will have guaranteed return to their neighborhood. High School System changes may affect how high school students are assigned to language immersion and ACCESS program beginning in 2011.

**What happens to students who are enrolled in a high school that closes in 2011?**

PPS has not closed a high school in almost 30 years. However, in more recent school closures at the elementary level, students from a closed school have either moved together into a neighboring school, or they have been split among two or more neighboring schools as the old attendance area is divided by new boundary lines. There are many options to consider, and the community will have the opportunity to weigh in and make their preferences known before decisions are final.

**What if the school doesn't close, but the attendance boundary changes after a student starts high school?**

The school board must vote on any boundary changes, and would discuss how to handle current students in boundary change cases. Recent school board policy and PPS practice have been to let students remain in their current schools through the highest grade offered.

**Will students who have transferred into a neighborhood high school have to return to the community school for their home address?**

Again, the school board will have this discussion later in the spring, but recent practice has been to let students remain in their current schools through the highest grade.

**Will high school boundary changes/closures affect elementary, middle and K-8 schools?**

PPS is not planning to modify existing elementary, middle and K-8 boundaries as part of the high school changes. However, some shifting may be considered at schools facing overcrowding, split-feeder patterns and other enrollment challenges.

**Will students have a second chance to choose this year after boundary change and closure decisions have been made?**

That is a possibility, but has not been decided. For example, if the School Board votes to close a neighborhood campus, it will also discuss and decide options for students already attending that school and those set to enter as freshman next year. PPS will notify students and families of their options before the final decisions are made.

**How can I learn more about High School System design and how it may affect my student?**

Much more information is on our Web site, [www.highschools.pps.k12.or.us](http://www.highschools.pps.k12.or.us). You may contact staff by e-mail, [highschools@pps.k12.or.us](mailto:highschools@pps.k12.or.us) or by phone, 503-916-3304.