

Public School Districts in the City of Portland: Equity, Governance and Process



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Introduction

At the May 2008 local convention of the Portland League of Women Voters, the membership approved a proposal to study the public school districts in Portland. In this two-year endeavor, the education study committee has focused on two components of education. One is the structure/organization within districts and how policies are formed. The other is equity, examining what school and course offerings are available to students with differing abilities and needs. The committee has chosen to look closely at three districts, Portland Public Schools 1J, David Douglas, and Parkrose, because they are almost entirely within the city boundaries. They are dissimilar in size and structure. Two other school districts, Centennial and Reynolds, have small areas of their districts within the city of Portland boundaries.

Riverdale has its high school building located within Portland city limits, but their students reside within their own education district.

The study committee initially examined all that the subject entailed, focusing finally on equity issues and the district structure and organization which impacted them. Besides information readily available in newspapers and on district websites, the committee conducted interviews with district staff and stakeholders, including representatives of outside groups concerned with the education process. Portland Public Schools is by far the largest among all these districts, and because of its size and complexity, as well as the fact that it was undergoing a massive organizational change, the committee has devoted more space to it.

District Statistics

Enrollment

Within the last few years school districts in Portland have undergone changes. Portland Public Schools 1J (PPS) has changed the way it educates 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students by restructuring many schools into kindergarten through 8th grade facilities (K-8's) and keeping others as 6-8th grade facilities. It is now in the final planning stages of restructuring its high schools. In 1982, PPS enrollment on ten high school campuses was 15,180 students. Now enrollment is 11,000. Elementary enrollment has similarly fallen. In 1999, enrollment of all students was 54,746; As of October 2010 it was 46,986, and rose to just over 47,000 by December. In addition, the capture rate, the percentage of students in each neighborhood attending a neighborhood high school, varies considerably within the district. In 2008-09, Wilson High School enrolled 85% of eligible neighborhood students, while Jefferson High School captured only 26%.¹

Thirty-two schools have been sold or repurposed for other than neighborhood classroom use since 1960, many in NE and SE Portland. Since 2000, PPS has closed 18 schools to neighborhood use and sold or repurposed them for special programs or storage, and one school has been replaced, as shown in Appendix 2 on page 23. All but one of these schools are in

north, northeast, or southeast Portland. Some schools had a low enrollment, such as Kenton which held 252 students at closing.² Others, however, were comparatively large; Rose City Park held 489 students, well over the district average of 471.³

With variables such as age and condition of building, capacity, and number of nearby schools with space, it is difficult to judge how the district made decisions about which buildings to close, but it is hard to disagree that the education of many students was disrupted. The enrollment trend fell sharply downward until 2009, when PPS saw its first rise of about 550 students; in 2010 there was an increase of 400.⁴ If this upswing continues, it seems likely that more classrooms will be needed. Indeed, there are now 58 double-classroom portables erected for use by existing schools, housing about a thousand students, as shown in Appendix 3 on page 24.⁵

David Douglas School District, in the same general period, has seen a 26% rise in enrollment, and it is overcrowded. In 2008-9 six classrooms were added to one middle school and eight to another. One building was designated as a kindergarten center and all kindergarten classrooms were moved to that building, relieving some elementary school overcrowding. Another elementary school and a community center await funding to be built.

Parkrose School District has seen its enrollment stay relatively stable, but has had a 29% rise in the number of students for whom English is their second language. Its newest building is the high school and community center built in 1997 and the district is planning a Capital Projects Bond in 2011 to update its other facilities and update infrastructure to support technology.⁶

The METRO Growth Report of 2009 predicts that David Douglas will average a growth of 330 students per year. PPS projects that over the next fifty years, based on Metro's number of expected households, 30,000 additional students will be added to the district. Projections do not anticipate growth in the Parkrose School District.⁷

Leadership Structure

PPS with over 47,000 students is the largest district in Oregon, and comprises 27 schools with K-5 students (some with pre-K), 31 schools with K-8, ten middle schools (6th - 8th), and ten neighborhood campus high schools (one to close in 2010), as well as one K-12 school and one 6-11. In addition, it has nine charter schools, 18 community-based alternative programs, and 16 special services programs. PPS is headed by a superintendent of schools, chosen by the school board. A chief of staff and a board secretary/general counsel round out the first tier of the administration. There are five Central Support positions: Community Involvement & Public Affairs, Finance, Human Resources, Operations, and System Planning & Performance. Responsibility for individual schools and programs is under four regional deputy superintendents and a Student & Academic Supports position.⁸

All the districts have school boards, whose chief responsibilities are to set the calendar, the budget, and district policies, and to hire and fire superintendents. In addition, all board members serve on subcommittees.

PPS has an uncompensated school board comprised of seven voting positions and one high school student representative. School board members are elected by zone by Portland voters for a four-year term. They oversee the education of all district students, regardless of zone. The student representative, whose input is considered and whose non-binding vote is recorded, is selected annually by the Student Advisory Council. The board meets on the second and fourth

Mondays.⁹

School board committees include Community and Student Affairs, Charter Schools, Finance/Audit Operations, and Student Achievement. The board develops annual goals and agenda and meets monthly or quarterly. The board monitors progress on the overall agenda, and adopts policies by resolution. Administrative directives implement policies which are then approved and adopted by the Superintendent.¹⁰

David Douglas, a district of 10,630 students in ten elementary schools, three middle (6th--- 8th grades), and one high school with one alternative high school campus, is headed by a superintendent and an assistant. Administrators oversee Administrative Services, Human Resources, Curriculum, and Student Services. David Douglas has seven uncompensated board members publicly elected to four-year terms, and meets on the first and third Thursdays.

Parkrose, a district of 3473 students in three elementary schools, one alternative elementary academy, one middle school (6th – 8th), and one high school is headed by a superintendent. District office departments oversee the following areas: student services/special programs, business services, including technology, maintenance, transportation, food, human resources, and school improvement.¹¹ Parkrose has five uncompensated board members publicly elected to four-year terms. The board has a work session on the second Monday, and a public meeting on the fourth Monday.

Committees

PPS has executive directors in charge of Operations, Finance, Human Resources, Planning and Performance, and Community Involvement and Public Affairs which includes the district's Communications Dept. There is also a chief academic officer and four deputy superintendents in charge of the schools in PPS's four regions.¹²

PPS has two specific-focus committees. The Citizen Budget Review Committee works from Dec. to April to review, evaluate, and make budget recommendations to the PPS School Board. It is a community group of eight to ten members, chosen through an application process by the Budget Office; members serve two-year terms. The committee also monitors use of local option levy funds. The Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Enrollment and Transfer consists of 12 members with two alternates, all

chosen by the superintendent from diverse areas and schools in the PPS area.

There are also PPS committees that advise on special student populations. For example, the ESL Parent Advisory Council, the TAG Advisory Council, the Title I District Parent Advisory Council, and the Special Education Advisory Council are ongoing committees.

David Douglas has several committees comprised of a combination of staff and community volunteers: the

Citizens' Advisory Committee, the Site Council, the Bond Committee, the Budget Committee, and the Educational Foundation Committee.¹³

Parkrose has 18 committees that vary in composition. Some, like the Alternative Education Evaluation Committee, are established by the superintendent with no term. Others, like the Budget Committee, are comprised of the board members and five others appointed by the board to serve three-year terms.¹⁴ Additional sub-committees exist for a specific duration and purpose.

Process for Decisions

Each school district has its own organizational structure. Larger districts often have more committees and support systems for policy-making than smaller school districts. David Douglas and PPS each have seven board members, while Parkrose has five. Although it can be difficult for stakeholders to make their voices heard when they must navigate many layers of administration, multiple committees with spaces for community members can provide opportunities for people to express concerns. Every year, PPS offers opportunities to serve on committees on such topics as the budget, enrollment, and transfer issues. Concerned citizens, including those who are neither staff nor parents, may also participate in school site councils.

School districts can either leave little time for citizen voices to be heard, or make an effort to listen. In different situations, the same school district has done both. PPS in 2006 found itself with a \$24 million budget shortfall. On April 4, 2006, Superintendent Vicki Phillips proposed a reconfiguration plan to close some elementary schools and combine others with middle schools to create fewer, larger schools, many of which would serve grades K through 8. She requested a board decision by April 24, just three weeks later. Stating that this plan would improve student learning in addition to saving money, the Superintendent noted that achievement test scores for middle school students were lagging and research indicated students benefit from fewer transitions from one school to another. Reconfiguration could address this problem by offering smaller class sizes and more rigorous math, science, and reading instruction. The community had an opportunity for input at three meetings held in one week.¹⁵

The School Board passed Superintendent Phillips' plan by a vote of 4-3, but the discussion did not end there. An article in *The Oregonian* that appeared on April 24, 2006, the day of the Board's decision, noted objections that changes were not being made equitably across the district; crucial details were being worked out after approval was given; staff and families were being uprooted and given little certainty or choice; physical changes to the buildings could not be implemented quickly enough; middle school specialists could not follow all students needing them, especially those relatively few 6-8th graders in the K-8 schools; and racial segregation would increase due to housing patterns. The article claimed that the district's failure to address these issues before the vote left many parents feeling betrayed, and reduced trust in the school system.¹⁶

When PPS decided it was necessary to redesign the high school program, it used a very different process. Rationale, research, and high school data including enrollments, capacities, and test scores for each high school were easily found on the PPS website. Superintendent Smith began conversations with stakeholders in 2008. Xavier Botana, PPS chief academic officer, talked about wider course offerings and freshman academies in all district high schools as a way to address high school equity issues. He outlined other changes aimed at helping individualize instruction such as online courses, some charter schools, and successful specialty programs such as Franklin's Mock Law Courts.¹⁷ A council of parents, teachers, and district staff met to discuss how best to engage families, and the Family and Community Engagement Initiative was implemented. The council's objectives were to ensure a plan at every school, provide training

for staff and families, assess family friendliness by all schools, improve central office communications, and regularly bring community organizations together as partners.¹⁸ The following year, the district organized well-publicized community meetings to discuss three possible plans, explaining that these plans were not set in stone and input was welcome. They included the pros and cons for each of the three options, along with a rationale for changing the status quo itself.¹⁹

Surveys were sent out and community meetings were held in April and May, 2009. In June, Superintendent Smith presented a plan to the School Board that responded to community comments. The changes were considerable. None of the three original plans escaped unscathed. A second round of community meetings was held from October to December 2009, and gradually the outline of a new redesign plan emerged. Meeting after meeting heard from concerned stakeholders. In April 2010, the superintendent presented more specifics to a still-skeptical School Board. In June, she presented additional revisions. During the summer, Superintendent Smith revised the plan yet again to address school board members' concerns, and presented it once again to

the Board in September. In October, the School Board, approved the plan with a split vote.

About 200 students in the Madison High School area now transfer to Grant High School with a resulting loss of money and course offerings at Madison. Madison High School principal Carla Randall and Grant High School principal Joseph Malone agree that reducing some courses at the biggest schools will enhance equity for the smaller schools.²⁰ Under the PPS redesign, transfers will be very limited in order to facilitate more comprehensive course offerings in each high school. Some model programs, such as those developed by the Marshall High School academies or the Roosevelt High School reading emphasis plan, will be implemented across the district.²¹

Although prolonged, the high school redesign process was thoroughly studied. School Board members did not quickly adopt administration plans and required additional facts and discussion over a protracted period. Stakeholders had opportunities to be engaged in the process. Their questions brought to light unanticipated problems, and increased public understanding of a difficult and controversial decision.

Achievement Gaps

The Federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) required states to set state achievement standards, test students in specific grades on those standards, and report the resulting test scores. The Act also required separate test score reports on the average performance in every state, school district, and school for specific groups of students of special concern to the government.²²

The resulting “disaggregated” test scores created a new public awareness of the differences among the test scores earned by these different groups, leading to many discussions of the “achievement gap.” For these discussions to be productive, we must understand how the “achievement gap” that is reported in a particular context has been obtained. How is “achievement” defined, understood, and measured? Who is included in the groups whose “gaps” are of concern? How is the “gap” itself being measured?

The Oregon Department of Education tests students in grades 3-8 and grade 10 with the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS). It reports on

whether Oregon students in each of these grades “exceeded”, “met” or “did not meet” agreed-upon cut-off scores in three subject areas: English/Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science. Every year, it provides the Federal Government with a State Report Card and an Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Report.²³ Oregon also reports the numbers and percentages of students in each school and school district who “met” or “exceeded” these set scores. The reports are further broken down by grade level and by the following groups:

- Race/Ethnicity
- Gender
- Talented and Gifted
- Migrant
- Limited English Proficient
- Economically Disadvantaged
- All Students

“Race and Ethnicity” is further broken down into:

- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Black (not of Hispanic origin)
- Hispanic
- White (not of Hispanic Origin)
- Multi-Racial/Multi-Ethnic

Both the membership of these groups and the benchmarks used to measure their achievement change frequently. Although some groupings such as gender are relatively stable, membership in others is affected by such factors as the economy (economically disadvantaged; migrant), trends in medicine (students with disabilities), or changing ideas about how an individual should be described. Students exit from the Limited English Proficient group when they learn English.

Interpreting trends over time is also challenging because Oregon has made frequent changes in the state standards that the OAKS assessments measure, in the OAKS itself, and in the cut-off scores used to determine who has “met” the standards.

The collection of data for seven grade levels, three subjects in each grade, nine major student groups and six sub-groups produces many different data points and many ways to summarize and interpret the data. Complicating it further, in reporting districts’ compliance with the AYP requirement, Oregon “adjusts” the score reports upwards to account for variable margins of error in the tests for each group and reports both the adjusted and unadjusted scores.²⁴

Two common measures for reporting student achievement are the average test score earned by members of a group and the percentage of students in a group who did not meet or who “met and exceeded” a given cut-off score or “benchmark”.

Similarly, “gaps” between one group and another may be reported either as a difference between the average test scores for the two groups or as the difference in the percentage of students in each group who “met” benchmarks. Reporters and politicians often use the second approach to discuss changes over time, but it can produce seriously misleading results; see a further explanation in the endnotes.²⁵ Because these data are often used to make important decisions, misunderstanding or misuse can have serious consequences.

There are many ways to map the same data. One alternative is to look at the average growth from year to year of students within various groups instead of simple scores—for example, measuring how the average gains of low income students from fourth to fifth grade compare with the average gains of other students. This enables researchers to compare what students have learned during the same time period. A second option is to consider the average performance or comparative growth of students at similar ability levels within different groups—for example, comparing high-achieving Hispanic students in one district with their counterparts in other districts, or with high-achieving Asian students in the same district. One promising method, used in some districts elsewhere in the U.S., is to measure each individual student’s growth against a predicted growth trajectory derived from the student’s own previous performance. This method helps to “wash out” socio-economic differences and may enable policy makers to make “apples to apples” comparisons of performance differences between classrooms, schools, or districts.

In the past, “achievement gaps” between girls and boys raised concerns. Today, many community groups are concerned about persistent differentials in the achievement test scores earned by Black and Hispanic students and those of other students. Other areas of concern are gaps between Economically Disadvantaged and Limited English Proficient students and other students.

In the winter of 2009, the Black Parent Initiative commissioned EcoNorthwest to study the Black-White achievement gap in Multnomah County.²⁶ The report concluded that in the school years from 2003/4 to 2006/7, Black students in Multnomah County scored 6 to 9 points below White students, a gap that translates to about 1.5 grade levels. The gap remained relatively constant from third grade through tenth grade, suggesting that once they are in school Black and White students learn at similar rates.²⁷

A second report by EcoNorthwest, issued in the summer of 2009, similarly found that Hispanic students in Oregon lag far behind their White counterparts, but that the gap is much smaller when the data are adjusted for family income and student language status. The report noted that English language proficiency was critical in narrowing the gap and suggested that ESL programs may be an important factor in improving outcomes for English Language Learn-

ers.²⁸ As had the earlier report, this report found the gap remained nearly constant throughout students' school careers.

Differences in achievement from one district to another are less frequently reported than are differences among members of ethnic and social groups within a district. In 2009/10, in many assessment areas, PPS's test scores were slightly above those for the state as a whole, an unusual accomplishment for a large urban district. In many assessment areas, however, David Douglas and Parkrose lagged behind the rest of the state. See, for example, Table 1.

According to 2008 figures, Oregon's graduation rate was 66%. In PPS, the graduation rate was 54%, in David Douglas, 62%. Portland, David Douglas, and Parkrose all had more than 10% of their students continuing in high school for a fifth year. Oregon's method of counting does not include students who earned a general equivalency diploma (GED), so the

Table 1: Percentage of Middle School Students Who Met Standards By District (2009-2010)²⁹

	<u>Portland</u>	<u>Parkrose</u>	<u>David Douglas</u>
<u>Math</u>			
All	78.99 %	69.06 %	66.89 %
Hispanic	68.58 %	57.78 %	59.34 %
Black	57.28 %	47.43 %	38.36 %
<u>Reading</u>			
All	78.09 %	65.50 %	66.51 %
Hispanic	61.71 %	51.27 %	56.53 %
Black	59.07 %	49.71 %	47.14 %

number of students receiving high school credit or its equivalent might be somewhat better. Oregon also does not count those students who have moved out of Oregon and are not tracked at all.³⁰

Distribution of Services

"Equity does not mean equal. Some schools and students simply need more support. Society must provide the health care, nutrition, assistance for families in crisis and enrichment opportunities that students need to be ready to learn and to achieve."

*Rebecca Levison, president of the Portland Association of Teachers.*³¹

An obligation of a public education system is to provide equitable services to all students. Access should not depend upon income, race/ethnicity, geography, or family background. All children are not the same; first-graders do not need the same curriculum, services, or activities as high school students. Equal access to programs and services does not mean that every child participates in every program or every service, nor does it mean that all children will leave school with the same skills, interests and knowledge. In addition to providing some services, such as nurses, to all students who need them, districts are also required by law to provide specific services to some groups of special needs students to ensure that they have the opportunity to learn.

The committee chose a few services for closer study. Since schools provide such a wide range of services, it is impossible for a short report to consider how

each service is distributed. The committee addressed services to special groups, as well as services that should be available to all students.

There is widespread agreement that such services (and the spending that supports them) should be equitably distributed within districts; there has been less agreement that services should be equally available across district borders. Until 1990, Oregon schools districts depended on local property taxes for most of their funding and there were very large differences in funding from one district to another. Oregon Ballot Measures 5 (1990) and 50 (1997), discussed further on p. 13, capped local property taxes, and increased funding to local school districts from the statewide income tax. The distribution of this state funding to local districts, using a formula based primarily on student enrollment, reduced spending inequalities among school districts, but disparities remained. These increased slightly in 1999 when the legislature also permitted districts to raise up to 15% of their funds through a local option levy. Thus, there are still differences among districts in per capita spending. Furthermore, very small districts and rural districts simply don't have a large enough student population to provide the array of courses and resources available to students in larger districts.

Because their funding and course selections are affected by their student numbers, districts are often reluctant to allow students to transfer to other districts or programs. This can be especially frustrating for students in districts that border larger or wealthier districts.

When a district has just one high school for all its students, it is easier to ensure that they have equitable access to services within the district. Because of its size and the number of schools it contains, Portland Public Schools faces the greatest challenge among the three school districts in securing equitable services among schools within the district.

Health Care

School districts contract with Multnomah Education Service District (MESD) for school nurses. Dollars from the state are available to districts, based on their school population, and districts can choose a level of nursing services from a menu of services. Community-based health clinics organized by the county health department have been operating out of PPS high schools such as Cleveland and Marshall, supplementing school nurse staffing provided by MESD, but in most other schools, nurses are assigned to schools for a few hours each week. For example, in 2009-10, Sunnyside Environmental School had a nurse on site for only two afternoons per week.

According to Barbara Kienle, David Douglas’s Director of Student Services, nurses staff the high school health room four days a week and the alternative high school twice a week. In addition, the high school houses a recently opened school-based health center run by Multnomah County which operates independently of the health room. Nurses are not assigned to specific middle or elementary schools, but two full-time nursing positions are filled by nurses available to go to each site for health-related work that must be done, as well as being on call for emergencies as they arise. They feel it works because kids don’t get sick or hurt on a schedule, and the district is small enough that they can get to any site quickly.³²

Parkrose has its school-based health center staffed by Multnomah County nurse-practitioners on a rotating basis. There is one MESD nurse for the elementary and middle schools who performs all other health services.

Library Services

PPS staffs its libraries with classified staff (teaching assistants), and/or with licensed personnel, who command a higher salary. The breakdown is shown in Table 2, including the total FTE (full-time equivalent). Some of these positions are not full-time, and some personnel have extended responsibilities.

Table 2: PPS Library Staffing By School Type ³³			
	<u>Classified</u>	<u>Licensed</u>	<u>Total FTE</u>
<u>High</u>	7	9	13.55
<u>Middle</u>	20	2	9.355
<u>K-8</u>	44	20	47.375

David Douglas prides itself on offering full-time licensed personnel staffing all its libraries. Budget concerns may impact this in the future, but it has been one of the priorities of this district.³⁴

Parkrose High School has one full-time certified media specialist and one classified teaching assistant. The middle school has two classified assistants and each elementary has one classified assistant.³⁵

Access to Courses, Electives, and Curriculum

Ensuring equal access to high-quality classes has proved to be difficult in Portland, as the district itself has recognized. In material prepared for district-wide meetings on the High School Redesign, PPS pointed out that there were large differences in student enrollment in existing high schools, with corresponding variations in the number of courses available to students. Enrollment varied from 185 at Pauling, one of the small schools housed at the Marshall High School campus, to nearly 1600 at Grant High School, the district’s largest. In a February 2010 presentation to the PPS School Board, Superintendent Carole Smith said, “There are elements of strength at each of our schools, room for improvement at all, and gross inequities in opportunities to find support and achieve success for students at different schools and within each campus.... We must recognize that none of our schools work for all of their students equitably.”³⁶

PPS hopes to address this problem by closing a few smaller programs, reassigning students to “comprehensive” high schools and eliminating most student transfers. This may ensure that all neighborhood high schools are large enough to offer a broader array of courses, but most high school students will lose access to unusual courses that are not offered at their neighborhood school.

The high school redesign follows a reconfiguration of the schools serving younger students. Between 2004 and 2006, PPS created 29 new K-8 schools by combining and re-organizing existing K-5 and middle schools. As several of the K-8s began with sixth grade classes and grew by one grade per year, it took several years to complete the reconfiguration plan. By 2010, all the schools that were reconfigured served students in all grades from K to 8 and the district was making efforts to improve consistency from

school to school. A PPS report entitled “PK-8 Implementation” acknowledged that “The transition has been bumpy. School district officials are still making adjustments, particularly to increase the availability of elective courses, address space constraints and smooth out enrollment.”³⁷

Although PPS says that student attendance and achievement test scores have risen since the reconfiguration, the district still faces challenges in equalizing students’ access to electives (especially language classes) and to such critical resources as a well-stocked school library/media center. The space limitations that are inherent in many of the older buildings make it impossible for these schools to increase the size and variety of their middle grade programs significantly. In addition, the district has found it necessary to increase the staffing (FTE) allotted for these programs.³⁸

Special Population Services

English as a Second Language

About 4,700 of PPS’s 47,000 students are English Language Learners (ELL). An investigation by the Oregon Department of Education in 2009 found that services to ELLs in PPS were not meeting all Federal standards including access to core classes such as history or sciences and the provision of staff support in those classes. Students exiting the program were not reaching designated English learning levels.³⁹ The Oregon Department of Education withheld \$600,000 in federal ESL funds and is monitoring the progress of compliance efforts. PPS submitted a plan to improve various aspects of ELL services to the state that will be implemented in 2010/11. Auditor Richard Tracy carried out an internal audit for PPS and found a lack of sustained commitment and leadership and a consistent, focused approach.⁴⁰ Parkrose has just one ELL teacher in Parkrose High School and the students have access only to one ESL class every other day. They spend a great deal of time in that class resolving questions about their other classes, and often don’t have time for targeted ESL instruction.⁴¹

Homeless Students

The numbers and needs of homeless students present special challenges in equity of educational services. Every school district that receives federal anti-

poverty funding must identify homeless students. The federal definition of homelessness includes students who are staying with friends; students whose families have moved in with friends or relatives; students living in tents, campers, or other substandard homes lacking electricity or water; and students living in low-rent motels. Schools are supposed to flag homeless students in order to help them: federal rules require districts to provide transportation to the schools they had attended before becoming homeless and to allow them to remain enrolled in the same school. Schools often provide other services to homeless students including school supplies, help finding food, referrals to agencies that provide assistance, and access to after-school programs.⁴² In the past, PPS was finding homeless students by counting staff requests for free bus passes, but in 2009 TriMet offered bus passes to all high school students. This complicated efforts to identify the students who were homeless. “We lost that particular lever, and we didn’t respond quickly enough to come up with an alternative system to identify those kids,” Susan Kosmala, Funded Programs Director said.⁴³ She added that Portland plans to adopt identification techniques developed by Beaverton, which has a smaller enrollment than Portland but identifies a higher percentage of its students as homeless. David Douglas and Parkrose have a questionnaire used at enrollment to

identify students that would qualify for services.⁴⁴ In 2009-10, PPS identified 1,068 students as homeless; David Douglas identified 534, and Parkrose identified 204.⁴⁵

Many homeless students depend more on institutions maintained by volunteers with donated funds than on services provided directly by some level of government. For example, in Parkrose a large group of volunteers have come together to sustain the Gateway Project which offers a range of support services to homeless students.⁴⁶ The Community Transitional School is a private, non-profit school open to all homeless children in any of the Portland area school districts. It staffs three full-time licensed teachers and two full-time instructional assistants, and with its fleet of four small buses it ensures that all students, even if they move, can attend.

Talented and Gifted Students

Although the Oregon TAG mandate requires districts to identify students in the top 3% as TAG, there are large discrepancies between districts in the proportion of students identified. Portland had nearly 6,000 identified Talented and Gifted (TAG) students in 2008/9: 13% of its student population of 44,959.⁴⁷ In David Douglas, 8% of a total district population of 10,505 was identified as TAG; in Parkrose just 4% of a total district population of 3,523 was identified as TAG.

The Oregon Department of Education investigated the TAG services provided to Portland students in 2008 and concluded that PPS was not meeting the requirements of state law. It issued a compliance order containing ten “corrective actions”.⁴⁸ In a letter issued in July of 2010, the Department found that some, but not all, of the violations had been corrected. In particular, the Department found that PPS was not providing equal access to accelerated programs to all PPS TAG students.⁴⁹ The current PPS high school redesign may have a negative effect on TAG High School students when it comes to providing advanced classes to meet the academic needs of TAG students. For example, Grant High School may drop from 25 Advanced Placement classes to between 10 and 16 classes.

Students with high ability traditionally do not make gains as great as those students who are not identified as TAG students. In 2008, PPS showed that compared to other students, TAG students showed mark-

edly fewer gains.⁵⁰

There have been studies showing that since 2000 low-achieving students have made good academic progress, whereas high-achieving student gains have been modest.⁵¹ Standards-based accountability tends to focus educational attention on students working just below the proficiency standards in order to help those students achieve a “meets standards” classification.⁵² In 1988, Congress passed the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act and federal money was budgeted for TAG education. Since 2002, appropriation for gifted education has declined. In 2002, the year NCLB was enacted, the federal budget allotted \$11.3 million; in 2009 the budget allotted \$7.5 million.⁵³ States do not have to budget for TAG education. In Oregon, services are mandated but are unfunded by the state.⁵⁴

Students of Color

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has found a pattern of harsher discipline toward students of color overall in Oregon classrooms, mirroring the pattern across the country, while showing that these students are no more likely to commit offenses than white students. The Oregon ACLU report focuses on data from 2008-9 showing that while African-American students represent 3% of total Oregon students, they represent 7% of students who receive out-of-school suspensions. Hispanic students comprise 17% of students and represent over 25% of students expelled.

Locally, a 2007 report from PPS shows that while African American middle school students comprised 16% of the district population, 25% were suspended or expelled. White middle school students comprised 57% of the district population and 7% were so disciplined.⁵⁵

Drop-out rates for these groups are high.⁵⁶ The final 2009-10 cohort graduation percentage figures are in Table 3 on p. 10.

At-Risk Students

These students, also called academic priority students, are so classified for a variety of reasons. The following factors are generally listed as putting students at risk of academic failure:

- Low socioeconomic status
- Living in a single-parent home

Table 3: Graduation Percentage By District⁵⁷

	<u>Portland</u>	<u>Parkrose</u>	<u>David Douglas</u>
<u>All</u>	53.3 %	54.6 %	57.3 %
<u>African American</u>	44.5 %	48.8 %	62.5 %
<u>Hispanic</u>	31.0 %	40.5 %	51.4 %
<u>Native Amer. & Alaska Native</u>	31.5 %	14.3 %	62.5 %
<u>Asian & Pacific Islander</u>	69.3 %	58.5 %	64.4 %

- Changing schools at non-traditional times
- Below-average grades in middle school years
- Being held back a grade in school
- Having older siblings who left high school without graduating
- Negative peer pressure⁵⁸

PPS has recently developed a range of strategies to address the varied needs of these students. The PPS “Milestones Framework” focuses on students at critical stages in their education: entering first grade, end of third grade, entering high school, entering tenth grade, and at graduation. At each point schools check to ensure that all students are on a track toward a successful outcome. The Milestones Framework sets specific targets in designated critical areas; they are third graders who can “read to learn”, and tenth graders who have passed core subjects with strong grades and earned sufficient credits to be on track for graduation.⁵⁹ In addition, individual school improvement plans must identify the strategies the school will use to assist students who are academically behind and respond to student academic needs.⁶⁰ It is still too early to anticipate the success of these initiatives.

Parkrose has also implemented programs for students they see as underserved. The Elevate Oregon program, in the planning stages for a year, opens in February 2011 and is a leadership program for urban underserved youth. Their first group of 25 students will be followed year-round and, as they learn skills, they will in turn teach them to younger students.⁶¹ AVID

(Advancement Via Individual Determination) is “acceleration, not remediation” for students in the academic middle who are underachieving. Students take high-level classes with one elective AVID class per day to offer help and support.⁶² Parkrose also has partnered with Reynolds and Centennial School Districts to offer ACE Academy. It teaches architecture, construction, and engineering on a high level with mentoring and internships from the building industry to juniors and seniors seeking a more hands-on approach.⁶³

Special Education Students

These students are entitled to additional services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which was first enacted in 1975 and re-authorized in amended form in 2004.⁶⁴ This Act stated that every public school student who had a disability that adversely affected the student’s education was entitled to a “Free Appropriate Public Education” (FAPE). Oregon identifies students in 11 different categories. A committee consisting of a district representative, the student’s teacher, an evaluation expert, and the student’s parents must agree on an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each student that provides a roadmap for the student’s education in the “least restrictive environment” consistent with that student’s situation. Although the Federal government promised to provide up to 40% of the costs of this Act, it has never come close to doing so and currently defrays about 18% of the cost of Oregon’s Special Education services.⁶⁵ Districts receive double their regular per capita funding from the state for every identified student. About 13% of all students in Oregon are identified for Special Education. Parkrose and David Douglas also identified 13% of their students as Special Education in 2008/9, but the percentage in Portland was 16%.⁶⁶

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), discussed further on page 12, sets targets for the participation of Special Education students in state testing and Oregon issues a Special Education Report Card annually for each district. Students with severe disabilities are assessed using alternate achievement standards. According to the 2008-09 Report Cards, PPS Special Education students were more likely than Special Education students elsewhere in Oregon to meet or exceed both grade level standards and alternate standards. Students in Parkrose and David Douglas, however, were less likely to meet both grade level

standards and alternate standards. In Portland, 11.9% of Special Education students were assessed on alternate standards; the percentages were 10.6 in Parkrose and 15.2 in David Douglas. In all three districts more than 70% of all Special Education students spent more than 80% of their day in regular classrooms. In David Douglas and Portland, fewer than one-third of parents surveyed by the Department of Education reported that their schools facilitated parent involvement to improve services; Parkrose was not surveyed.⁶⁷

Oregon requires an improvement plan for any district that does not meet state targets for Special Education students. David Douglas currently has correction and/or improvement plans for the following: Student Graduation, High School Dropout, Academic Achievement, Least Restrictive Environment, and Timeline for Eligibility.⁶⁸

Special Education in PPS has been the subject of recurring complaints.⁶⁹ In a survey for a review of Special Education in 2010, only a minority of teachers said they had regular and systematic support to help them with these students. Fifteen percent of teachers felt special education students in their classrooms “constantly” disrupted the learning of other

students and 76% reported that this happened at least once a day. Nineteen percent reported that they were so physically threatened or injured by students that they worried about their own safety and only 26% felt their buildings consistently responded to disruptive behavior. A little more than one-quarter of general education teachers surveyed “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that Special Education students made adequate academic progress in their classrooms. Administrators had a much more positive view of the success of their building in addressing the needs of these students; however, fewer than half of all parents surveyed thought the available services met the needs of their children.⁷⁰

Following the review, PPS has combined Special Education with Student Services to form a new department, Integrated Student Support. In order to reduce the frequency with which students changed schools, PPS consolidated self-contained Special Education classrooms into programs in fewer schools. Students who were previously in heterogeneous classes have been grouped by their disability and their level of academic performance in order to provide better targeted materials and instruction.⁷¹ It is too soon to determine how successful these changes will be.

Funding and Local Control

At one time states were sovereign in managing their schools. *Plessy v Ferguson* in 1896, which agreed that “separate but equal” was a fair doctrine, solidified states’ feelings that they could make the rules. In 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* overturned the states’ “separate but equal” argument and mandated that “separate but equal” was essentially not equal. Since that time, federal mandates have eroded and overridden state statutes in many areas, including education. A few of the many federal and state mandates are listed below.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), in 1965, authorized federal grants for elementary and secondary schools to support low-income students.

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), passed in 1975 and renamed in 1990, was passed by Congress in response to charges that school districts were excluding many special

education students due to the cost or difficulty of educating them. IDEA requires districts to give each child a free and appropriate public education, and also to abide by any more stringent state statutes. It sets clear guidelines regarding evaluation and placement, with a “zero reject” principle and a required individualized education plan (IEP).

Title I, earlier called Chapter I, was folded into the No Child Left Behind Act and gives extra funding to schools in which 75% of students qualify to receive free and reduced-price lunches. It is the largest federally funded education program. Title I schools must show promotion of high academic standards for children, an increased focus on teaching and learning, flexibility to stimulate local initiatives coupled with responsibility for student performance, and improved communication between schools, parents, and community. Funds must be used in hiring and teaching, not for clerical uses.

Reading First is a program funded under NCLB to provide grants to districts with a large proportion of low-income students. Districts must agree to use specific research-based commercial reading programs for reading instruction in kindergarten through third grades. Districts must apply and must demonstrate eligibility.⁷²

Improving Teacher Quality is a program to increase the number of highly qualified teachers and administrators in schools, and to hold schools accountable for academic improvement as seen by test scores. Highly qualified teachers (HQT) are those who have at least a bachelor's degree, are licensed by the State in their area of teaching, and exhibit competence to teach in their field. Districts may apply for funds, which can be used for teacher training and improvement.⁷³

The English Language Acquisition Program offers grants to states to create measurable objectives for assisting students in mastering English. Funds can also be used for developing and instituting language instruction programs which follow NCLB's research-based approaches.⁷⁴

NCLB (No Child Left Behind), proposed in 2001 and taking effect in 2003, amended or modified most of the earlier education mandates. It required states to submit yearly test scores in math and reading. Along with data on attendance, percent of students tested (a minimum of 95% of students must participate), and graduation and drop-out rates, these scores determine whether schools have made adequate yearly progress (AYP). States decide how to classify ethnicity of students and establish uniform statewide performance criteria. If all students in a Title I school or any subgroup within it do not meet the criteria two years in a row, that school must offer its students transfer and free transportation to another, demonstrably more successful school. After three years, a Title I school must offer free tutoring, and after five years of not meeting criteria, a Title I school must make major changes to its program, such as reorganization, reconstitution with teachers and administrators replaced, or state or private takeover. Data gathered under NCLB highlights areas of underachievement among some populations and could inform districts about education inequities.

Each year the success requirement is steeper; by 2014 all schools must achieve a 100% pass rate on state tests. Over 30,000 schools nationally are already on

Table 4: Acts Amended⁷⁵

Adult Education and Family Literacy Act
Age Discrimination Act of 1975
Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship Act of 1994
Augustus F. Hawkins-Robert T. Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988
Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998
Civil Rights Act of 1964
Communications Act of 1934
Community Services Block Grant Act
Department of Education Organization Act
District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999
Education Amendments of 1972
Education Amendments of 1978
Education Flexibility Partnership Act of 1999
Education for Economic Security Act
Educational Research, Development, Dissemination, and Improvement Act of 1994
Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965
Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993
General Education Provisions Act
Goals 2000: Educate America Act
Hazardous and Solid Waste Amendments of 1984
Higher Education Act of 1965
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
James Madison Memorial Fellowship Act
Internal Revenue Code of 1986
Johnson-O'Malley Act of 1934
Legislative Branch Appropriations Act, 1997
McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987
Museum and Library Services Act
National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977
National and Community Service Act of 1990
National Child Protection Act of 1993
National Education Statistics Act of 1994
National Environmental Education Act of 1990
Native American Languages Act
Public Law 88-210
Public Law 106-400
Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980
Rehabilitation Act of 1973
Safe Drinking Water Act
School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994
State Dependent Care Development Grants Act
Telecommunications Act of 1996
Tribally Controlled Schools Act of 1987
Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976
Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century
Workforce Investment Act of 1998

the “needs improvement” list; more schools probably will have difficulty meeting stricter requirements and will experience upheaval.⁷⁶ The federal government has increased funding to education overall, though critics say the new mandates are more costly. The federal government has responded by saying that these mandates are not unfunded, because states do not have to avail themselves of them. However, since NCLB has altered or encompassed over fifty earlier federal acts, shown in the box on page 12, it provides a great deal of money which districts might find hard to replace.⁷⁷

If federal mandates have reduced states’ control over education, Portland residents have lost some local control to the state as well. Ballot Measure 5, passed in 1990, capped local property taxes, with no

provision for making up the difference. Measure 5 limited property taxes to \$15 per \$1,000 of assessed value, gradually falling to \$5 per \$1,000 at the end of 5 years. Taxes for other uses were capped at \$10 per \$1,000. Measure 50, adopted in 1997, converted tax bases to permanent rates and limited assessed value growth to 3%.⁷⁸ Oregon’s legislature now uses student numbers to equalize funding between districts.⁷⁹ Portland, which had a larger tax base than some other areas, had regularly voted for tax increases to support Portland schools, and this was no longer possible. Before Measure 5, local property taxes supplied two thirds of Portland’s education funding; now state income taxes supply the majority, about three fifths of the funding.⁸⁰

Foundation Funding

Because one of the effects of Ballot Measure 5 was to equalize funding over Oregon’s school districts, some high-cost school districts such as PPS were left with fewer resources than they once had.

In 1994 PPS established a task force to consider whether parents at individual schools could raise private funds for retaining teacher positions and other basic needs. Parents at some schools in wealthy neighborhoods had formed non-profit foundations to raise funds, but less affluent schools were less able to raise money. To increase equity among schools, the task force recommended the establishment of a city-wide foundation and the allocation of one-third of any funds raised through local foundations to this citywide foundation. The Portland Schools Foundation (PSF) was formed in 1995. Later the first \$10,000 raised was exempted from the sharing requirement, to allow less affluent schools to keep most of what they raised. The PPS Equity Fund distributes the pooled money.

Currently seven PPS schools have their own independent local foundations. They are Ainsworth, Bridlemile, Chapman, Duniway, and Forest Park Elementary Schools, as well as West Sylvan Middle School and Cleveland High School. All local school foundations, including these, contribute one-third of their funds raised (after the first \$10,000) to the Portland Equity Fund. As established by PPS School Board policy, the local school foundations are the only way

Portland Schools Foundation Mission:

The Portland Schools Foundation is an independent, community-based organization that mobilizes ideas, leadership, public support, and resources necessary to ensure a world-class education for every child, in every public school, in every neighborhood.

in which school communities and parents may raise funds to pay for personnel (FTE or full-time equivalencies). In-kind donations⁸¹ and grants given to specific schools do not have to give one-third back to the Foundation and can be used for other purposes. Other fundraising is done at schools through groups such as PTAs and booster clubs, to raise money for specific things such as library books, trips, and uniforms. These funds are not shared with the Equity Fund.

2010 was the first time The Portland Schools Foundation gave grants to schools in the city outside of PPS. It is developing partnerships with all five major school districts in the city of Portland. The majority of its grants remains those from the PPS Equity Fund and directed at students in PPS.

Special relationships with local businesses and special programs fill gaps in equity support for many schools. Llwellyn Elementary won a \$10,000 grant from Umpqua Bank for a garden. Student teams and colleges provide special programs or free tutoring.

For example, Reed College students tutor at Franklin High School. The Sellwood Middle School Foundation holds a road race to raise money for electives such as Spanish, art, music and industrial arts. Jefferson High School music concerts have raised money to form a band.⁸² Madison High School has one of most heavily utilized libraries, but no funds for new books, so a sale of donated media items is planned.

Parkrose and David Douglas also have district-wide 501(c)3 non-profit foundations. The Parkrose Educational Foundation was formed in 1994 and is managed by a nine-person volunteer board. They raise money with fundraisers, especially an annual auction.

School Choice

In Oregon, school attendance is required for all children between 7 and 18 who have not completed the 12th grade nor have high school diplomas or the equivalent. Exceptions are those being home- or privately schooled, emancipated minors, or lawfully fully employed students over the age of 16. Students demonstrating equivalent knowledge to school coursework may also be exempted. Within those parameters, students in Portland schools have choices. There are charter schools and alternative schools established by private companies or school districts. Students may take part in the Oregon Virtual School District, an online program of study overseen by the Dept. of Education.⁸⁵

School choice refers to transfers from one school to another within a district or from one district to another. PPS permits admission of non-resident students if their families pay tuition, or if the sending district approves the transfer and transfers the student's funding to PPS. Students are assigned to their neighborhood elementary and middle schools and have a right to attend them. They may transfer to other district schools if space is available and the receiving school agrees. PPS prioritizes language immersion program students, those needing ESL services, and students leaving NCLB-targeted schools. PPS School Board policy 4.10.54 further gives transfer priority if the transfer will bring the receiving school closer to the district's gender balance or average income, or if a sibling is enrolled at the same time. It allows for siblings to apply as a family for transfers.⁸⁶ PPS also does not approve transfers out of district, except in extenuating circumstances.⁸⁷

In addition, citizens and businesses donate to schools for student activities. In 2007-08, their grants included funds for positive behavior and reading incentives, field trips, and journalism, choral, band, and drama programs, for a total of around \$18,500.⁸³ David Douglas's Educational Foundation is managed by a 6-person volunteer board and was formed in 1991. As of June 2009 its assets are approximately \$304,000, and include investments and funds restricted for scholarships, special needs students, and the Performing Arts Center. Unrestricted funds are used for school needs and can be accessed through grant applications.⁸⁴

David Douglas allows transfers in, but does not approve transfers out of district. Students residing within a school's boundaries are expected to attend that school, though exceptions are made for extenuating circumstances.⁸⁸

Parkrose School District permits transfers within the district on a space-available basis, and gives priority to students transferring from schools that are not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind. It also gives priority to students who have been victims of assault or attend schools defined as dangerous, and to special education students who need access to special programs. It does not approve transfers out of district.⁸⁹

Public school options abound, but not all options are available to all students. All districts have neighborhood schools that serve students in a specific boundary area. There are alternative programs in every district serving students with special needs such as TAG students, students with learning differences, and pregnant girls. Charter schools such as Trillium and Opal are available. Special focus schools that offer a specialized curriculum such as language immersion are filled by application and lottery selection. Early childhood education and Head Start are offered for pre-kindergarten children. Some children with long-term needs are enrolled in contract schools or programs; if private, the sending school district pays tuition.

Because Parkrose and David Douglas have only one high school, students have no choice of public high schools. In PPS, high school students are assigned to

their neighborhood school but can transfer freely on a space-available basis. This exacerbated an uneven distribution of 9-12 grade students, from Jefferson's low of 400 students to overcrowded Grant at 1600, causing a disparity in course offerings. Under the current high school redesign plan, most transfers will be prohibited. To increase the number of students in

neighborhood high schools, Marshall High School will close in the spring of 2010, the size of Benson will be reduced, and Jefferson will be reconfigured to offer a "middle college" program in conjunction with Portland Community College, Cascade campus, and receive credit at both institutions.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Offering School Choice

Advantages

- Encourages families to remain in a district
- Promotes school loyalty
- Promotes happiness and student engagement
- May increase diversity
- May promote more efficient use of resources
- Maximizes student access to programs of interest
- Assists students to maximize their learning
- Enhances access to unique or scarce programs (native language speakers, special equipment)
- Enables students to leave schools with a "poor fit" or where they were crime victims
- Allows students to start over, escape conflicts
- Provides feedback to school districts about success of programs
- Serves special needs students
- Serves parent and family needs
- Enables some students to work near school
- Most families want choice
- Especially popular with African-American families
- Makes education more varied

Disadvantages

- Harder to predict enrollment size of schools
- Increases uncertainty for families
- Adds transportation costs
- May decrease diversity
- May reduce resources and options within unpopular schools
- Specific choices have disadvantages—cost, time, inconvenience, loss of access to a wide range of programs
- Choice may be found to be a poor one
- Students may not receive their choice
- Unequal access to information/knowledge may disadvantage some families
- Increases oversight burden on districts
- Oversight of programs may become harder
- May take resources out of districts
- May complicate collective bargaining, staff assignments

It is still unclear whether school choice increases student achievement.

School Reorganization

There are different kinds of "school reorganization". Schools can be graded or ungraded, grade span can be reconfigured, magnet or focus schools can replace comprehensive schools, districts can centralize their decision-making or make it site-based.

For our purposes, we are looking at the research which refers to grade configuration. Schools can house students from kindergarten through high school in one building, as in PPS's Metropolitan Learning Center. There can be separate schools for single

grades, as David Douglas has with a kindergarten center. For the 20 years before 2006, Portland used the elementary (K-5), middle (6-8), and high (9-12) schools model. In PPS, there have been many elementary schools (housing K-5 grades) and middle schools (6-8) recently converted to K-8's.

Approximately forty years ago there was a move from junior highs (7-9) to middle schools (6-8). It was felt that junior highs did not adequately address the specific development needs of young adolescents. Current emphasis on accountability and assessment reveals that middle schools are not meeting their students' needs any more successfully. Some would argue that middle schools are often junior highs with a different name. The changes necessary to meet those special needs were never made. According to M. Hayes Mizell, director of the Program for Student Achievement at the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, "The only way middle school students will perform better, and the only way middle school teachers and administrators will perform better, is if they all get a great deal more support than is now the case."⁹⁰ According to Paglin and Fager (1997) of the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, "Research has not provided definitive answers to the myriad possible questions about grade span, but the questions have never gone away. They are questions which arise whenever school reform, increasing or declining enrollment, or financial considerations bring about a reorganization of existing schools, the building of new schools, or consolidation of districts."⁹¹

A recent study of New York City schools suggests that students in K-8 schools do better than their peers enrolled in middle schools. Researchers speculated

that the size of a given grade may affect the transition of students to 6-8 schools where the number of students per grade was twice the size of that grade in the K-8 schools. But the study did not include charter middle schools which may have smaller grade cohorts. Nor did this study compare how students transitioning from K-8 or 6-8 schools did in high school.⁹²

While research on the "best" grade configuration is inconclusive, research does show differences with different grade configurations. Curriculum choices are often broader in a middle school setting for 6 – 8th graders than in a K-8 setting, since there are more students and thus more classes.

Broader grade configurations reduce the number of transitions students must go through from one school to another. The separation into middle schools is often justified by the belief that they better meet the developmental needs of preadolescents, and those needs are considered different from those of younger elementary or older teenagers.

Researchers found that transitions can be stressful for students. Alsbaugh (1999) found a significant achievement loss during each transition year. He also found that some students regain what is lost in the following year, but it would seem that students who make fewer transitions need fewer years to make up for achievement losses caused by transitions. He concluded, "The higher the grade level of the last transition to high school, the higher the dropout rate."⁹⁴

"Researchers who found that sixth-grade students in both elementary and combination K-12 schools outperformed students in middle schools or junior high

Table 5: Program Equity By School Type (Middle vs. K-8) in PPS⁹³

	<u>Physical Education*</u>	<u>Art</u>	<u>Media Specialist**</u>	<u>Technology</u>	<u>World Language***</u>	<u>Music</u>
<u>K-8</u>	17/31	14/31	11/31	24/31	15/31	22/31
<u>Middle</u>	9/10	7/10	3/10	4/10	8/10	9/10

* More than 90 minutes per week.

** All schools have operational libraries with some staff. Thirteen K-8 schools offer library as a class period. Ten have media specialists. One middle school offers library as a class period.

*** Six K-8 and eight middle schools offer high school credit for world language. The other schools have only exposure to world languages.

schools considered the number of transitions a significant factor. Another research study found that girls in early adolescence suffered from a drop in self-esteem, extracurricular participation, and leadership behaviors when they made the transition into middle school or junior high, but not if they remained in an elementary school setting. This study found that the effects of this transition lingered throughout subsequent school years. For boys, the study found similar negative effects in extracurricular participation and grades, but not in self-esteem, when they made the transition into middle school or junior high. The authors concluded that the relatively protected elementary school setting made the entry into adolescence less stressful for both boys and girls. The students who had not had the stress of the earlier transition seemed to cope better with the transition into high school than did other students.”⁹⁵

Paglin and Fager compiled a list of nine factors that school districts might want to consider when making decisions about grade configurations of individual schools:

- The cost and length of student travel, particularly in a school district that covers a large area
- A possible increase or decrease in parent involvement, possibly affected by the distance to the school and the number of schools a family's children attend
- The number of students at each grade level, which may affect class groupings and courses offered
- The effect of school setting on achievement, particularly for low socio-economically affected students
- The effect of whether the neighborhood schools close or remain open
- The number of school transitions for students
- The opportunities for interaction between age groups
- The influence of older students on younger students
- The building design suitability for only a few or for several grade levels

“Paglin and Fager concluded that use of a particular span of grades in schools will not in itself guarantee that students will learn well and be well-adjusted.”⁹⁶

Promising Practices

There are groups, locally and nationally, which are examining ways to increase educational success for all students. They have isolated practices which they believe could improve student achievement. Some groups have only one focus, such as reducing the dropout rate, or study one population, such as African American children. Others feel there are steps to take which would increase the success of all children.

In PPS, volunteers in **Community and Parents for Public Schools (CPPS)** created workshops in three Title I elementary schools to explain to parents in both English and Spanish how to help their children read more successfully. From 25 to 38 percent of families in the designated schools consider Spanish their first language.

CPPS is one of 19 chapters in 11 states of Parents for Public Schools, a Jackson, Mississippi-based organization that also advocates for more parental activism at higher district levels. “We believe it is crucial for parents to be involved in a way that they understand the laws, what schools are required to do for their children, and the education product schools are deli-

vering. And when things need to be changed, parents need to be part of making those changes,” declares Anne W. Foster, CPPS’s executive director.

“Our goal is to have meaningful parent involvement at every level, not just helping your kids do homework but also in decision-making and leadership at the district level,” asserts Doug Wells, board president of Portland’s CPPS and a parent. Among other activities, CPPS offers an annual Parent Leadership Conference, held in 2010 at Parkrose High School, to teach parents “everything from how to get involved at the basic school level to how to become a school activist and get involved at the higher levels,” Wells explains. He chairs the PPS committee that reviews the district’s budget. CPPS leaders also meet bi-monthly with Superintendent Carole Smith to discuss other “high level strategic issues,” like redesigning high schools, Wells says.

The Chalkboard Project is a non-partisan group formed by five Oregon foundations, and later joined by a sixth, which is committed to neutrality, independence, and achieving a better understanding of the

problems and solutions surrounding our K-12 public schools. From available statistics, the Chalkboard Project extrapolates what they see as best practices to solve public education's problems. It finds that students taught by effective teachers gain one or more grade levels per academic year. These are the steps it recommends that school districts take in order to raise achievement levels and close the achievement gap:

- Oregon should reduce K-1 class size. At present it averages 25 students, among the top five in the country. States with class sizes of 15 in those grades outperform their peers in regular classes of 22. Chalkboard's research shows that gains are maintained through 8th grade. This is critical to reach minority students early who traditionally lag behind their majority peers.
- Parents need to be involved in their students' schools, and employers and communities must make it easier for them to do so.
- Oregon should mentor new teachers, and teachers should be compensated for becoming leaders and mentors.
- Reading tutors need to be available for every child in K through 3rd grades who is not reading at grade level; this will be easier and more cost-effective than remediation later.⁹⁷

Self-Enhancement Inc. (SEI) is a program started by Tony Hopson Sr., the founder and president, as an informal mentoring program for African-American students attending Jefferson High School. He saw students who, with encouragement and a positive adult role model, could succeed at school, but who had neither and were falling behind. It became a formal program with PPS picking up part of the roughly \$7,000 per year, per student cost for year-round tutoring, enrichment, and mentoring. The program has expanded to include identified students of all races from grade school through high school and beyond, offering some services until the age of 25. A full-time coordinator is based in each school with SEI students; two days a week students meet for dinner, homework help, music lessons, and a lesson in high expectations. Students are treated to enrichment activities that would be available to middle-class children such as trips to restaurants, museums, water parks, and college tours. SEI also helps with crises at home such as lack of funds for a bill or getting a parent into addiction treatment. Over 95% of SEI students earn high school diplomas, in contrast to the

45% of African American students statewide. In 2008, of 28 students who were helped by SEI during all four years of their high school career, all graduated; in 2010, 27 of 29 graduated.⁹⁸

The **Black Parent Initiative** (BPI) has as its aim to ensure their children achieve educational excellence. It provides a Parent University that works with Multnomah County Educational Service District (MESD) to offer parent-centered classes on parenting, literacy, finance, health, and tutoring. An At-Home program works with the Child Welfare system to provide help and services for Black families who have lost or are in danger of losing custody of children. In partnership with The Concordia School of Business and Mercy Corps, BPI has been involved in micro-financing, providing \$5,000 in grants so far.

Charles McGee of the BPI believes that Black families need support from the Black community to break out of a cycle of intergenerational poverty. He sees race as a big issue, but money as a bigger one. In order to create a system of equity, unequal distribution is required, giving more resources to those most in need of them. He is pleased that CPPS has received a grant to conduct focus groups of people not ordinarily heard in policy decisions.⁹⁹

McGee cites the following improvements needed in the school system:

- Better planning between city and local schools involved
- Stronger leadership
- Cooperative mentality, rather than "us vs. them"
- Community support for student success
- Rigor and cultural relevance
- Wrap-around services, which correlate to school achievement
- Leadership from the Black community, all social strata¹⁰⁰

The **Native American Youth and Family Center** (NAYA) seeks to help stabilize the lives of Native American youth and their families through educational services, cultural arts programming, and direct support to reduce poverty. It uses the Relational Worldview Model and the concept that individuals can be assessed and treated most effectively when all elements of their lives are considered. Nichole Maher has stated that students who use NAYA programming services for two years of their high school years have a 79% graduation rate, double that of PPS or other

Multnomah County graduation rates.¹⁰¹

Head Start is a national program of early childhood education and care for 3- and 4-year-olds, and has seen mixed results in its impact on the readiness of children for school. The congressionally mandated Head Start Impact Study gathered data from 2002 to 2006, and found some positive gains. The largest positive impacts were found to be in the areas of pre-reading skills, access to health services, and a reduction in problem behaviors exhibited and physical discipline in the home. At the end of one year, in comparison to 3- and 4-year-olds in the general population of the U.S. across all income levels, Head Start children were still below the average performance level, but had cut the expected achievement gap in half. Four-year-olds showed gains in more areas than did the three-year-olds.¹⁰²

What Works Clearinghouse is a program under the U.S. Department of Education designed to provide educators with a source of research into what works in education. It analyzed data from a large study in Florida which furnished self-selected summer reading books, free of charge, to young students in high-poverty schools for three years. The study then compared reading scores with students who did not receive them. The reported improvement in reading was roughly equivalent to moving a student from the 50th percentile to the 56th in reading achievement. A sub-group of students receiving free lunches saw an even larger effect.¹⁰³

Formative Assessment is a self-reflective process to improve a teacher's teaching in order to enhance student learning. Teachers are continually appraising their own classroom approach and gauging the learning in their classrooms in order to adapt to students' needs. They look at a student's work in order to determine what needs to be improved and how to guide the next steps by providing specific "feedback" for increased learning, not a letter grade assignment. Students also learn to revise and improve their own work based on feedback from their teachers and peers.¹⁰⁴ There is a body of research that supports improvement in student achievement where formative assessment is part of classroom practices and finds that the improvement may be greatest for underachievers.¹⁰⁵

The **Portland Teachers Program** (PTP) has been in existence for twenty years. In partnership with Portland Community College, Portland State University,

University of Portland, and the Beaverton and Portland Public School Districts, its mission is to increase the number of culturally competent teachers, with a special emphasis on the recruitment and graduation of historically underrepresented groups in the teaching profession. In 1997-8 in Oregon, the percentage of minority students was 16.3% and of minority teachers was 3.9%. In 2005-6, the minority student percentage had risen to 25.8% of students but minorities accounted for only 4.8% of teachers, and the ratio in Portland is similar.¹⁰⁶ The PTP feels that it is important for students' success to see teachers in classrooms who look like themselves, as well as for all students to experience learning from teachers with backgrounds different than their own. PTP hopes that an increase in diversity will reduce the overrepresentation of African American male students in special education, behavioral programs, and disciplinary actions.

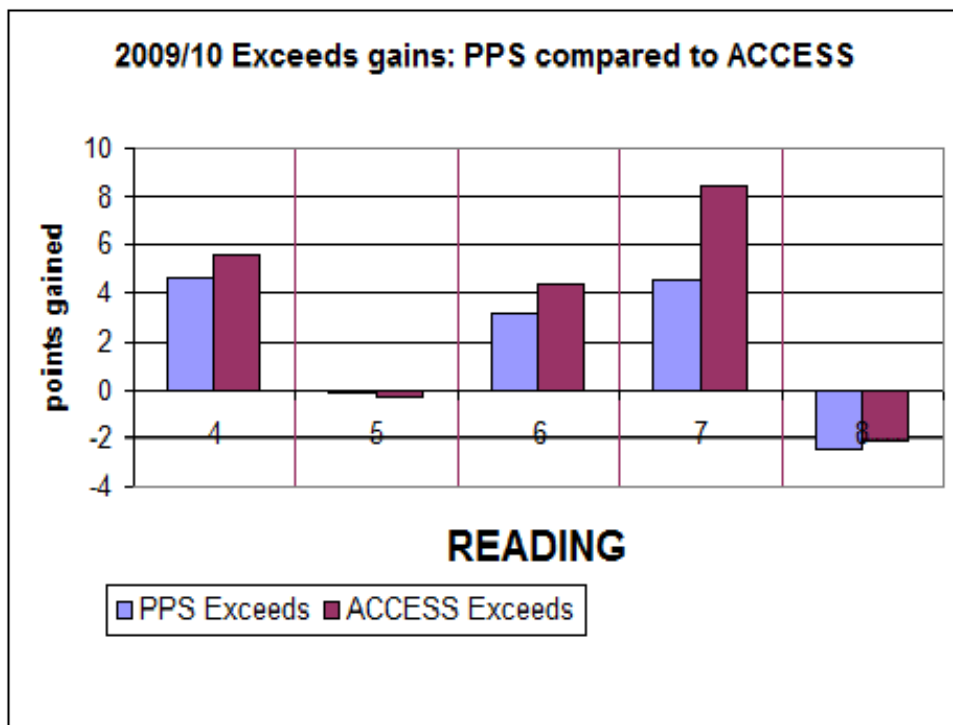
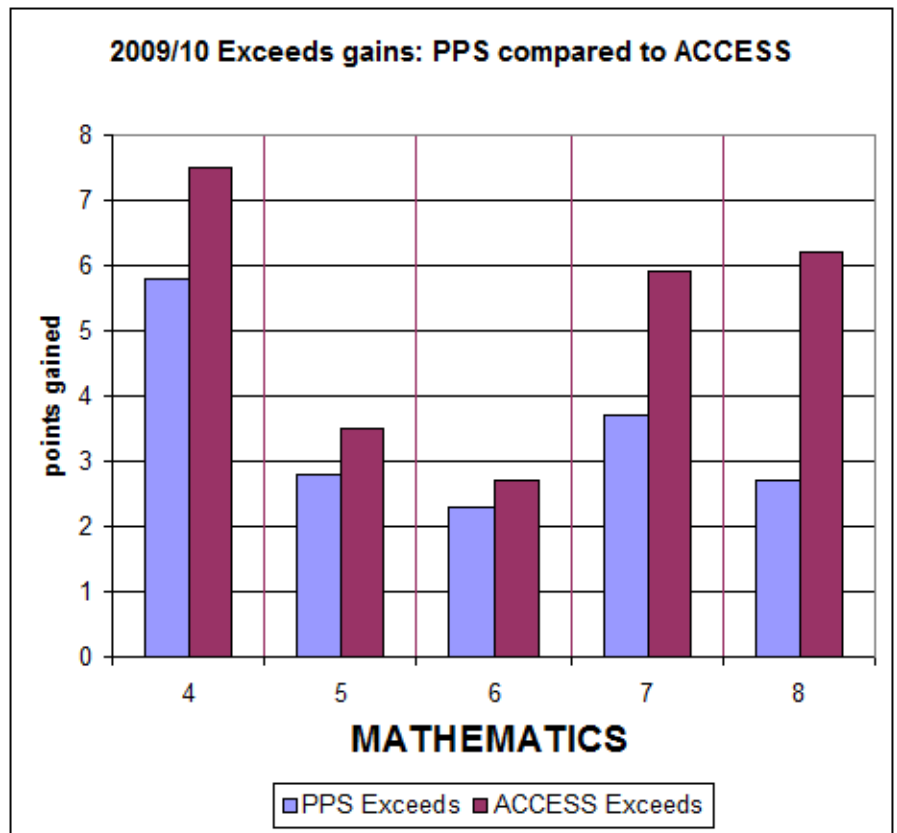
These prospective teachers take all the usual course work for their Oregon teaching license, and in addition they are required to address topics around race and class in America, white privilege, leadership, stereotypes, internalized racism, leadership as service, and issues in education for some historically underrepresented communities. The "Courageous Conversations" program now in place for two years in PPS is, according to PTP program director Deborah Cochrane, a good start, though modest. This is a training program for teachers and administrators developed by Pacific Educational Group to facilitate understanding and address the impact of systemic racism on student achievement. The Group feels that "systemic racism is the most devastating factor contributing to the diminished capacity of children, especially African American, Latino, and Native American Indian children, to achieve at the highest levels. This leads also to the fracturing of the community that nurtures and supports them."¹⁰⁷ Cochrane is pleased that the program is continuing for a second year. She feels it would be helpful to have some sort of evaluation built in, perhaps as part of teacher evaluations, to ensure that teachers are indeed using the cultural competencies they have been taught.¹⁰⁸

ACCESS is a PPS program for Talented and Gifted (TAG) students identified as the top 1% in academic achievement, those who "exceed" in testing materials. It is housed separately and teaches at a high level and rate. Recently PPS has begun reporting ACCESS scores separately from other scores, and students in

the program are showing higher gains than those without this specialized curriculum and instruction. In every case, from 4th to 8th grade, ACCESS students outperformed students who “exceeded” but were not in the program, except for a very slight dip in 5th grade reading. The tables show points gained by those students in PPS classrooms who “exceed” in testing as compared to those “exceeding” but taught in the ACCESS program.¹⁰⁹

On a national level, former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and his wife helped found and now chair America’s **Promise Alliance**, a nonprofit organization dedicated to drop-out prevention. Their plan is to have summit meetings of stakeholders to formulate a series of concrete steps to address factors driving student drop-out. Their ten-point plan includes:

- Support accurate graduation and drop-out data
- Establish early warning systems to support struggling students
- Provide adult advocates and student support
- Support parent engagement and individualized graduation plans
- Establish a rigorous college- and work- preparatory curriculum for high school graduation
- Provide support options for struggling students to meet rigorous expectations
- Raise compulsory school-age requirements under state laws
- Expand college-level learning opportunities in high school
- Focus the research and disseminate best practices
- Make increasing high school graduation and college and workforce readiness a national priority¹¹⁰



Conclusion

The committee recognized that Portland school districts are struggling to educate all their students and manage changes in expectations, requirements, and funding. Overcoming the differences of students' circumstances, experiences, and behaviors, while meeting a very wide range of needs, poses a formidable challenge to our schools. The extent of this diversity is both the challenge and the strength of our public education system.

It is encouraging that so many individuals, including

many who do not have children presently in school, and so many organizations, both public and private, are trying to find the keys to successful education for all students. Their ideas and focus often differ in how to allocate resources, identify best practices, and select organizational structures, but they all see public education as an institution worth their time and energy. Our community depends on educated citizens, and every child deserves an excellent public education.

Appendix 1: District Information

	Portland Public Schools	David Douglas School District	Parkrose School District
	DISTRICT OFFICES	DISTRICT OFFICES	DISTRICT OFFICES
	501 N Dixon	1500 SE 130 th	10636 NE Prescott
	Portland, OR 97227	Portland, OR 97233	Portland, OR 97220
	503.916.2000	503.252.2900	503.408.2100
	www.pps.k12.or.us	www.ddouglas.k12.or.us	www.parkrose.k12.or.us
Student ENROLLMENT*			
Elementary	25969	4,846	1610
K-8			
Middle	5156	2,490	801
High School	11052	3,294	1062
Other programs, charters, etc.	<u>4878</u>	_____	_____
NUMBER OF STUDENTS	47055	10,630	3473
Average General Fund Per Pupil Spending**	\$8,853	\$8,225	\$8,533
Average per pupil spending***	\$11,158	\$9,920	\$9,770
ETHNICITY: % of student body**			
African American	15%	10.50%	14%
Asian/Pacific Islands	11%	13.90%	20%
Hispanic	14%	20.40%	21%
Native American	2%	1.80%	2%
White	55%	53.40%	43%
Languages spoken	100	67	29
English language learners**	10%	23.70%	12%
Eligible for free/reduced lunch**	45%	73.20%	71%
Receive special education**	15%	12.90%	11%
TAG students***	13%	8%	4%
District NCLB rating**	DID NOT MEET	DID NOT MEET	DID NOT MEET
Employees**			
Administrators (FTE)	175.9	28.3	11
Teachers (FTE)	2,598.70	602.7	179.8
Educational Assistants (FTE)	729.8	158.1	67.1
Other Staff (FTE)	<u>1,823.70</u>	<u>379.8</u>	<u>117.2</u>
Number of employees	5328.1	1168.9	375.1

* October 2010 Enrollment from District or their website

** Figures from 2009-10 District Report Cards

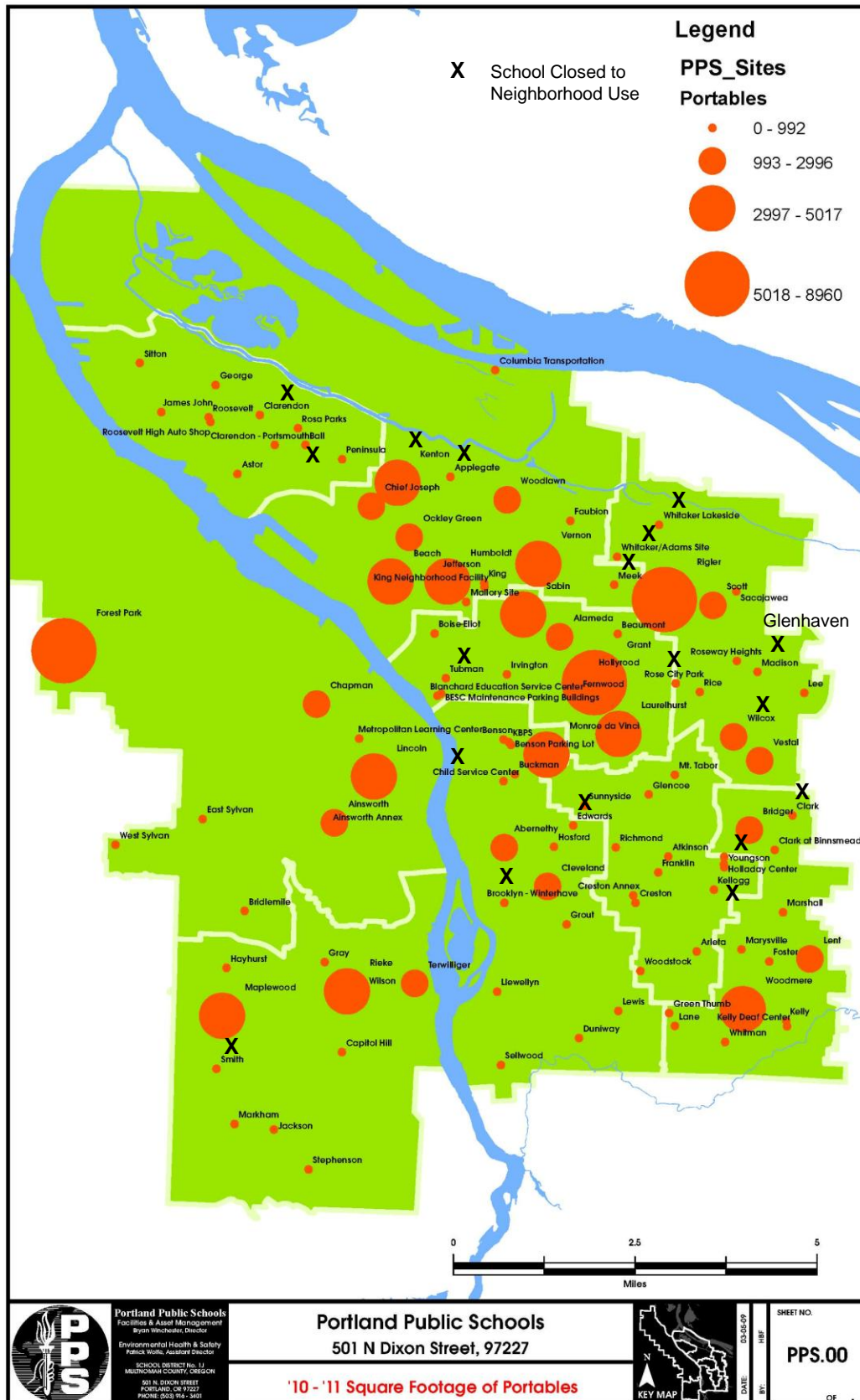
*** Open Books Project based on 2008-09 figures

Appendix 2: PPS Schools Closed to Neighborhood Use or Repurposed (Since 2000)

Adams High	5700 NE 39th	Closed in 1981 as a high school, utilized as Whitaker Middle School until 2001, closed and torn down as radon site ¹¹¹
Applegate	7650 N Commercial	Closed in 2005, students merged with Woodlawn ¹¹²
Ball	4221 N Willis	Closed in 2006, replaced by Rosa Parks in 2006, building sold ¹¹³
Brooklyn	3830 SE 14th	Closed in 2003, merged with Grout, now housing Winterhaven ¹¹⁴
Clarendon	9325 N Van Houten	Closed in 2006, merged with Portsmouth ¹¹⁵
Clark	1231 SE 92nd	Closed in 2007, merged with Binnsmead, now housing Creative Sciences ¹¹⁶
Edwards	1715 SE 32nd Pl	Closed in 2005, merged with Abernathy ¹¹⁷
Glenhaven	8020 NE Tillamook	Closed 2004 after housing Vocational Village 1991-2004, sold ¹¹⁸
Kellogg	3330 SE 69th	Closed in 2007 ¹¹⁹
Kenton	7528 N Fenwick	Closed in 2005, students merged with Chief Joseph ¹²⁰ , leased long-term to De La Salle North
Meek	4039 NE Alberta Ct	Closed in 2003, now houses Vocational Village ¹²¹
Rose City Park	2334 NE 57th	Closed in 2007, students merged with Gregory Heights ¹²²
Smith	8935 SW 52nd	Closed in 2005 ¹²³ , leased to Riverdale School District ¹²⁴
Tubman	2231 N Flint	Reconfigured in 2006 to Young Women's Academy for 7th to 12th grade girls ¹²⁵
Whitaker	5135 NE Columbia Blvd	Closed in 2005, students merged with Tubman ¹²⁶ , now leased to NAYA
Washington High	531 SE 14th	Closed in 1981 as a high school, closed in 2003 after housing other PPS services, now for sale ¹²⁷
Wilcox	833 NE 74th	Closed in 2001, students merged with Vestal ¹²⁸
Youngson	2704 SE 71st	Closed in 2001 ¹²⁹

Appendix 3: PPS Portable Sites and Schools Closed to Neighborhood Use (Since 2000)

1 Portable with 2 Classrooms = Approximately 900 square feet



Glossary

AP	Advanced Placement Classes: courses that prepare students for national examinations administered by the College Board. A passing grade (3, 4, or 5) on the AP exam in a specific subject is accepted by many colleges and universities as an equivalent to passing an introductory college-level course in that subject. International Baccalaureate (IB) classes are at a similar level to AP classes.
AYP	Adequate yearly progress, measured by federal government
BESC	Blanchard Education Service Center, 501 N. Dixon Street, the main administration building for Portland Public Schools 1J
CAC	Citizens Advisory Committee, groups giving input into local school decisions
Cohort	The cohort graduation rate now required by the federal government compares the number of students who entered high school anywhere with the number who graduated in Oregon four years later. It is adjusted for students who move, emigrate, or die. Students who receive alternative credentials such as a modified diploma or GED now count as non-graduates or dropouts. Before 2009, Oregon reported dropout rates by dividing the number of students receiving diplomas by the number of students enrolled at the beginning of the year (National Center for Education Statistics rate or NCES rate). Students who obtain alternative credentials did not count as dropouts. Oregon will also report a five-year cohort graduation rate.
CPPS	Community and Parents for Public Schools, a network of parents and community members working for quality public schools
DD	David Douglas School District Number 40
ELL	English Language Learners, those students learning English as a second language
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a 1965 federal grant program for use in low-income schools
ESL	English as a Second Language, a course of study for English language learners
FAPE	Free and Appropriate Public Education, a federal guarantee that children with disabilities can be educated in public schools
FTE	Full time equivalencies, a system school districts use for converting part-time and full-time school positions into school allotments
GED	Variously known as general equivalency diploma, general education diploma, or graduate equivalency degree, it can be earned by those without a high school graduation diploma by passing a five-subject test. A High School Equivalency Diploma will then be awarded.
HQT	Highly Qualified Teachers are those who have a bachelor's degree, are licensed by the state in their area of teaching and exhibit competence to teach in their field
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Act, federal legislation in 1990 stating that every public school student with a disability adversely affecting learning ability was entitled to a "free and appropriate education."
IEP	Individual Education Program, a plan crafted by parents, teachers, and an evaluation expert for each student covered under IDEA, and agreed to by the school district
LLP	Limited Language Proficiency Group, those enrolled in ESL classes
LSAC	Local School Advisory Committee, a committee with input into local school decisions

NAYA	Native American Youth And Family Center, formerly known as Native American Youth Association, a local group giving support to Native American students and families
NCLB	No Child Left Behind, a federal grant program designed to raise the academic achievement of disadvantaged students
OAKS	Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, a criterion-referenced assessment instrument based on the Oregon content standards, with sections in mathematics, reading/literature, science, and social studies. Its purposes are to provide information on individual student achievement, to provide information for policy decisions by the legislature, the governor, the State Board of Education, and local school districts, to support instructional program improvement efforts, and to inform the public about student achievement in Oregon schools.
Parkrose	Parkrose School District 3
PPS	Portland Public School District 1J
PPS Equity Fund	The one-third of money raised over \$10,000 by local foundations which must be shared within a lower income school pool
PSF	Portland Schools Foundation, a community-based organization mobilizing ideas, leadership, public support, and resources to raise funds to ensure a world-class education for all children in Portland public schools
PTP	Portland Teachers Program is designed to recruit and help prepare culturally competent teachers for Portland and Beaverton school districts, with an emphasis on historically underrepresented groups in the teaching profession
PTSA	Parent Teacher Associations which have a student component
SEI	Self-Enhancement, Inc., a program of mentoring and support for students at risk of academic failure, in use and partially supported by PPS
SES	Socio-Economic Status, a category designed for lower income students within the school system. It is identified primarily by inclusion in the free or reduced price lunch program, and is used to examine whether equal education opportunities are reaching this group and whether their academic needs are being met.
TAG	Talented and Gifted; students so identified by Oregon mandate as the top scoring 3% of students. They are to be taught at their own level and rate and have their own educational plan prepared by teachers and parents.

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students taking the reading test in fourth grade during the 2009-10 academic year, 397 were Black and 1678 were White (not of Hispanic origin). Of the 1678 White students, 1562 “met” or “exceeded” the cut-off score. So 76% of the Black students and 93% of the White students met or exceeded the cut score. Some writers might describe this as a difference of 17 percentage points but it is not a percentage of either score. It is a difference in the percentage of each group that surmounted the bar. The mean score of the 397 Black students was 215.1 and the mean score of the 1678 White students was 226.4. The difference between the two means was 11.3 points. The average gain of these two groups of students from third to fourth grade was 6.6 and 6.7 points respectively, so the difference in their mean test scores was the equivalent of between one and two years of learning, but both groups gained approximately the same amount during their fourth grade year. Among those fourth grade students taking the reading test, Black students who “exceeded” based on their third grade test score gained 2.5 points and White students who “exceeded” based on their third grade test scores gained 4.7 points. Portland Public Schools, Mean Test Score Gains by Prior Benchmark Status by Ethnicity (2009-10), Retrieved Nov. 7, 2010 from http://inside.pps.k12.or.us/depts-c/rne/results/2010/16/distr_e_16_ethn_0110.pdf

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