

To: Bob McKean, Superintendent
From: Chris Russo, Assistant Superintendent, Teaching & Learning
Subject: 8th Grade Japan Research Residency (JRR) Recommendations
Date: March 13, 2017

NOTE: This recommendation does not move the JRR trip to the summer. Also this recommendation specifically addresses concerns expressed about the JRR program only. If any piece of the recommendation affects other like programs those respective communities will be fully informed and engaged.

BACKGROUND

In response to a parent complaint, staff was asked to look into the potential negative impacts of the 8th Grade Japan Research Residency (JRR) at Mt. Tabor Middle School, and if necessary, to develop recommendations to mitigate or eliminate any negative impacts.

(The JRR is an optional two-week study abroad program developed and organized by Oya No Kai, the parent non-profit organization that supports activities and programming for the K-12 Japanese Magnet Program (JMP) at Richmond Elementary, Mt. Tabor Middle School and Grant High School.)

The following informed staff recommendations:

- 1) A preliminary summary report developed by OTL staff outlining the history of the JRR, the potential negative impacts associated with holding the travel study program during the school year and potential solutions to help mitigate any negative impacts on the larger Mt. Tabor Middle School community.
- 2) A Mt. Tabor Middle School listening session process facilitated by the Office of Equity & Partnerships, which involved representative stakeholders from each of the three program strands that co-exist at Mt. Tabor along with school and central office administration. The objective of this process was to (a) gain a collective understanding of the pros & cons of the 8th Grade Japan Research Residency (JRR) taking place in April, (b) brainstorm win-win solutions, and (c) provide the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching & Learning with this information for consideration.
- 3) Information received through written correspondence as well as face-to-face meetings and Board of Education public comment.
- 4) Further research conducted internally with our Human Resources, General Counsel and Risk Management departments.

The following Board policies and administrative directives provided guidance for staff recommendations:

- 1) [6.50.020-P Foreign Study Programs](#)
- 2) [6.50.021-AD Foreign Travel - Study Programs](#)
- 3) [6.50.011-AD Field Trips](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS

There were three key concerns raised due to the timing of the JRR at Mt. Tabor Middle School as outlined in the complaint.

- 1) The safety of all participants in the JRR and who is ultimately held responsible for the safety of all participants
- 2) The quality of instruction for the Mt. Tabor students who do not participate in the JRR
- 3) Equity issues that arise as this unique learning opportunity is only available to some students in the Mt. Tabor community and not others

In order to address those key concerns, the staff recommend the following:

1. ***Acknowledge the JRR as a “district-facilitated” foreign travel-study program.*** In accordance with the Foreign Travel-Study Programs administrative directive (6.50.021-AD), the JRR most closely resembles a program “facilitated” by PPS where responsibility for development, planning, recruitment, management, funding and risk management for the program lies with *Oya No Kai*.

In order to bring the program into compliance with this policy, the following changes should be strategically and thoughtfully implemented:

- (a) PPS teachers or administrators can no longer attend the JRR as PPS employees. If a PPS teacher or administrator wanted to participate in the program during the school year, they would need to take a personal leave from work. In the case that they are taking unpaid days off of work, *Oya No Kai* could explore other options to offset compensation. Principals and/or Senior Directors would need to approve leaves of absence for staff or administrators. PPS will pay for the cost of substitutes upon leave approval. Only up to one school administrator may have permission to attend the JRR.
- (b) Attendance policies would apply as normal for students on the JRR.
- (c) All marketing and recruiting for the JRR would need to clearly indicate that it is **not** a PPS endorsed program, and that any PPS staff participating in the program are **not** working on behalf of PPS.
- (d) *Oya No Kai* would assume all responsibility for the safety of all JRR participants.
- (e) The JRR **would continue** to be an optional program. PPS would need to ensure that JMP students who choose not to attend the JRR would have access to a high quality curriculum before, during and after the JRR. The Office of Teaching and Learning will provide yearly funding in the form of extended hours for teachers to help develop/refine this curriculum in

additional to offering direct district support for the non-Japanese immersion track during the time when the JRR occurs.

- 2. *Develop and implement a school-wide plan to ensure high quality curriculum and instruction are available to all students before, during and after the JRR.*** Every year school administration will direct planning well in advance of the JRR trip to ensure that (a) teachers are aware of diminished class sizes that will occur during the JRR, (b) teachers create lesson plans that leverage smaller class sizes and opportunities for personalized instruction, and (c) opportunities exist for teachers to collaborate before, during and after the JRR to promote best practices. School administration will also ensure that communication to parents occurs both collectively to the whole school as well as directly from each classroom teacher regarding how instruction may look different before, during and after the JRR for their child.
- 3. *Engage families and staff from all three programs at Mt. Tabor Middle School to build a school climate that is inclusive of all students and families.*** Many of the equity concerns that were brought forward center on a feeling of “haves” and “have-nots”. In order to build cross-program relationships, build collective understanding of racial equity, and ultimately build a more inclusive community, The Office of Equity & Partnerships will provide support for developing a School Climate Plan and for the forming of any subsequent committees that reflects the beliefs and needs of the entire Mt. Tabor Middle School community.

In order to address more system-wide impacts, the staff recommends the following should be considered:

- 4. *Review and edit policies to provide more specific guidance for staff.***
 - (1) The Board should consider its position on different types of trips and if applicable, change policy language to reflect their thinking. Clarification is needed regarding (a) what criteria drive approval of exceptions to having trips occur during the school year (b) definitions of field trip vs. travel-study program (c) size limits for field trips and (d) maximum duration of programs (f) who has final approval on travel study programs.
 - (2) The Board should take into consideration and understand the mechanics of how foundations, non-profits or similar institutions through fundraising provide unique opportunities for certain groups of students when addressing future concerns surrounding equity of access to programming.
- ❖ *The staff is committed to open and thoughtful discourse and input prior to the implementation of any of said recommendations.*
 - ❖ *The program, or specific aspects of the JRR, will continue “as is” until the recommendation(s) can be implemented.*

