



Recommendations are first big step in structural change for schools

The District-wide Boundary Review Advisory Committee (DBRAC) formally presented to Superintendent Carole Smith its first set of recommendations for balancing enrollment. Balancing enrollment addresses over crowding at some schools and under-enrollment at others. The goal is to allow for enough students at each school to support enough teachers to offer a strong range of classes and electives for all students.

Summary of recommendations

The committee is recommending:

- That PPS return to a primarily K-5/middle school model, with clear criteria to identify any schools that would remain K-8s.
- That middle schools also meet certain criteria to support a strong program, while retaining the benefits of K-8s where possible.
- That the reconfiguration of most K-8 schools not occur until Fall 2017 to allow time to plan, staff and prepare the school buildings.
- That boundary and program changes be made on the West Side and take effect in Fall 2016 to resolve overcrowding at several schools.

Why change from K-8s to K-5/middle schools?

The DBRAC concluded that a K-5/middle school model was the best way to insure that all students have access to a robust academic program. This includes core subjects like language arts, science and math, at a variety of levels, and electives such as art, music, PE, world language and more that help students succeed.

- PPS determined that K-8s should have enough students to provide three sections per grade level (three 6th grade classrooms, three 7th grade classrooms, etc.) to offer a strong program. Yet few of the K-8s have this number of students. In some cases, the buildings are too small to fit that many in the first place.
- Meanwhile, middle schools have six or more sections per grade level, affording lots of different classes for students to take.
- Students of color are more likely to be in an under-enrolled K-8 and white students are more likely to be in a large K-8 or a middle school, leading to students of color having less academic opportunities than white students.

Recommendations on K-8 reconfiguration

DBRAC is recommending that schools that remain K-8s must have sufficient enrollment and space, in one building, to support three sections per grade at all levels, while not draining so many students from surrounding schools that those schools can no longer offer strong programs.

The committee also identified exceptions to this rule. These include:

- Faubion PK-8, due to the unique instructional and partnership model there with Concordia University.
- Focus schools such as Odyssey and Winterhaven that are undergoing a separate review.
- Skyline K-8, which serves a small and remote population in Northwest Portland.

Ockley Green Middle School

DBRAC recommended that Ockley Green, the 4th-through-8th-grade half of the dual campus Chief Joseph/Ockley Green K-8 School, become a middle school in Fall 2016, rather than waiting for Fall 2017. Ockley Green Middle School would draw students from surrounding K-8's, which would become K-5s. Jefferson community leaders outlined the school's and the community's readiness for the change.

Criteria for middle schools

The committee attempted to strike a balance between large middle schools that would offer the greatest choice of electives and smaller middle schools that would also offer course choices while also maintaining closer proximity to neighborhoods.

The DBRAC recommended that middle schools incorporate benefits of the K-8 model with such approaches as:

- Sixth grade academies that allow entering students to root in a middle school.
- Partnerships between the middle and feeder K-5 schools that help students and families build community across the K-8 continuum.
- Relationship building between students and staff.
- Transportation planning that eases the burden on siblings and families traveling between the two school levels.

West Side boundaries, program change

The DBRAC approved key steps to relieve overcrowding at Chapman, Capitol Hill and Hayhurst elementary schools and Lincoln High School in fall 2016.

Recommendations include:

- Moving the West Side Spanish Immersion program from Ainsworth Elementary to the East Sylvan building; retaining the feeder pattern into Sylvan Middle School and Lincoln High School.
- Moving the northwestern portion of Bridlemile to Ainsworth and reassigning the resulting smaller Bridlemile attendance area to Gray Middle School and Wilson High School.
- Moving portions of Chapman's northwestern and southeastern boundaries to Ainsworth.
- Moving Odyssey from Hayhurst, where it is currently co-located, to the currently vacant Smith School in Southwest Portland in Fall 2017. Allows a year for upgrades to the long-closed Smith building for planning how to maintain the program and services at Hayhurst with fewer students.
- Shifting Maplewood Elementary to feed Jackson, instead of Gray, Middle School.
- Moving a portion of the Capitol Hill boundary to Stephenson Elementary.
- Retaining Skyline School as a K-8 feeding to Lincoln and existing boundaries at all other West Side schools save for a small portion of Maplewood that moves to Hayhurst.

Next steps

February/March: The superintendent will make final recommendations to the school board. The board will deliberate and then vote on this first set of changes.

Spring 2016: The DBRAC will reconvene assist PPS in setting boundaries and feeder patterns for the reconfigured K-8 schools. The school board will also consider and vote on these recommendations. The vote is expected before the end of the school year, giving families certainty about their school assignments a year in advance.

Fall 2016: West Side boundaries and program changes would take effect. District policy says that students affected by a boundary change, and their younger siblings, can remain at their current school through the highest grade. Fifth and 8th graders whose middle or high school assignments shift due to a boundary change, however, attend the new middle or high school in the fall that the changes take effect.

2016-17: Planning, staffing and building improvements take place to prepare for K-8 reconfiguration.

Fall 2017: Students begin attending newly configured K-5 and middle schools.

History

District-wide boundary review was the answer to the school district's previously piecemeal efforts to balance enrollment between schools. It became the K-8 version of High School System Design, which was implemented in 2011 to ensure that student enrollment supported a strong core program in every high school regardless of zip code.

The DBRAC is made up of 26 community volunteers, including experts in urban planning, demography, housing and real estate; leaders of diverse communities; parents and principals, teachers and PPS administrators. The committee's first set of recommendations comes after 14 months of research, analysis, modeling and public engagement, including 18 committee meetings.

Partners essential to effective process

Advising PPS in this effort was the Portland State University Center for Public Policy.

Community partners included the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon, Black Parent Initiative, Center for Intercultural Organizing, Communities & Parents for Public Schools, Latino Network, NAYA Family Center, Neighborhood House and Portland Council PTA. PPS is grateful to its partners for their collaboration and leadership on 18 community meetings across the city in multiple languages, including meetings with teachers, principals and students.

More than 4,000 people attended the meetings, learned about enrollment balancing scenarios and shared their opinions. Hundreds more engaged via Facebook and Twitter town halls, an online survey and testimony submitted to the DBRAC via email.

Learn more, comment

www.pps.net , Click "Growing Great Schools." Email to ppsgrows@pps.net . Stay tuned for other opportunities for public comment.