

SACET Recommendations to Align the Enrollment & Transfer System and the Racial Educational Equity Policy for Portland Public Schools

October 28, 2014

Table of Contents

I.	Executive Summary	p. 3
II.	Core Belief: Neighborhood schools are the heart of the community	p. 6
III.	Recent Findings	p. 7
IV.	Recommendations	p. 14
V.	Appendix	p. 29

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Superintendent formed the Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Enrollment and Transfer (SACET) in 2008 to guide her as she seeks to improve equity, program access and educational achievement for all students.

The 12 men and women on the standing committee live in neighborhoods across the district and represent a diverse sample of the city's racial composition, including people who are African American, South Asian, Pacific Islander, West Indian, Middle Eastern, Latina, Caribbean, White and Multiracial. SACET includes PPS alumni, parents, educators and community members.

In March 2013, Superintendent Carole Smith issued the following charge to SACET:

1. Recommend revisions to enrollment and transfer policies to improve alignment with Portland Public Schools' strategic framework and Racial Educational Equity Policy.
2. Participate in a district-wide school boundary review process. This ongoing process is a joint project of Portland Public Schools and the Portland State University Center for Public Service.

Because SACET provided feedback on high school transfer issues in 2009, we focused this review on K-8 programs and schools. In keeping with the Superintendent's charge we focused on transfers covered by policy 4.10.051 and focus options as described in policy 6.10.022.

Awareness of the racial educational achievement gap permeated our work. This gap is evidenced by the statistics shaping the Superintendent's top three academic priorities:

- A. Boosting early literacy: Just 61.3 percent of the district's historically underserved students meet the third-grade reading benchmark compared to 75.3 percent of all district third-graders.
- B. Reducing exclusionary discipline rates: African-American students are four times more likely to be expelled or suspended than White students.
- C. Graduating more students on time: The district's four-year graduation rate stands at 59 percent for historically underserved students and 67 percent for the district.

In recognition of the pervasive achievement and opportunity gaps, we have applied the Racial Equity Lens throughout our discussions. We studied policies, programs, practices and decisions and asked if they ignored or worsened existing disparities,

destabilized the system as a whole, or produced other unintended consequences. It is clear that enrollment and transfer policies and practices have differing repercussions depending on racial group.

In June 2014, SACET issued a report that provided extensive analysis of the historical context and current state of the enrollment and transfer system. We outlined preliminary recommendations, and described additional actions necessary to complete our charge, including data simulations and additional outreach. This report presents final recommendations that have been informed by that work, and is meant as a supplement to, not a replacement of, SACET's earlier work. This report builds on those findings, incorporating what we learned over the last five months and sharpening our recommendations in ways that we think will rectify inequities for historically underserved students.

SACET's process

We have met over 40 times in the last 18 months. We held panels with neighborhood and focus option school principals, and we heard from the district's dual-language immersion and special education departments. We also held several meetings with the district-wide boundary review team from the PSU Center for Public Service.

We spent the summer revisiting our preliminary recommendations, conducting data modeling, and listening to additional families whom the district has often neglected to include in its decisions. We found it crucial to engage groups that have historically been disenfranchised in Portland Public Schools' policy making. Over the past year, we've held listening sessions with African-American, Latino, Native American, Asian and Pacific Islander families, as well as families of students in special education. SACET is grateful to the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), Self Enhancement Inc (SEI), Portland African American Leadership Forum (PAALF), Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA), and Latino Network for the planning, outreach and facilitation of the listening sessions, which drew in total approximately 70 parents, students and community members. While we recognize that is a limited sample, participants' perspectives were important to gather and might not have been heard in more typical settings.

Destabilized schools, program inequities, exacerbated segregation

As reported in our preliminary recommendations, we find that the district's enrollment and transfer system has, over time, destabilized the school system; helped create inequities in educational programs at the K-5, K-8 and middle school levels; and exacerbated patterns of segregation by race and class. Further, we have identified barriers in the lottery system that perpetuate socioeconomic disparities and that conflict with the Racial Educational Equity Policy by perpetuating racial disparities.

Our recommendations seek to address these findings and, in keeping with the Racial Educational Equity Policy, to foster "welcoming environments that reflect and support the racial and ethnic diversity of the student population and community," and improve access to "high-quality and culturally relevant instruction, curriculum, support, facilities and other educational resources." In an increasingly diverse district, SACET realizes that this is an imperative at all schools.

Overview of recommendations

All of our recommendations are grounded in our core belief that neighborhood schools should be the foundation of the Portland Public School system and that district leaders must forge strong, accessible schools in every neighborhood.

We recommend:

1. Ending neighborhood-to-neighborhood lottery transfers.
2. Strengthening the petition transfer process.
3. Implementing a quality review process for focus option schools.
4. Continuing the district's support for dual-language immersion programs.
5. Modifying the focus option lottery system.
6. Providing greater enrollment stability for children receiving special education services.

We have tried to accommodate members' diverse views in our deliberations. This report and our recommendations reflect consensus but not unanimity. The degree of member support is noted for each recommendation.

Just as the current system has had many unintended consequences, every recommendation carries with it the possibility of unintended consequences. We have weighed those to the best of our ability. We strongly recommend that SACET or another body regularly monitors the implementation of these recommendations to identify and address inequities before they become entrenched.

This report is supported by 12 of 12 committee members.

CORE BELIEF: NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS ARE THE HEART OF A COMMUNITY

Our committee holds a number of guiding beliefs (see appendix). But we want to call attention to our most fundamental belief: All students should have access to a high-quality and appropriate education close to their home. The same belief is also laid out in the Educational Options Policy, which states: “The Board is committed to providing a quality school near every student’s home and an appropriate learning environment for all students, including those with special needs, within their home cluster.”

However, the evidence listed on Page 1 of this report makes it clear that not all students are benefitting from such programs now. Furthermore, one out of every three PPS students attends a school outside their neighborhood, and 10 percent of the district’s students seek new transfers through the lottery each year, pulling them farther from home, not closer to it.

We are aware that families can choose schools, including private and charter options, in many ways. Some can buy or rent a house – or fraudulently claim the address of a friend or family member – near the school they desire. Others will go through the processes established by the district. We heard at a NAYA listening session this summer a sentiment that echoed across all listening sessions about all kinds of school choices: “When a community hears about a supportive school, families try to get their kids in there.” This was especially important for families of color who have not been well served by the district.

Still, we want the district to design a system where the color of a student’s skin does not predict success, as it currently does. The system should ensure student success, regardless of how they learn, where they live, what language they speak or their economic status. We call on the district to ensure every school has adequate resources to provide an enriched curriculum, high quality, culturally competent teachers and principals, and fully inclusive classrooms for students with disabilities and exceptional needs.

The system we desire will give families fewer reasons to leave their neighborhood schools. Culturally responsive and authentic outreach is also necessary to draw community members into long-term, positive relationships with their neighborhood schools.

We understand that the district has been through a period of enormous change in recent years in response to an 18 percent, 12-year enrollment slide and diminished revenues. Over 16 years, 20 schools closed. Grade structures changed at 32 schools; boundaries shifted between 44 schools; choice programs were added or significantly reduced or expanded at 23 schools.

Today, enrollment is growing and funding has stabilized. PSU forecasts enrollment will push past 50,000 students by 2025. Today, some schools have too many students, and others, not enough. Some factors, such as a lack of affordable housing, will always be out of the district's control. But we believe the district has an obligation to use mechanisms it does control, such as school boundaries and transfer options, to design a more equitable educational system for all students. SACET urges the Superintendent to use the upcoming district-wide boundary review process, along with the recommendations included in this report, as a catalyst for cultivating the kind of schools that will earn back the trust of all families, especially those who have been historically underserved.

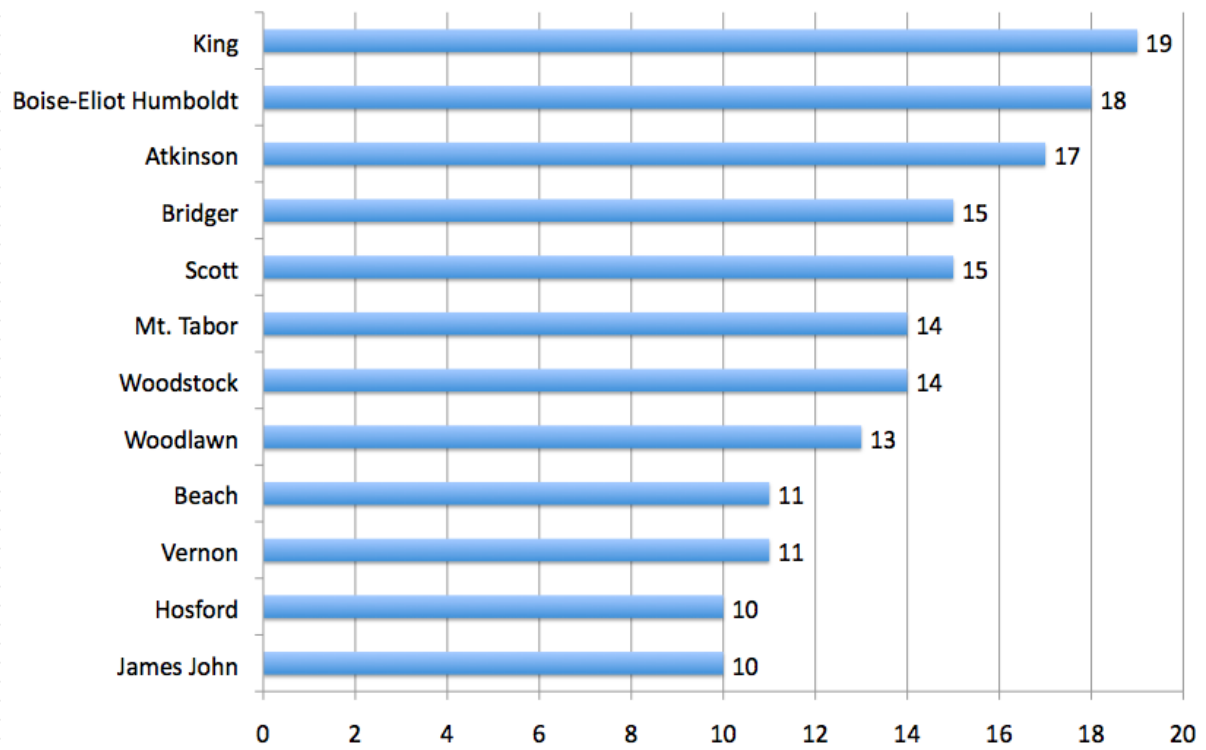
RECENT FINDINGS

Information we gathered since our preliminary report confirms: program offerings are largely determined by enrollment numbers, which are in turn a product of neighborhood size and transfers. While it's true that most families send their children to neighborhood schools, at some schools, the volume of students transferring out has a visible negative impact on programs. What's more, the schools with high transfer rates out tend to be the ones that serve the most students of color as well as the most economically disadvantaged students.

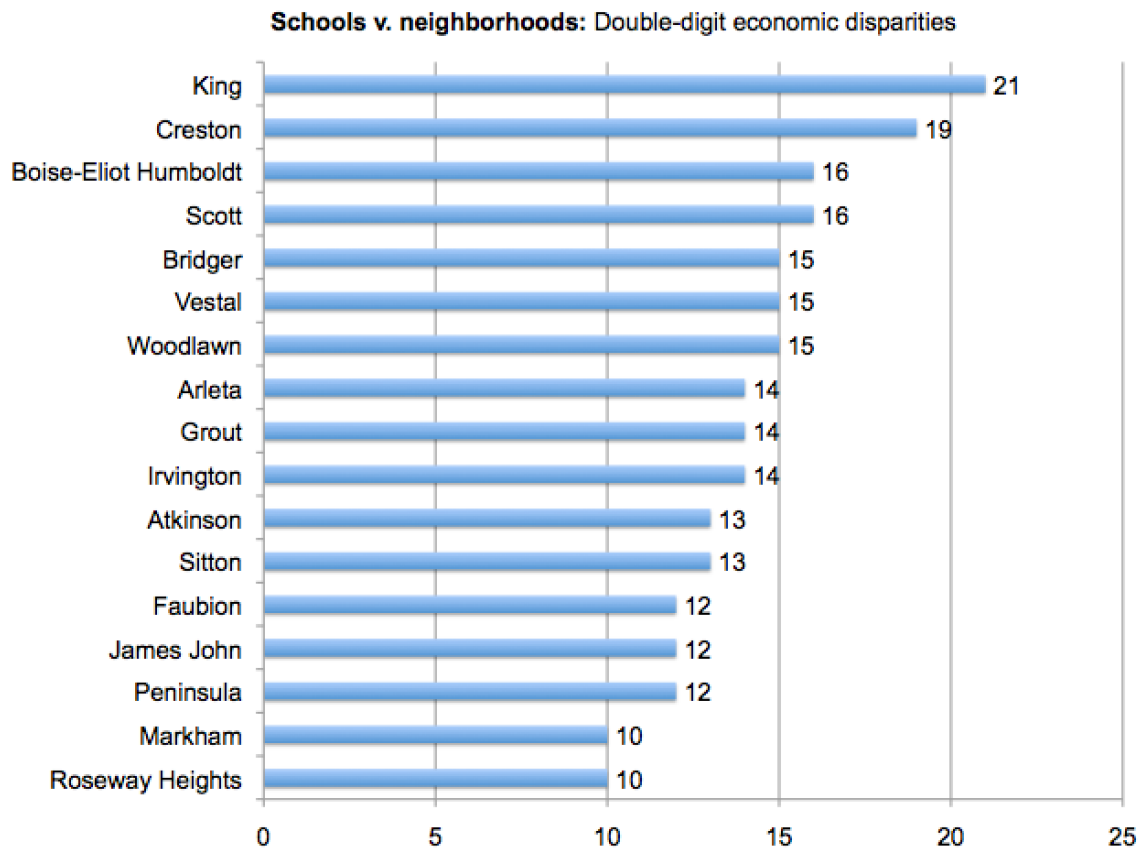
Relationship between school demographics and enrollment and transfer system

SACET found that the demographic makeup of the student body in most schools is reasonably consistent with that of its neighborhood. But in a subset of schools, we see a substantial difference between the school and neighborhood along lines of race, poverty, and sometimes, both. For example, King K-8 School in Northeast Portland has a student body demographic that has 19 percent more students of color than the demographic of students who reside in the King catchment area. This statistic is due both to students who transfer out of King to other neighborhood schools, charters and focus options, and to transfers into King from students who live in other neighborhoods. When compared to the neighborhood school demographic, transfers out have been disproportionately White students, and transfers in have been disproportionately students of color.

Schools v. neighborhoods: Double-digit racial disparities



Percent difference between the share of enrolled students of color compared with the share of students of color residing in the neighborhood



Percent difference between the share of enrolled low-income students compared with the share of low-income students residing in the neighborhood.

This data has reinforced and clarified the findings we reported in June. We see that potential changes to the transfer system may bring enrollment at some schools more in line with the population of the neighborhoods they are meant to serve. However, SACET also recognizes that these steps alone will not offset the fact that different neighborhood compositions, along with different school building sizes, are likely to result in inherently different opportunities at neighborhood schools across the district.

Current system destabilizes schools and contributes to program inequities

Reviewing data and listening to families reinforced the extensive evidence offered in our preliminary report. We find that the enrollment and transfer system feeds some schools and bleeds others of the predictable enrollment that is key to providing equitable access to the high-quality instruction, curriculum, support, and other educational resources called for by the Racial Educational Equity Policy.

When students transfer out of their neighborhood school, public money follows them. Enrollment at the schools on the losing end of the transfer equation often falls far short of what the district considers the minimum necessary to provide “adequate staffing and programming across all grade levels.” Private money also follows students because wealthy families can raise it to augment staffing and programs at their schools through foundations. Schools with relatively low enrollment and concentrated poverty offer fewer resources and programs than those with higher enrollment and little poverty.

Over time, schools with weak programming attract even fewer neighborhood families. This loss has been particularly acute for a number of K-8 schools at the middle-grade level and schools in gentrifying neighborhoods. Low enrollment in grades six through eight means students are exposed to far fewer curricular, elective and athletic options than students in comprehensive middle schools enjoy. “It is bigger than the transfer policy,” one community member told us at a listening session this summer. “It shouldn’t take White kids for electives to come to a school.”

Factors driving school choice

Our listening sessions over the summer reinforced and illuminated themes that were visible from the data we reviewed. We learned a lot about what drives families to choose one school over another. We also learned what limits their ability to choose a different school.

To begin, we learned that many families were not aware that a transfer process existed, knowing only of their assigned neighborhood school option. Families who are aware they have other choices make decisions about where their children attend school based, in part, on how they perceive school staff values them. Parents talked about the importance of having their children attend schools that are welcoming, where they would see other children who looked like them and shared their culture, and where they would be known and looked after. “I am a single parent and need those caring people,” said a participant at one session.

Next, families raised concerns about gentrification, an issue that has been of concern to our committee for some time. Historically in Portland, African-Americans were confined to North and Northeast neighborhoods through redlining and other mechanisms. Eventually, housing prices and rents increased, eviction rates rose and rentals were converted to condos. Neighborhood standards for architecture, landscaping, noise and nuisance changed. All of these factors pushed out many economically disadvantaged

families of all races, replacing them with young singles and couples, and the neighborhood demographics became wealthier and Whiter.

SACET did not assess the overall benefits or harms of gentrification, but worked to understand the interplay between gentrification and the enrollment and transfer system. We recognize a dynamic tension exists between these two forces, which impacts racial groups differently. Data reveals that wealthier (and often, White) families *move into* the historically African American communities of North and Northeast Portland and then *choose out* by transferring their children to schools outside the neighborhood. On the flip side, the same system forces families of color and economically disadvantaged families to *move out* to more affordable neighborhoods, but provides a way to *choose in* by transferring to historically African American schools. Some community members explained that school transfers allow them to remain connected with communities that share their history and values, and expressed they fears that transfer limits would contribute to the loss of those connections.

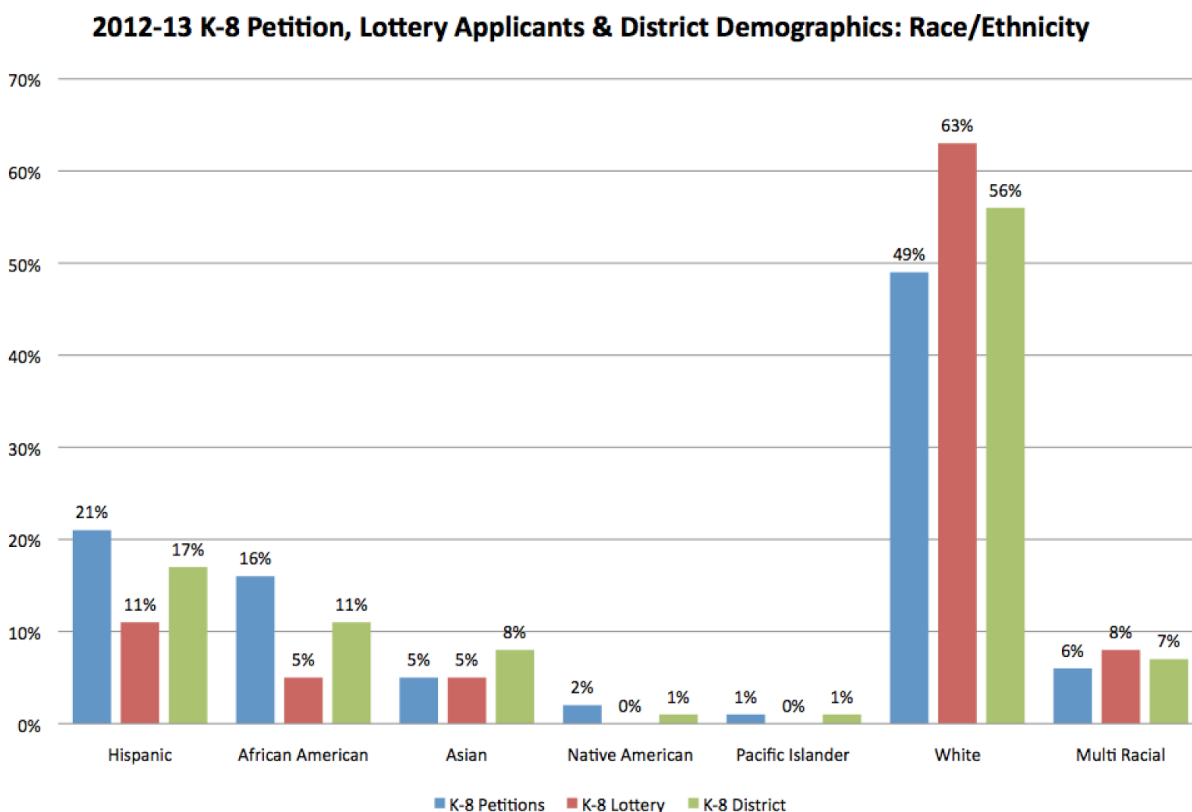
While our committee has been focused on transfers inside the district, we heard at every listening session about the difficulties of families who move even farther away due to the rise in housing prices, and then attempt to navigate the bureaucratic process for transferring across district lines. In conclusion, SACET should look at the issue of inter-district transfers, given that this is a real concern for families of color and economically disadvantaged families.

Next, proximity matters to parents. They want to be close to a supportive network of family and friends. Parents also value keeping children together at the same school. Finally, families are drawn to language immersion because it provides a program where teachers affirm language and culture. PPS should be flexible and agile when locating dual-language programs so that emerging bilingual students will have equitable access in the future, even if they are priced out of their current neighborhood or district.

Factors limiting school choice

The enrollment and transfer system is complicated and poses many barriers. As mentioned, many families represented at listening sessions did not know about the transfer process, while those who did described the process as confusing, time-consuming and inhospitable.

Data shows that lower percentages of families of color and economically disadvantaged families use the annual lottery to request transfers when compared to the petition process.



This may be because the timing of the lottery requires families to begin thinking in September about where their child should attend school the following year. Families who don't expect to make school choice decisions so early may miss the lottery entirely. Families who attempt to apply may be limited by the fact that the online application is in English only. Paper applications are available at the district office and in schools in five out of the 91 current languages spoken in the district. We heard from emerging bilingual families that their older children completed lottery transfer applications on their behalf.

Some families said unwelcoming school environments, disproportionate discipline of students of color and persistent achievement disparities made them distrust the school system – and by extension, the enrollment and transfer system. District employees losing their paperwork or denying transfers compounded the distrust. Some participants admitted to falsifying their address to enter a school. “Figure out a better way,” one asked, “so people can go where they are comfortable without having to lie.”

Currently, the pool of lottery applicants tends to be disproportionately White and not living in poverty. During deliberations about how to increase diversity at focus option schools, which fill most of their slots through the lottery, SACET noted the importance of the current priority for co-enrolled siblings. The lottery now puts the siblings of students who've already been granted a transfer first in line. Maintaining the current level of sibling priority for focus options that are already disproportionately White and middle- to upper class will undermine other efforts to increase access for historically underserved families.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The actions called for below are necessary, but they are not sufficient to address our fundamental belief that all students should have access to a high-quality and appropriate education close to their home. Only systemic improvements to PPS will accomplish that goal. SACET recommends the district set high standards for all schools and impose consequences for not meeting them. In the meantime, the actions we recommend will move the enrollment and transfer system in the right direction as the district undertakes other initiatives toward this goal.

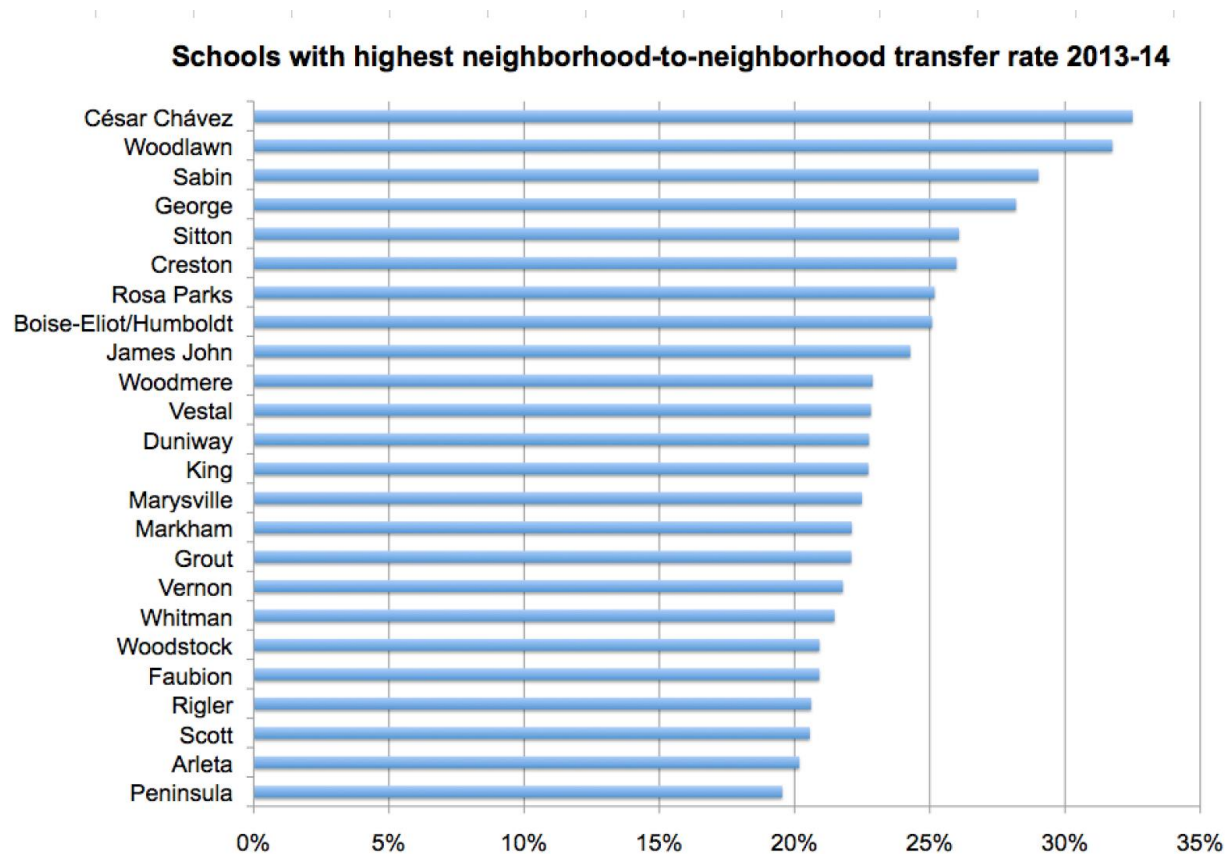
Recommendation One: End neighborhood-to-neighborhood lottery transfers

As demonstrated by the chart below, a relatively small number of students transfer between neighborhood schools each year. However, when we apply the Racial Equity Lens to the cumulative effects of those decisions, we see that lottery transfers to neighborhood schools have disproportionately affected schools that serve higher proportions of historically underserved students.

K-8 neighborhood-to-neighborhood lottery transfers

Year	Applied	Approved	Approve %
2011-12	705	524	74%
2012-13	478	340	71%
2013-14	425	338	80%

While district-wide, 16 percent of elementary and K-8 students and 13 percent of middle school students attend a neighborhood school other than their own, the rates are very different at a sub-set of schools.



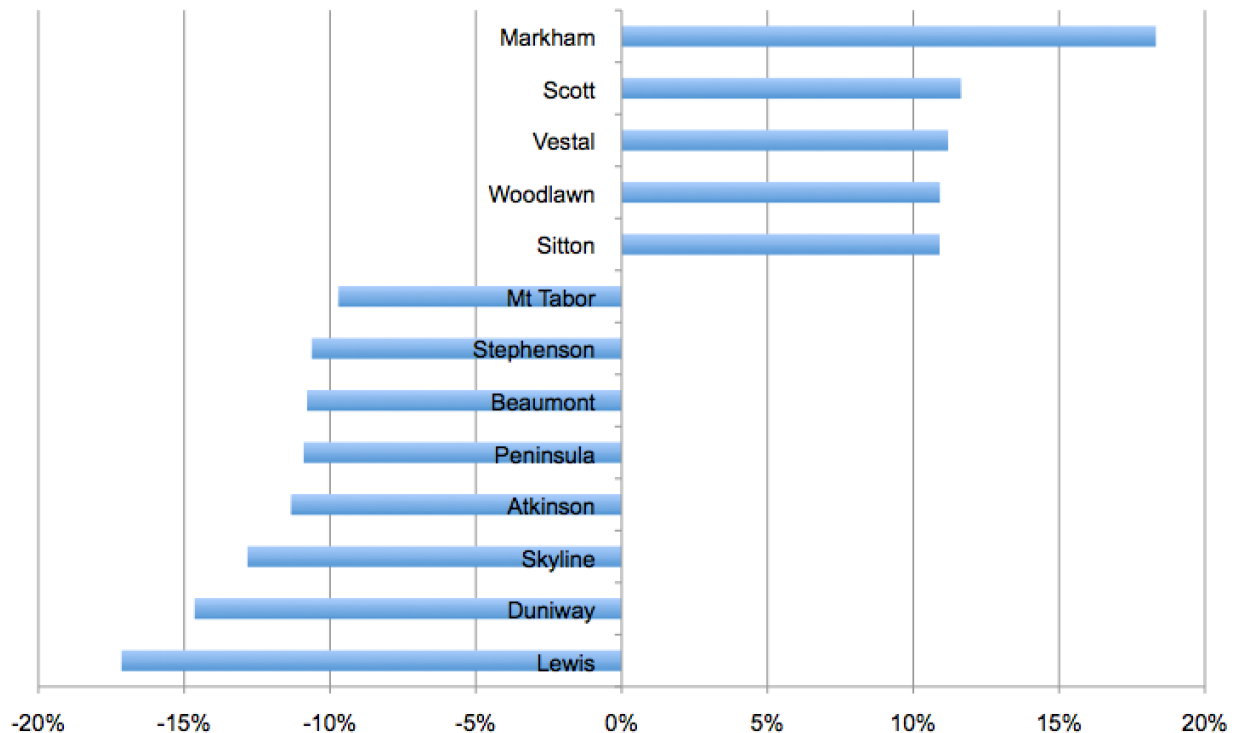
What is particularly concerning is that the lottery does not require a valid reason for approval, just a winning number. SACET believes that the impact of neighborhood lottery transfers is too disruptive to allow without a clearly understood reason.

To supplement the evidence we presented in the June report, we reviewed a data simulation that assigned back to the neighborhood school every student who was approved through a neighborhood-to-neighborhood lottery transfer over the past eight years. It showed that ending neighborhood-to-neighborhood lottery transfers could modestly impact on enrollment at most schools, but the percentage of change possible at a dozen schools is in the double digits. This data simulation reinforces our earlier analysis that ending neighborhood-to-neighborhood lottery transfers would be an important step to stabilize neighborhood schools.

Neighborhood lottery data simulation results

This data simulation illustrates the potential enrollment at some neighborhood schools if there had not been lottery transfers into other neighborhood schools.

Neighborhood lottery ends: Major enrollment changes



This data simulation illustrates the enrollment changes possible at some neighborhood schools. Markham, Scott, Vestal, Woodlawn and Sitton could have a 11 to 17 percent enrollment increase.

For these reasons, ending neighborhood-to-neighborhood lottery transfers is an important step the district must take to ensure that transfers between neighborhood schools are limited to reasons based in fact rather than perceptions.

Possible unintended consequences

Families with fewer housing choices stand to lose an important educational option if transfers to schools in gentrifying areas are limited. As students within the neighborhood begin to attend their neighborhood schools, some schools that have historically been serving students of color will begin to serve more White students, which may have unintended consequences. We recommend a culturally relevant petition process to help mitigate this possible consequence, and we will explain why in our second recommendation.

This recommendation is supported by 12 of 12 committee members.

Recommendation Two: Strengthen petition process

As mentioned earlier, data has shown us that students of color, economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities tend to apply for transfer through petition more often than they use the lottery process. And we know many families seek transfers between neighborhood schools for compelling reasons, including to keep siblings together, to be near child care and other important family supports, and to attend a school that feels more culturally and socio-emotionally appropriate for the students. The petition process also differs from the lottery in that it is based on people telling their story, something families of color have told our committee that they're more comfortable with than a random lottery. This suggests that the petition process is a more appropriate way for families to request transfers into other neighborhood schools. With a strong focus on cultural relevancy, the process could, in fact, decrease barriers for historically underserved families. Furthermore, the petition process may accomplish one key objective that a lottery can't: it can give the district important information about why students are leaving some schools and seeking others.

If our first recommendation is approved, the petition process will be the only way for families to request transfer into different neighborhood school. With this in mind, we ask the Superintendent to ensure improvements to the petition system so that it is aligned with the Racial Educational Equity Policy and becomes a known and trusted remedy for families.

Recommendation 2.1 Cultural competence and flexibility to be hallmarks of petition process

We envision a system where families seeking transfers can tell their stories to district employees who have been trained to apply the Racial Equity Lens and can review the petitions with intelligence and humanity. To respond to the historical disenfranchisement of communities of color through subjective decision-making, PPS will need to establish clear, flexible, culturally relevant protocols that challenge the system to respond to the needs of underserved communities. PPS must make sure families know that the petition system exists and how it works. The district must monitor petition volume and results to make sure the process is serving its intended purpose.

Recommendation 2.2 Collect and use reasons for transfer

We further recommend the district formally monitor the reasons families seek transfer out of neighborhood schools, including issues such as disproportionate discipline, a wider academic achievement gap for students of color, a poor school climate, or

ineffective leadership. We suggest involving the district's ombudsman in the process. The district should also notice and react when many students seek transfers out of one school. We're not suggesting officials try to talk parents out of transferring. Rather, the qualitative and quantitative data should be treated as an early warning system that alerts the district to problems at a school so that they can be solved with support, training and staffing before they become entrenched. Further, the district should take note of why some schools attract families and foster those positive attributes at other schools. Finally, the district should regularly audit the decisions made about petition requests to ensure district officials award transfers equitably. We believe a petition process such as the one we've described would ultimately strengthen neighborhood schools rather than deplete them.

Possible unintended consequences

The district originally created the lottery process in response to a perception of abuse and insider trading around transfers. A petition process is both less transparent and more subjective than a lottery process. PPS will have to display a high degree of accountability in order for the proposed change to build trust across the community.

People who feel pushed out by the old system may not trust the new one. "When you feel unwelcome at a school, how much further away does the district process feel?" we heard at SEI. "Why would you believe that the district would do right by you?" The district will need to act in good faith over an extended time to convince parents that they can speak the truth.

If more families are allowed to transfer outside of what has been a spring transfer cycle, the district may need to extend staffing timelines.

This recommendation is supported by 12 of 12 committee members.

Recommendations addressing focus option schools

Introduction

Right now, the district offers several types of focus option schools for K-8 students, defined in policy as “separate Board-recognized school or program structured around a unique curriculum or particular theme.” Focus options include 16 dual-language immersion schools and seven focus option schools with different themes or pedagogies. Immersion schools are the subject of Recommendation Five. A guide summarizing how our recommendations would affect each focus option school is included in the appendix.

SACET closely studied enrollment and transfer activities for a subset of focus option schools that serve the district as a whole. With the exception of the Richmond Japanese Immersion program, these schools do not fall within the district’s immersion expansion plan. This group includes Creative Science School, da Vinci Arts, Odyssey, Richmond and Winterhaven Math and Science – schools that draw all of their students through a lottery. The group also includes Buckman Arts and Sunnyside Environmental, which offer unique learning opportunities but draw students mostly from their neighborhoods.

During our review of focus option schools, we came to a crucial conclusion: PPS has not followed its own policy regarding these schools. The district’s Educational Options Policy is designed to provide consistent guidelines and procedures for schools, including focus options. The policy states that the Board intends focus options to “actively seek to create a sense of community in which racial, economic and cultural isolation are reduced,” and to “promote equity and diversity in the admission of students to educational options and minimize barriers to participation in educational options.”

Some of the major omissions in promoting equity and accountability:

- The district has not established an evaluation system to assess ongoing needs and determine future status, as called for in the Educational Options Policy. Nor does the focus option lottery structure “effectively promote equity and diversity in the admission of students and minimize barriers to participation.” Evidence:
 - Of the seven focus options that we studied closely, we found that almost 75 percent of students are White, substantially higher than the district average of 56 percent White students. Less than 20 percent of their students are economically disadvantaged, compared to 45 percent of all

district students. This subset of focus options enrolls lower rates of students receiving special education services than the district average.

- In 2012 and 2013, the district closed Ockley Green Arts program and Harriet Tubman Young Women's Leadership Academy, two North Portland focus options that served mostly students of color.
- The district has not followed the direction to “facilitate the siting of educational options to maximize the distribution of options throughout the district.” In fact, focus options are clustered in Southeast Portland and tend to draw the vast majority of their student body from the immediate surrounding neighborhoods.
- The stated purpose of focus options – to “meet the different learning needs and educational interests of all students” – is so broad that it could encompass almost any type of program, which makes assessment and decision-making around focus option schools very difficult. It is unclear what role focus options are intended to play within the full portfolio of PPS schools and how effective they are in meeting their stated missions. SACET has asked for several years for PPS to provide a more specific explanation of the function focus option schools are meant to serve. This missing information constrains the committee's ability to recommend improvements. At minimum, Portland Public School leaders should make sure focus option schools meet needs that neighborhood schools can't meet.

Given that PPS already has in place a policy framework for evaluating and assuring equity and quality in focus options schools, we recommend the immediate implementation of the following strategies for all focus options schools, including dual-language immersion programs:

Recommendation 3: Implement a quality review process for focus option schools.

In order to ensure that focus options truly meet needs that cannot be met by neighborhood schools, the district should establish a clearer rationale for focus options, implement a routine evaluation process with clear benchmarks, and systematize supports and expectations for focus options.

Recommendation 3.1: Establish clear rationale and benchmarks for focus option schools.

PPS leaders should immediately clarify the rationale for focus option programs, calling out intentional distinctions between the purpose and structure of focus options versus neighborhood schools. Soon after that, PPS should set benchmarks for essential factors

of focus options, including student body diversity that closely approximates the district in terms of race, ethnicity, income, children receiving special education, and geography. Teaching practices and school culture should match each school's purpose and be culturally inclusive. The district should incorporate lessons learned from focus option schools that were closed in the past.

Recommendation 3.2: Establish evaluation and support system for focus option schools.

The district should enact an evaluation and support system as called for in the Educational Options Policy. Evaluation should include clear criteria that are aligned with the Racial Educational Equity Policy. As part of the process, focus option successes should be shared with neighborhood schools in order to foster innovation and improvement.

As spelled out by the Educational Options Policy: "The district shall collaborate with educational options to assess their ongoing assistance needs and determine their future status, including renewal, modification, termination, replication, or transition from program to school." Unless and until such a system is created, the district should refrain from opening any additional non-immersion focus options.

Recommendation 3.3 Review focus option locations as part of the district-wide boundary review

As part of the boundary review process, the School Board and Superintendent should study the effect a focus option's location has on neighborhood schools' enrollment, especially where focus options are already clustered in one part of the district. Leaders should ensure that neighborhood schools near focus options have boundary areas large enough to offset the inevitable draw that the focus options present. PPS should take into account the location of other educational options, public and private, when performing this assessment.

Possible unintended consequences

We believe that additional accountability and supports for focus options will result in more students of color enrolling in those schools. PPS should prepare for this change by ensuring ample training and assistance for focus option staff, students and families in order to avoid future students of color being neglected or marginalized.

This recommendation is intended to swiftly bring about more meaningful understanding and oversight of focus options. But we are concerned that it could result in a lengthy process that delays the kind of changes that would improve equity. To mitigate this concern we encourage the superintendent and school board to schedule time during the 2014-15 school year to clarify the purpose of focus option schools and conduct an initial focus option evaluation.

This recommendation is supported by 12 of 12 committee members.

The consensus vote above is the culmination of many perspectives, including a belief that focus options should not be subject to additional evaluation beyond that which is required of every school by the district and state, and a strong feeling that focus options, by nature of their exclusivity, will never be equitable and should be closed now in order to accelerate program equity at neighborhood schools. Additionally, there was a call to begin moving existing focus options to other locations, given their close proximity now and the significant impact it has on nearby schools. However, consensus was to allow the evaluation process to serve as the mechanism for deciding if and when any focus options should be relocated.

Recommendation Four: Expand access to dual-language immersion programs

The Educational Options Policy does not distinguish dual-language immersion programs from other focus options. However, we find that dual-language immersion programs designed to draw half of their students from the partner language stand out from other focus option schools because there is clear evidence of increased achievement for emerging bilingual students who are enrolled in these programs. Our committee fully supports the district's efforts to expand dual-language immersion programs, particularly when offering programs to emerging bilingual students and other historically underserved students within their neighborhood schools. We're aware that African-American students are underrepresented in dual-language programs; a phenomenon that points to the need for effective outreach to historically underserved populations.

Possible unintended consequences

There are lessons to be learned from the haphazard way PPS has sited focus option schools in the past that should be applied to siting immersion programs, as well as other

focus options, in the future. While we applaud district leaders for locating new dual-language immersion programs in neighborhoods that are accessible to emerging bilingual students, we note that more than half of our current programs – at Beach, Bridger, César Chávez, James John, Kelly, King, Lents, Rigler, Sitton and Scott – are located in neighborhoods identified by the city as at-risk of gentrification. As we heard in listening sessions, gentrification can drive families to other parts of the district or out of the district completely. Unless PPS establishes greater flexibility and agility in siting programs, a potential consequence of future gentrification is reduced equity of access for emerging bilingual students and other students of color. To ensure programs remain accessible to the students who have the potential to benefit the most, the district should be willing to either move programs to new locations following population changes, or to provide greater transportation supports and innovative partnerships with neighboring districts.

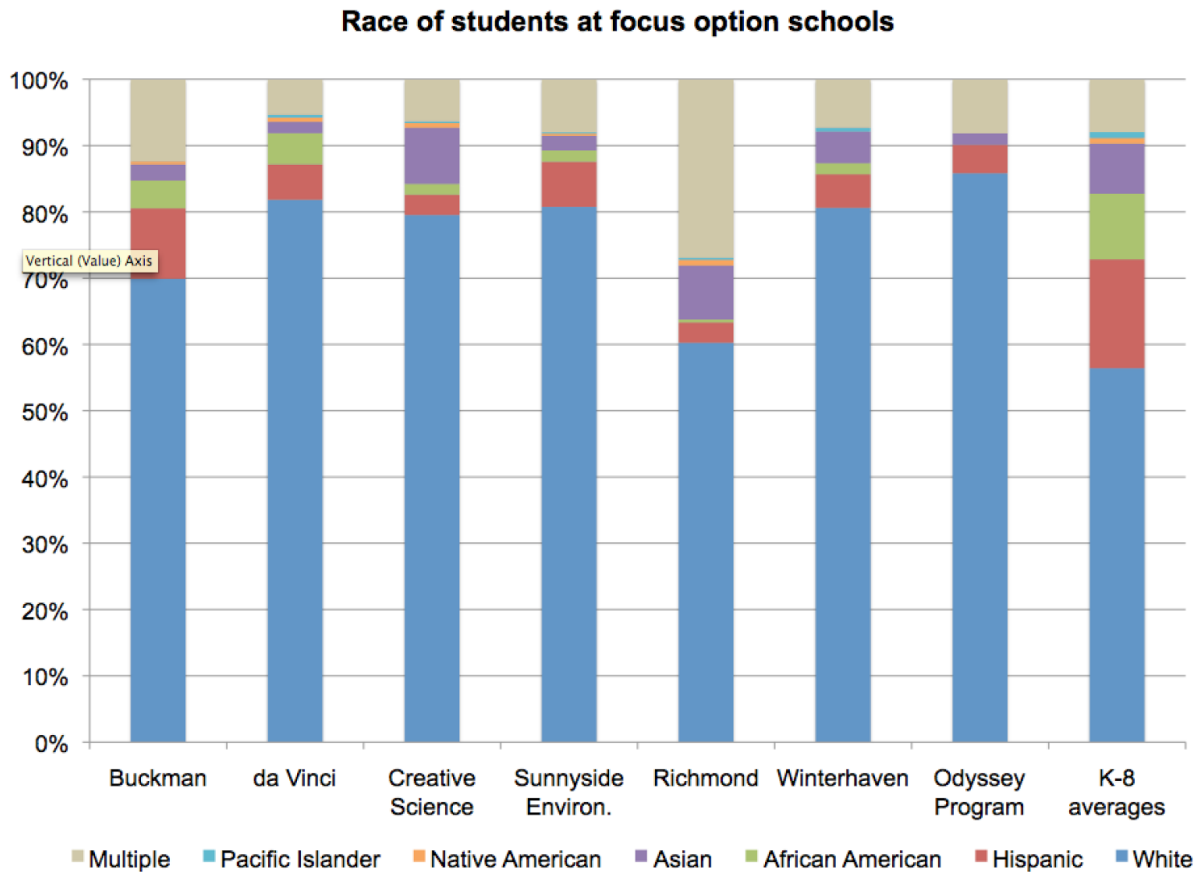
We are concerned that co-locating immersion and neighborhood programs in the same buildings has resulted in resource imbalances in the past and is a difficult model to maintain equitably. However, we're aware that shutting down neighborhood programs in favor of expanding language immersion programs carries with it significant consequences. For example, it could split up families where some children are enrolled in the language program and others aren't. It could also exacerbate segregation by shifting many native language speakers to a handful of schools.

This recommendation is supported by 12 of 12 committee members.

Recommendation Five: Modify the Focus Option Lottery System

Despite the lack of clarity about the purpose of non-immersion focus options, we are committed to making changes to the enrollment and transfer system that would immediately begin increasing equitable access to focus options.

The graph below shows the current demographic makeup of seven focus option schools and programs.



SACET proposes both adjustments to the lottery process and to other student support systems to address the current imbalances. It should be noted that PPS currently uses a weight for socio-economic status, and not race, so a more racially sensitive, yet still legally allowable factor, needs to be developed for future lotteries. We know that, in the last two years, a few major schools districts have made inroads into creating such criteria. PPS should consult with them.

Currently, lotteries for two-way dual language immersion programs already have factors for native language and residency. The recommendations described below are geared toward non-immersion and one-way immersion programs, including Richmond-Mt Tabor-Grant Japanese Immersion and Ainsworth-West Sylvan-Lincoln Spanish Immersion. Positive results should be considered for implementation at dual-language immersion programs in the future.

Data simulation: Lottery changes could improve focus option diversity

To test whether it was possible to make focus options look more like the district's demographics, we conducted a data simulation using nine years' worth of lottery applicant data. We knew which applicants had attended Head Start and which qualified for free or reduced-price meals, and that gave us an idea of their socioeconomic status. We also understood that there is a strong correlation between these economic factors and race.

In the simulation, we automatically approved all economically disadvantaged students, filling up 45 percent of the available slots. If more than 45 percent of applicants were economically disadvantaged, we balanced those who were approved by district cluster. We used 45 percent because that is the current average rate for K-8 students in the district who qualify for free or reduced-price meals. We approved siblings of current focus option students next, balancing them by cluster, too.

We found under this model that the percentage of students from economically disadvantaged families would rise considerably, but at 33 percent would still be well below the district average of 45 percent. Balancing lottery approvals geographically would somewhat increase the geographic diversity of students.

Recommendation 5.1: Lottery priorities to balance schools by income and geography and recognize the importance of co-enrolled siblings.

Our recommended lottery priorities for focus option schools and programs, not including dual-language immersion, are as follows:

1. Reserve for economically disadvantaged applicants a percentage of slots corresponding to the district-wide percentage of students who qualify as economically disadvantaged; i.e., who qualify for free or reduced-price meals or are enrolled in Head Start for Pre-kindergarten.
Tiebreakers, if more applicants than slots:
 - a. Equal numbers of students selected from the range of high school clusters represented in the applicant pool.
 - b. Sibling preference changes to a weight that is applied within each geographic grouping. In other words, co-enrolled siblings will be selected first within each group of economically disadvantaged students by high school region.
 - c. A random number will be used as a final tiebreaker.
2. Remaining slots will be evenly distributed by high school region.
Tiebreakers, if more applicants than slots:
 - a. Co-enrolled siblings will be selected first within each group of students by high school region.

- b. In the case of more co-enrolled siblings than slots by high school region, a random number will be used as a final tiebreaker.
- c. If there are more non-sibling applicants than remaining slots by high school region, a random number will be used as a final tiebreaker.

Recommendation 5.2: Student supports to improve equity of access to focus options

Lottery changes will help, but we should not expect focus options to mirror the district demographics without innovative efforts at culturally relevant outreach. Focus option schools are currently not permitted to market themselves beyond word of mouth, which is insufficient to bring about change in the demographic makeup of the schools. Current partnerships with community organizations serving culturally specific groups could be leveraged to promote greater awareness and interest in focus options.

Focus options would also benefit from affordable afterschool programs, such as those offered in the SUN school system. With focus options clustered mostly in Southeast Portland, achieving equitable access may require district-provided transportation, though we acknowledge that transportation has not improved equity in the Richmond Japanese Immersion Program.

Possible unintended consequences

The lottery simulation had its limitations. For instance, when we tried to see how the simulated results would filter through several years of enrollment at each school, we found that some of the students who would have been approved under the new methodology had left the school district. There were limitations in the data that prevented us from directly testing for racial impact. We still must test how our recommended lottery modifications will alter the racial makeup of focus option schools. We believe that the modifications we propose will be an improvement over the current system and certainly won't be worse than what we have now, but the simulation wasn't sophisticated enough to say this definitively.

We recommend that the district continue to experiment with simulations and then adopt lottery preferences that appear to best meet the benchmarks adopted by the School Board.

SACET struggled with the inherent tension that arises when sibling priority is a factor in admission to focus options. Since focus options are ostensibly meant to serve students' individual needs, not those of a whole family, some members saw a clear rationale for

ending all levels of sibling priority into these specialized schools and programs. At the same time, any limitations on siblings attending school together may be a barrier to access, particularly for historically underserved families seeking a sense of community and belonging for their children. We are concerned that a consequence of the sibling change proposed above will be to continue to deter students of color from applying to focus options. However, we are also concerned that continuing to offer sibling priority, even at a lower level than in the current system, will continue to shut out students whose intellectual and socio-emotional needs are a strong match with the focus option. A possible way to mitigate both of these concerns is for PPS to investigate whether qualitative criteria should be added to the application process.

If done wrong, a consequence of increased focus options marketing efforts could be further destabilization of neighborhood schools. To avoid this, similar outreach efforts are needed to highlight the strengths of each neighborhood school--particularly those disproportionately impacted by focus options and other transfer choices.

This recommendation is supported by 10 of 12 committee members.

Minority view: Due to time constraints, focus option schools and the proposed changes to the lottery system did not undergo the same scrutiny as other facets of the enrollment and transfer system. I disagree with this recommendation as it stands, and I suggest that district leaders – and perhaps, the next iteration of SACET – take the time to delve more deeply into focus option schools and the lottery system.

Minority view: Regarding Recommendation 5.1, there is no reason for families with multiple children to have any privilege when applying for lottery slots over families with one child.

Recommendation Six: Supporting students receiving special education services

Applying the Racial Equity Lens, we saw that students of color are overrepresented among students who receive special education, particularly services that cannot be offered at their neighborhood schools. Students who receive specialized services frequently experience a greater degree of movement and disruption than their peers. Many students are placed outside of their neighborhood schools in order to access services, and often experience this disruption more than once in their school career as programmatic availability or needs change. This results in families being split across

more than one school, separating the student from family and peers and compromising parents' ability to engage in their child's education.

Recommendation 6.1 Continuity for students assigned away from their neighborhood schools for special education services.

SACET recommends that students with disabilities who are assigned to services outside of their neighborhood school be allowed to remain at that school to the highest grade, if their Individualized Education Program changes and they transition into general education. Further, we advocate that preference be granted for siblings to have the option to join them at the same school.

Recommendation 6.2 Move toward cluster-based, and eventually neighborhood school-based, programming for all students receiving special education services.

The committee unanimously encourages the district to align services and concentrate programs within clusters so that special education students experience fewer transitions. One benefit of Universal Design is that it reduces the need for students to be moved out of their neighborhood school and minimizes transitions to different schools.

Recommendation 6.3 Clarify policy language

SACET recommends that Policy 4.10.051-P Student Enrollment and Transfers be amended to acknowledge that the right to attend the neighborhood school or the right to request a transfer may be superseded for a student with disabilities by the assignment to specialized program services.

This recommendation is supported by 12 of 12 committee members.

APPENDIX

SACET BELIEF STATEMENTS

We were guided in our work by these shared principles:

- The strength of the PPS system is our prevailing consideration - even over individual needs and desires.
- Portland's vitality is rooted in strong neighborhoods, with neighborhood schools at the heart of local communities.
- Neighborhood schools throughout the system should have equitable programming and resources.
- We acknowledge that access to choice systems via lottery is not a luxury afforded to all, and therefore weakens the ability of PPS to equitably meet the needs of all students.
- The enrollment system should not exacerbate patterns of segregation by race, class or disability, nor should it serve only those who are privileged.
- SACET supports a meaningful boundary review process that will contribute to right-sized enrollment and equitable neighborhood schools.
- SACET supports lessening the degree of choice by lottery in favor of strengthening neighborhood enrollment and choice through petition.
- SACET applauds the Superintendent's 2013 decision to increase the equity allocation for school funding, leading to greater parity in program offerings.
- Focus option schools – which, by policy, serve the general population – should reflect the demographics of the district.
- The district needs to provide strong English as a Second Language programs as close to home as possible for Emerging Bilingual students so that traveling for essential services is eliminated. PPS also should eliminate access barriers for EB students to attend schools with more ESL course offerings and programs such as dual-language immersion.

- SACET believes that before making a policy change, all recommendations must be tested with data simulation in order to refine implementation and mitigate unintended negative consequences.
- Further community conversations across diverse populations must be undertaken to help discern the potential consequences of policy changes. It is clear that decisions have been made in the past without being informed by those communities that are historically underserved.

K-8 Focus Option Schools and Programs						
Name	Grade Structure	HS Cluster	Program Type	Feeds to	Current lottery priorities	Proposed lottery priorities
Ainsworth	K-5	Lincoln	Spanish Immersion	West Sylvan MS, Lincoln HS	15% slots for native Spanish speakers 50% set aside for Ainsworth neighborhood students Geographic priority for Lincoln, Wilson clusters Sibling preference in each geographic/language group Small weight for low-income, gender	Add low-income preference into each geographic/language group
Atkinson	K-5	Franklin	Spanish Immersion	Mt. Tabor MS, Franklin HS	50% slots for native Spanish speakers 50% set aside for Atkinson neighborhood students Geographic priority for Franklin, Cleveland clusters Sibling preference in each geographic/language group Small weight for low-income, gender	None at this time Consider adding low-income priority in future
Beach	K-8	Jefferson/Roosevelt	Spanish Immersion	Roosevelt HS	50% slots for native Spanish speakers 50% set aside for Beach neighborhood students Geographic priority for Jefferson, Roosevelt clusters Sibling preference in each geographic/language group Small weight for low-income, gender	None at this time Consider adding low-income priority in future
Bridger	K-8	Franklin	Spanish Immersion	Franklin HS	50% slots for native Spanish speakers 50% set aside for Bridger neighborhood students Geographic priority for Franklin, Cleveland clusters Sibling preference in each geographic/language group Small weight for low-income, gender	None at this time Consider adding low-income priority in future

K-8 Focus Option Schools and Programs						
Name	Grade Structure	HS Cluster	Program Type	Feeds to	Current lottery priorities	Proposed lottery priorities
César Chávez	K-8	Roosevelt	Spanish Immersion	Roosevelt HS	50% slots for native Spanish speakers 50% set aside for César Chávez neighborhood students Geographic priority for Jefferson, Roosevelt clusters Sibling preference in each geographic/language group Small weight for low-income, gender	None at this time Consider adding low-income priority in future
James John	K-5	Roosevelt	Spanish Immersion	George MS, Roosevelt HS	50% slots for native Spanish speakers 100% set aside for James John neighborhood students	None at this time Consider adding sibling preference in future
Lent	K-8	Franklin	Spanish Immersion	Franklin HS	50% slots for native Spanish speakers 50% set aside for Lent neighborhood students Geographic priority for Franklin, Cleveland clusters Sibling preference in each geographic/language group Small weight for low-income, gender	None at this time Consider adding low-income priority in future
Rigler	K-5	Madison	Spanish Immersion	Beumont MS, Madison HS	50% slots for native Spanish speakers 100% set aside for Rigler neighborhood students Sibling preference in each language group	None at this time
Scott	K-8	Madison	Spanish Immersion	Madison HS	50% slots for native Spanish speakers 100% set aside for Scott neighborhood students Sibling preference in each language group	None at this time
Sitton	K-5	Roosevelt	Spanish Immersion	George MS, Roosevelt HS	50% slots for native Spanish speakers 100% set aside for Sitton neighborhood students	None at this time Consider adding sibling preference in future

K-8 Focus Option Schools and Programs

Name	Grade Structure	HS Cluster	Program Type	Feeds to	Current lottery priorities	Proposed lottery priorities
King	K-8	Jefferson/ Grant	Chinese Immersion	To be determined	15% set aside for native Chinese speakers 40% set aside for students from Chinese Head Start 35% set aside for siblings of students attending King 10% set aside for other transfers	None at this time
Woodstock	K-5	Cleveland	Chinese Immersion	Hosford MS Cleveland HS	35% set aside for native Chinese speakers 50% set aside for Woodstock neighborhood students Sibling preference in each geographic/language group Small weight for low-income, gender	None at this time Consider adding low-income priority in future
Kelly	K-5	Franklin	Russian Immersion	Lane MS Franklin HS	50% slots for native Russian speakers 50% set aside for Kelly neighborhood students Resident students prioritized over non-residents Sibling preference in each geographic/language group small weight for low-income, gender	None at this time
Richmond	K-5	Franklin	Japanese Immersion	Mt. Tabor MS Franklin HS	15% set aside for native Japanese speakers Sibling preference in each geographic/language group Small weight for low-income, gender	Add low income preference and geographic preference
Roseway Heights	K-8	Madison	Vietnamese Immersion	To be determined	50% slots for native Vietnamese speakers	None at this time Consider adding sibling preference in future
Buckman	K-5	Cleveland	Arts	Neighborhood students to Hosford, Cleveland	Neighborhood students are guaranteed and do not have to apply Sibling preference Small weight for low-income, gender	Add low income preference and geographic preference
Creative Science	K-8	Madison	Constructivist	None	Sibling preference Small weight for low-income, gender	Add low income preference and geographic preference

K-8 Focus Option Schools and Programs						
Name	Grade Structure	HS Cluster	Program Type	Feeds to	Current lottery priorities	Proposed lottery priorities
daVinci	6-8	Grant	Arts	None	Sibling preference Small weight for low-income, gender	Add low income preference and geographic preference
Odyssey @ Hayhurst	K-8	Wilson	Living history curriculum	None	Sibling preference Small weight for low-income, gender	Add low income preference and geographic preference
Sunnyside	K-8	Franklin	Thematic environmental curriculum	Neighborhood students to Franklin	Neighborhood students are guaranteed and do not have to apply Sibling preference Small weight for low-income, gender	Add low income preference and geographic preference
Winterhaven	K-8	Cleveland	Math & Science	None	Sibling preference Small weight for low-income, gender	Add low income preference and geographic preference