

May 7, 2020

TO: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT BOND COMMITTEE
Portland Public Schools

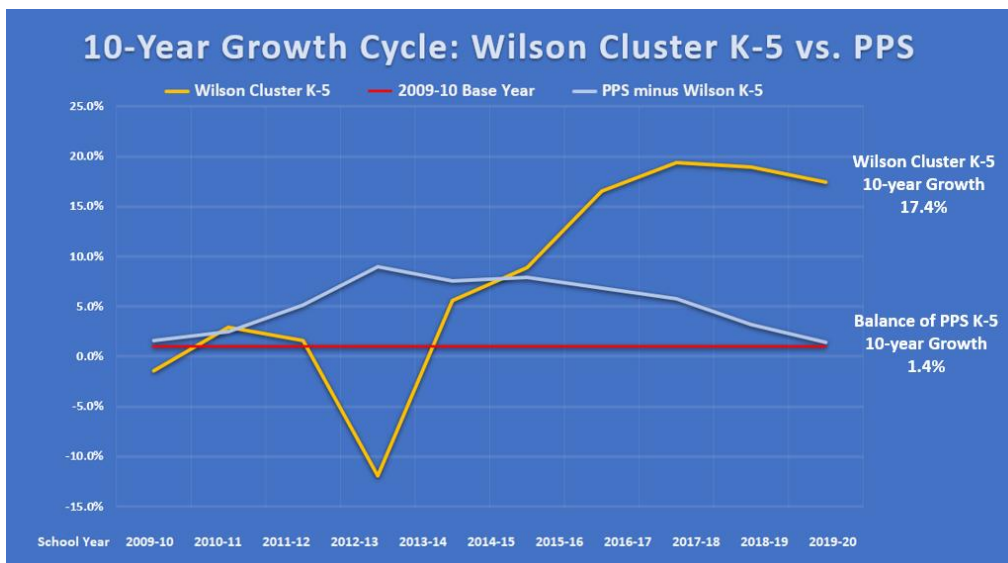
FROM: Dean Smith, Ashcreek NA representative
SWNI Schools Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed PPS 2020 School Bond Measure. Because I am not able to tune into your meeting this evening, I am submitting these comments in lieu of live testimony. Also, I have not been able to discuss this matter with the SWNI Schools Committee or the ANA Board since Board Member Scott outlined a new Bond approach to the Board earlier this week, so these comments are my own.

First, as you know, the currently closed Smith School is an indispensable asset and safety valve to manage K-5 enrollment shifts and growth in Southwest Portland. The Ashcreek Neighborhood Association has consistently advocated that Smith School be renovated and reopened as soon as possible. ANA's position has been that if Smith School was not included in the 2020 Bond package, by the time reopening the school could be in the next planned bond measure (2028) and open for classes would be some time in 2031.

Based on last year's PSU student enrollment study [we understand an updated study will be forthcoming soon], the District will experience a decline in districtwide K-5 enrollment from now until 2025 when it will begin to rebound back to current levels and beyond. That seems to me to bring enrollment growth back into the discussion within this decade – and K-5 schools in Southwest Portland will no doubt continue to be the largest component of growth in those grades as has been the case for at least the last 15 years.

Based on the District's figures, the seven (7) K-5 elementary schools in the Wilson Cluster experienced 17.4% growth between 2009-2010 and 2019-2020. Meanwhile all other K-5 schools within the District have shown only 1.4% over the last decade, as illustrated in the chart below. Since K-5 schools in the Wilson cluster have consistently experienced stronger growth than the rest of K-5 schools, it's reasonable to expect that trend to continue in both less loss of enrollment as well as faster, stronger rebound.



Second, through my own experiences in the last two months being engaged in distance learning with two K-5 students in my household, I recognize the need for the District to upgrade and improve student access to technology as well as to create a more robust distance learning curriculum. So, I applaud a renewed focus an emphasis on technology and special education investments. I also fully appreciate the significant amount of underfunded school physical facility, maintenance and security needs that currently exist.

Considering all of these factors, I am pleased that the District is considering a shorter Bond period and asking voters to approve a smaller funding request this November. Under present economic conditions and personal hardship, I believe an 8-year, \$1.4 billion dollar request – even if it maintained the current levy rate – would not fare well at the ballot box.

I would encourage the Committee to consider another 4-year bond measure that would focus on the currently pressing technology, educational and facility needs, as well as completing the high school modernizations that will require additional funding. At the same time, to properly prepare for the anticipated rebound in K-5 enrollments within the Wilson cluster, I strongly urge that the District either include the \$56.6 million necessary to renovate, expand and modernize Smith School or to at least include funds for master planning a Smith School renovation so that it can be included in a 2024 or 2026 bond measure and be ready to accept students by the end of the decade.

Thank you.

CC: PPS Board of Education
Maripat Hensel, SWNI Schools Committee
Jerry Rundorff, President, Ashcreek NA