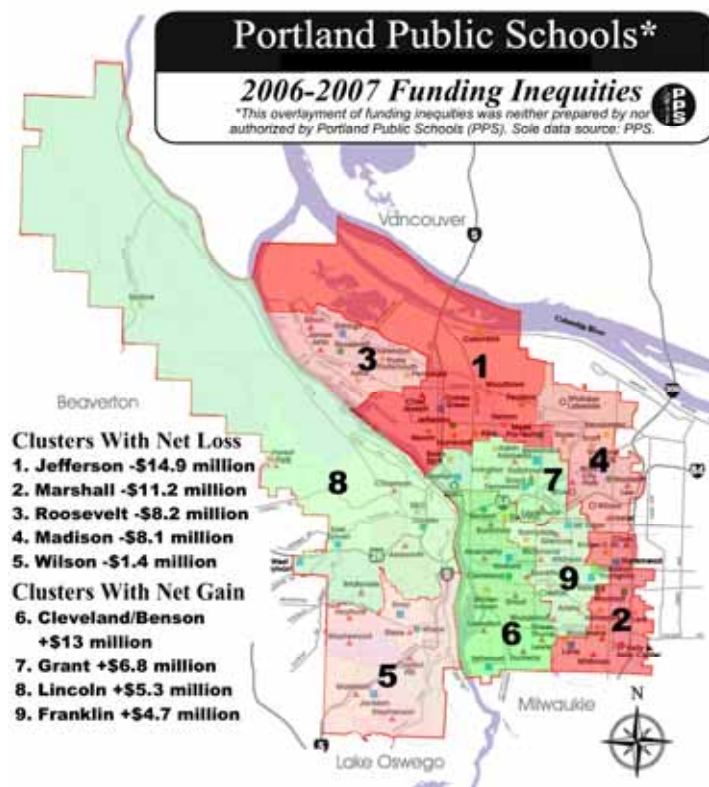


Charting Open Transfer Enrollment

and

Neighborhood Funding Inequities

A report to complement the Flynn-Blackmer Audit



Prepared for
Portland Public Schools Board of Education
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Executive Summary

The neighborhood schools of Portland are renowned as the crown jewels of our city. The fact that 83.7% of eligible students attend Portland Public Schools¹ is a testament to our city's livability and vibrant public spirit.

But this distinction is in danger of slipping away, particularly in our poor and working-class neighborhoods.

This study finds a clear pattern of investment in neighborhoods disproportionate with the distribution of Portland Public Schools students. Specifically, wealthier neighborhoods get more investment, and poorer neighborhoods get significantly less in relation to their student population. For the "red zone" neighborhoods, this amounted to a divestment of nearly \$43.8 million in 2006-2007.

The cause of this inequity is the open transfer enrollment policy. The Flynn-Blackmer audit² has clearly described how this policy has harmed the goal of strong neighborhood schools and contributed to racial isolation. This study complements that study, adding a focus on the overall distribution of public investment within the district.

"School Choice" is a trendy concept in school reform communities. It is touted as a salve for the "achievement gap" and racial isolation. But the data for Portland Public Schools³ are clear: neighborhood-to-neighborhood transfers have increased racial isolation and resulted in gross inequities in public investment by neighborhood.

Portland neighborhoods are becoming increasingly integrated, yet our schools are increasingly segregated. We have allowed open transfers to determine where our hundreds of millions of dollars of public investment go without regard for demographic trends, and this policy has begun to strain the system in ways that will be very costly to fix later.

This study recommends a phased curtailment of neighborhood-to-neighborhood transfers, coupled with a prerequisite equalization of educational and extracurricular programs at all schools. It also addresses No Child Left Behind, with a proposal to create model "traditional magnet schools" at sites under federal sanction, providing enhanced learning opportunities that can eventually be incorporated district-wide as budgets allow.

Our open transfer enrollment policy has outlived any usefulness it once may have had in preventing "white flight," and there is no policy rationale for keeping it. We need to re-examine school boundaries, ensure equal programs across the board at all neighborhood schools, and curtail neighborhood-to-neighborhood transfers. That is, remove all legitimate reasons for transfers, then end transfers.

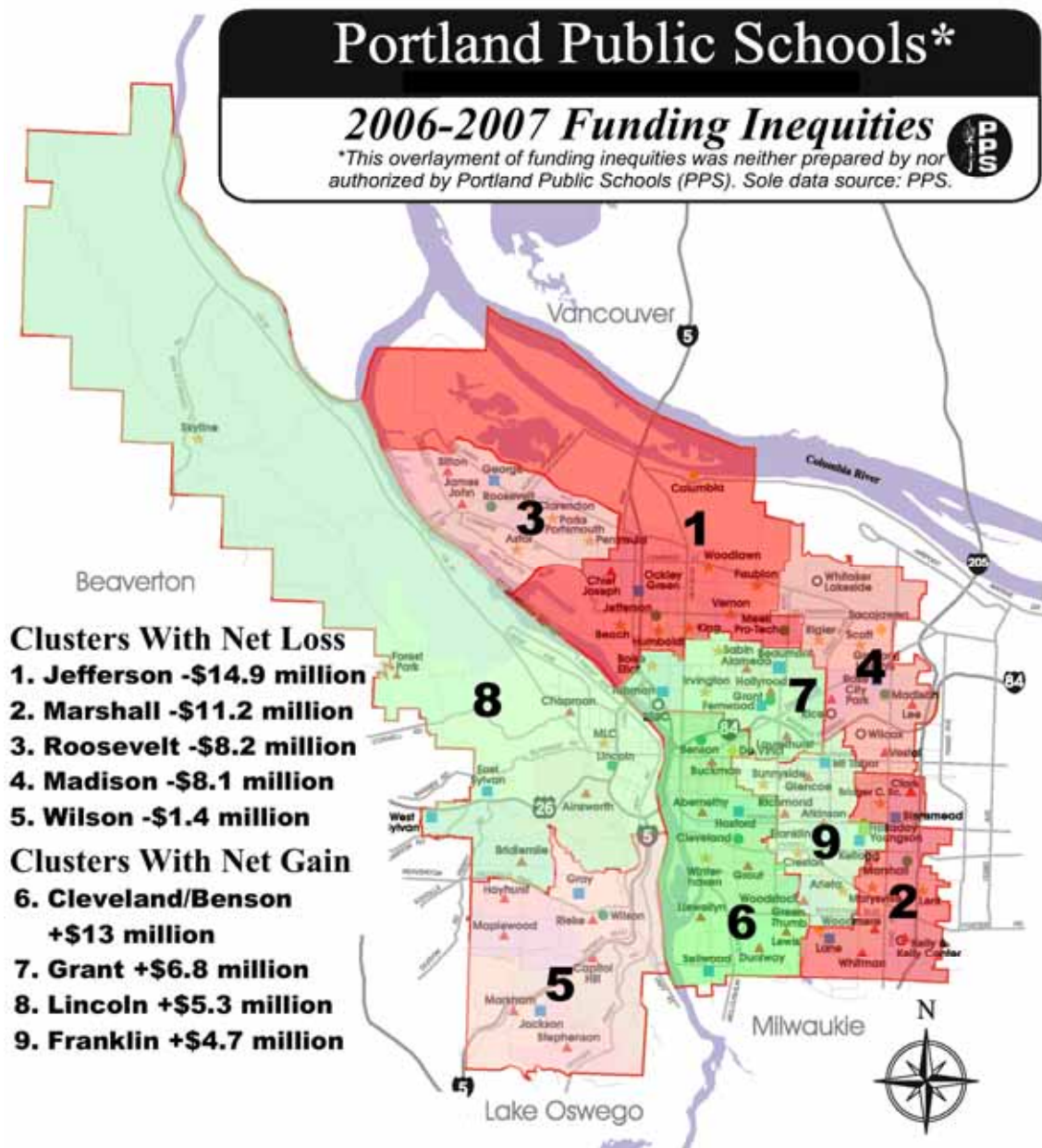


Figure 1: Portland Public Schools 2006-2007 Funding Inequities
Data source: Portland Public Schools³

The Problem: Unequal Distribution of Public Investment

Portland Public Schools has a system of school choice that has resulted in a radical redistribution of public investment. Any students may transfer out of their neighborhood school for any or no reason, and into any school of their choice, space permitting.

Since funding follows students, this has created a self-reinforcing pattern of money leaving our poor and working-class neighborhoods and flowing into our wealthiest neighborhoods. As more and more students have followed the money with their own funding, we are left with a two-tiered school system, as illustrated in the map in figure 1.

This pattern is self-reinforcing, because the schools left behind in the “red zone” are faced with falling attendance, leading to program cuts and school closures. These cuts lead to further out-transfers. Students that leave tend to be higher achieving students. This “skimming” effect, noted in the Flynn-Blackmer audit², leaves school administrators with student populations that are more expensive to educate, but with less money to do so.

Consequently, principals are faced with the question of how to spend their allotted fulltime-equivalent (FTE) budget, and can be forgiven for cutting out music and art to pay for extra literacy help. This leads to further skimming, as families with the means to transfer are drawn to schools in wealthier neighborhoods, with more enrichment programs and better test scores.

On the ground in the “red zone” neighborhoods, prekindergarten-8 students are faced with a patchwork of schools and attendance areas that do not match their neighborhood demographics. Schools are closed, and their buildings leased to competing private or charter schools. Schools that remain often have fewer “special” offerings than schools in wealthier neighborhoods.

High school students in the “red zone” are faced with narrow choices between special-focus “academies”, with limited elective and advanced placement options, and reduced extracurricular programs.

In the “green zone”, students are also faced with problems, especially at the high school level. Facilities are inadequate to handle the higher enrollments. Class sizes are large, and there can be insufficient numbers of textbooks and supplemental materials. There are even cases where there are not enough desks to accommodate all the students in certain classes. More extracurricular programs are available, but they are also overcrowded, effectively reducing arts, athletic, and academic enrichment opportunities for students.

This study examined the transfer and enrollment data for 2006-2007, and found five high school clusters lost investment due to net loss of enrollment from out-transfers. These are the same clusters that have seen disproportionate numbers of school closures and

program cuts, and experiments with narrowly-focused schools-within-schools at the high school level.

The remaining four clusters had net gains in enrollment. There have been fewer closures in these clusters, and schools have generally maintained full slates of academic and extracurricular programs. High schools there have maintained traditional programming and configurations.

Monetary values for these net gains and losses are calculated using a conservative approximation of average district spending per student. For each cluster, enrollment was subtracted from PPS neighborhood population, and the result was multiplied by \$6,800 (See Appendix A). The \$6,800 figure was arrived at using the Open Books Project's spending per student figure of \$9,442, and subtracting the approximately 28% of that figure that doesn't go directly to the classroom in the form of teaching and student resources⁴.

This study includes schools without attendance areas in the clusters where they are geographically located. For example, Benson High is included in the Cleveland cluster. Note that the Cleveland cluster would still be in the surplus category without Benson, with in-transfers representing \$4.2 million of funding above what it would receive based on attendance area population.

The clusters with net losses due to transfers in 2006-2007 were, in order of magnitude:

1. Jefferson, -\$14.9 million
2. Marshall, -\$11.2 million
3. Roosevelt, -\$8.2 million
4. Madison, -\$8.1 million
5. Wilson, -\$1.4 million

The clusters with net gains due to transfers in 2006-2007 were, in order of magnitude:

1. Cleveland/Benson, +\$13 million
2. Grant, +\$6.8 million
3. Lincoln, +\$5.3 million
4. Franklin, +\$4.7 million

These numbers represent significant public divestment from the neighborhoods that most need public investment. Conversely, they represent public investment in Portland's wealthier neighborhoods disproportionate to the student population living there.

This pattern of divestment and excess investment affects real estate prices and the long-term quality of life in our neighborhoods. This is a compounding factor to the effects on community and education detailed above and in Flynn-Blackmer².

The Solution: Funding Equity and Reinvestment

This study recommends the curtailment of neighborhood-to-neighborhood school transfers to reinvest in the neighborhoods that have lost due to transfers. Before this can be considered, we must eliminate the legitimate factors that lead families to choose a different neighborhood school. We must also re-evaluate school attendance area boundaries, in order to properly match populations to facilities.

The re-evaluation of facilities will likely show a shortage of adequate buildings in neighborhoods that have suffered the most divestment due to out-transfers. In neighborhoods without adequate facilities, the district should consider building new facilities to replace outdated buildings, or to backfill for buildings that have been leased, sold, or demolished.

The district should immediately curtail any leases of closed schools, particularly to competing private or charter schools, and should also place a moratorium on new charter schools to be located in any “red zone” neighborhood.

All educational programs must be equalized across the district. “Special” programs like music, art, P.E. and counseling are currently at the discretion of site administrators, which creates disparity between schools both in terms of class size and enhanced academic offerings. We must curtail this localized discretion, and mandate a basic level of “specials” at every school.

We should begin with a goal of art, music, P.E., and counseling for all Pre K-8 schools. If the budget is not available for all of these programs at all schools, we must make the difficult decision which programs to cut, and cut them across the board. Every school must offer the same programs, and similar class sizes.

All high schools should be similarly equalized, with a full slate of electives, advanced placement courses, and extracurricular activities offered at all schools.

Once we have removed these common reasons for neighborhood-to-neighborhood transfers, we should begin to phase them out. New enrollment should be assigned by default to neighborhood schools. Existing transfers may be grandfathered until students complete their course of study at their current school.

In order to ease any shock to families or potential resistance, the district may show its goodwill to the areas currently suffering the most out-transfers by offering enhanced general fund contributions to these schools. Additional enhancement programs intended to eventually be offered district-wide should first be offered at these schools as an affirmative step to draw back transferred students and assure new families that the district’s intentions for equity are in earnest.

Special Focus and Magnet Schools

This study does not recommend the complete curtailment of school choice. Magnet and special focus schools have a strong and important role in any school district, and Portland Public Schools have many programs of which to be proud.

However, we must take a close look at where some of these programs are located, particularly dual-language immersion programs. We must evaluate how well they serve the neighborhood population, and make decisions on whether to move them to better serve other neighborhoods. The Spanish immersion programs at Ainsworth and Beach are two prime examples.

Another concern is the co-location of schools within neighborhood schools. Without neighborhood-to-neighborhood out-transfers, these buildings may need more space for their neighborhood programs.

When considering locations of new or relocated programs, the district should give priority to areas that have suffered the most divestment under open transfers.

No Child Left Behind

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires that the district allow transfers out of schools that fail to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This study recommends the creation of “traditional magnet schools” at sites that fail to meet AYP. These schools would have enhanced educational and extracurricular programming, with extra general funds used to cover the additional expenses.

Extra emphasis on literacy and math education, combined with enhanced enrichment programs, family and cultural outreach, and focus on community pride and ownership will combine to both discourage out-transfers and bring the school back into compliance with NCLB.

These schools will serve as models for expanding enrichment programs to the rest of the district when budgets allow.

What Hasn't Worked

Portland Public Schools has attempted to soften the blow of school choice by instituting a weighted lottery. This has introduced unworkable complexity to the system, as documented in Flynn-Blackmer², and has done little or nothing to ameliorate the inequity brought on by neighborhood-to-neighborhood transfers.

While school choice has been touted by its proponents as a tonic for the “achievement gap”, clear evidence shows that it instead increases racial isolation, which is known to contribute to the problem.

Creating special small schools-within-schools has also failed in retaining or drawing back enrollment, and this approach has severely limited academic options for students who stay at their neighborhood schools in our poorer neighborhoods.

Conclusion

Students learn best in integrated, well-funded schools that reflect the values of their communities. Our current system of open transfers has contributed to racial isolation, the fragmentation of communities, and a radical redistribution of public investment away from the communities that need it the most.

We must formulate a better policy for the public investment controlled by the school district, a policy that is not only more fair to all neighborhoods of Portland, but that also provides a better education for our children in strong, neighborhood-based, community-centered schools.

Neighborhood-to-neighborhood transfers are in direct conflict with the goals of strong neighborhood schools and closing the achievement gap, as documented in the Flynn-Blackmer audit². No amount of tinkering around the edges of this policy can change that fundamental fact. There is no legitimate policy rationale for allowing open neighborhood-to-neighborhood transfers, and a great deal of evidence to show that they are extremely harmful to our goals as a district.

If our goal has been to create a two-tiered system, we have succeeded. If our goal is neighborhood funding equity and equal educational opportunities, we have embarked on a path that is spiraling in the opposite direction. We must change direction immediately to avoid further damage.

In the best interest of the children of Portland and the neighborhoods they live in, we must change the direction of our public investment policy. Instead of poor neighborhoods subsidizing rich ones, we must embark on a path of reinvestment in our neediest areas.

The longer we avoid dealing with this difficult problem, the more damage we are doing to our children and their communities.

Appendix A: 2006-2007 PPS Enrollment Data

(see page 4 for a description of the methodology used in arriving at the +/- figures)

School	Students	Neighborhood	+/- students	+/- funding
Benson cluster				
Benson	1294	0	1294	
Benson cluster total			1294	8799200
Cleveland cluster				
Abernathy	357	399	-42	
Buckman	506	232	274	
Cleveland	1472	1375	97	
Duniway	446	377	69	
Grout	333	516	-183	
Hosford	476	543	-67	
Lewis	293	217	76	
Llewellyn	309	326	-17	
Sellwood	515	444	71	
Winterhaven	344	0	344	
Cleveland cluster total			622	4229600
Franklin cluster				
Arleta	370	488	-118	
Atkinson	549	282	267	
Creston	309	413	-104	
Franklin	1283	1393	-110	
Glencoe	498	577	-79	
Kellog	269	376	-107	
Mt. Tabor	633	357	276	
Richmond – Japanese immersion	360	0	360	
Sunnyside	501	276	225	
Woodstock	384	298	86	
Franklin cluster total			696	4732800
Grant cluster				
Alameda	678	538	140	
Beaumont	500	401	99	
Boise-Elliot	415	263	152	
Da Vinci	444	0	444	
Fernwood	347	403	-56	
Grant	1691	1619	72	
Hollyrood	210	261	-51	
Irvington	473	385	88	
Laurelhurst	561	506	55	
Sabin	429	361	68	
Grant cluster total			1011	6874800

Charting Open Transfer Enrollment and Neighborhood Funding inequities

School	Students	Neighborhood	+/- students	+/- funding
Jefferson cluster				
Beach	412	475	-63	
Chief Joseph	359	505	-146	
Faubion	332	410	-78	
Humboldt	240	286	-46	
Jefferson	566	1751	-1185	
King	458	376	82	
Ockley Green	442	327	115	
Tubman	131	430	-299	
Vernon	404	732	-328	
Woodlawn	450	687	-237	
Jefferson cluster total			-2185	-14858000
Lincoln cluster				
Ainsworth	509	317	192	
Bridlemile	458	469	-11	
Chapman	478	421	57	
Forest Park	508	525	-17	
Lincoln	1498	1395	103	
MLC	439	0	439	
Skyline	233	220	13	
West Sylvan	896	882	14	
Lincoln cluster total			790	5372000
Madison cluster				
Gregory Heights	471	664	-193	
Lee	354	375	-21	
Madison	936	1455	-519	
Rigler	538	579	-41	
Rose City Park	406	510	-104	
Scott	440	589	-149	
Vestal	343	508	-165	
Madison cluster total			-1192	-8105600

Charting Open Transfer Enrollment and Neighborhood Funding inequities

School	Students	Neighborhood	+/- students	+/- funding
Marshall cluster				
Binnsmead	484	734	-250	
Bridger	421	398	23	
Clark	508	603	-95	
Kelly	439	466	-27	
Lane	527	683	-156	
Lent	400	427	-27	
Marshall – Pauling	254			
Marshall- Biztech	292			
Marshall—Renaissance	314			
Marshall composite	860	1775	-915	
Marysville	368	421	-53	
Whitman	384	434	-50	
Woodmere	422	521	-99	
Marshall cluster total			-1649	-11213200
Roosevelt cluster				
Astor	331	353	-22	
Clarendon	401	418	-17	
George	383	502	-119	
James John	459	505	-46	
Peninsula	299	335	-36	
Portsmouth	286	389	-103	
Roosevelt – ACT	288			
Roosevelt – POWER	289			
Roosevelt – SEIS	217			
Roosevelt composite	794	1418	-624	
Rosa Parks	435	464	-29	
Sitton	285	498	-213	
Roosevelt cluster total			-1209	-8221200
Wilson cluster				
Capitol Hill	341	356	-15	
Gray	457	490	-33	
Hayhurst	345	278	67	
Jackson	688	652	36	
Maplewood	307	342	-35	
Markham	359	496	-137	
Rieke	280	328	-48	
Stephenson	310	265	45	
Wilson	1556	1642	-86	
Wilson cluster total			-206	-1400800

Source: Portland Public Schools³

References

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