



Benson Polytechnic High School Alumni Association

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TO: Carole Smith, Superintendent of Portland Public Schools

Participation in high school athletics can be a very valuable life experience. Students learn about team work, leadership, responsibility, and the importance of persistence and hard work. These are also very valuable skills and attributes sought by future employers.

As advocates for maintaining a viable school in Benson Polytechnic High School, alumni are concerned about the current athletic program reorganization. It appears from the written material, the public meetings, and answers to questions concerning PPS plans, the district proposal of having all of Portland Public School's high schools in a single 6A conference will lead to fewer opportunities for fewer students.

The proposal on the table appears to penalize schools like Benson, Jefferson, and Roosevelt with smaller enrollments, and it has no transition plan to level the playing field within a designated time frame. In what is being deemed as a starting point to more equity and higher participation in athletic programs looks to be a bumpy path of inequity that diverts limited athletic funds to the biggest schools in the district. This has repercussions for the future health of smaller schools and could potentially lead to issues with providing equal sports opportunities for girls.

Scholar Athletes are an important component of a healthy high school environment. They bridge the gap between academics and sports. They cross social barriers and develop friendships outside the academic silos. In some cases they keep students in school to graduate. Benson has throughout time prided itself on creating an environment that does many of those things through the CTE programs, but sports have also helped balance the equation, especially for girls in the vocational technical areas.

We have continued concerns about what PPS deems a 'viable' program and how it impacts smaller schools that cannot field teams at all three levels (i.e. varsity, junior varsity, and freshman) in a particular sport. We are asking that you restructure this requirement with smaller schools in mind. In the interest of increasing/maintaining student participation, why not allow Benson or any other high school to have only one varsity team if that is all they can field? If there are OSAA obstacles, PPS should valiantly strive to get waivers for this rule if you are in earnest about a restored city-wide PIL conference.

We fully understand that a focus option high school by its nature cannot offer the same array of electives during the normal school day – more class time must be devoted to the school's focus classes. For it to be a focus school, however, there should be equity in the extracurricular and after school opportunities. The size of the school should not restrict the opportunity for students to participate in sports. Fairness, equity, opportunity are at stake here - not whether PPS teams are 6A, 5A, or some mix.

We look forward to creatively working with the District, and particularly the Director of Athletics, in finding the means (waivers if necessary) to increase, and not limit, the opportunities for Benson students and student-athletes at every other small school to participate in athletics while in high school.

Rob Johns,
Chair, Benson Polytechnic High School Alumni Association
CC: PPS School Board Members
Marshall Haskins, Athletic Director
Curtis Wilson, Jr., Principal