

Wilson High School principal outlines future for students

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

Beginning in September, Wilson High School will undergo a fresh coat of ideas, changes, and courses. Besides the required credits needed for graduation, there will be an assortment of classes normally offered at a community center.

According to Principal Brian Chatard, for the first time in 12 years, the school budget was not cut. Instead, he has been busy hiring.

Chatard gave his "State of the School" report to the Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc. Schools Committee on May 15. Chatard was asked to speak on the changes, challenges, and the future of Southwest schools.

"There is a lot of interest in Portland Public Schools right now," Chatard said. "Class sizes are lower. Amazing candidates have applied, and due to many retirements, fresh, new teachers will be in the building this coming fall. I have 15 openings."

Chatard replaced long-time Principal Sue Brent who retired in June 2012. Chatard was a vice-principal at Grant High School and began his stint at Wilson the following September. While at Grant, he partnered with the Hollywood Theatre in documentary film and film as language classes.

According to Chatard, not all students excel at the three Rs (reading, writing, and 'rithmetic). "Instead, one student may thrive in the arts, others in technology, and some in the core areas. We have to offer diverse topics that will be market-

able in the 21st Century."

Take physical education and health. According to Chatard, a third of the students excel, a third does okay, and the rest hide. It's his goal that students become more physically active beyond the minimal P.E. requirements.

P.E. curriculum will eventually include lifestyle activities such as rock climbing, hiking, physical fitness, and ultimate Frisbee, not just team soccer or basketball.

"My wish is to encourage everyone to be fit and healthy," stressed Chatard. "There are over 850 student athletes here at Wilson but we need to compete with 24 Hour Fitness."

Wilson received a sizeable grant to convert two classrooms into a fitness, yoga, and mindfulness center. Educators emphasize that students who practice yoga remain healthier spiritually, physically and emotionally.

For this reason Wilson has partnered with One House of Peace (Zen meditation and awareness). An Oregon Health and Science University research study will follow 90 students regarding the impact of yoga, nutrition and healthy eating.

Chatard also has to face the common core standards which are directed from Salem. With more than 1230 students enrolled at Wilson, the state is concerned about all students passing.

After four years of high school, the state accounts for students in one of eight categories: regular diploma, adult diploma, modified diploma, extended diploma, alternative certificate, GED, continued enrollment or dropout.

Wilson's graduation rate is 84.4 percent. "Assessment is a hot button,"

Chatard went on. "It's not written in a user-friendly way. The tests are the most controversial and the state is not helping"

An astounding 40-60 percent of students are not expected to pass the exams. Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills involves a lot of writing and interacting on computer.

If a student does not pass OAKS, teachers and staff need to remediate in order for students to pass. It begins in May 2015. "What do you do with kids that don't ever pass?" one of the committee members asked.

"The Oregon Education Association is calling for a moratorium until this is properly vetted," answered Chatard. "Private schools are not held accountable to the assessments."

"Who benefits?" someone else asked. "The corporate test makers," replied Chatard.

Beyond faculty, resources for schools are on the back burner especially on the west side. The budget for basics like books, furniture, and computers hasn't been raised in over 10 years.



Principal Brian Chatard

"At \$72 a student, it doesn't amount to much," Chatard said. "There has been a lot of fundraising by parents but advocacy is needed here in Southwest Portland. Workstations need to be replaced, students need new computers. My furniture is from the early '70s!"

A ground breaking event for the new Wilson turf field will be held on Thursday, June 5, at 5:00 p.m. It will be the last event on the old field and there will be a spring football intra-squad scrimmage.

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