

Jefferson Gets City's Attention

Mayor, staff will move in for a week

BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Celeste Jackson, senior-class president at Jefferson High School, got her wish after leading a group of students to meet with Mayor Tom Potter.

Potter accepted her challenge last fall to visit the school and showcase the opportunities, successes and challenges facing Jefferson and other Portland schools.

Potter said he would not only visit the school, but bring along his entire staff and invite political and civic leaders, as well as parents and local business owners to join him.

Beginning Monday, Jan. 14, Potter will conduct a week's worth of city-hall business at Jefferson and deliver his annual State of the City Address from the north Portland campus.

"The more that average folks in Portland see Jefferson, the more they'll understand what's going on there," said Potter, in a recent meeting with Jackson to prepare for the temporary move. "It's about what's occurring at Jefferson and all the good things that people just normally don't read about."

Besides exposing the public to a different perspective on the school, students have assured time in front of more than 100 city employees and Jefferson alumni who are prepared to share personal experiences.

The City Council agenda on Wednesday evening, Jan. 16, will include consideration of a resolution to create a new Office of Human Relations, which will focus on eliminating discrimination and bigotry and strengthening relationships between groups in an increasingly diverse city. A Racial Profiling Committee will present a status report on its work.

During the week, city employees also come armed with more than 30 other projects ready for student input.

Citing the importance of knowing how government works, Jackson hopes the experience serves to unlock doors all around. "I wanted people to see all of the good things that are going on, what we're striving for and all of the kids going to college against all odds," she says.

The student initiative to organize a week of events led to a theme for each day starting with a Jefferson scholarship showcase on Monday, Careers will dominate Tuesday, civic immersion Wednesday, parents and community Thursday, and citywide support for students Friday featuring the mayor's annual address at 12:15 p.m. in the school's auditorium.

Students and city officials are seeking ways for interactions to provide opportunities for seeing past stereotypes.



PHOTO BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Celeste Jackson, Jefferson High School's senior-class president, speaks with Mayor Tom Potter as the entire City Council and city staffers prepare to relocate to the north Portland school for one week.

Whitney Egbert, assistant to the mayor, acknowledges the limitations of the gesture, since city government lacks direct political control over schools.

"We're not there to fix the problems," Egbert says. "We're there to say that there are a lot of things that we can do as people."

Egbert and Jackson point out that Jefferson is not unique in its struggles and argue that the school deserves some reconsideration.

"We've lacked support, so his being here shows that he's willing to do what he can," Jackson adds. "The only way people can change their perceptions about Jeff is if they come and see for themselves."

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Updating School Facilities Possible

Icon buildings could get renovated or replaced

BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A planning process is giving Portland Public Schools hope for millions of dollars a year to repair, renovate or replace buildings with a property tax bond measure.

Everyone can pretty much agree that PPS facilities need investment. The schools have experienced "deferred maintenance for many years," according to Leslie Rennie-Hill, chief of high schools.

Birdie Kirk, head custodian at Benson High School with 29 years of school-district experience, gives an example: Delayed circulation-

schools, but anything else about school buildings could be changed or refigured.

"We're committed to 10 viable high-school campuses," said Rennie-Hill, "but I doubt that high schools will look very much like they do now in 10 years."

At Benson, continuing staffing cuts have nearly put the high school in crisis mode. Year after year has seen the end of trade programs unique to the technical school.

A recent PPS building assessment uses the same words for many schools, including Benson: "This facility is in relatively good condi-

day, Jan. 22 at Madison High School and Wednesday, Jan. 23 at Franklin High School.



PHOTO BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Benson High students Nate Hepp (from left) Santiago Rivera, Jamar Johnson and Chris Williams, discuss issues that impact the school, like needed renovations and repairs and dwindling technical and vocational course offerings.

system adjustments that have caused mold problems in buildings are not unique to the now-demolished Whitaker Middle School.

Whitaker, a northeast Portland campus that opened as John Adams High School in 1969, serves as a case study in discussions on the cost priorities for district buildings that are nearing an average age of 70. Kirk cites unheeded warnings about Whitaker's physical condition to argue that adequate maintenance budgets are needed.

PPS officials said they will keep options open for facilities until they hear from the community. A comprehensive study on the condition of school buildings will be presented to the public in the coming weeks.

With enrollment figures stabilizing, there are no plans to close more

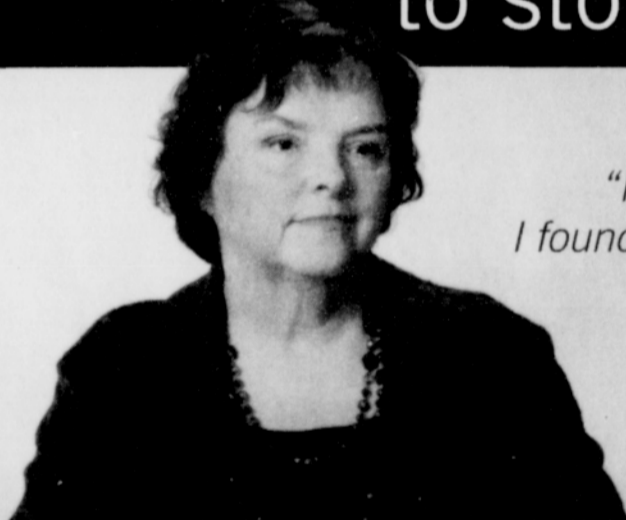
tion, however loss funding has forced the district to eliminate cyclical improvements to buildings such as painting, roofing replacement and brick preservation."

The neglect of maintenance in Portland's schools has some veteran staffers up in arms about the push for rebuilding while less and less goes toward what's already there.

"You can't build a building without maintaining it," Kirk says.

District officials invite community members to give input on specific recommendations for each of Portland's school buildings and other facilities. Sessions will be held from 7 to 9:30 p.m. in school cafeterias Tuesday, Jan. 15 at Jefferson High School; Wednesday, Jan. 16 at Wilson High School; Tues-

"The desperation came from not being able to stop gambling."



"I made the call to get some help. I found people that really understood me..."

"I was mesmerized."

"I didn't know that gambling did not affect everyone the way it affected me."



"The counselor made me understand that there was hope and I have not placed a bet in 6 years."



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