

Heated Discussion

continued **▲** from Front

The first idea would keep funnel 10th graders into career/interest paths after attending small high school academies.

The second would assign students to their neighborhood school, which would offer the same course offerings across the district.

The third option would divide schools into regions, with students being able to choose large schools or small specialized academies to meet their needs and interests.

The crowd, which included about 50 students, was divided up into tables that seated about 10 people each. Zeke Smith asked the crowd specific questions about what they wanted from the redesign. After the crowd deliberated Smith made his rounds among tables getting peoples' ideas.

Issues surrounding equity and access to class offerings kept coming up in peoples' responses, as did problems with the way high school boundaries are drawn up, teacher support and accountability.

The issue of diversity and racial tension came up in the comments made by several students willing to give up their Saturday morning.

EJ Kincaid, a 17-year-old junior at the Spanish English International School at Roosevelt said that diversity and essential so that "we can better understand each other."

An issue that kept coming up during the discussions was the district's policy of allowing students to transfer to any of the 10 schools in the

district. A number of people expressed their displeasure with the policy since it drained some schools of money, students, and community support.

Options one and two have serious implications for embattled neighborhood schools that have seen their enrollment shrink under the district's open transfer policy (see "High Schools Do Over," Portland Observer, April 22 issue.) Such schools, which are a source of pride for the cities neighborhoods, periodically grapple with rumors that they face closure.

Zeke Smith openly acknowledged that one neighborhood high school would have to shut its doors under

Participants in a Saturday forum at Jefferson High School to consider proposals to completely redesign the city's high schools break into small clusters to discuss the proposals. Teletha Benjamin (right) rose to point out the level of distrust the community harbors toward the district.

PHOTO BY JAKE THOMAS/
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER



these plans.

Sporadically, a participant would suggest that the problems with the city's high schools couldn't be sepa-

rated from issues facing lower grades. "I feel like I'm sacrificing my child if I left them in K-8, and she's the only one I have, and that's the only opportunity

I have," said LakeiTha Elliott, who started home-schooling her 12-year-old daughter because she was so unimpressed with PPS teachers.

Roosevelt Boosters Want Principal Back

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Portland Public Schools Superintendent Carole Smith caused a dust up with the Roosevelt High School Boosters last month when she made the decision to yank the school's popular principal, Deborah Peterson, and place her at Madison High School.

Supporters of Roosevelt say Peterson has proven herself to be a huge asset to the north Portland school by raising test scores, bringing in arts and music programs that have long been absent, and generally rallying the community around the school.

"She's just a firecracker," said

Bob Johnson, who's involved with the Roosevelt Boosters and attended the school forum.

PPS Spokesperson Matt Shelby explained that Peterson position was supposed to be temporary from the day she was hired on for the job. Roosevelt was undergoing a reorganization that put three small schools at the campus. But with the transition finished, Peterson's work was done and each of the small schools will now be overseen by an administrator, said Shelby.

He added that since Peterson was already employed by the district there was no requirement that there be a public involvement process when she was transferred.

"Whenever you have a structural change there will always be people who support it and people who don't," said Shelby.

But the boosters are not pleased with that answer.

"There's going to be a three-headed monster at that campus next year," said Johnson.

At the end of a related forum Saturday on high schools redesigns district-wide, Smith agreed to stay late to meet with the supporters of Roosevelt.

She began by thanking them for participating constructively in the forum.

"Are we looking for a win-win? You bet," she said to about two dozen

supporters who reiterated that Peterson's accomplishments had revitalized the school.

Laura Day, one of the Roosevelt boosters, offered a solution to the problem: Keep Peterson on as principal, and hire a vice principal. This solution would cut down on staffing costs since three administrators for the small schools wouldn't be needed.

However, Toni Hunter, assistant superintendent of high schools, said that staff at the school needs to be consulted because there are questions as to whether or not Peterson is credentialed to do staff evaluations.

"We're not going to get this resolved today," Hunter said.

Coach on Mission

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is impressed by his dedication to getting kids involved in the sport.

So far, Todd has largely spearheaded the effort on his own. He's already shelled out a couple hundred of his own dollars to pay for the league fee and insurance. He's also purchased equipment to keep up maintenance on Jefferson High School's field.

But this could change soon.

According to the school's athletic director, Mitch Whitehurst, Todd is likely to get a job coaching baseball at the school. Whitehurst agrees that

it's crucial to have a sustained effort to keep kids interested in the sport, which is what he expects Todd to do.

"We need to start with the grassroots. We need to start with young kids," said Whitehurst.

After knocking off of work at Portland's Bureau of Transportation Todd heads to the field to do maintenance on it, which he says is the one of the most crucial components for having a successful team.

"They started acting like baseball players," said Todd of when he brought his team to the field he's spent hours on. "You can't underestimate how important that is."



Long time and respected baseball coach Matthew Todd has returned to his Jefferson High School roots in an attempt to revive the sport and inject a new sense of pride in the school and neighborhood

PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Todd, clad in an aging "Demos" baseball jacket from the 1990s, envisions a competitive baseball team at Jefferson that will produce stories that will be told for generations.

For Todd, the issue is about more

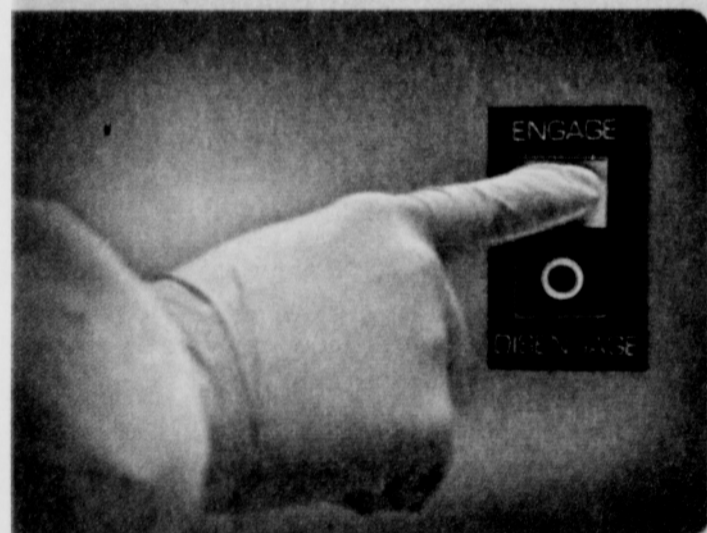
than having the sport at the school. Jefferson's enrollment has steadily dropped off in recent years as students in the area transfer to other schools, which befuddles Todd who hopes that if he takes the initiative on

this it will encourage others to rally around their school and neighborhood.

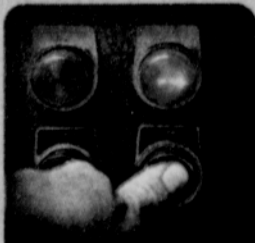
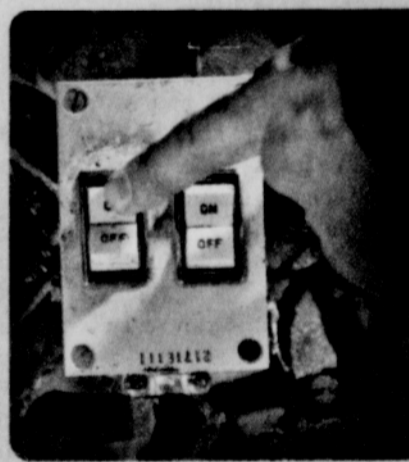
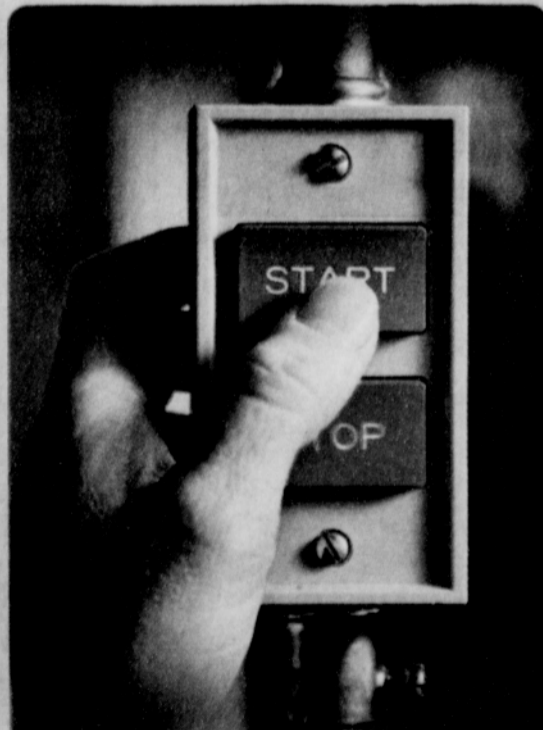
"When the people in the neighborhood see change, sometimes I think they rally behind it," said Todd. "They're going to want to be part of it."

But Todd realizes that this won't be easy, and will require a sustained effort. He's vying to head up the baseball program at Jefferson, and said he's willing to do whatever it takes to keep kids interested in baseball.

"It's not easy, and you have to stay after it, and you have to do it yourself," he said. "You can't expect someone else to pick up your sword because it's not necessarily going to happen."



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