

# OPINION

## Letters to the Editor:

### Neighbors Support Jefferson

The Humboldt Neighborhood Association opposes the plan to close Jefferson High School. We strongly support a high school redesign that will include Jefferson as a comprehensive neighborhood high school.

The perennial issues at Jefferson have been created by Portland Public Schools, and Portland Public Schools has a responsibility to repair what it has damaged, not walk away from its own mess. Within living memory, Jefferson was one of the finest schools in the state. But over the last 30 years, the revolving door of leadership at Jefferson, along with funding issues, has stigmatized this fine school. Academic life at Jefferson has regularly been disrupted by trendy, untested programs, poorly implemented, with no continuity or follow-through. Under your leadership, Jefferson

has become the very embodiment of unsustainability. The school is one of the things in which our diverse neighborhood takes pride; the current proposal, announced without sufficient opportunity for adequate community input, takes advantage of a manufactured crisis to close not just an historic landmark, but what is and must continue to be an essential part of the fabric of public education in Portland.

We are convinced that if Jefferson is closed as a neighborhood school, the revised high school boundaries will divide our neighborhood between two or more schools, further fragmenting our community identity. Jefferson is the heart of our neighborhood, a community that sees our diversity as one of our most treasured assets, and we believe that with proper leadership, funding and programs it can thrive. As described in the modified plan proposed by Superintendent Smith, specifically increasing the projected number of students advanced to the school and reinforcing its core program would be a great start in rebuilding Jefferson. The parents of young children in our neighborhood are committed to their children, their local schools, and to sending their

children to Jefferson.

We believe that Portland Public School's treatment of Jefferson High School through the last 30 years, culminating in its current proposal to close the school, is disgraceful. The School Board cannot justify its leadership credibility while leaving one of the most populated areas in the city and state without a comprehensive neighborhood high school.

As parents and as community members, we want Jefferson to be a strong and healthy neighborhood school, the center of a multicultural, diverse and vibrant neighborhood. The district should follow up on the Superintendent's proposal to make major investments to improve Jefferson's academic offerings and support an environment that will enable Jefferson students to succeed. The opportunity to bolster Jefferson as a comprehensive school is also an opportunity to bolster pride in our neighborhood and unite our community.

We insist you support a high school redesign that will include Jefferson as a comprehensive neighborhood high school.

**Humboldt Neighborhood Association**  
*Paul Anthony, chair*

### History of Disrespect

Your editorial (Saving Jefferson High School, June 16 edition) against the recently-announced proposal put forth by the majority of school board members to close Jefferson High School, was an excellent, thoughtful, and informed one, and I applaud you.

You did a great job illuminating how high the stakes are at this moment; that their vote is not merely today's intent, but is a continuation of the history of disrespect and thoughtlessness that has contributed to Jefferson's current difficult moment.

It is public record that Portland Public Schools has a less than enviable history in response to the needs and aspirations of students of color, low-income and poor students and, particularly African-American students. As a result, the public education of our children includes numerous sorry chapters, with Jefferson HS bearing constant witness to ideas for change that never materialize for the betterment or benefit of our students.

The anticipated move by the board to close down Jefferson, challenges the recommendations of a thoughtful Superintendent who has given evidence that she is trying to do differently than her predecessor; which certainly should count for more than a quick "hands down!"

That Carole Smith has recommended a new starting point for Jefferson - and Benson - although flawed in a number of aspects, provides room for consideration and negotiation to benefit the many families and students in our community who have histori-

cally been ignored or dismissed, and we need that option.

I'd suggest to our school board that they be more transparent, honest and brave enough to tell the truth about their quick and sudden agreement; that they more clearly articulate the assumed benefits and the implications for their choices.

I'd further suggest that they give the larger Jefferson HS community the same level of consideration and deference they accorded to the more affluent and connected Grant High School when suggestions for change, including closure, surfaced.

Anything less is simply unacceptable.

*Sharon Gary-Smith, Community and Social Justice Advocate*

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