

The INSIDE

The Week in Review page 2



Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

pages 7-11



METRO

page 9



OPINION

pages 12-13

CLASSIFIEDS

pages 14-15

CALENDAR

page 15

page 16

FOOD



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What's on your list today?®



PHOTO BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Benson High School Principal Curtis Wilson inspires students by teaching a Zumba dance class during a freshmen physical education class as a way of connecting with the over 300 new students that come to Benson each year.

Connecting

Principal lets guard down to dance and inspire

BY DANNY PETERSON
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

It's not every day that you will find your school principal at the front of the class leading charges in a dance routine. But that's exactly what Benson High School Principal Curtis Wilson did Thursday for boys and girls enrolled in a Benson freshmen physical education class.

Wilson started teaching Zumba,

the fitness craze that uses the beats from hip-hop, samba, salsa, mambo, and other music to provide motivation and drive for aerobic exercise, when he began as principal of the northeast Portland school five years ago.

It's a tradition he has held one day each year at Benson, in the spring, ever since.

The school leader says it's a great way of connecting with the over 300 new freshman that come to his school each year.

"To me, it's negative energy out of my body. And so I really enjoy it," Wilson told the Portland Observer. "Now do I have enough time to do it on a consistent basis anymore? No. But this one day, I

just move all my appointments to the side."

Wilson was introduced to Zumba at his gym a few years ago. At first, he was an assistant instructor for the class, which was held regularly at the school before he arrived there. But the main instructor wasn't available the second year, so he memorized the moves and took over.

Wilson is pretty sure students appreciate their face to face time with him in class.

"I really want to spend [time] with these kids so that we can make life-long memories," he said. "Because years from now, when they're off in college or where ever, high school will start to fade. But I'm pretty sure that spending a day with their principal dancing will probably stay with them for a long time."

Teacher Disciplined for Protest

A popular middle school teacher who led students in a school walkout last month to protest a police officer involved shooting death was placed on leave after a school district investigation found he put students at risk.

In a letter sent Friday to Ockley Green parents, principal Paul McCullough and district senior director Karl Logan say students from the north Portland school were subjected to the risk of harm

because of unauthorized actions that were not in keeping with the school's obligation to ensure student safety at all times.

During the walkout, students were directed to lie down on Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard near Ainsworth Street as part of a die-in protest to support the family of Quatrice Haynes, an unarmed black teenager killed by Portland police last year.

The disciplinary action against

the teacher, identified as Chris Riser, was criticized by his supporters who have started a change.org petition to help get him back in the classroom. "He is a strong voice for social justice, diversity and equity," the petition reads. "At a critical time when gun violence is rampant, Chris Riser is teaching the kids that their greatest weapon is their voice."

More than 1,300 people had signed the petition as of Sunday.