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Advocating for KairosPDX

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standards in reading or math.

KairosPDX is one of the schools trying to turn that statistic around, one student at a time, Pen-son said.

“Kairos creates a program to change things and improve outcomes. And we are doing this. While our sample size is low, the early results are very promising. In some cases, black students at Kairos are outperforming black students at other schools in the districts over four to one,” she said.

Part of how they achieved the positive results was by hiring high quality educators and holding classes year-round, both proven techniques of improving learning outcomes. The school also creates culturally specific curricula.

Meanwhile, the threat of being forced to move to another location seriously throws into question whether the school can remain open.

The school asked for a five year lease from the district back in December, and in late June, the district responded with its own offer of a one year lease, as well as a rent increase of over 30 percent, KairosPDX board member Chris Nelson testified to the school



Marsha Williams (from left), Zalika Gardner and Kali Thorne-Ladd are founders of KairosPDX, a public non-profit charter school designed specifically to close the achievement gap for minority students in Portland. Thorne-Ladd is the school's current executive director.

board last month.

As a compromise, KairosPDX is now asking for a two year lease.

Penson said the school has looked at ‘dozens’ of properties in the Albina area in the past year, and even hired a facilities person to help them do so back in 2016, but none of the locations met the criteria to hold their more than 160 students.

“We are fully committed to giving the district their building back and our own space. The only thing we’re asking for is time. Our roots in this community are essential and we want to stay here. We are trying our best to be fair and reasonable; we have tried our best to partner, I’m left with the conclusion that the district just doesn’t care about our kids.”

KairosPDX offered to partner with Portland Public Schools earlier this year to help train teachers to be equity-focused, which the district did not respond to, Penson said.

The school previously received a grant to train district teachers, which they did, to high evaluations, in its first year of operation.

Penson added that the main mission the four founders of the school committed to when they started it was to close the achievement gap for underserved, minority students.

“We’re on track. We’re making good on ours. So now it feels like PPS gets to toot that horn. We’re an asset. And so that’s why I’m really confused,” she said.

Upon reaching out to the district, Portland Public Schools cited a deficit of facilities district wide, as well as the subsequent obligation to provide additional space to students at other schools all over Portland as the main reason for their offering.

“PPS appreciates the important work Kairos does as a charter school for our community in educating students who historically have been underserved. We look forward to finalizing a new one-year lease agreement in support of this work as our district works to address a significant shortage of space to serve all of the students in our district,” a message from the district reads.

Then-school board chair Julia Brim-Edwards echoed a similar sentiment following testimony from KairosPDX spokespersons, including Penson, at a school board meeting last month.

“We don’t have extra space and charter schools have an obligation to find their own facility and we believe that offering a one year lease is a very fair thing to do and are willing to enter into it. But we also have....our board has a fiduciary responsibility to PPS students and we have a severe facilities need and we’ve tried to offer a lease with terms that are both fair to Kairos but also fair to the rest of the students at PPS,” Brim-Edwards said.

KairosPDX staff will next testify to the school board on Tuesday, Aug. 28.



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