

PortlandTribune

Adams lends support, not opinions, to school redesign discussion

BY JENNIFER ANDERSON

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Mayor Sam Adams is weighing in on the Portland Public Schools' high school redesign process.

But for the moment, he's simply lending his support to the effort, without making any judgments about the vote the school board is expected to take Monday evening.

"Obviously, closing schools is the measure of last resort," he told the Tribune Friday afternoon, a few hours after sitting in on Superintendent Carole Smith's high school redesign address to the Portland City Club. "I want to give them a chance to come forward with a substantive proposal. The bottom line for me is, how do we improve academic performance?"

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Smith told the City Club that she plans to improve the graduation rate and lower the achievement gap with a proposal that would: balance the number of students on each campus at 1,350; offer the same "core program" of coursework on every campus; restrict transfers from neighborhood to neighborhood school; and close one to three of the high school campuses to account for lower enrollment.

The closures are the most controversial element; critics wonder why the same outcomes can't be achieved while keeping the neighborhood schools in tact.

No schools have been named for closure yet; Smith has 45 days after the resolution passes to return to the board with those details after taking further community input.

Responding to proposals

Smith said it's a "balancing act" to have the right number of students, staff and resources to be able to provide the same breadth and depth of opportunities for students at every campus.

If no campuses closed, she said, the district would need additional resources or would have to "figure out what programs we're not able to offer at every campus."

She also said she and staff have been trying to find the "sweet spot" between the desire for neighborhood schools and choice in the form of focus option schools. Her plan would offer both, although some critics don't see the need for the focus options.

Adams credited Smith for the work done so far to address the "shameful" inequities in the district.

"We have some of the best and the worst schools in the state in the same city, across the river from each other," he said. "I'm supportive of removing the academic inequities that exist in this city. It's shameful and embarrassing that it cuts along racial lines and household incomes."

Adams said he's been meeting with parents across the district to hear their concerns. He met with the biggest organized opposition group, "Close the gap, not the schools," this past weekend, but wouldn't say specifically what he thought of their ideas.

"(Possible closure of facilities) is obviously a topic on the table I'm concerned about, everyone's concerned about," he said. "But I want to see what the whole plan is to address the inequities.

"There's a lot of hope, nervousness, concern. Right now it's at the concept level and I'm going to wait to

respond to specific a proposal.”

For Smith’s proposal and new high school redesign information, see: www.pps.k12.or.us/news/3028.htm .

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