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Portland Superintendent Carole Smith answers high school redesign questions at the City Club

By Kimberly Melton, The Oregonian

March 05, 2010, 7:03PM

Portland Public Schools superintendent Carole Smith answered questions about the district's high school redesign this afternoon at the City Club of Portland.

In the question and answer session, Smith addressed questions about some of the most prickly aspects of the redesign plan including transfer policy and boosting the graduation rate.

Oregonian reporter Betsy Hammond led the session with Smith, asking questions for about a half hour. City Club members also asked questions of Smith for about a half hour.

Here's a snapshot of some Smith's comments:

On changing the district's high school system instead of targeting specific schools, Smith said none of the district's nine neighborhood campuses currently meet the needs of all of their students. She cited Grant High School – largely seen as a school that has it all – as an example. More than 320 students -- about 22 percent -- of the school's 1,600 kids were labeled "academic priority," meaning they struggled in some aspect of eighth grade. Yet, the school only offers four support courses for struggling kids.

On how her plan will boost achievement or narrow the achievement gap between white and minority students, Smith said the new core program will allow schools to target supports to kids who need them and give students the opportunity to challenge themselves with more rigorous college-level courses.

On the district's intent to end students' ability to transfer from one neighborhood school to another, Smith said that the district does plan to limit transfers except in specific situations that include boosting socioeconomic diversity or allowing kids to access programs they don't have at their neighborhood schools.

On the district's controversial track record around implementing big changes such as the K-8 redesign, Smith admitted it could have been done better but also said that students in K-8 schools have started to show academic progress.

To listen to the hour-long program, visit <http://www.pdxcityclub.org/>

--Kim Melton

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