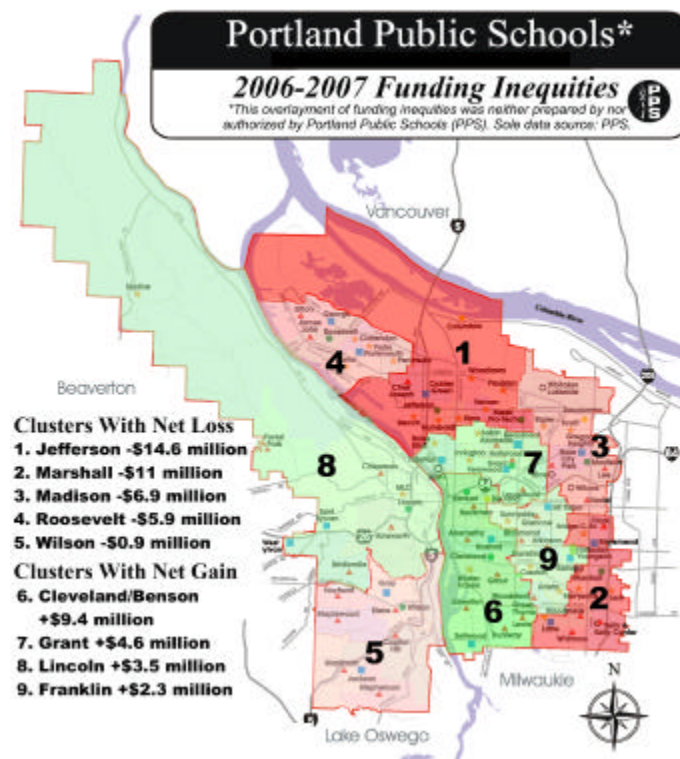


Charting Open Transfer Enrollment

and

Neighborhood Funding Inequities (draft)

A report to complement the Flynn-Blackmer Audit



Prepared for
Portland Public Schools Board of Education
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Executive Summary

The neighborhood schools of Portland are renowned as the crown jewels of our city. The fact that 83.7% of eligible students attend Portland Public Schools¹ is a testament to our city's livability and vibrant public spirit.

But this distinction is in danger of slipping away, particularly in our poor and working-class neighborhoods.

This study finds a clear pattern of investment in neighborhoods disproportionate with the distribution of Portland Public Schools students. Specifically, wealthier neighborhoods get more investment, and poorer neighborhoods get significantly less in relation to their student population. For the "red zone" neighborhoods, this amounted to a divestment of nearly \$40 million in 2006-2007.

The cause of this inequity is the open transfer enrollment policy. The Flynn-Blackmer audit² has clearly described how this policy has harmed the goal of strong neighborhood schools and contributed to racial isolation. This study complements that study, adding a focus on the overall distribution of public investment within the district.

"School Choice" is a trendy concept in school reform communities. It is touted as a salve for the "achievement gap" and racial isolation. But the data for Portland Public Schools³ are clear: neighborhood-to-neighborhood transfers have increased racial isolation and resulted in gross inequities in public investment by neighborhood.

Portland neighborhoods are becoming increasingly integrated, yet our schools are increasingly segregated. We have allowed open transfers to determine where our hundreds of millions of dollars of public investment go without regard for demographic trends, and this policy has begun to strain the system in ways that will be very costly to fix later.

This study recommends a phased curtailment of neighborhood-to neighborhood transfers, coupled with a prerequisite equalization of educational and extracurricular programs at all schools. It also addresses No Child Left Behind, with a proposal to create model "traditional magnet schools" at sites under federal sanction, providing enhanced learning opportunities that can eventually be incorporated district-wide as budgets allow.

Our open transfer enrollment policy has outlived any usefulness it once may have had in preventing "white flight," and there is no policy rationale for keeping it. We need to re-examine school boundaries, ensure equal programs across the board at all neighborhood schools, and curtail neighborhood-to-neighborhood transfers. That is, remove all legitimate reasons for transfers, then end transfers.

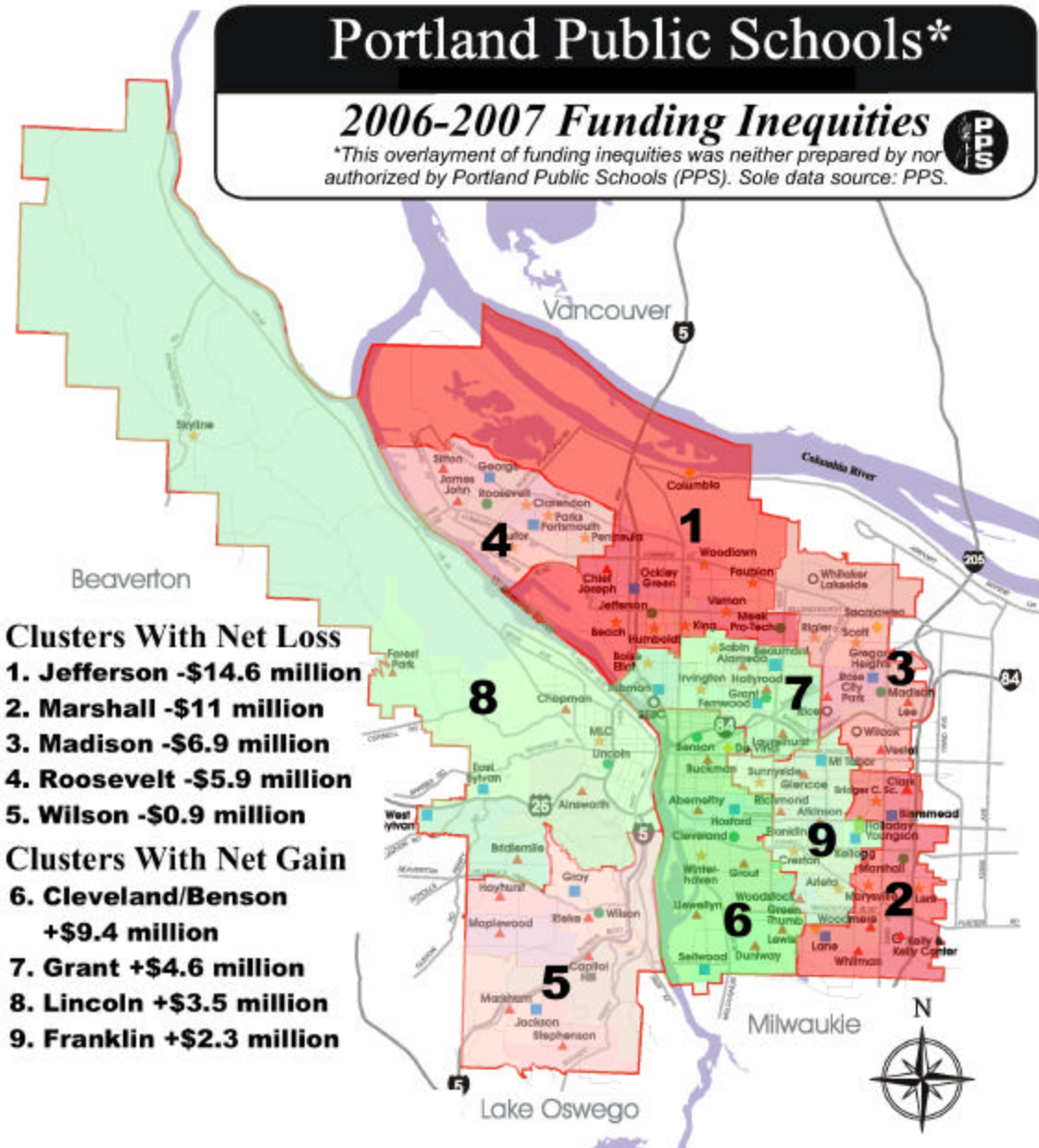


Figure 1: Portland Public Schools 2006-2007 Funding Inequities
 Data source: Portland Public Schools³

The Problem: Unequal Distribution of Public Investment

Portland Public Schools has a system of school choice that has resulted in a radical redistribution of public investment. Any students may transfer out of their neighborhood school for any or no reason, and into any school of their choice, space permitting.

Since funding follows students, this has created a self-reinforcing pattern of money leaving our poor and working-class neighborhoods and flowing into our wealthiest neighborhoods. As more and more students have followed the money with their own funding, we are left with a two-tiered school system, as illustrated in the map in figure 1.

This pattern is self-reinforcing, because the schools left behind in the “red zone” are faced with falling attendance, leading to program cuts and school closures. These cuts lead to further out-transfers. Students that leave tend to be higher achieving students. This “skimming” effect, noted in the Flynn-Blackmer audit², leaves school administrators with student populations that are more expensive to educate, but with less money to do so.

Consequently, principals are faced with the question of how to spend their allotted fulltime-equivalent (FTE) budget, and can be forgiven for cutting out music and art to pay for extra literacy help. This leads to further skimming, as families with the means to transfer are drawn to schools in wealthier neighborhoods, with more enrichment programs and better test scores.

On the ground in the “red zone” neighborhoods, prekindergarten-8 students are faced with a patchwork of schools and attendance areas that do not match their neighborhood demographics. Schools are closed, and their buildings leased to competing private or charter schools. Schools that remain often have fewer “special” offerings than schools in wealthier neighborhoods.

High school students in the “red zone” are faced with narrow choices between special-focus “academies”, with limited elective and advanced placement options, and reduced extracurricular programs.

In the “green zone”, students are also faced with problems, especially at the high school level. Facilities are inadequate to handle the higher enrollments. Class sizes are large, and there can be insufficient numbers of textbooks and supplemental materials. There are even cases where there are not enough desks to accommodate all the students in certain classes. More extracurricular programs are available, but they are also overcrowded, effectively reducing arts, athletic, and academic enrichment opportunities for students.

This study examined the transfer and enrollment data for 2006-2007, and found five high school clusters lost investment due to net loss of enrollment from out-transfers. These are the same clusters that have seen disproportionate numbers of school closures and

Charting Open Transfer Enrollment and Neighborhood Funding inequities

program cuts, and experiments with narrowly-focused schools-within-schools at the high school level.

The remaining four clusters had net gains in enrollment. There have been fewer closures in these clusters, and schools have generally maintained full slates of academic and extracurricular programs. High schools there have maintained traditional programming and configurations.

Monetary values for these net gains and losses are calculated on a school-by-school basis, and then totaled by cluster. For each school, enrollment was subtracted from PPS neighborhood population, and the result was multiplied by the budget per student at that school. (See Appendix A.)

The resulting numbers for clusters with net gains and those with net losses do not add up to zero, since every school has a different budget per student. This study includes Benson High in the Cleveland cluster, since it has no attendance area, and it is situated within the Cleveland attendance area. Note that the Cleveland cluster would still be in the surplus category without Benson, with in-transfers representing \$2.6 million of funding above what it would receive based on attendance area population.

The clusters with net losses due to transfers in 2006-2007 were, in order of magnitude:

1. Jefferson, -\$14,650,778
2. Marshall, -\$11,090,061
3. Madison, -\$6,976,508
4. Roosevelt, -\$5,906,403
5. Wilson, -\$938,786

The clusters with net gains due to transfers in 2006-2007 were, in order of magnitude:

1. Cleveland/Benson, +\$9,446,945
2. Grant, +\$4,664,333
3. Lincoln, +\$3,524,847
4. Franklin, +\$2,375,196

These numbers represent significant public divestment from the neighborhoods that most need public investment. Conversely, they represent public investment in Portland's wealthier neighborhoods disproportionate to the student population living there.

This pattern of divestment and excess investment affects real estate prices and the long-term quality of life in our neighborhoods. This is a compounding factor to the effects on community and education detailed above and in Flynn-Blackmer².

The Solution: Funding Equity and Reinvestment

This study recommends the curtailment of neighborhood-to-neighborhood school transfers to reinvest in the neighborhoods that have lost due to transfers. Before this can be considered, we must eliminate the legitimate factors that lead families to choose a different neighborhood school. We must also re-evaluate school attendance area boundaries, in order to properly match populations to facilities.

The re-evaluation of facilities will likely show a shortage of adequate buildings in neighborhoods that have suffered the most divestment due to out-transfers. In neighborhoods without adequate facilities, the district should consider building new facilities to replace outdated buildings, or to backfill for buildings that have been leased, sold, or demolished.

The district should immediately curtail any leases of closed schools, particularly to competing private or charter schools, and should also place a moratorium on new charter schools to be located in any “red zone” neighborhood.

All educational programs must be equalized across the district. “Special” programs like music, art, P.E. and counseling are currently at the discretion of site administrators, which creates disparity between schools both in terms of class size and enhanced academic offerings. We must curtail this localized discretion, and mandate a basic level of “specials” at every school.

We should begin with a goal of art, music, P.E., and counseling for all Pre K-8 schools. If the budget is not available for all of these programs at all schools, we must make the difficult decision which programs to cut, and cut them across the board. Every school must offer the same programs, and similar class sizes.

All high schools should be similarly equalized, with a full slate of electives, advanced placement courses, and extracurricular activities offered at all schools.

Once we have removed these common reasons for neighborhood-to-neighborhood transfers, we should begin to phase them out. New enrollment should be assigned by default to neighborhood schools. Existing transfers may be grandfathered until students complete their course of study at their current school.

In order to ease any shock to families or potential resistance, the district may show its goodwill to the areas currently suffering the most out-transfers by offering enhanced general fund contributions to these schools. Additional enhancement programs intended to eventually be offered district-wide should first be offered at these schools as an affirmative step to draw back transferred students and assure new families that the district’s intentions for equity are in earnest.

Special Focus and Magnet Schools

This study does not recommend the complete curtailment of school choice. Magnet and special focus schools have a strong and important role in any school district, and Portland Public Schools have many programs of which to be proud.

However, we must take a close look at where some of these programs are located, particularly dual-language immersion programs. We must evaluate how well they serve the neighborhood population, and make decisions on whether to move them to better serve other neighborhoods. The Spanish immersion programs at Ainsworth and Beach are two prime examples.

Another concern is the co-location of schools within neighborhood schools. Without neighborhood-to-neighborhood out-transfers, these buildings may need more space for their neighborhood programs.

When considering locations of new or relocated programs, the district should give priority to areas that have suffered the most divestment under open transfers.

No Child Left Behind

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires that the district allow transfers out of schools that fail to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This study recommends the creation of “traditional magnet schools” at sites that fail to meet AYP. These schools would have enhanced educational and extracurricular programming, with extra general funds used to cover the additional expenses.

Extra emphasis on literacy and math education, combined with enhanced enrichment programs, family and cultural outreach, and focus on community pride and ownership will combine to both discourage out-transfers and bring the school back into compliance with NCLB.

These schools will serve as models for expanding enrichment programs to the rest of the district when budgets allow.

What Hasn't Worked

Portland Public Schools has attempted to soften the blow of school choice by instituting a weighted lottery. This has introduced unworkable complexity to the system, as documented in Flynn-Blackmer², and has done little or nothing to ameliorate the inequity brought on by neighborhood-to-neighborhood transfers.

While school choice has been touted by its proponents as a tonic for the “achievement gap”, clear evidence shows that it instead increases racial isolation, which is known to contribute to the problem.

Creating special small schools-within-schools has also failed in retaining or drawing back enrollment, and this approach has severely limited academic options for students who stay at their neighborhood schools in our poorer neighborhoods.

Conclusion

Students learn best in integrated, well-funded schools that reflect the values of their communities. Our current system of open transfers has contributed to racial isolation, the fragmentation of communities, and a radical redistribution of public investment away from the communities that need it the most.

We must formulate a better policy for the public investment controlled by the school district, a policy that is not only more fair to all neighborhoods of Portland, but that also provides a better education for our children in strong, neighborhood-based, community-centered schools.

Neighborhood-to-neighborhood transfers are in direct conflict with the goals of strong neighborhood schools and closing the achievement gap, as documented in the Flynn-Blackmer audit². No amount of tinkering around the edges of this policy can change that fundamental fact. There is no legitimate policy rationale for allowing open neighborhood-to-neighborhood transfers, and a great deal of evidence to show that they are extremely harmful to our goals as a district.

If our goal has been to create a two-tiered system, we have succeeded. If our goal is neighborhood funding equity and equal educational opportunities, we have embarked on a path that is spiraling in the opposite direction. We must change direction immediately to avoid further damage.

In the best interest of the children of Portland and the neighborhoods they live in, we must change the direction of our public investment policy. Instead of poor neighborhoods subsidizing rich ones, we must embark on a path of reinvestment in our neediest areas.

The longer we avoid dealing with this difficult problem, the more damage we are doing to our children and their communities.

Appendix A: 2006-2007 PPS Enrollment Data

School	budget/student	Students	Neighborhood	Loss/gain
Benson Cluster				
Benson	5290	1294	0	6845260
Benson Total				6845260
Cleveland Cluster				
Abernathy	4620	357	399	-194040
Buckman	4297	506	232	1177378
Cleveland	4247	1472	1375	411959
Duniway	4518	446	377	311742
Grout	4810	333	516	-880230
Hosford	4656	476	543	-311952
Lewis	4376	293	217	332576
Llewellyn	4224	309	326	-71808
Sellwood	4740	515	444	336540
Winterhaven	4330	344	0	1489520
Cleveland Total				2601685
Franklin Cluster				
Arleta	4864	370	488	-573952
Atkinson	4253	549	282	1135551
Creston	4938	309	413	-513552
Franklin	4888	1283	1393	-537680
Glencoe	3899	498	577	-308021
Kellog	8432	269	376	-902224
Mt. Tabor	4573	633	357	1262148
Richmond – Japanese Immersion	4452	360	0	1602720
Sunnyside	3880	501	276	873000
Woodstock	3921	384	298	337206
Franklin Total				2375196
Grant Cluster				
Alameda	4104	678	538	574560
Beaumont	5288	500	401	523512
Boise-Eliot	6309	415	263	958968
Da Vinci	4200	444	0	1864800
Fernwood	5562	347	403	-311472
Grant	4374	1691	1619	314928
Hollyrood	5361	210	261	-273411
Irvington	4766	473	385	419408
Laurelhurst	4440	561	506	244200
Sabin	5130	429	361	348840
Grant Total				4664333

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School	budget/student	Students	Neighborhood	Loss/gain
Jefferson Cluster				
Beach	5449	475	246	1247821
Chief Joseph	5278	359	505	-770588
Faubion	4806	332	410	-374868
Humboldt	6518	240	286	-299828
Jefferson	7614	566	1751	-9022590
King	6411	458	376	525702
Ockley Green	6973	442	327	801895
Tubman	12133	131	430	-3627767
Vernon	5545	404	732	-1818760
Woodlawn	5535	450	687	-1311795
Jefferson Total				-14650778
Lincoln Cluster				
Ainsworth	4334	509	317	832128
Bridlemile	4366	458	469	-48026
Chapman	4404	478	421	251028
Forest Park	4371	508	525	-74307
Lincoln	4225	1498	1395	435175
MLC	4583	439	0	2011937
Skyline	4426	233	220	57538
West Sylvan	4241	896	882	59374
Lincoln Total				3524847
Madison Cluster				
Gregory Heights	6678	471	664	-1288854
Lee	5332	354	375	-111972
Madison	6545	936	1455	-3396855
Rigler	4948	538	579	-202868
Rose City Park	4379	406	510	-455416
Scott	4987	440	589	-743063
Vestal	4712	343	508	-777480
Madison Total				-6976508

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School	budget/student	Students	Neighborhood	Loss/gain
Marshall Cluster				
Binnsmead	6462	484	734	-1615500
Bridger	5167	421	398	118841
Clark	4742	508	603	-450490
Kelly	5289	439	466	-142803
Lane	5624	527	683	-877344
Lent	5275	400	427	-142425
Marshall - Pauling	6724	254		
Marshall - Biztech	5771	292		
Marshall - Renaissance	5378	314		
Marshall Composite	5908	606	1775	-6906452
Marysville	5230	368	421	-277190
Whitman	5535	384	434	-276750
Woodmere	5252	422	521	-519948
Marshall Total				-11090061
Roosevelt Cluster				
Astor	4565	331	353	-100430
Clarendon	4809	401	418	-81753
George	6170	383	502	-734230
James John	4599	459	505	-211554
Peninsula	5320	299	335	-191520
Portsmouth	8097	286	248	307686
Roosevelt – ACT	5306	288		
Roosevelt – POWER	5633	289		
Roosevelt – SEIS	6665	217		
Roosevelt Composite	5796	794	1418	-3616704
Rosa Parks	5226	435	464	-151554
Sitton	5288	285	498	-1126344
Roosevelt Total				-5906403
Wilson Cluster				
Capitol Hill	4217	341	356	-63255
Gray	4876	457	490	-160908
Hayhurst	4515	345	278	302505
Jackson	4342	688	652	156312
Maplewood	4164	307	342	-145740
Markham	4750	359	496	-650750
Rieke	4537	280	328	-217776
Stephenson	5166	310	265	232470
Wilson	4554	1556	1642	-391644
Wilson Total				-938786

Source: Portland Public Schools³

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