

Teaching  
& Learning  
R E V I E W

FINDINGS and  
RECOMMENDATIONS

from the Teaching and Learning Review in Portland Public Schools

*Conducted by* Portland Public Schools

*In collaboration with* Portland Schools Foundation and Community Education Partners

*Designed and facilitated by* Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University

*Prepared by the*



Annenberg  
Institute for  
School Reform

AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

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## Members of the Teaching and Learning Review Action Teams

Note: This list shows participants' assignments as they were in 2004–2006.

### Portland Public Schools

#### TEACHERS

Linda Christensen, *Grant High School*  
Paula Fahey, *Markham Middle School*  
Bryn Gillem, *Kellogg Middle School*  
Sonja Hoffman, *Ockley Green Middle School*  
Linea King, *Portsmouth Middle School*  
Rich Kolinski, *Lincoln High School*  
Marcia LaViolette, *Literacy Coach, Gray Middle School*  
Laurie McDowell, *Kellogg Middle School*  
Jeff Miller, *Cleveland High School (President, Portland Association of Teachers)*  
Kehaulani Minzghor, *Lane Middle School*  
Dan Tibbetts, *Beaumont Middle School*  
Eileen Wiedrich, *Mt. Tabor Middle School*

#### TEACHERS ON SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT (TOSAS)

Laura Bergeron, *Special Education*  
Cathy Boyce, *Middle School Math*  
Margaret Calvert, *High School Math*  
Andy Clark, *K–12 Math Coordinator*  
Kay Heiney, *Special Education*  
Kara Mortimer, *High School Talented and Gifted*  
Andrea Porter, *Special Education*  
Cheryl Rectanus, *Middle School Math*  
Jody Rutherford, *K–12 Literacy*  
Pam Sesar, *Middle School Talented and Gifted*

#### PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS

Mariam Baradar, *ESL/Bilingual*  
Amy Welch, *Talented and Gifted*

#### PRINCIPALS

Lynn Buedefeldt, *Office of Teaching and Learning, Principal on Special Assignment*  
Melissa Dragich, *Assistant Principal, Jackson Middle School*  
Cynthia Gilliam, *Principal, Mt. Tabor Middle School*  
Cynthia McLeod, *Principal, Irvington Elementary School*  
Joan Miller, *Principal, Vernon Elementary School*  
Willie Poinsette, *Principal, Robert Gray Middle School*  
Juanita Valder, *Vice Principal, Jefferson Campus, School of Champions*

#### CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF

Marcia Arganbright, *Secondary Curriculum Director*  
Carole Smith, *Director of Alternative Education*  
Greg Wolleck, *Professional Development Director*

### Community Education Partners

Scott Bailey, *Community and Parents for Public Schools*  
Debra Ballard, *Urban League of Portland*  
Nicole Bowmer, *Portland Schools Foundation*  
Shannon Connelly, *Stand for Children*  
Chatele Darden-Ward, *Portland Schools Foundation*  
Colleen Davis, *Stand for Children*  
Will Fuller, *Community and Parents for Public Schools*  
Debbie Gordon, *Community and Parents for Public Schools*  
Linda McKim-Bell, *Portland School Alliance*  
Howard Moriah, *Urban League of Portland*  
Beverly Perttu, *Stand for Children*  
Dee Simmons, *Portland Association of Teachers*  
Claire Small, *Stand for Children*  
Sheila Warren, *Community and Parents for Public Schools*  
Lore Wintergreen, *Portland Schools Alliance*

### Portland Schools Foundation

#### LIAISONS TO ACTION TEAM

Leslie Rennie-Hill, *Director of Program Initiatives*  
Zeke Smith, *Director of Community Engagement*  
Chatele Darden-Ward, *Executive Assistant*  
Nicole Bowmer, *Program Assistant*

### Annenberg Institute for School Reform

#### LIAISONS TO THE PORTLAND ACTION TEAMS

Dennie Palmer Wolf, *Director, Opportunity & Accountability*  
Deborah King, *Associate Director, District Redesign*  
Deanna Burney, *Senior Consultant*  
Greg Hodge, *Senior Consultant*  
Heather Harding, *Principal Associate*  
Michael Kubiak, *Research Associate*

#### TEACHING & LEARNING REVIEW TEAM

Margaret Balch-Gonzalez  
Deanna Burney  
Tyanne Carter  
Susan Fisher  
Ellen Foley  
Heather Harding  
Greg Hodge  
Haewon Kim  
Deborah King  
Michael Kubiak  
Tracie Potochnik  
Amy Rittenhouse  
Joanne Thompson  
Warren Simmons  
Dennie Palmer Wolf

# Preface to the Updated Teaching and Learning Review



Annenberg  
Institute for  
School Reform

AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

In 2005, researchers from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University joined in a partnership with the Portland Public Schools, the Portland Schools Foundation, and a broad group of Community Education Partners. The focus of the partnership was to conduct a Teaching and Learning Review of middle and high schools in Portland, focused on issues of equity and excellence.

The Review was conducted by Action Teams that brought together district staff, members of community-based organizations, and outside researchers. The Action Teams reviewed data on student achievement, trained together to develop shared strategies for interviewing and observing, and then spent two days in each of three middle and three high schools that represented the range of secondary schools in the district.

Based on that process, the partners developed a set of findings. From those findings, Annenberg Institute researchers made a series of recommendations. These recommendations were directed toward affecting the district's plans for school years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, ensuring greater equity and community participation in their implementation.

In reviewing those recommendations, the Community Education Partners raised major concerns. They pointed to the many findings in the Review that spoke to deep-seated issues of institutionalized inequities that affected the lives of students and families in daily and destructive ways. As a result, the Partners wrote a strong and thoughtful critique of the original recommendations.

As a result, we are reissuing and redistributing the earlier review. This version contains the Community Education Partners' critique, the original background and findings, and a set of recommendations that includes those of the Community Education Partners.

We cannot have asked for more from our partners. It is in the spirit of their fierce concern for all of Portland's students that we send you this revised report and urge you to use it to make a difference.

Sincerely, *Dennie Palmer Wolf, Director, Opportunity & Accountability*  
*Deborah King, Associate Director, District Redesign*  
*Deanna Burney, Senior Consultant*  
*Greg Hodge, Senior Consultant*  
*Heather Harding, Principal Associate*  
*Michael Kubiak, Research Associate*

## **Providence**

Brown University  
Box 1985  
Providence, RI 02912  
T 401.863.7990  
F 401.863.1290

## **New York**

233 Broadway  
Suite 720  
New York, NY 10279  
T 212.328.9290  
F 212.964.1057

[www.annenberginstitute.org](http://www.annenberginstitute.org)

# Comments from Community Education Partners

on the Teaching and Learning Review Findings and Recommendations

## OVERVIEW

In 2003-2004, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University facilitated a Central Office Review for Results and Equity (CORRE) in Portland Public Schools (PPS). The CORRE included as one of its major findings that:

The variations in instructional supports across PPS is significant, and there is scant evidence of centralized guidance. As a result, standards are uneven and achievement is inequitable.

The 2006 Teaching and Learning Review that took place in several Portland public schools was conducted in response to that finding. Using a set of research, observation, and interview tools developed by the Annenberg Institute, it was guided by four questions about promised and delivered results, effectiveness, and choices in public education. Its answers to those questions document that “there are persistent gaps between the performance of students from low-income families, students of color, and recent immigrants with limited English proficiency and the performance of more privileged students who are White, English speaking, and middle class and possess U.S. citizenship” (p. 1). These gaps are related at least in part to a districtwide lack of cultural proficiency, and such proficiency strategies as exist “center almost exclusively on content and curriculum . . . rather than on broader forms of relationship building and respect” (p. 7).

It is clear from the review that **more work is needed in Portland Public Schools to close the opportunity gap** created by highly uneven levels of rigor and effectiveness in teaching across the district. The Review, designed to build the capacity of its participants, is both a guide and a goad for that needed work.

**The process of the Review was commendably collaborative**, mixing professionals and community members in shared observation, which led to greater understanding and respect between these two groups. This culture of collaboration and respect is a model for the culture that should be common in the teaching and learning practices of our public schools.

The findings and the process form a **promising beginning to promote real change in Portland’s teaching and learning**. We were disappointed, therefore, that the **recommendations did not live up to that promise**. They are generally appealing and move toward needed consistency, rigor, and partnerships, but they do not go far enough, given the history and pattern of racial discrimination here in Portland.

Because Portland has a long history of institutionalized racism – and racial discrimination here is often buried in “Portland niceness” – **we look for very specific, measurable recommendations which can show whether the Review leads to meaningful progress in confronting and reducing**

**racism.** Too often in Portland, commendable recommendations such as those in this report “with this regard their currents turn awry, and lose the name of action.”

Rather than such a sharply focused set of recommendations clearly addressing the problem of race and class discrimination so fully documented in the findings, the recommendations could be seen as a continuation of the status quo, just done better. For example, **nowhere in the recommendations is there a specific call for professional development, evaluation, or curriculum changes to emphasize cultural proficiency (but note the PPS actions in the section What Next).**

## THE NEED FOR CHANGE

**Of all our public institutions, public schools are the most important instruments of change.** They are key to addressing the inequities of class and race that have so persistently denied our children equal access to their share of the American dream.

Community Education Partners (CEP) was founded on the need for systemic change. **Our stated purpose is that CEP “work as a catalyst to change the educational system, and stands united to ensure the personal success and academic achievement of all children.”** Therefore, it is unacceptable to us that the Teaching and Learning Review backs away from a stronger set of recommendations for change.

We, and Portland Public Schools, are addressing issues that have been around for decades. **We cannot wait around for more decades** hoping that the latest well-intended strategies can improve things in general enough to root out the specific issues of disrespect and misunderstanding that have undermined such strategies in the past.

**Race and class discrimination** are not barriers that, once breached, are gone forever. They are **weeds in our school garden** that grow especially well in Oregon, with pretty flowers of tolerance on the surface but **with deep, undermining roots of intolerance.** They will continue to grow, and they will continue to undermine our efforts, unless we take **deliberate, specific action to get them out and keep them out.**

## WHAT NEXT?

The district is beginning to put some of the recommendations from the Teaching and Learning Review into action. That action should be supported and accelerated wherever possible. There must be regular progress reviews to strengthen emphasis, gain general understanding of the process, and prepare the ground for more general public awareness and involvement in the work. New District leadership builds expectations for strong action in this area.

This action should include collection of disaggregated data – specifically, measures that will show disparity/inequity, such as test scores, referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and teacher quality – as well as immediate interventions, including training for cultural proficiency in both teaching (methods and curriculum) and family involvement.

We recommend reconvening the entire Teaching and Learning group to review progress in Portland Public Schools in addressing the needs documented in the report. For Community Education Partners to make recommendations alone, and for a subgroup of district staff to implement the recommendations, does not honor the collaborative, open process of the Review itself. We should not miss this opportunity to strengthen the community of learners that engaged in this review and to practice being the learning organization Portland's public school system needs to be.

We call for a collaborative continuation of the work begun by this review, with an emphasis on change at the most fundamental level – developing effective, districtwide, culturally proficient teaching and systemic practices. This will include not only content and curriculum, but also professional development to address “broader forms of relationship building and respect” (p. 7) and to address specific issues like differential rates of suspensions and expulsions.

The recommendations have supporting detail under each one and a timeline for each, which help to spice up the rather bland flavor of the recommendations themselves. If we focus on meaningful detail and keep to a high-priority timeline, we in Portland can move toward the change we most profoundly need.

Our school system not only *can* change – it *must* change. Given the power of our public review, and sharpening the recommendations of this review, it *will* change.

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION PARTNERS

Scott Bailey, *Community and Parents for Public Schools*

Debra Ballard, *Urban League of Portland*

Nicole Bowmer, *Portland Schools Foundation*

Shannon Connelly, *Stand for Children*

Chatele Darden-Ward, *Portland Schools Foundation*

Colleen Davis, *Stand for Children*

Will Fuller, *Community and Parents for Public Schools*

Debbie Gordon, *Community and Parents for Public Schools*

Linda McKim-Bell, *Portland School Alliance*

Howard Moriah, *Urban League of Portland*

Beverly Perttu, *Stand for Children*

Dee Simmons, *Portland Association of Teachers*

Claire Small, *Stand for Children*

Sheila Warren, *Community and Parents for Public Schools*

Lore Wintergreen, *Portland Schools Alliance*

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This two-year process was a remarkable coming together of individuals and institutions across the city of Portland to focus first and foremost on the quality of teaching and learning in its public schools for adults and children alike. The result was important cross-sector conversations about examining evidence, drawing grounded conclusions, and formulating constructive recommendations. The frank and collaborative nature of their shared work and reflection is a testament to one of Portland's greatest resources: a community that understands, supports, and demands the best of public education.



# The Promise of Public Education in Portland

At its best, public education gives back to the community that supports it. It expands what students can do and what they aspire to; it creates a sense of striving and possibility in educators and in families; it engages the entire community in supporting the development of the next generation. And, in recent years, educational reforms at the district, state, and federal levels have emphasized proficiency standards and accountability measures, representing a promise to communities around the nation that all children will learn at high levels.

## VISION AND REALITIES IN PORTLAND

In Portland, many stakeholders believe in the promise of public education:

“I want to be challenged more. I want to go to college and be successful.”

—Portland high school student

“I came here without having been trained to teach in a mixed classroom. I had no classes in ESL, for instance. But I feel like I am making progress. I'd like to stay to get good at it.”

—First-year Portland teacher

“Usually, when people talk about professional development, they think about teachers. But I supervise teachers: I need to understand literacy. And I need to understand how to give my teachers feedback.”

—Portland principal

In Portland, however, as in many other urban communities across the U.S., there remains a substantial difference between the promise and the realities of public education.

- Few students achieve at the highest levels; and there are persistent gaps between the performance of students from low-income families, students of color, and recent immigrants with limited English proficiency and the performance of more privileged students who are White, English speaking, and middle class and possess U.S. citizenship.
- High levels of student achievement remain significantly correlated with the wealth and power of a school's surrounding neighborhood; students of color live in neighborhoods and attend schools where there are often lower expectations and fewer well-organized supports.
- Educators in Portland do not reflect the diversity of the city they serve.
- Many young teachers leave the profession within three years, and others are drawn away into higher-paying suburban communities.

- While elementary schools have succeeded to some extent in raising achievement for all students, high schools have had much less success.
- The Portland community has yet to align its many resources (including in- and out-of-school time, internships, and jobs).

Determined to address these issues, the Portland Public Schools (PPS), together with the Portland Schools Foundation, engaged the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University as a partner in its reform efforts. The focus of the partnership is to identify how current practices both at central office and in schools, along with engagement of the community, could change to promote both excellence and equity at scale.

In 2003, the Institute facilitated a Central Office Review for Results and Equity (CORRE) in collaboration with a team of community and educational leaders. A major finding from the CORRE inquiry stated:

The variation in instructional supports across PPS is significant, and there is scant evidence of centralized guidance. As a result, standards are uneven and achievement is inequitable.

In response to this finding, the Portland Public Schools undertook a second project with the Institute, the Teaching and Learning Review, a collaborative process designed to look closely at the standards, curricula, and classroom- and school-level practices that have direct and powerful effects on student engagement and achievement.

## ABOUT THE TEACHING AND LEARNING REVIEW

The Teaching and Learning Review is a set of research, observation, and interview tools developed by the Annenberg Institute. Using these tools, a community can examine the expectations, materials, school policies, and daily classroom practices that are key to high student achievement.

The Review is designed to build the capacity of its participants – district and school staff, students, community organizations, families – to engage in inclusive and honest discussion about the extent to which their public schools effectively serve all their children and youth. The Review is also designed to help a community reflect on the choices and commitments that are needed to make education a source of development and opportunity for all students.

## Structure of the Teaching and Learning Review

Four questions guide the Teaching and Learning Review.

1. What results does public education promise?
  - *What outcomes do state and district standards, assessments, and curricula promise students and their families as a result of K–12 education?*
2. What results does public education currently deliver?
  - *What are the current districtwide patterns of student achievement and engagement, disaggregated by level, school, and student characteristics?*
  - *How does the context for teaching and learning (professional, fiscal, academic, etc.) support or undermine high student achievement?*
3. How effective are a school community's current policies and practices along a set of dimensions known to have direct and powerful effects on student achievement and engagement?
  - *How challenging, equitable, and inclusive is the classroom experience for different groups of students?*
  - *What are the expectations and learning opportunities for teachers, principals, and central office staff?*
  - *How meaningfully are families involved in student learning?*
4. What choices and commitments must Portland Public Schools and its partners pursue in order to deliver excellent educational opportunities at scale and to ensure just and equitable outcomes for students?
  - *What do national research and experience in other districts, as well as insights of local educators and community members, suggest for improving outcomes for all students?*
  - *What must be done immediately?*
  - *What longer-term commitments and partnerships are necessary?*

To address these questions, Institute staff train and collaborate with a team of professional educators and community members in the district to: examine data on student outcomes; review curricula in use across the district; and, in structured classroom observations and interviews with educators and students, gather data on practices along a number of dimensions that research has shown to have an impact on student achievement (see Appendix A).

Through frank and sustained discussions of the data they have collected, the team develops detailed findings that emphasize strengths that the district and its partners should build on as well as identifies work that remains to be done. Based on their findings, the team proposes both immediate and longer-term recommendations for district and community leaders.

*At first, there was considerable hesitation about the roles that community members and professional educators should play. Educators worried that, without formal training, community members might not be able to effectively observe and evaluate what happens in the classroom. At the same time, there was skepticism on the part of community members about whether their voices would really be heard and valued through the process. Upon training together and actually beginning the work, it was clear that these fears were misguided. The process brought together community experts and educational professionals in a way that deepened the value of the evaluation. It has become evident that this level of analysis would not be complete without these two perspectives brought together in this new and important way.*

– Staff member at the Portland Schools Foundation

## The Teaching and Learning Review in Portland

At the request of PPS Superintendent Vicki Phillips, the Teaching and Learning Review in Portland focused on two areas where overall achievement is lowest and where gaps in student performance are most pronounced: literacy and mathematics at the secondary (6–12) level.

In the first phase of the Review, district staff and Institute researchers examined student-performance data on Oregon state accountability measures, as well as the advanced, grade-level, and support curricula used in each school.

In the second phase of the Review, six teams of ten to twelve district staff and community members collected data on teaching and learning at three middle and three high schools. The schools were chosen by the district as representative of different regions of the city, populations of students, and profiles of achievement as measured by state assessment data. The teams spent time reviewing each school's data and demographics and then conducted

two-day visits in each school. On the first day of the school visit, team members examined the work and learning of educators: the principal, teachers, counselors, etc. On the second day, team members examined how students learn. Both days included structured classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, and focus groups, along with team discussions of the patterns within the evidence they collected.

In the final phase of the Review, team members, in collaboration with Institute staff, compiled and analyzed their data and developed a set of findings. In light of those findings, they proposed recommendations that address not only the district, but also the potential contributions of a citywide network of partners invested in the quality of education and outcomes for young people. Those findings and recommendations are presented in summary below and in detail on pages 18–37.

Appendices A–C provide detailed information on the Teaching and Learning Review process and how it was carried out in Portland.

## SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The first question that guided the Teaching and Learning Review in Portland is:

*What results does the Portland Public Schools system promise?*

### Proficiency Standards

Through the Oregon state standards, state assessments, and the admission standards for the Oregon University System, along with district curricula and

standards, the district effectively promises to prepare all students for postsecondary success – whether in college, work, or public service. A review of the standards shows that they are low compared with national and international standards, the levels of achievement needed to master the district-adopted curricula, and the rising demands of knowledge-based workplaces.

The second question that guided the Teaching and Learning Review in Portland is:  
*What results does the Portland Public Schools system currently deliver?*

### **Achievement Outcomes**

Portland students overall perform relatively well when measured against other urban districts in the state. However, as of the 2005–2006 school year, school and student performance remained linked to the status of children and families served. When the performance data is disaggregated by a variety of criteria, it reveals substantial gaps in

- the performance of schools in rich vs. poor neighborhoods;
- the achievement of different groups of students based on characteristics such as race and class;
- the achievement of students in the same schools and classrooms based on race, class, and gender.

Also, almost half of the middle and high school students in the district fail to meet the standards set by the Oregon Statewide Assessment Tests (OSATs) in mathematics and literacy or by the entry requirements to the Oregon university system. There is wide variation among schools in meeting these benchmarks.

### **Classroom-Level Patterns of Student Engagement**

Based on observational data collected during school visits, it is clear that even in the same classrooms, doing the same activities, the experience of currently high- and low-performing students is very different.

- Low-performing students are disengaged for as much as a third of the time.
- When low-performing students are engaged, it is more typically in routine tasks unlikely to improve their understanding.

The third question that guided the Teaching and Learning Review in Portland is:  
*How effective are Portland's current policies and practices along a set of dimensions known to have direct and powerful effects on student achievement and engagement?*

The Action Teams' examination of teaching and learning was structured to examine policies and practices around a set of dimensions (see Appendices A and B) that research shows are linked with student achievement. Variations in these practices that are observed across and within schools may underlie some of

the most stubborn differences in student performance and achievement that plague Portland and most other urban districts.

### **Engaging and Challenging Content**

In some classrooms, students have access to rigorous learning that engages individuals who have a range of current achievement levels. But, in many classrooms, poor students, students of color, and students with a history of low achievement face less engaging assignments and are held to lower standards that focus on routine completion of short daily activities. Teachers report that they want both clear standards and tools for how to realize these standards with low-achieving students.

### **Emphasis on Effort and Motivation**

In classrooms and schools where students are more privileged, motivation and effort are driven by goals such as getting into advanced classes or going to an elite college. Standards of excellence are implicit, leaving students to convert them into getting high marks.

Compared to their peers in more-advanced classes or higher-income neighborhoods, lower-performing students in poorer schools or less-advanced classes frequently go without models of excellence, opportunities to revise their work, or discussions about setting and pursuing goals for improvement.

Within the same classroom, high- and low-performing students often have different experiences in levels and amounts of engagement in learning.

Teachers, guidance counselors, and principals want to study effective models of how to build and sustain motivation, particularly with low-achieving students.

### **Classrooms Structured as Communities of Learners**

Many PPS educators try to amplify and diversify learning through student-to-student interactions. This can work well when it is purposeful and structured to make good use of the exchange of knowledge or points of view. But, particularly in heterogeneous classrooms, teachers – and students – often struggle to conduct joint work in ways that stimulate thinking, make standards clear and public, and build students' capacity to learn from one another.

### **Differentiated Supports for Learners**

Teachers report that the span of achievement levels in their classrooms is wider than in the past, and they want more sustained and explicit training in adapting instruction and assignments to the needs of individual learners without lowering expectations. While students have many support programs (e.g., tutoring, mentoring, after-school help sessions), they need clearer and earlier information about programs, eligibility, fees, and schedules.

### **High Expectations for Adult Learning and Accountability**

In Portland, there is a long tradition of individual teacher excellence. One outgrowth is that the content and timing of professional development is largely voluntary. This makes unified district- and schoolwide change difficult. Portland educators – many of whom learn chiefly on their own – want increased opportunities to work with colleagues on critical issues; principals want the skills and knowledge to become effective instructional leaders.

### **Meaningful Roles for Family and Community in Student Achievement**

School and central office personnel tend to involve students, families, and community members in periodic and one-directional ways, mostly focused on school needs, discipline, or summary reports on student achievement. Students and their families, along with community organizations, want earlier, sustained, substantive, and more collaborative roles in school improvement.

### **High Level of Cultural Proficiency**

School strategies to build cultural proficiency center almost exclusively on content and curriculum (e.g., multicultural texts, translation of documents), rather than on broader forms of relationship building and respect. Many school staff want substantial, practice-embedded approaches that will help them challenge their cultural assumptions, engage students in different ways, and develop effective partnerships with families.

Details of these findings, with specific attention to literacy and mathematics, are presented on pages 18–31 of this report.

## **SUMMARY OF MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

If the Portland Public Schools are to fulfill their promise as individual sites and as a system that provides all children with what they need to thrive and contribute, the schools themselves must be instruments of change. The following recommendations address the fourth and, in many ways, most important question that guides the Teaching and Learning Review:

*What choices and commitments must Portland Public Schools and its partners pursue in order to deliver excellent educational opportunities at scale and to ensure just and equitable outcomes for students?*

The following recommendations include responses to the findings from the previous sections of this report. They also respond to the comments of the Community Education Partners. The recommendations are grouped into three major areas.

## **Ensuring Excellent and Equitable Educational Opportunities**

To improve the overall quality of teaching and learning, with a strong emphasis on addressing the achievement gap that separates the performance of Hispanic, African American, and Native American/Alaskan Native students from that of White and Asian students, the district must rigorously align all of its resources to create a strong pre-K–16 learning continuum that supports all students. It is important that these heightened expectations are shared with students and families in meaningful ways and at several points in time, such as educational planning conferences prior to and midway through every level of school (elementary, middle, and high school). The district must increase its investment in high-quality professional development opportunities for all educators, not only those who volunteer to participate. The district must also recognize and further develop the expertise of teachers and share best practices through classroom and cross-school visits and utilizing Web-based technologies to publish examples of classroom practices that yield strong results for the full range of students.

Aligning standards and expectations across the full set of in-school learning opportunities will better enable students to master important ideas, skills, and ways of working to succeed in higher education and the new economy. And in order for all students to meet these heightened expectations, the system must create early and effective interventions. These programs should be monitored to ensure that they accelerate students' development and do not segregate particular groups of students.

To ensure equitable outcomes, PPS should develop a process at both the district and school level that will allow families and communities to look at disaggregated student outcomes to identify schools that are successfully closing racial achievement gaps, as well as schools that are struggling and require added investments.

## **Widening Responsibility and Leadership for Public Education**

Strong leaders and skilled staff at central office have helped the district to make strides in raising overall student achievement, attracting grants, and developing a strong reputation. However, PPS cannot afford to operate as a sealed engine room. Even the most smoothly running and expert central office cannot solve the issues of unequal outcomes for students without drawing on the considerable insights of its many community and county partners.

To utilize and augment the capacity of these partners, the district should build on the leadership of community-based organizations by reconvening the entire Teaching and Learning group to review the progress that PPS has made in addressing

the areas of concern highlighted in the Review. Similarly, the district must create mechanisms for the full range of students to participate in conversations around school and districtwide improvement.

### **Establishing Long-Term Initiatives to Create a System of Equitable Educational Opportunities**

The city of Portland should build a cross-institutional coalition that includes the city and county governments, postsecondary education institutions, businesses, and nonprofits working on behalf of children and youth. The city can institute an annual “State of Our Students, Schools, and Communities” event that features data on academic achievement, extracurricular opportunities, safety, community service, and other important aspects of youth development. The collaborative process of the “Connected by 25” initiative’s report and recommendations provides an excellent model for these efforts.

Details of these recommendations are presented on pages 32–39 of this report.

# The Context for Teaching and Learning in Portland Public Schools

The current context in which teaching and learning take place in the Portland Public Schools is outlined in this section. The material is drawn from the Institute's research conducted in the spring of 2005, which included national, state, and district data sources; interviews with district personnel; and site and school visits during the 2005–2006 school year.

## CURRENT DISTRICT ASSETS

PPS has a remarkable set of assets that position it to build equity and excellence at scale, supported by an array of civic partners.

### K–16 Alignment

Oregon has the building blocks of a strong K–16 educational system characterized by clear alignment and high standards for high school graduation (Certificate of Initial Mastery, Certificate of Advanced Mastery, the Oregon University System PASS standards, etc.).

### Districtwide Focus on Teaching and Learning

Under the current superintendent and central office staff, the district is organizing both its human and financial resources to focus on teaching and learning, as well as supports for students. For example:

- PPS has introduced a new five-year strategic plan with teaching and learning as the foundation.
- The school board is invested in the reform agenda of the district.
- District commitment to teaching and learning is paying off, as evidenced by the first increase in five years in PPS student achievement on the 2005 OSATs in reading and mathematics at every grade level tested (3, 5, 8, and 10).

### Instances of Excellence

As a district, Portland contains many instances of excellence:

- There are high-performing schools at each level.
- There are skilled and experienced teachers who are known regionally and nationally for their innovative and superior practice.
- There are principals who are skilled at addressing the needs of their specific schools and communities.

## Public Investment in Education

- Parents and community members continue to be deeply committed to strengthening PPS; 85 percent of students attend public schools, and community groups and advocacy organizations serve as strong partners and catalysts in promoting equity and excellence across all PPS schools.
- For a broad network of community organizations, education and the well-being of children and families are at the core of their missions. These organizations take seriously their roles as constructive critics of current policies and practices.

## External Funding Focused on Instruction and Student Outcomes

Working together with its partners, PPS has attracted external funds to support its renewed focus on instruction, including:

- multimillion-dollar funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Meyer Memorial Trust;
- federal funding for language-immersion programs;
- a U.S. Department of Education Striving Readers grant to improve literacy at the secondary level;
- a Connected by 25 grant from a network of national funders aimed at developing public- and private-sector investments to help youth gain the skills, knowledge, and cultural connections to become productive adults; and
- a multiyear commitment from the Wallace Foundation to strengthen leadership and cultural proficiency in PPS and other school districts in Oregon.

## CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR THE DISTRICT

Even with these assets, it will be challenging for PPS to achieve excellence and equity at scale. Portland residents are accustomed to thinking of their city as having strong, even cutting-edge schools with talented teachers and many special programs – such as world languages and dual enrollment in college courses. In a number of respects, Portlanders are correct. However, in other ways, public opinion needs a sharp dose of reality.

### Substantial Promises, Only Moderate Expectations

The new expectations for student performance set by national policies in No Child Left Behind and Oregon's curriculum frameworks promise that students throughout the state will all be proficient in math, reading, and science by 2014. Given the demanding curriculum adoptions in the district that are under way, Portland is promising students and families that there will be substantial opportunity to learn at these new, higher levels.

But when examined against national and international standards, Oregon’s standards actually set only modest expectations at grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. Moreover, a review of high school course taking in 2005 showed that, while an average of 86 percent of Portland students completed the district’s course requirements for graduation, these rates ranged from 56 percent to 94 percent depending on the school. Even more sobering, on average, only 51 percent of all PPS seniors completed the entrance requirements for the Oregon university system. The percentages by school ranged from 17 percent to 80 percent.

Thus, while there is a perception of high achievement, it is against moderate – maybe even low – standards for a district with Portland’s considerable assets.

### A Tradition of Individual Excellence

Historically, PPS has had a culture of individual excellence that has encouraged and supported the work of individually skilled and thoughtful teachers, as well as networks of educators deeply interested in particular aspects of teaching and learning – such as improving student writing or developing early language-immersion programs. The system has also given considerable power to school sites to develop their own identities and brands of excellence. These practices, coupled with a liberal transfer policy, have created an urban system with many strong and effective programs – serving the families whose social and cultural resources put them in a position to identify, capture, and hang onto those opportunities for their children. This means that in Portland, unlike many other cities, the middle and upper-middle classes remain invested in public education. The darker side of these patterns is the uneven distribution of this excellence.

### Persistent Achievement Gaps

While student achievement is rising across the district, particularly at the elementary school level, racial and ethnic achievement gaps persist, growing more pronounced at the secondary level, as shown in Figure 1.

*Source: Oregon Department of Education, 2006*

		<b>American Indian/ Alaskan Native</b>	<b>Asian/ Pacific Islander</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Declined to Report Ethnicity</b>
<b>Grade 8</b>	READING	61	73	49	47	80	62
	MATH	65	81	44	50	79	50
<b>Grade 10</b>	READING	39	52	26	26	65	64
	MATH	21	60	18	26	56	46

**Figure 1.** Percentage of eighth- and tenth-grade students who met or exceeded the OSAT reading and math standards in 2005–2006

Achievement gaps are often understood chiefly in terms of high numbers of poor children of color scoring at low levels of achievement. However, in Portland, as elsewhere, there are gaps all along the continuum of performance. For instance, English-language learners are underrepresented in the district’s talented and gifted programs, as well as in enrollment in Advanced Placement courses.

### **Middle and High School Restructuring: No Guarantee of Excellence or Equity**

PPS is changing the structures of both its middle and high schools. Several high schools are in the process of becoming small learning communities and academies with specific themes such as health care, leadership, or language immersion. These changes are intended to create high-quality, personalized, relevant, and rigorous learning opportunities for all students, accelerating the learning of students who are behind and challenging high-achieving students. At the same time, over the next four years, the district will significantly increase the number of K–8 schools.

These structural transitions reflect timely responses to declining enrollments, funding constraints, repairs to and modernization of school buildings, and research about the structures that best support student outcomes. However, national research on small schools and on conversions to K–8 schools shows that structure is no guarantee of either equity or excellence. Without substantial attention to patterns of enrollment, rigor of instruction, and responsible advising, new structures do not lead to improved student outcomes for the young people who need it most. Two issues are of critical importance:

- As grades 6–8 become part of elementary campuses, they must nevertheless provide rigorous preparation for secondary curricula, providing students with the agency and habits of mind necessary for increasingly complex learning in high school and beyond.
- Similarly, creating smaller high schools can multiply the opportunities for personalization, relevance, and differentiated support for learning. But small enrollments neither guarantee improved relationships nor ensure relevance and support. These have to be created – and equitably distributed.

### **Cultural and Economic Diversity in the Context of Privilege and Increasing Gentrification**

Even though the population of both Portland and Oregon remains majority White (87 percent in Oregon; nearly 80 percent in Portland), the city’s schools serve students and families from a widening range of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and economic backgrounds. For example, students in Portland schools speak over seventy-five languages in their homes and communities. Curricula, out-of-school

programs, and policies must respect and build upon this diversity. At the same time, the city is gentrifying rapidly, making it harder for working-class and low-income families to thrive and, thus, adding to the pressures that many secondary students experience.

Moreover, poor and marginalized families have a difficult time breaking into the islands of excellence available in PPS. They do not have the social networks or the assets (e.g., cars, free time, comfort with school policy and English) to “work” the system. As PPS reconfigures its schools, there is a critical opportunity to rethink attendance and transfer policies, to redesign communications with students and families about options, and to make judicious choices about what programs and which leaders to place in which schools and neighborhoods. In all of these decisions, questions of equity and access must be in the forefront.

These choices are made all the more important by the conditions surrounding the Portland schools. As city neighborhoods gentrify and the price of home owning rises steeply, increasing numbers of families struggle to continue living in the city. Similarly, as the job market in Portland bifurcates between knowledge-based and service-linked occupations and as wages stagnate, increasing numbers of families are “waging a living.” In these circumstances, high-quality public education could become an engine for redistributing opportunities – but this will not happen by accident. The district and its partners will have to create a citywide culture in which the shared work is to create a great system of schools, rather than enough individually good schools.

### **Making the Purposes and Effects of Reform Public**

PPS has been engaged in major changes. Vital as the changes are, many of them are interior to central office. A major challenge is making the importance of these changes seem more than technical. As one participant in the Teaching and Learning Review remarked, “Yes, they have built a leaner, stronger engine room over at Central, but parents – and the public more broadly – have to see it and feel it where their kids go to school.”

### **Inadequate Funding**

In 1990, Oregon voters approved an initiative limiting local property-tax rates as a revenue source for school districts, which consequently shifted public school funding to the state. However, the state continues to dramatically underfund public education, with particularly severe consequences for urban districts that have more children with needs for additional supports and services.

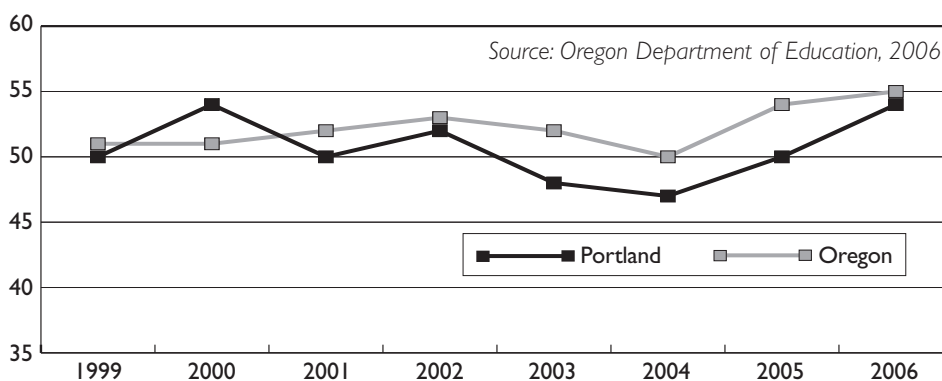
While PPS closed an expected budget gap of \$57 million in the spring of 2006 through several one-time funding sources, PPS leadership seeks a long-term solu-

tion that will stabilize funding at an appropriate level. In the fall of 2006, there will be a citywide vote on a local option that would provide additional funding for schools. In a city where more than three-quarters of the citizens do not have school-age children, PPS has made serious cuts to demonstrate fiscal responsibility and won the consequent support of the business community. To win voter approval, the district will have to convince families that added dollars translate to important and equitable improvements in classrooms and schools. The district will also have to convince Portlanders without children in the public schools that investing in education is synonymous with investing in the future of their city.

However, the fundamental problem of chronic underfunding of public education at the state level remains. Unless and until that issue is addressed, Portland will be saddled with too few resources to provide the kind of public education it envisions. As the largest and most urbanized district in the state, PPS will have a major role in arguing for expanded funding for public education.

## THE CONTEXT FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN LITERACY

Student achievement in literacy (reading) in tenth grade, as measured by the OSAT, declined overall in Portland from 2000 through 2004. In 2005, it began to rise, though only to a level where 50 percent of students met or exceeded the standards set for grade 10. Scores rose again in 2006 to match the level (54 percent) in 2000 (see Figure 2). Thus, nearly half of tenth-graders do not meet the OSAT standards, which are set for proficiency at the *midpoint in high school* – not for college or workplace success.



**Figure 2.** Percentage of students who met or exceeded OSAT literacy standard in grade 10

In the 2004–2005 statewide assessment of reading, the gaps between different groups of students, already wide at the eighth-grade level, widens further for tenth-graders (see Figure 1 on page 12). In the three PPS middle schools visited

during the Teaching and Learning Review, the percentage of students meeting the state standards in reading varies from 96 percent to 59 percent; in the three high schools, this percentage varies from 82 percent to 23 percent. On the tenth-grade writing exam, the range is from 78 percent to 35 percent. These are sobering data given the key role that literacy plays in all academic subjects and in success in the world of work.

In the first phase of the Teaching and Learning Review,<sup>1</sup> an examination of curricula and the professional development support systems across the district revealed:

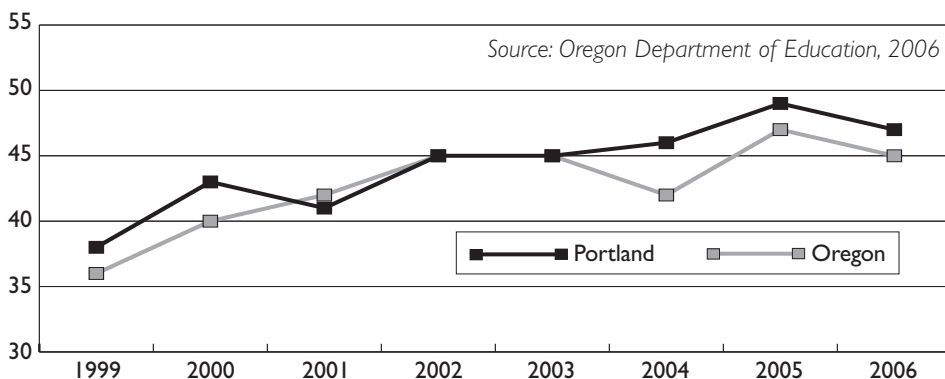
- considerable variability within and across schools in the curricula used for grade-level instruction;
- an overall emphasis on literature, with much less attention to the comprehension and critical skills necessary to reading informational texts, which are the backbone of many academic courses;
- extreme variability and, in some cases, an absence of planned instructional materials to support currently underachieving students, including students with disabilities and students who are learning English as an academic language;
- no common set of expectations for the grade-to-grade progression of reading and writing skills;
- professional development rarely conducted with special education and ESL teachers and regular classroom instructors;
- uneven knowledge of literacy curricula and supports for accelerated learning at the secondary level among area directors;
- uneven knowledge of their school's/teachers' curricular choices on the part of building principals.

## THE CONTEXT FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN MATHEMATICS

Over the past six years, elementary-level student achievement in math as measured by the OSAT has steadily improved across all racial and ethnic groups. In grades 8 and 10, students are also improving (see Figure 3 on page 17), though to a lesser degree. Since 2002, PPS tenth-graders have met or outperformed the statewide average.

PPS is committed to common and high standards in mathematics. In 1999, PPS established and implemented a common math curriculum at elementary and middle schools. In 2006–2007, a common math curriculum will be implemented at

<sup>1</sup> This research was conducted in 2005 by Deanna Burney, a consultant with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Since that time, some progress has occurred, but much remains to be done.



**Figure 3.** Percentage of students who met or exceeded OSAT math standard in grade 10

the high school level. Beginning with the class of 2009, students must successfully complete three years of math courses to graduate.

Reinforcing this commitment to advanced math, PPS now requires all ninth-graders to take algebra or a higher math class; various in-school diagnostic and support programs (e.g., Cognitive Tutor) and out-of-school tutoring opportunities are being piloted in high schools to prepare students for success in algebra and beyond. Decisions must be made regarding which best practices will be spread widely across the district.

In December 2005, PPS adopted the College Preparatory Math curriculum and textbooks for first- and second-year algebra and geometry. In addition, the district reinforced its commitment to supporting strong practice by approving an alternate geometry book because of the successes several schools have achieved using it in geometry classrooms.

Through multiyear initiatives supported by the National Science Foundation and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, a core group of math educators have built extensive repertoires of practices and a deep understanding of the new curricula. This group developed model lesson plans and common assessments for the new curricula. Teachers on Special Assignment have played an integral role in these workshops and collaborative professional development opportunities. PPS has an opportunity to utilize new sources of external funding to ensure that the knowledge and skills of this core group support the development of building-level expertise to these same high standards.

# Detailed Findings from the Teaching and Learning Review

## WHAT THE SYSTEM PROMISES

The first question that guides the Teaching and Learning Review is:

*What results does the Portland Public Schools system promise?*

Through the criteria established by No Child Left Behind, the standards set by the Oregon state department of education, and its own district-adopted curricula, Portland Public Schools promises that all its students will graduate proficient in mathematics and literacy and prepared for success in further education or the workplace.

For instance, the district's ambitious strategic plan for 2005–2010, entitled "Getting Results, Sustaining Hope!" identifies the district's core values and student outcome goals, including:

- a strong commitment to academic progress for every student;
- high standards that conform to the expectations of a global society; and
- equitable and timely supports for successful transitions at every level of education.

PPS promises that "every student by name meets or exceeds academic standards and is fully prepared to make productive life decisions."

### Proficiency Standards

**OVERALL FINDING** While district curricula promise high achievement through rigorous and challenging content in literacy and mathematics, the state's standards and assessments provide a less-than-rigorous roadmap to reaching proficiency in those areas.

- Oregon's elementary (grades 3–5) standards in mathematics and literacy are low in comparison to national and international standards in these areas.
- The state's Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM), a combination of state assessment scores and student-work samples measuring a student's mastery of content through tenth grade, is a measurement of what students need to know and be able to do at the midpoint in their high school careers. As such, it does not provide a powerful set of expectations for post-high school achievement in college or the workplace.
- The state's Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM) – requiring students to join rigorous academic preparation with career-related knowledge, skills, and

learning experiences – is a much better map of the kinds of performance necessary for thriving in college or knowledge work in a profession.

**MATH-SPECIFIC FINDINGS** The new common mathematics curricula at the middle and high school levels are an important step in building uniformity of math content knowledge. Teachers see this as a strategy for addressing student mobility and as a transition to increased graduation requirements.

At the same time, these materials set very high expectations for student mastery of both mathematical procedures and problem solving. These curricula also demand very high levels of cognitive academic English.

**LITERACY-SPECIFIC FINDING** Literacy instruction at the secondary level is largely based on literature, and these texts are often challenging in their language and content. However, the literacy expectations and standards do not rise steadily from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Thus, there is no widely understood or balanced literacy framework that connects curricula, strategies, standards, and assessments from the end of elementary school through graduation from high school.

## WHAT THE SYSTEM DELIVERS

The second question in the Review follows from the first:

*What results does the Portland Public Schools system currently deliver?*

The findings relevant to this question are drawn from the initial review of standards, data on the district, and Action Team observations and interviews.

### Achievement Outcomes

**OVERALL FINDING** Almost half of the high school students in the district fail to meet or exceed the standards set by the OSATs in mathematics and literacy or by the entry requirements to the Oregon university system. There is wide variation among schools in meeting these benchmarks.

- Only 35 percent of PPS high school graduates in 2006 earned the Certificate of Initial Mastery. High schools across the district (as across the state) vary widely in the emphasis placed upon students' reaching CIM proficiency, reflected in their respective percentages of graduates receiving the CIM (which range from a low of 10 percent at one PPS high school to a high of 57 percent at another).
- Very few PPS students attempt the Certificate of Advanced Mastery (and, unlike the data reporting the percentage of students graduating with a

diploma and CIM, the diploma-with-CAM percentage is not yet reported on the annual No Child Left Behind school and district report cards).

- While 86 percent of PPS high school students take the courses the district requires for graduation, this percentage varies from 56 percent to 94 percent depending on the school. Even more sobering, the number of students taking the courses required for entry into the Oregon university system is only 49 percent on average, and ranges from 17 percent to 80 percent.
- There is a significant drop in performance levels on the OSAT between eighth- and tenth-graders across all racial/ethnic groups, ranging from 15 to 44 percentage points. (See Figure 1 on page 12).

**OVERALL FINDING** Despite overall gains in performance, disaggregated student-performance data show that achievement remains linked to student characteristics such as race and class both across and within classrooms.

*Even at some of our “exceptional” schools, there is an unacceptable achievement gap between our more affluent students and those who come from low-income homes. Even at our strongest schools, students of color are not doing as well as students who are White. By high school, almost half of our students fall short of the state benchmarks.*

– Superintendent Vicki Phillips, “State of the Schools” address, October 17, 2006

- When achievement data are disaggregated by school, the levels correlate with the demographics of communities they serve.
- Across the district and within schools, there is a correlation between level of performance and the class, race, and citizenship of students. Data on eighth- and tenth-grade students meeting or exceeding the OSAT standards show that the percentage of White and Asian students at or above the standard in math and reading is between 33 percent and 39 percentage points higher than the percentage of Hispanic, African American, or Native American students (see Figure 1 on page 12).
- Within the same school and even the same class, both achievement and engagement vary by a student’s class, race, and gender.

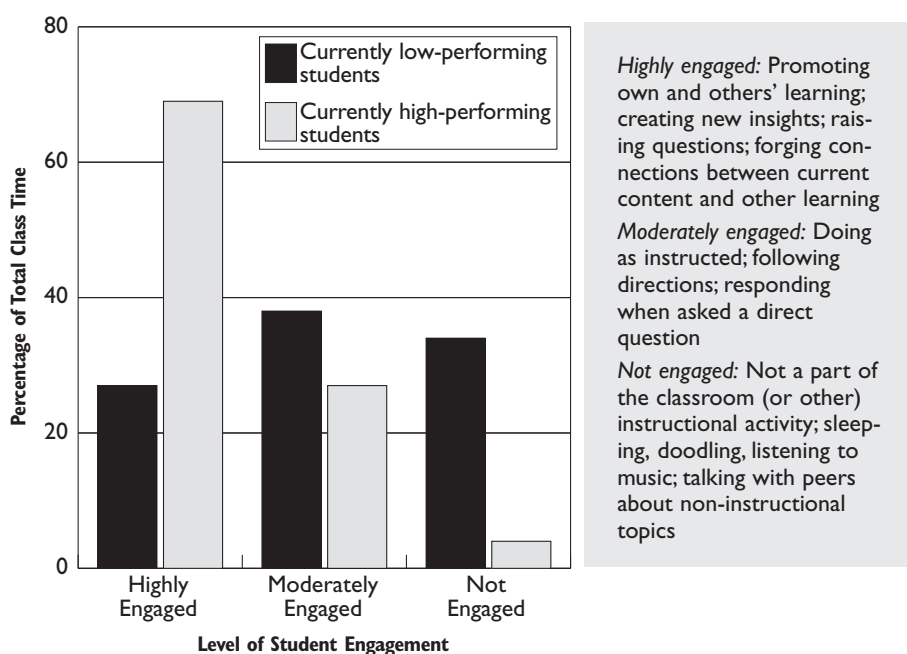
**MATH-SPECIFIC FINDING** Student performance in mathematics at the secondary level has been rising across the last several years. However, at both eighth and tenth grades, there are still significant achievement gaps between students of different racial and ethnic identities.

**LITERACY-SPECIFIC FINDING** Only about half of students meet the expected CIM outcomes at tenth grade. Writing is persistently the area of lowest performance. Even within this pattern of achievement, there are significant gaps between students of different racial and ethnic identities.

## Classroom-Level Patterns of Student Engagement

**OVERALL FINDING** The overarching pattern found through classroom observations was a clear variability in student engagement, the quality of instruction, and the level of expectations. The presence of high expectations and high-quality instruction could often be predicted by a student's race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and first language. When there was less variability in instruction and expectations, engagement was uniformly high.

- Within and across classrooms, high-performing students, on average, were engaged for over 95 percent of a class period, while low-performing students in the same classes were engaged only 65 percent of the time (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Percent of class time high- and low-performing students are engaged

- The higher-achieving students were engaged in more rigorous ways (e.g., asking questions, contributing ideas, forging connections between past and current learning).
- These significant differences in the amount and type of engagement mean that currently low-performing students, on average, are losing out on 34 percent of instructional time – approximately fifteen minutes of a forty-five-minute period – and on forms of interaction that could accelerate their learning and help to ensure that they become, and are treated as, active learners.

- When classroom practices were strong, there was virtually no difference between the ways in which students with varying achievement profiles participated in learning. In several middle and high school classrooms, the combination of engaging and challenging content, an emphasis on effort, effective peer-to-peer learning, and other strong instructional practices created learning environments that equalized opportunities to learn.

## EFFECTIVENESS OF ACHIEVEMENT-RELATED PRACTICES

The following findings address the third question:

*How effective are Portland’s policies and practices along a set of dimensions known to have direct and powerful effects on student achievement and engagement?*

These findings are drawn primarily from the documentation by the Action Teams during their school visits. In their observations, interviews, and focus-group discussions with students and educators, Action Team members focused on a set of dimensions of teaching and learning that research has shown to be related to student achievement (see Appendices A and B).

### Engaging and Challenging Content

**OVERALL FINDING** Depending on the classes they take and the school they attend, Portland students experience widely different levels of challenge. Poorer students and students of color are more likely to be in lower-level classes in which assignments are more routine, highly structured, and less engaging. While there are classrooms and programs where students and teachers are uncoupling the usual ties between status and achievement, there are few mechanisms for recognizing, documenting, or spreading their practices.

*I was in a high school known for serving low-performing, high-needs students. I observed in a mathematics class that was at once some of the best mathematics teaching I had ever seen, the most differentiated teaching without any lowering of expectations, and some of the best teaching of academic English I have ever listened to, bar none.*

– Portland math educator and Action Team member

- The most effective educators combine high levels of rigor and student engagement. These classrooms exist in schools teaching both the most privileged and the neediest students.
- In other classrooms, students may be busy or active but are engaged in lessons that do not have substantial academic payoff.
- Low levels of expectation and routine activities are more likely to occur for students who are poor, of color, or from immigrant families.
- Educators and students alike are aware of and concerned by the varying levels of opportunity in different schools (e.g., uneven availability of high-level courses such as AP, IB, or joint high school–college courses) and different classrooms (e.g., how much algebra is learned in different sections).

- Teachers report that they want clear grade-level and vertical standards and examples of how to realize high standards with currently low-achieving students. While they are cautious about standardization, they see such tools as necessary for building mutual accountability.

**MATH-SPECIFIC FINDINGS** Although PPS requires algebra proficiency, access to algebra – a major gatekeeper for high school success – and to algebra-preparatory courses varies for eighth-graders across schools and within schools (e.g., special education students and English-language learners encounter numerous barriers to gaining access to these courses).

PPS educators are invested in building student skills through relevant applications to students’ lives, but they currently need support to build their understanding of how to make this happen.

**LITERACY-SPECIFIC FINDING** Currently, there is little explicit focus on developing high levels of literacy (e.g., cognitive academic English – the specialized language of schooling and its specific disciplines) across subject-matter classes other than English (science, history, etc.), even though each of those courses has specialized vocabularies, genres, and texts. The assumption is that reading is reading and writing is writing, independent of the content or discipline. This has serious consequences for students who do not come to middle and high school with strong literacy skills. Frequently, these individuals are poor or from ethnic and racial minorities.

### Emphasis on Effort and Motivation

**OVERALL FINDING** The structures and strategies for motivating students to work hard and achieve higher standards over time are unevenly developed and unevenly effective both within and across schools.

- Students at different levels of achievement encounter very different expectations and supports. This often translates to different expectations for students of different racial, linguistic, and class backgrounds. Students for whom there are low expectations – more often those who are poor and from racial and linguistic minorities – are expected only to turn in work that is on time, neat, and meets minimum specifications (e.g., ten problems, three paragraphs). Such lowered expectations affect students’ effort and their motivation to do more than “just get by.”

*In the same school, on the same day, and at the same grade level (tenth grade), Action Team members recorded a range of class assignments and literacy expectations that point to problems with implementation of curriculum standards and the quality of teaching. The assignments in two classrooms showed a low level of demand: writing slogans for political posters on the Mexican-American War, and writing phrase-long associations for popular brand names. In contrast, students in two other classrooms were assigned bigger-level work – an in-depth discussion about the political and social context for Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* using illustrations from the novel and outside reading, and impromptu speeches on topics from Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*.*

– From Action Team observation notes

*Students, unfortunately, are often held to very different levels of expectations. In one middle school classroom where I observed, the teacher allowed a group of African American students to listen to music on their iPods instead of participating in the math lesson. Since the students were not being “disruptive” to the rest of the class, they were permitted to disengage. In contrast, a second teacher, in a similar situation, brought the students back into the lesson throughout the class period in a respectful – but firm – manner.*

– Action Team member

- Students vary in their understanding of standards for good work and of the achievement measures used by the district and the state. For instance, few students understand graduation requirements or the different diplomas they can earn (Certificate of Initial Mastery, Certificate of Advanced Mastery, the Oregon University System PASS requirements).
- Many students are unaware that effort, not just raw talent, makes the substantial difference in school success. Some report that they are unmotivated because they do not see themselves as “good at school” or as going on to college. Few students – especially poor students or students of color – know how to advocate for improving the quality of their own or their peers’ education (e.g., what can be changed, who to speak to).
- Observers noted relatively few explicit strategies for motivating students to do well (e.g., displays of excellent work, exhibiting work to external audiences, applying work to real-world settings such as teaching peers or younger students). Where these strategies occurred, the spike in student engagement and effort was striking.
- Teachers, guidance counselors, and principals want cross-school, cross-classroom, and cross-program visits to study the work of educators who know how to build and sustain motivation, particularly with students who are striving to accelerate their own learning.

**MATH- AND LITERACY-SPECIFIC FINDING** The supports for high achievement – such as the use of criteria and explicit forms of assessment, examples of student work that demonstrate excellence, or structures that support the revision of work to meet proficiency standards – vary significantly within and across schools. These supports are often absent in the settings where students need them most (e.g., in classes and schools where students are below proficient).

### Classrooms as Communities of Learners

**OVERALL FINDING** Many PPS educators try to amplify and diversify learning through student-to-student interactions. This works well when it is purposeful and structured to make use of students’ different points of view, approaches, or knowledge base. But, frequently, group work, peer editing, etc., are undercut because students, and sometimes teachers, are inexperienced at using collaborative work effectively.

- Educators rely heavily on small-group work to promote students’ learning. They make less use of other approaches, such as trained peer tutoring,

student-developed rubrics for excellent work, or class discussion and modeling of how to improve failing or basic work.

- Where small-group work is well designed (e.g., carefully crafted assignments with interlocking roles to maximize learning), student agency and academic learning increase for students with a variety of current needs.
- The outcomes of shared learning are often weakest for the most vulnerable students (e.g., students who lack skills, English-language learners, students with attention or learning difficulties, students who need more challenging work to stay engaged). Teachers report wanting much more focused professional development to help them work with such heterogeneous groups.

**MATH-SPECIFIC FINDING** The new high school math curriculum and secondary texts require educators to utilize a range of teaching strategies – including group work – that go beyond “chalk and talk.” Teachers do not currently have access to explicit supports to realize the promise of this curriculum in heterogeneous classrooms.

**LITERACY-SPECIFIC FINDING** Some English and social studies classes contain a wide range of potentially strong practices such as peer editing, “literacy circles,” and jigsawed reading (in which students each read a different text in order to contribute to a broader understanding of a topic).

## Differentiated Supports for Learners

**OVERALL FINDING** Teachers report that the span of achievement levels in their classrooms is wider than in the past. They want more sustained and explicit training in adapting their instruction and assignments – without lowering expectations. At a number of schools, after-school programs provide high-quality and diversified supports for learners. However, there is a major difference between programs being available and being accessible and helpful.

- Several sites have developed supports that operate within the school day, including an open period in which students can get help from their teachers.
- Before- and after-school support programs draw quite effectively on a range of adults (such as para-educators, parent volunteers) and community resources (such as students from local universities).
- Many school staff are regularly available for additional academic support (e.g., during lunch or recess, before or after school, and via e-mail). But more students – particularly those who are striving to make it in school – need explicit

*One school created “flex time” – teachers’ open office hours built into the school day when students can seek help. Students, educators, and school staff identified flex time as critical to student success. Flex time is optional after ninth grade, but struggling students are required to attend to receive individualized support from their teachers. Students say: “It’s a great place to see teachers. It’s like personal time” and “I can ask questions, get help in a smaller setting, and go deeper with the material.”*

– Observation notes from an Action Team member

opportunities to learn the agency skills that more-privileged students exercise to get what they need (e.g., asking for help, explaining what is hard for them, requesting chances to extend or revise assignments). Students also need clearer and earlier information about programs, eligibility, fees, and schedules.

- Students who have other demands on their time (e.g., work, family responsibilities) report being unable to make use of many of the programs and supports currently offered.
- Professionals who deal most directly with student supports (counselors, student-support program staff, para-educators, etc.) are often not included in training or professional development opportunities. They report this limits their ability to get students the supports they need and their chances to develop into effective student advocates.

*One high school has developed an impressive array of supports for students who enter without the math and literacy skills to succeed in Algebra I. This school created a two-course math program for struggling students: one period of algebra and one period of numeracy. The school is also using Cognitive Tutor, a program that supports students who did not pass algebra in their first attempt. With support from the principal, the math faculty used professional development days and discussion periods to develop these programs.*

– Observation notes from an Action Team member

**MATH-SPECIFIC FINDING** The district has invested in programs such as the computer-based Cognitive Tutor for high school mathematics, which selects problems based on a student’s skills and targets areas for improvement. In settings where there is good technical and mathematics support for the program, struggling students have shown improvement.

**LITERACY-SPECIFIC FINDING** Students whose first language is not English often transition into mainstream classes before they have command of academic English. They continue to need support in reading demanding texts and writing extended pieces. Supports designed to help them are also relevant to other students who have weak literacy skills.

## High Expectations for Adult Learning and Accountability

**OVERALL FINDING** In Portland there is a long tradition of individual educator excellence. One outgrowth of this is that the content and timing of professional development is largely voluntary, which makes unified district- and school-wide change difficult. Many PPS educators report that they learn primarily on their own and want increased opportunities to work with colleagues in critical areas. Principals want the skills and knowledge to become effective instructional leaders.

- While PPS has invested in high-quality professional development, the opportunities for in-depth training are often optional. The result is a core of individually excellent teachers who invest in renewing and sharpening their skills, but an uneven spread of improved practice across the district.
- School-based educators want a balance of common expectations and accountability across the district and the opportunity to fulfill those shared responsi-

bilities in ways that draw on their experience and skills and respond to the needs of their particular students.

- Principals seek much more support from the district in the area of instructional leadership. These areas include standards and expectations, supervising and evaluating teachers, and building cross-curricular supports in fundamental areas like literacy and mathematics.
- School-based educators desire additional training and skills to effectively differentiate instruction in order to teach linguistically diverse, currently low-achieving, and special education students.
- Educators have a strong desire for professional development that includes sustained site-based, practice-related, and collaborative practices that mentor and support new teachers, build on effective practices, and encourage the development of teachers as instructional leaders.
- Educators view technology as a critical but underutilized resource for improving their practice. They are eager to have access to lessons, samples of student work, discussions of critical issues with colleagues, and opportunities for distance learning.

*All the way home, I thought, How can I adapt the lessons I observed today to my own classes tomorrow? You guys rock! You inspired me to rethink what I'm doing in my classroom. Total engagement. After the bell rings, I'm still trying to get [one of my students] off his desk and [another student] to put her cell phone away! You were all working on big ideas that matter and using difficult texts to teach students tools and strategies they can take with them to the next text. I left your school today full of good feelings about the work you're doing. Thanks for giving me new tools and new ideas.*

– Message from an Action Team member (a Portland English/language arts educator) to the principal and educators following the school visit

**MATH-SPECIFIC FINDINGS** Professional development in mathematics is strong in the areas of common standards, curricula, and assessment, but it has not yet addressed the needs of special education students and English-language learners and their teachers.

Math educators need additional professional development supports to work with colleagues in other subject areas in order to build cross-curricular opportunities for students to develop deep understanding of key math concepts.

**LITERACY-SPECIFIC FINDING** Professional development has been strong in the areas of literature and personal expression. Work in informational reading and writing across the curriculum is more recent and less developed. In addition, common professional development has not been available at scale for all teachers across subjects where literacy is a major gatekeeping skill.

## Meaningful Roles for Family and Community in Student Achievement

**OVERALL FINDING** School and central office personnel tend to involve students, families, and community members in periodic and one-directional ways, mostly focused on school needs, management, discipline, or summary reports on student

achievement. Students and their families, along with community organizations, want earlier, sustained, substantive, and more collaborative roles in school improvement.

- Educators want the help of families and communities, but they lack effective strategies to integrate these community resources into student learning experiences.
- It is easy for families who have free time, access to transportation and a computer, and English fluency to become involved in their children's school. Becoming involved is difficult for families who do not have these advantages or who are uncomfortable with the structure and routines of U.S. schools.
- Educators, schools, and the central office rely heavily on electronic methods of communication (e-mail, course Web sites, PPS Web site, etc.). This advantage families who have access to and familiarity with these technologies.

**MATH- AND LITERACY-SPECIFIC FINDING** As standards rise and as students have the opportunity for more education than their parents did, it is increasingly hard for families to know how to support and ensure their children's success in school and afterwards. At present, it is very difficult for families to acquire a deep understanding of what is expected at each grade level or to participate meaningfully in helping their children achieve those expectations.

*I spoke with a young Hispanic woman who was a junior. Before her freshman year, her parents and she decided she would attend a high school out of her district because they thought she would get a better education. She was very lonely and felt quite out of place at that new school, where the students did not accept her. No one seemed to notice her. After freshman year, she transferred back to a newly created small high school in her home district. There, she was a part of a small group. She liked the school because the teachers expected her to learn, and they all wanted to help her succeed.*

*During our two-day visit to this school, the overriding theme I heard from teachers and students was that they cared about each other, and they said this with words of mutual respect. The students were proud that they were being asked to step it up academically and they knew the teachers and staff were there to help.*

— Action Team Member

### High Level of Cultural Proficiency

A number of findings in the preceding sections have significant implications for increasing cultural proficiency. In both mathematics and literacy, there are persistent achievement gaps at the secondary (eighth- and tenth-grade) level. These are especially wide for Hispanic, African American, and Native American/Alaskan students. School-based interviews and observations highlighted a number of practices that may underlie these gaps.

### FINDINGS about Cultural Proficiency from the Preceding Dimensions

#### *Engaging and Challenging Content*

- Low levels of expectation and accountability are more likely to occur in classrooms where students are poor or of color.
- Access to algebra, a major gatekeeper for high school success, or to algebra-preparatory courses varies for eighth-graders across schools and within schools (e.g., special education students and English-language learners encounter numerous barriers to gaining access to these courses).

### *Emphasis on Effort and Motivation*

- As compared to their more privileged peers, lower-performing students in poorer schools or less-advanced classes frequently go without models of excellence, opportunities to revise their work, or discussions about setting and pursuing goals for improvement.
- Within the same classroom, high- and low-performing students often have different experiences in levels and amounts of engagement in learning.
- Such different levels of expectations have consequences for the level of student effort and their motivation to do more than “just get by.”

*One of the students I interviewed said that he received all the help he needed at the school but that he really only went to school because his mother wanted him to. He was often absent and said he would rather just stay at home.*

– Action Team Member

### *Classrooms as Communities of Learners*

- Shared learning is often weakest when the most vulnerable students are involved (e.g., students who lack skills, are English-language learners, appear to have attention or learning difficulties, or need more challenging work to stay engaged).

### *Differentiated Supports for Learners*

- Students whose first language is not English often transition into mainstream classes before they have command of academic English. They continue to need support in reading demanding texts and writing extended pieces. Supports designed to help them are also relevant to other students who have weak literacy skills.
- While students have many support programs (e.g., tutoring, mentoring, after-school help sessions) available, they need clearer and earlier information about programs, eligibility, fees, and schedules. In addition, programs need to work for students who are juggling family responsibilities, work, as well as school.

### *High Expectations for Adult Learning and Accountability*

- School-based educators desire additional training and skills to effectively differentiate instruction in order to teach linguistically diverse, currently low-achieving, and special education students without lowering standards.

### *Meaningful Roles for Family and Community in Student Achievement*

- It is easy for families who have free time, access to transportation and a computer, and English fluency to become involved in their children’s school. Becoming involved is difficult for families who do not have these advantages or who are uncomfortable with the structure and routines of U.S. schools.

*At the conclusion of the focus-group session at one of the high schools, the interviewer (a White female) approached me (an African American male) to ask if I would be willing to speak with a student (an African American young man). “Scott” introduced himself as an active student who did well in his classes and wanted to talk about the not-so-rare phenomenon that African American males who do well academically get shunned and ostracized by other Black kids for “acting White.” Scott said, “My friends don’t seem to want to let others know how smart they are. They don’t seek out help from the teachers or counselors when they are having problems. What can I do, as a student, to change this?” I asked Scott about other Black men who might be role models, who might be able to engage this group of young men about their challenges and confront the myth and the unsettling stereotype. He paused and said, “No, that’s why I’m asking you. What could I do, on my own, to make a change for the better?” I responded that more adults who “get it” need to help him search out solutions to this increasingly common urban education dilemma.*

– Action Team member

**ADDITIONAL OVERALL FINDINGS** for Increasing Cultural Proficiency: School strategies to build cultural proficiency center almost exclusively on content, rather than human communication and interactions.

- There is widespread attention to diversifying the literature that students read and acknowledging a range of perspectives on historical events. Attention and resources are also invested in hiring translators and providing translations of print materials into multiple languages.
- Many educators address issues of cultural proficiency chiefly in terms of understanding racial, ethnic and language differences. Other dimensions of difference – such as class, citizenship, or families’ access to education – are not part of the conversation.
- Students who attend schools outside of their neighborhood often feel “invisible” or like “outsiders” due to racial, ethnic, linguistic, and/or class differences.

**MATH-SPECIFIC FINDING** The increased math requirements reflect the commitment of PPS to provide all students with the skills to succeed in the global, knowledge-driven economy. But there are significant gaps between students of different racial and ethnic identities.

**LITERACY-SPECIFIC FINDING** Literacy-based classes have been the most successful in adapting and expanding their curricula to include rich content reflecting the diversity of families in Portland. But there are significant achievement gaps between students of different racial and ethnic identities, and writing is persistently the area of lowest performance.

## SUMMARY OF LITERACY AND MATH FINDINGS

A background discussion of literacy and math achievement can be found on pages 15–17.

### Literacy Findings

- PPS has supported a culture of individual practice and teacher-designed curricula in literacy, giving rise to a group of extremely capable educators who have developed challenging courses, innovative projects, a model of socially concerned literacy practice, and strong mentor relationships.

- However, there is no widely understood literacy framework that connects curricula, strategies, standards, and assessments from the end of elementary school through graduation.
- Access to high-quality curricula and supports currently varies both within and across schools in substantial ways that are often correlated with class, race, and ethnicity.
- Many students, not just English-language learners, are unevenly prepared for reading, writing, speaking, and listening to cognitive academic English.
- Common and widespread professional development in literacy has not been available at scale for PPS educators. In particular, the expectations and standards do not rise steadily from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

### Math Findings

- The new common math curriculum has been recognized as an important first step in building uniformity of math content knowledge. Teachers see this as a strategy for addressing student mobility and the transition to increased graduation requirements.
- Although PPS requires algebra proficiency, ninth-grade students are unevenly prepared for the course, which functions as a “gatekeeper” for secondary and postsecondary opportunities.
- Professional development in mathematics has been strong in the areas of standards and assessment. It has not yet consistently addressed the needs of educators in special education and English-language learning.
- PPS educators are interested in encouraging higher-order thinking and in making content relevant to students’ lives but do not have the supports to build deeper pedagogical knowledge and connect to colleagues across subject areas to do so.

# Recommendations for Immediate and Long-Term Action

Using a set of research, observation, and interview tools developed by the Annenberg Institute, the Teaching and Learning Review found:

There are persistent gaps between the performance of students from low-income families, students of color, and recent immigrants with limited English proficiency and the performance of more privileged students who are White, English speaking, and middle class and possess U.S. citizenship. (p. 1)

It is clear from the Review that not only more – *but also substantially different* – work is needed in Portland Public Schools to close the opportunity gap created by highly uneven levels of rigor and effectiveness in teaching across the district. It is not enough that Portland is home to some excellent schools, some remarkable classrooms, a number of skilled teachers and principals, and rising aggregate results.

If PPS is to fulfill its promise, both as individual sites and as a system that provides all children with what they need to thrive and contribute, the schools themselves must be instruments of change. The following recommendations address the fourth, and in many ways, most important question that guides the Teaching and Learning Review:

What choices and commitments must Portland Public Schools and its partners pursue in order to deliver excellent educational opportunities at scale and to ensure just and equitable outcomes for students?

The following recommendations include responses to the findings from the previous sections of this report. They also respond to the comments of the Community Education Partners. The recommendations are grouped into three major areas:

- Ensuring excellent and equitable educational opportunities
- Widening the responsibility and leadership for public education
- Creating an equitable city- or countywide system of learning

## ENSURING EXCELLENT AND EQUITABLE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The following recommendations are in concert with the initiatives to improve teaching and learning already selected and funded by the district for this school

year. Even as these initiatives aim at excellence (e.g., rising test scores and higher percentages of students in college-relevant courses) these recommendations are designed to ensure that both the investments and the outcomes are equitable.

### **Ensure Quality Teaching and Learning**

To improve the overall quality of teaching and learning, with a strong emphasis on addressing the achievement gap that separates the performance of Hispanic, African American, and Native American/Alaskan Native students from that of White and Asian students, the district must rigorously align all of its resources and activities to the following goals:

1. **Create a strong pre-K–16 learning continuum that supports all students through and beyond high school graduation.** District data show declines in student performance after elementary school. Three factors need attention: more rigorous standards for grades pre-K–5; high and equitable expectations for grades 6–8, as many Portland elementary schools become K–8 facilities; and intensive work on the transitions from grades 8 to 9 and from grade 12 to postsecondary options.
  - **Share these expectations with students and families in multiple languages and formats** (e.g., print, workshop discussion). Developing strategies for meeting these expectations must become the joint work of the Office of Curriculum and Instruction and the recently established Office of Student, Family, and School Support.
  - **Develop a system of long-range planning conferences that engage students and families in mapping out a full range of learning opportunities in each major segment of public education** (e.g., primary, upper elementary, middle school, early and later high school). These discussions must address all of the opportunities that fuel differences in student outcomes: in-school courses, electives, out-of-school opportunities, internships, and work placements for high school students.
2. **Ensure that *all* educators – not only those who volunteer – have high-quality professional development in literacy and mathematics, coupled with the cultural proficiency to ensure they reach the full range of students in their classrooms.** This must include teachers who work with ELL students and students with disabilities, teachers in after-school programs, family members who receive training as liaisons, and members of community organizations that provide services to students. These efforts must be aligned with other district initiatives (SAELP, training in cultural proficiency) and must become an ongoing, rather than a one-time effort. This professional development should build on

the work of educators throughout Portland and Multnomah County who have demonstrated the capacity to expect and support growth in all of their students.

3. **Guarantee the implementation of common curricula and support materials across the district in ways that spark and sustain the engagement of students and educators alike.** The district has taken a number of steps to adopt common materials. However, these materials alone are not enough to ensure equitable outcomes. In addition, the findings in this Review point to the need to:
  - **Implement the new elements of common curriculum in ways that leave room for teachers and students to extend and adapt units of study** to the passions and experiences of students and educators alike.
  - **Support subjects like physical education, social studies, world languages, and the arts,** even as federal and state accountability systems focus intently on mathematics and reading. These subjects keep students engaged and provide many students with important opportunities to learn and excel.
4. **Align expectations across the entire set of in-school learning opportunities** (e.g., reading and writing across the curriculum; the application of key math ideas in science courses; alignment of all tutoring and support services, alternative programs, supplementary services). Creating a set of widely shared goals can multiply all students' opportunity to master important ideas, skills, and ways of working to prepare all students for success in higher education and the new economy.

### **Develop and Deliver Timely and Effective Supports and Special Programs for Learners**

5. **Design early and effective interventions to prevent failure and loss of hope.** This means spreading existing examples of effective supports (e.g., a period inserted in the school day or week for individual help, after-school programs staffed with older students who are fluent in ELL students' first languages and in academic English, the skilled implementation of programs such as Cognitive Tutor that can support and supplement student success in key courses like Algebra I, and summer remediation and enrichment opportunities).
  - **Interventions must occur as early as possible, rather than being triggered by failure.** For example, if graduating eighth-graders are more than six months behind, they require summer and ninth-grade academy experiences that get them back on track – *before* they begin to fail.

- Intervention programs must be regularly examined to ensure that they accelerate student learning and development and do not segregate particular groups of students unfairly or for long periods of time.
  - The district should build on the positive and successful programs at the Sun Schools that already provide an excellent model for constructive intervention.
  - These supports should also be aligned with the strategies outlined in the “Connected by 25” Report.
6. **Ensure that the processes and tools used to identify students for special programs are fairly and well implemented.** There is an overrepresentation of poor children of color in special education and an underrepresentation of these same children in the most challenging programs the district offers (such as Talented and Gifted and language immersion). To change this situation, the district needs to use multiple measures, include families and students as sources of evidence, identify Portland sites and other districts that are making progress, and examine the resulting enrollment and persistence data over time.

### Ensure Equitable Outcomes

7. **Monitor the results of these investments on an annual basis.** At both a school and a district level, PPS should develop a process that will allow families and communities to examine disaggregated student outcomes on an annual basis, identify persisting inequalities, and use processes like the Teaching and Learning Review to identify sources and potential solutions. This process should also encourage site visits to Portland-area schools that have made notable progress in closing achievement gaps.
8. **Institute an annual “State of Our Students, Schools, and Communities” event** that begins with school-level discussions of data on a broad set of student outcomes, including: academic achievement, extracurricular activities, service, and other aspects of development. These meetings could culminate in a town hall event focused on using district, city, and county resources (knowledge, systems, human resources, and available dollars) to address stubborn problems of gaps in achievement. The collaborative process featured in the development of the “Connected by 25” report and recommendations provides an excellent model.
9. **Continue to address achievement gaps and their underlying causes.** This must be an ongoing process. No single event or set of short-term initiatives can substitute for persistent attention to the most fundamental issue in public education.

## WIDENING RESPONSIBILITY AND LEADERSHIP FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Strong leaders and skilled staff at central office have helped the district to make strides in raising overall student achievement, attracting grants, and developing a strong reputation. However, PPS cannot afford to operate as a sealed engine room. Even the most smoothly running and expert central office cannot solve the issues of unequal outcomes for students without drawing on the considerable insights of its many community and county partners.

### Build the Skills of Central Office Staff and Principals to Lead Change for More Equitable Outcomes

10. **Develop the instructional expertise and cultural proficiency of area directors and principals.** The district has begun to develop tools for looking at the quality of instruction (e.g., the quality of assignments and the resulting student work and school-visit protocols that focus closely on the quality of instruction). These tools cannot afford to be omnibus tools that look only at the average or aggregate experience of classrooms of students. These tools must pay explicit attention to the learning lives of specific groups of students, particularly those that are most at risk in PPS. The Teaching and Learning Review introduced Action Team members to such processes, allowing members to compare what occurred for currently high- and low-achieving students. It is important to build on this experience. As this process develops, PPS might engage educators from nearby districts, particularly those that have made strides in closing the achievement gap. This could build a countywide consortium on strategies for equitable education.

### Engage Teachers as Thinkers and Leaders

11. **Develop and build on teacher knowledge.** As the district moves forward with a set of clear and common expectations (common curriculum, anchor assignments, etc.), it is vital to balance those core expectations with multiple forms of acknowledgment and opportunities for teacher leadership at the building and district level. This could include:
  - **cross-classroom, cross-school, and cross-district visits to effective classrooms** for accelerated learning, ELL instruction, or the effective inclusion of students with special needs;
  - **a Web site that publishes examples of how skilled teachers have implemented anchor assignments** in ways that yield strong results for the full range of students in their classrooms;

- **teacher-led scoring of anchor assignments** with an emphasis on identifying classrooms and schools where student achievement is rising for multiple groups;
- **a program of teacher-led action research**, funded with competitive mini-grants, on issues critical to improving outcomes for students.

### **Build on the Leadership of Community-Based Organizations**

The Teaching and Learning Review is an example of the powerful role that community-based organizations play in informing and speaking out about issues of quality and equity in public education.

12. **Reconvene the entire Teaching and Learning group to review the progress that PPS has made in addressing the needs documented in the Review.** It is vital that the groups that invested in the Review continue to be actively involved. This is a major way in which to form a community and district partnership to ensure that PPS is a collaborative learning organization that listens and learns from its constituents.
13. **Make this process continuous.** (See Recommendations 7–9.)

### **Build Meaningful Partnerships with Students**

Throughout the Review, numerous students raised issues that they are concerned about and want to address. However, the mechanisms for this type of ongoing and issue-oriented student engagement are currently limited to small groups of students serving on student government or special, appointed task forces. Across the country, districts are engaging young people in ways that improve teaching and learning and build student skills. PPS should consider these measures:

14. **Convene a citywide youth task force** that draws from all high schools across the city and engages interested students from all neighborhoods. The goal of the task force is to develop an agenda for engaging young people in a substantive way in school planning and improvement. Each high school should have a working group of the task force.
15. **Develop course offerings that support youth voice and leadership.** For example, there could be English and social studies courses that support youth broadcasting, debate, and journalism, as well as offerings that provide students with the literacy, public speaking, and research skills that will make them full partners in school improvement. For instance, consider independent study or student government options in which students would learn interviewing, observation, and data-analysis skills that could help individual teachers, departments, or the school at large understand how to improve and equalize learning.

## Create Stronger Partnerships with Families

Families throughout the city want the best for their children. However, as the demands of contemporary education change, more and more families are uncertain about what is expected and how to support their students. This is most acute for family members whose own education was unsuccessful, for illegal immigrants, and for those whose children are struggling in the public schools. It is time to capture the hopes and will of family members by spreading good existing practices and building more. PPS should consider these measures:

16. **Place a professionally trained family liaison in each school.** This person should be familiar with the practices and beliefs of the communities that send their children to the school, speak at least one of the languages spoken in their communities other than English, and/or have access to translators who are also familiar with school expectations. The liaison should work both at the school site and at a community-based location. Liaisons should be a part of district professional development – both as learners and as teachers.
17. **Convene educational planning conferences prior to and midway through every level of school (elementary, middle, and high school).** These sessions would involve an informed teacher or advisor, a student, and a family member in discussions about whether a student is on track to meet high expectations, what interventions or opportunities could accelerate or enrich learning, and how to access those. The goal is for both students and family members to develop the agency, knowledge, and skills that it takes to negotiate the best from schools and other institutions.
18. **Provide professional development and learning opportunities for parents.** At the school and community level, it is critical that parents have access to learning about current expectations for their children and how to raise questions that they have about policies, decisions, etc. For instance, PPS parents would like pamphlets (as well as a Web site) that provide families with a clear picture of what student work should look like by the middle and end of each year of school, particularly in mathematics and writing. Conferences with parents should use these examples and samples of their child's own work to discuss progress and next steps.

## ESTABLISHING LONG-TERM INITIATIVES TO CREATE A SYSTEM OF EQUITABLE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

A comprehensive cross-sector education initiative for Portland could sustain and amplify the actions outlined above. To this end, the district and its partners should:

19. **Build a cross-institutional coalition** that includes the city and county governments, postsecondary education institutions, businesses, and nonprofits working on behalf of children and youth. Develop a robust and widely held definition of what it takes to contribute and prosper in Portland (e.g., health and safety, excellent public schools, after-school and summer opportunities, “thinking” jobs and internships, long-term financial planning, and social supports to persist into and through college).
  - **Create a city- or countywide data bank** with indicators that measure who has access to these opportunities across the city. Make this data part of the citywide summit described in Recommendation 8.
  - **Develop a set of “dashboard indicators”** for monitoring access and outcomes for children and youth over time in each neighborhood of the city.
20. **Develop a cross-sector examination of current streams of funding for children and youth**, their current uses, and where synergies, savings, and better investments might occur. There are many programs, both private and public, that invest in the well-being and learning of children and youth. Currently there is no systematic way to know where those resources “pile up” and where they are scarce. Nor is there a way to examine how those funds could best be invested to maximize outcomes for young people.
21. **Develop legislative and private-sector strategies to identify, capture, invest, and monitor the return on new streams of funding** for a public education system composed of excellent schools, as well as many other educational opportunities that develop young people’s capacities. Portland and surrounding communities cannot pursue excellent and equitable public education in the current atmosphere of undependable and meager funding.

# Final Thoughts on the Promise of Portland Public Schools

This report has highlighted some of the ways in which Portland has great promise as a city that harnesses and aligns multiple resources into a coherent system of opportunities to learn that are available to all children and youth. The report also highlights the work that needs to be done to realize that goal, along with recommendations for immediate and long-term steps.

There are roles for all sectors of the Portland community in this work that is so crucial for the city's future. Schools, alone, cannot provide all the opportunities that children need – schools also need the participation, support, and commitment to mutual accountability of the rest of the community. Portland has promised that all its public school students will be prepared to succeed in high-level postsecondary work or study. This ambitious goal can only be realized if schools are embedded in a larger civic system in which all sectors invest in Portland's next generation.

## The Teaching and Learning Review: Process, Tools, and Methodology

The Teaching and Learning Review is a set of research, observation, and interview tools and processes, developed by the Annenberg Institute, that enables community stakeholders – district and school staff, students, community organizations, and families – to closely examine teaching and learning in their schools. The Review intentionally builds the capacity of these stakeholders to engage in inclusive and honest discussion about how effectively their public schools serve all their children and youth and about what is needed to make public education a source of development and opportunity.

The Review consists of a broadly defined process and a set of observation and interview tools that are customized to reflect the context of the community undertaking the Review. A detailed description of the Review in Portland appears in Appendix B.

### PROCESS

The Teaching and Learning Review comprises three broad phases: collaborative planning and preparation, collection and analysis of data from schools and classrooms, and development of findings and recommendations for action.

#### Planning and Preparation

- Institute staff meet with the superintendent, other district personnel, and community leaders to collaboratively tailor the Review to their community's needs. The group identifies the schools to be visited during the Review.
- The district/community planning group identifies a team of educators from the district's schools and central office, leaders of key partner organizations, and family and community members who will gather data during school and classroom visits and develop findings and recommendations.
- Institute staff train the team members in the data-collection process, introducing them to the Teaching and Learning Review tools for observations and interviews and working with the team to adapt the tools to the context of the community.
- Data and background materials about the district, the community, and students are gathered and compiled to provide context for the Review.

## Data Collection and Analysis

- Team members spend two full days in the selected schools, gathering data on teaching and learning through classroom observations and individual and focus-group interviews. One day is focused on educators; the other day is focused on students.
- Institute staff compile the data from all the observations and interviews. Following an analysis of the data, the staff draft a set of preliminary findings for review by the school-visit team.

## Findings and Recommendations

- The school-visit team meets, facilitated by Institute staff, to discuss and complete the findings and to develop a set of recommendations that emphasize strengths that the district and its partners should build on as well as identifying work that remains to be done.
- The findings and recommendations are shared with district and community leaders.

## TOOLS

The Review features a set of tools designed to gather data consistently across multiple classroom observations and individual and focus-group interviews by each of the school-visit team members.

### Observation Tools

- Classrooms observations of both educators and students are recorded on “running record” forms. Every two minutes during the class period, the observer notes in writing the actions (who is talking, listening, etc.), language, interactions between educator and students or colleagues, and materials being used.
- Observers also look for five key dimensions<sup>2</sup> that have been shown by research to impact teaching and learning (see Figure A-1 on page 41). Following each observation session, the observer reviews the running record and notes instances of these dimensions for use in data analysis.

### Interview Tools

- Individual and focus-group interviews with educators and students follow a set of scripted questions to ensure consistency in data collection. The questions focus primarily on the key dimensions listed above.

<sup>2</sup> During the analysis of the school-visit data in Portland, the dimension Shared Learning Community was expanded into three dimensions – shared learning communities for educators (High Expectations for Adult Learning and Accountability), for students (Classrooms as Communities of Learners), and for families (Meaningful Roles for Family and Community in Student Achievement) – making a total of seven dimensions for that Review. This adaptation exemplifies the flexible design of the Teaching and Learning Review that allows it to be customized in response to differing local district contexts.

<b>Key Dimensions</b>	<b>Example of what to look for</b>	<b>Example of what to listen for</b>
<b>Challenging and Engaging Content</b>	How does the educator get students to explain their thinking?	How does the educator model and encourage the use of academic language in the classroom?
<b>Organization for Effort and Motivation</b>	How does the educator encourage students to invest in doing quality work?	How does the educator ensure that students are comfortable asking questions?
<b>Differentiated Supports for Learners</b>	What strategies does the educator use to support English-language learners or students with special needs?	How does the educator respond when a student struggles or makes a mistake?
<b>Cultural Proficiency</b>	What strategies does the educator use to engage students with different cultural backgrounds and approaches to learning?	How does classroom conversation reflect a range of cultures and/or represent the family backgrounds of students?
<b>Shared Learning Community</b>	What opportunities do educators have to work together?	How does the educator speak about his/her colleagues and the communities the school serves?

**Figure A-1.** Key dimensions that impact teaching and learning

## APPENDIX B The Teaching and Learning Review in Portland

The Portland Public Schools (PPS), in partnership with the Portland Schools Foundation (PSF), undertook a Teaching and Learning Review between the spring of 2005 and the spring of 2006 with funding from the Gates Foundation and the Meyer Memorial Trust. Staff from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University facilitated the Review.

A detailed timeline of the Review process in Portland appears in Appendix C.

### INITIAL PHASE: REVIEW OF PPS DATA

The Review began in the spring of 2005 with a comprehensive examination of districtwide student-achievement data in literacy and mathematics from the past several years as well as state standards, summaries of curricula taught in different schools across the city, emerging plans for school closings and consolidations, etc. In addition, in collaboration with the district's area directors, each school in the district was surveyed for the curricula and support materials that teachers used in mathematics and literacy instruction.

This initial review underscored several important points.

- While Portland elementary students were performing increasingly well relative to the rest of the state, Portland's secondary (middle and high school) students were not performing at similar levels.
- A concerted effort in instruction and professional development in mathematics had resulted in improving student achievement on Oregon state tests, but there had not been a similar improvement in literacy, even though reading and writing are fundamental to academic success across subjects.
- The achievement gaps between different populations of students were substantial and persistent in both middle and high schools.
- A significant number of high school students (regardless of their achievement level) were not taking the necessary courses for entry into state colleges and universities.
- There was no commonality in the curricula and support materials used in the same grade levels across the district. The materials in use varied in approach and levels of expectations for students.
- The wide variation in the performance of different middle and high schools across the city correlated with the ethnic, racial, and linguistic composition of their student bodies.

- The district lacked systematic data on its students' persistence and success in postsecondary education (whether academic or vocational).

## THE SCHOOL-VISITS PHASE

The planning and execution of the school visits to collect data on teaching and learning in Portland secondary schools took place in the fall and winter of 2005–2006.

### Planning and Preparation

In response to the findings in the initial phase, PPS Superintendent Vicki Phillips requested that the school-visits phase of the Review focus on mathematics and literacy in middle and high schools. She outlined three major purposes for the Review from the district's perspective:

- to inform the emerging plans for instructional improvement;
- to provide a school- and community-level complement to the central office redesign being undertaken by the Bridgespan Group and the central office staff;
- to work with Portland administrators and teachers to develop a set of tools that would develop their capacity to reflect on and improve their current practice in an ongoing way.

The Portland Schools Foundation, with its long history of building public engagement in education, saw the Review also as an opportunity

- to craft a substantial role for youth, families, and community organizations in improving public education.

Both PPS and PSF wanted the Review

- to generate a frank report to the superintendent and the school board detailing findings and recommendations for making rapid progress on improving opportunities and outcomes for students;
- to create a set of tools that Portland educators could use and adapt to support their own practice as well as school-improvement planning;
- to train a group of educators and community members who could carry out future Reviews.

During the fall and winter of 2005–2006, nearly fifty individuals from PPS, PSE, and a number of community education partners came together to form six Teaching and Learning Review Action Teams (see the inside front cover for a list of the Action Team members).

Facilitated by staff from the Annenberg Institute, the teams trained together in the observation and interview processes and tools, which they would be using during the school visits to examine both the opportunities to learn and the outcomes for Portland educators and students (see Appendix A). Part of the training sessions included a critique of the tools and processes, which were subsequently refined and adapted for use in the Portland Review.

Superintendent Phillips and her staff selected three middle and three high schools to be the focus of the observation and interview phase of the Review. These six schools represented different areas of the city, served families with different means, and included both high-performing and struggling schools, as measured by state tests, attendance, and selection data.

### **The School Visits**

In February and March of 2006, each of the six Action Teams (comprising approximately ten people) visited one of the selected schools for two full days. Over the two days, Team members each observed two educators and two students in literacy and math classrooms; conducted individual interviews with the educators and students they observed; and led focus groups with other students, teachers, and school staff. Team members completed a running record form for each educator and student observed and took detailed notes on responses to each of the interview and focus-group questions (see Appendix A).

At the end of the visit, Team members participated in debriefing discussions with principals and interested staff members at the school site.

The structure of a two-day school visit is detailed in Figure B-1 on next page 45.

During the six school visits, the Action Teams, in total:

- observed and individually interviewed 64 educators,
- observed and individually interviewed 120 students (a range of high- and low-achieving students),
- facilitated 34 focus groups (participants included additional students, educators, administrators, and support staff who were not otherwise interviewed or observed; focus group topics included math, literacy, and family/community engagement),
- held 6 structured debriefs at school sites with the principal; debriefs were open to all staff.

The data collected during the school visits offer a detailed snapshot of teaching and learning at the secondary level in Portland. However, for the reasons outlined

<b>Day 1: Educators at Work</b>	PRE-OBSERVATION MEETING WITH EDUCATORS
	OBSERVATION 1: 5 Settings, 2 Action Team members in each setting <b>LITERACY</b> <b>LITERACY</b> MATH MATH OTHER
	OBSERVATION 2: 5 Settings, 2 Action Team members in each setting <b>LITERACY</b> <b>LITERACY</b> MATH MATH OTHER
	INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS 1: the 5 educators from Observation 1
	INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS 2: the 5 educators from Observation 2
	FOCUS GROUPS: 3 groups of 6 educators each <b>LITERACY</b> MATH OTHER
	ACTION TEAM DEBRIEF & PREP FOR DAY 2
<b>Day 2: Students' Learning</b>	PRE-OBSERVATION MEETING WITH EDUCATORS
	OBSERVATION 1: 5 Settings, 2 Action Team members observing 1 student each <b>LITERACY</b> <b>LITERACY</b> MATH MATH OTHER
	OBSERVATION 2: 5 Settings, 2 Action Team members observing 1 student each <b>LITERACY</b> <b>LITERACY</b> MATH MATH OTHER
	INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS 1: the 10 students from Observation 1
	INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS 2: the 10 students from Observation 2
	FOCUS GROUPS: 3 groups of 6 students each <b>LITERACY</b> MATH OTHER
	DEBRIEF WITH PRINCIPAL AND SCHOOL STAFF
	ACTION TEAM DEBRIEF

**Figure B-1.** Structure of the two-day school visits by Portland Action Teams

below, it is important to bear in mind that these data constitute a *slice* of secondary teaching and learning in Portland, not a comprehensive research or statistically valid study:

- Teams were in approximately one-fifth of the system's middle and high schools.
- Teams observed two consecutive days of instruction, at one particular time of the year.
- Teams saw less of teachers' professional lives (e.g., grade-level meetings, IEP meetings, planning periods) than anticipated.

- Schools, classrooms, teachers, and students were largely volunteers.
- There were no random or surprise visits.
- The process did not engage students' families.

### **Data Analysis and Preliminary Findings**

Working in pairs at the end of their school visit, Action Team members began the data-coding process by identifying instances of the key dimensions in their running records on their educator and student observations and comparing the experiences of the two students they observed in the same classroom. In addition, they listed what they saw as areas of strength and areas in need of investment from their school visit.

Annenberg Institute staff compiled the data from the Action Teams' observations and interviews and combined them with the initial background research from the first phase of the Review to produce a preliminary set of findings.

In broad outline, the Annenberg Institute (research and other staff and consultants) completed the following steps:

1. Transcribed the handwritten data from the school visits, aligned materials from multiple observers, double-checked coding, and verified confusing or missing information with school sites.
2. Grouped data in three types: middle school and high school, the key dimensions of teaching and learning, and literacy and mathematics.
3. Completed two readings of each data type to double-check the Action Teams' coding of the data.
4. Compiled a preliminary list of major findings (to be considered a finding, a point had to occur across two or more sources of data – such as student observations, focus groups, Action Team debriefs – or across schools).

### **Final Findings and Recommendations**

The draft findings from the analysis by Institute staff were reviewed by the Action Team members, PPS central office staff, PSF staff, and community education partners at a meeting in late April. The findings specific to math and literacy were also shared with the Teachers on Special Assignment in those subject areas. Institute staff then expanded and clarified the findings, which were again reviewed by the Action Team members at a meeting in August 2006.

Based on the Action Team findings, Institute staff developed a series of immediate, near-term, and long-range recommendations for action by the district and the Portland education community.

In the late summer of 2006, the Action Team findings were reviewed by key PPS partners working on issues relating to teaching and learning in Portland – the Bridgespan Group, the Center for Teaching Quality, and The Education Trust – to identify areas of alignment and build a common set of recommendations that could contribute to and support the district’s plans for building on strong practice and continuing to improve it. These common recommendations were shared with all Portland principals during the 2006 Leadership Week that preceded the opening of school.

The final draft of findings and recommendations from the Teaching and Learning Review was presented to Superintendent Phillips in mid-September; the final report was published in November.

## APPENDIX C **Timeline for the Teaching and Learning Review in Portland**

### **Spring 2005 Initial Phase: Building Understanding and Relationships**

Under the direction of educational consultant Deanna Burney, PPS area directors worked with schools to create a districtwide map of the enacted curricula (i.e., the texts, approaches, supports, and assessment materials) that were in use at the time in mathematics and literacy.

This initial phase included:

- Review of
  - » standards and assessments in Oregon
  - » trends in Portland's student-achievement data
  - » earlier work in Portland on student and educator learning
  - » curriculum materials and programs currently in use
- Dialogue with community education partners
- Interviews with area directors

### **Fall 2005 Preparation for the Observation and Interview Phase**

Annenberg Institute staff met with Superintendent Phillips and with PPS and PSF representatives to begin laying the foundations for the school-site visits. The PPS Office of Research and Evaluation supported this stage of the review by supplying detailed district and school-by-school data on multiple measures. This phase of the Review included:

- Selection of Action Team members (see inside front cover)
- Creation of a Portland Teaching and Learning Review Web site and an Action Team e-mail group
- Planning with the PPS Office of Teaching and Learning
- Selection of schools for site visits

### **Fall–Winter 2005–2006 Training for the School Visits**

- November: Action Team training with PPS staff and community education partners
- December: Revision of tools in response to training

- January:
  - » Revised tools posted for review by Action Team members
  - » On-site preparations for the Review:
    - Planning sessions
    - Information session for participating schools
    - Training session for new Action Team members
    - Review of the *Action Guide* for school visits with key stakeholders:
      - › Portland Association of Teachers
      - › Community education partners
      - › Portland Schools Foundation
      - › PPS Office of Teaching and Learning

### **February 2006 First Round of School Visits and Design Revisions**

- Action Team visits to one middle school and one high school
- Debrief of visits (initial themes and process improvements)
- Revisions to tools and visit design
- Tools posted to the Web and e-mailed to teams conducting March school visits

### **March 2006 Second Round of School Visits**

- Action Team visits to two middle schools and two high schools
- Action Team debrief of visits (March 9)

### **March–April 2006 Data Compilation and Analysis**

- Identification of major findings by Annenberg Institute team, based on the data coding of Action Team members
- Compilation of major themes across visits completed by Institute staff
- Draft findings posted to the Web site in advance of April Action Team meeting in Portland (March 31)
- Action Team meeting to review findings and implications; members prioritized findings and illustrated with evidence from the data (April 11)

### **Spring–Summer 2006 Review of Findings and Recommendations**

- Revisions from the Action Team review posted to Web site (May)
- Math and literacy findings reviewed by respective TOSA teams
- Action Team meetings and e-mail distribution of the findings in the district and to its major partners in teaching and learning (August and September)

### Fall 2006 Release of Findings and Recommendations

- Review of final draft of findings and recommendations by key district leaders and the Office of Teaching and Learning (September 15)
- Final review of findings and recommendations by Action Team members
- Delivery of the report of major findings and recommendations (November 15)

### **About the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University**

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform is a national policy-research and reform-support organization at Brown University that focuses on improving conditions and outcomes in urban schools, especially those serving disadvantaged children. The Institute works through partnerships with school districts and school reform networks and in collaboration with national and local organizations skilled in educational research, policy, and effective practices to offer an array of tools and strategies to help districts strengthen their local capacity to provide and sustain high-quality education for all students.