

Benson Polytechnic High School Alumni Association
Benson High School
546 NE 12th Ave
Portland, Oregon 97232

Carole Smith, Superintendent
Portland Public Schools
501 N. Dixon
Portland, Oregon 97227

Ms Smith,

The Benson Polytechnic High School Alumni Association (BPHSAA) is very pleased that the recently announced model for the District's high school system includes Benson High School as one of the District's and City's magnet schools. As you may well remember the Association has been urging the District since January and throughout the spring planning process to re-invigorate Benson as a four-year career exploration and preparation high school and to increasingly focus its programs on sustainability and green technology.

We strongly believe Portland's students need such an educational option whether they intend to enter the work place upon HS graduation or to continue their education in college in technical or non-technical fields. There is a local and regional demand for well-educated and -rounded technical graduates at either level. Benson can thus continue to make a major contribution to Portland and the Northwest's economy that is among the nation's leaders in green technology and sustainability. As such there should be many opportunities to build upon and expand Benson's long history of partnerships with industry and institutes of high-education.

We believe a well designed technical high school curriculum with ample time for career exploration and then career preparation in fascinating and challenging courses of sustainability and green technology – combined with a well-rounded high school experience in liberal arts and extra-curricular activities – will certainly interest and motivate an important set of Portland's high school students. What could be a better way to engage students in the classroom and contribute to their rate of graduation?

The Benson Alumni Association, however, continues to have several concerns that we hope will be answered in the on-going planning efforts:

- (a) Will Benson be a 4 year school?

We believe that to shorten the career exploration phase to less than 2 years would provide inadequate time to make a wise choice for further study and that 2 years is probably the minimum for career preparation for the increasingly complex technical fields.

We further believe that if all students were required to spend 1 or 2 years at one of the community high schools before transferring to Benson or another magnet school there would

be a reluctance among many students to transfer, during their high school years, to one of the District's magnet schools once they had established friendships, developed relationships with teachers, and become involved in extra-curricular activities at the community schools

- (b) Will Benson, as a magnet school, offer a full array of extra-curricular activities including athletics, music and arts, etc.?

We believe that it is as important for high school students enrolling in a CTE magnet school program to participate in athletics and music programs, student government, and various clubs and activities to become well-rounded citizens and/or to compete for college entrance and college scholarships as those students in the "community high schools". To do otherwise would be to introduce new inequities between the District's high school system.

- (c) What will be the focus of Benson's technical programs?

We believe that with the increasing focus on sustainability and green technology in Oregon a corresponding focus of Benson's technical/CTE programs towards sustainability and green technology will better prepare Benson's graduates for the evolving work place and technical offerings in college. The changing focus at Benson will increase the possibility of quickly establishing strong partnerships with industry as well as civic organizations and colleges.

We hope that the District will continue its practice of enlisting the assistance of the various Association members with technical, educational, and civic experience in the on-going additional planning and implementation efforts. At that time we might further expand upon our concerns and rationale for our point of view.

In closing, the Association thanks you for the past opportunities to contribute as a group and as individuals, and commends the District's High School Design Team for their work to date.

Sincerely,

Dale Bajema
Chairperson, Board of Directors, BPHSAA