

Date: January 31, 2019

To: PPS Board of Directors
Policy & Governance Special Committee
Julia Brim-Edwards, Chair, Mike Rosen, Rita Moore, Amy Kohnstamm

From: Oya No Kai Board of Directors
Amy Starr Thomas, Sara DeLuca, Sean Egusa, Presidents 2019-20

RE: Proposed revisions to PPS Policy 6.50.010-P Field Trips, Foreign Travel, and Other Off-Campus Activities

Oya No Kai, as parent representatives of the Japanese Dual Language Immersion Program (JDLI), is here to voice our strenuous objection to the process and content of the proposed revisions to the PPS Policy on Field Trips, Foreign Travel and Other Off-Campus Activities. One of the most alarming impacts of the proposed revisions is the resulting elimination of 8th Grade International Research Residency trips, which are the learning capstones of the Japanese and Mandarin Language Immersion programs.

Unreasonable Hardship

In its current format, the immediate adoption of the proposed revisions would have a devastating impact on more than 200 language immersion students and their families who are in active preparation for overseas exchange experiences this spring. Plane tickets have been purchased, host families arranged for and countless hours already spent - in multiple countries - preparing for the trips. Students have been engaged in these preparations as an essential part of their academic experience since September. Fundamental alteration to trip itinerary and management, or the cancellation of these trips, at this late date would be extraordinarily punitive to these teachers, students and parents who, until yesterday, had literally no awareness that the policies governing these trips were under review, and have been preparing for these trips in good faith with school-based leadership.

Process Concerns

- ***PPS failed to inform the community of program-altering policy changes.*** Yesterday, January 30, 2019, was the first time members of the JDLI community were officially informed of these policy revisions. Prior to that, over the winter break, ONK heard through unofficial channels that there may be some policy “cleaning up” regarding foreign travel, but “nothing to be concerned about.” After finding the proposed policy revisions online, determining that there are indeed things to be concerned about, and reading that there was a January 2 deadline for initial public comment, on January 1, we reached out and shared our concerns with the full PPS board. Three weeks later, on January 25, Ms. Brim-Edwards recommended that we attend today’s meeting and give public comment at the three upcoming board meetings. Unfortunately, though we called to reserve space to speak on the very day we were advised to do so, we were told there was no space available until the February 26 meeting. That is unsatisfactory and unfair to the hundreds of students affected by the proposed policy changes, because according to the announcement the community received yesterday, the board will likely vote on these recommendations before then. The history of the process for the proposed revisions raises serious questions as to whether the process complies with the Oregon Public Meetings law.
- ***This is an inadequate format for meaningful stakeholder input and board member education.*** Testimony at public board and committee meetings do not provide sufficient opportunity to inform you as policy makers about the complexities of these research residencies, their educational value, why the itineraries are

established as they are, and the full consequences of the recommended revisions. You should be basing policy change on complete and accurate information about these programs. To our knowledge, no such forum has been established in which to gather it.

- ***The recommended policy changes disregard previous agreements made between PPS administrators and stakeholders.*** If adopted as written, the 5-day limit placed on off-campus activities will effectively eliminate the 8th grade research residencies - internationally recognized programs that have been profoundly transforming the lives of young people in PPS for 22 years. Less than two years ago, in the spring of 2017, foreign travel programs came under the scrutiny of the Teaching and Learning Committee and then Asst. Superintendent Chris Russo, in response to a single parent complaint. At that time, after tens of hours of conversation between District administrators and board members, teachers, students and parents **it was determined that the timing and makeup of the two existing 8th grade research residencies had academic merit as designed and should remain unchanged**, as long as the educational environment of non-traveling students remained intact. To achieve this the T & L Committee affirmed the following:
 - No more than one school-building administrator may attend the research residency, and attendance is given at discretion of a senior director.
 - Non-immersion teachers may not participate in the residency, in order to maintain the integrity of classroom instruction for non traveling students.
 - The Office of Equity will provide support, guidance and facilitation to ensure school climate is addressed.
 - The Office of Teaching and Learning will provide support, guidance, and financial resources to ensure the children who remain receive a high quality education.
 - That the research residencies will function “ as it has,” in all other regards until a viable solution around mechanics can be determined, with the full inclusion of all stakeholders. (We request that all Board members review the transcripts of the 4/3/17 T&L Committee Meeting.)

Trip leaders and school building administrators immediately complied with the requests made above. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Russo resigned his post and ONK has heard nothing more about this matter until news of these most recent policies revisions came to light.

To ONK’s knowledge, PPS has not provided the promised support, guidance or financial assistance to ensure students who remain receive a high quality education. Nor have we seen PPS provide any support to foster a healthy school climate inside buildings that operate multiple programs. If these efforts have been made, there has been no inclusion of the JDLI or MDLI communities, although it is these communities that are at greatest risk if these efforts fail. ONK and MIP leaders have reached out to the district, to non-immersion community members, and even the parent complainant herself, to offer our support to address concerns around quality neighborhood school programming and school relations. These offers have not been accepted.

With the proposed policy revisions, this committee is effectively disregarding its pledge to protect the integrity of the research residencies as promised, disrespecting and dismissing the countless hours of honest work put in by stakeholders two years ago, and unilaterally maneuvering to adopt policies that will effectively eliminate one of the District’s most successful and profound student experiences.

ONK Requests

- Postpone bringing these recommendations to a vote by the full board until all stakeholders have had equal access and opportunity to inform the committee of their ramifications and consequences.
- Fully inform stakeholders of these proposed policy revisions via a transparent and broad spectrum outreach campaign, and give them reasonable and ample time to weigh in, ask and answer questions.
- Create forums that enable information to be provided equally by all stakeholders without any one single person unduly influencing the process.
- Include school building administrators and relevant classroom teachers in policy evaluation. This includes the educators who lead these programs abroad and those who stay with non-traveling students. (For the past 12 years the JDLI was run by the 2018 Oregon Teacher of the Year. Neither he, nor the teacher director of the CRR, has been consulted about how these revisions will impact their programs, or even informed that their programs are at risk.)

Conclusion

ONK is deeply distressed by continued PPS responsiveness to the complaints of one voice in opposition to students in immersion programs participating in research residencies. We are continually told that the basis of these policy inquiries and revisions are to ensure that all students have equal access to quality programs.

The responsibility of PPS is to address the issue of student learning inequality not by eliminating successful programs that are serving hundreds of students, but through the development of robust programming to reach even more. Recognize that these international exchange opportunities do not exclude, but rather encourage inclusivity. Over the past five years, ONK alone has granted over \$250,000 in student scholarships and sponsorships. **No student - not one - has ever been denied participation in research residencies - or any ONK-supported exchange - due to financial limitations, providing access to opportunities that countless students would otherwise never have.**

These policy revisions get us no closer to improving weak programming, or improving educational outcomes for students. They simply destroy programs that have demonstrated year, after year, after year, to be extraordinary for young people and a model of successful PPS programming. Closing a door on one child is not the path to opening doors for others.