

**Date:** February 6, 2019

**To:** Guadalupe Guerrero, Superintendent, Portland Public Schools

**From:** Amy Starr Thomas, Sara DeLuca, Sean Egusa  
Oya No Kai Co-Presidents, 2018-19  
Japanese Dual Language Immersion Program

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

---

Recognizing the complexity of the situation, Oya No Kai appreciates the opportunity to speak candidly to our concerns about the proposed revisions to PPS field trip and foreign travel policies. We offer sincere support in drafting policies that address PPS concerns, as well as embraces the continuation of current, highly successful long-standing programs that benefit hundreds of students each year, such as the Japan Research Residency.

**ONK proposes the following:**

- *Shelve the current policy language.* In ONK estimation, there is no time-urgent element driving these proposals, and the language, as it exists, is punitive and targeted to programs that have had little to no input in the policy development process. Take the time to educate decision makers so the outcomes are thoughtful, informed and supported by stakeholders.
- *Review the travel policies currently marked as “rescind” and update them in accordance with the Whitehurst Report and updated PPS Risk & Communication policies.* Rescinding, rather than refining, our foreign study and sister-city administrative directives and policies leave us with no guiding values around the importance of developing global citizens and relationships, and have the potential of causing great harm to long-established and hard-earned positive relationships between PPS and countless international families and communities within Portland and overseas.
- *Develop a Capstone Steering Committee to capture current capstone programs and create new opportunities across PPS (DLI and non-DLI) for all middle schools.*
  - Obtain a 1-2 year commitment from committee members, with invitations extended to communities that currently offer capstone experiences (ie., the JDLI , MDLI, and Sunnyside Environmental), as well as teachers who lead existing programs.
  - Begin to research and develop curriculum-based capstone programs for all middle schools. This will require evaluation with middle school administrators and teachers, and the high schools being fed into, in order to develop educational focus that complements a schools’ programmatic design.
  - Consider a partner system whereby programs with established capstone experiences mentor emerging programs, including curriculum development and fundraising.
  - Develop funding capabilities to ensure every child who wishes to participate, may, regardless of economic circumstance (work with private industry that might be aligned with the focus curriculum).
  - Target launch of 6th grade curriculum education in 2021-22.

### **Ongoing concerns regarding stakeholder communications and input.**

Broad-scale communication from PPS to impacted communities regarding proposed policy revisions has yet to occur. Time is running out for public comment and PPS is simply not meeting its ethical obligation to inform stakeholders that their activities are at serious risk. These stakeholders include:

- All DLI programs with travel programs that occur during the school-year, as well as those that coordinate summer and school-holiday trips.
- Parents of children in immersion programs who enrolled their children in good faith that the design of the programs presented to them in kindergarten would still be operational years down the road.
- DLI programs that are in the active stages of developing a research residency.
- All teachers who participate in travel-study programs - both domestic and abroad. Science teachers, language arts teachers, music teachers, etc.

Further, there has been no recognition of or consideration given to the promises made in 2017 regarding JRR evaluation (see attachments).

### **What is the problem that PPS is trying to resolve by changing these policies?**

We have heard many different concerns from the PPS Board regarding foreign travel, yet most of these concerns have either already been addressed, or are not remedied through these proposed revisions. What exactly are the policy objectives the district is trying to achieve, that is still of concern? Until that question is clearly identified, no policy revision is appropriate.

PPS concerns expressed to date:

- *Student financial limitations will prevent program participation.* As stated in public testimony, no student participating in the JRR, CRR or any other JDLI-related foreign exchange opportunity has ever been denied participation for lack of financial resources. Can every other PPS-sponsored trip, foreign or otherwise, say the same?
- *Inequity in participation regarding passport availability.* ONK assumes this to mean that there are concerns that students who do not have passports (for reasons other than financial limitations), are not able to participate in foreign trips; therefore, they are inherently discriminatory. A passport is required for any international travel, regardless of its length. How does a 5 day international travel limit address this concern? Additionally, beginning in 2018, nine US States, including Washington State, now require a US passport to travel domestically. Does PPS apply this same passport accessibility requirement to all PPS domestic travelers, knowing some of our students and teachers reside in Washington?
- *There is a negative impact on non-traveling students who remain in school buildings when classmates are on educational exchanges.* Where is the evidence for this? In compliance with the 4/2/17 directive, non-immersion teachers are no longer permitted to participate in the JRR or CRR. Building administrators may only participate at the discretion of senior directors, and all classroom instruction continues on pace, regardless of immersion student participation. In fact, some teachers postulate that smaller class sizes during the JRR allow them to do in-depth projects with non-traveling students that they could not otherwise teach within the constraints of their regular classes.

- *Inequity of student accessibility.* The most vocal argument against PPS sponsored or facilitated foreign exchange programs is that they are not available to every student in the district. However, that is a targeted and unreasonable criteria to apply only to international experiences, as the district offers countless opportunities to subsets of students, available to some but not others, based on a variety of factors. Constitution teams, choirs, bands, journalism clubs, sports teams, science clubs, debate teams - these are examples of programs that offer exceptional opportunities to some PPS students that are not available to all. Like the JRR and CRR, participation in these opportunities is dependent upon student completion of criteria outlined when they embarked, or enrolled in the program, team or club. In fact, many of these programs determine student participation based on skill or ability - something the foreign exchange programs do not. If PPS is going to apply a standard of accessibility to special programming, then it must apply it equally across all programming.

### **Revision proposals with negative impacts specific to JDLI-related trips**

Families made focus-option and DLI enrollment decisions when their children were in kindergarten, based on the design and description of the learning opportunities imbedded into their design, including foreign exchanges. As written, the proposed revisions will effectively cripple all three of the JDLI foreign exchange programs - the 5th Grade Cultural Exchange, the 8th Grade Japan Research Residency, and the high school Sapporo Summer Institute.

- *“District staff or other persons may not use District email, social media, hard-copy distribution to students, or other methods of District-controlled distribution that are not open to the general public to communicate to District students or families about non-school sponsored off-campus activities.”* The proposed revisions prohibits the use of PPS communications for any non-PPS sponsored travel opportunity. This is a drastic step to take simply to prevent confusion, and assumes a level of incompetence by our parent communities. This will effectively kill summer-based trips that students are informed of throughout the academic year. These trips, including many non-DLI summer trips throughout the district, rely on school-based communication channels to spread the word and coordinate these opportunities. If PPS channels that reach all parents can’t be used, only those parents who are “in the know” or have the time, resources and capacity to access the information, will be aware of travel opportunities available to their students.
  - Doesn’t this then create inequity because it necessarily excludes students and families who aren’t part of the group above?
  - How many academically profound, non-immersion experiences taking place outside of the school year and that rely on school-based communications, will this affect? Has an impact-study been performed?
  - This policy revision is in direct conflict with Policy 3.30.035-P, that gives school staff permission to distribute materials to students to take home from non-profits and qualified for-profit organizations.
  - A clear statement of required language is an easy and rational remedy to address concerns around parent comprehension of the distinction between PPS-sponsored and non-PPS sponsored activities.

- This district must be prepared to apply and enforce this standard to all activities communicated via school channels by outside organizations, including after care programs, sports programs, music and arts programs, etc.
- *“Off-campus activities of more than five consecutive days when students are otherwise scheduled to be in class, will not be authorized.”* This restriction would fundamentally change the design and implementation of both the JRR and the CRR. In 2017, the PPS Office of Teaching and Learning did a thorough analysis of the form and function of the JRR, determined that it has academic merit as designed, and that significantly altering the timeline of the residency compromises the integrity of the program. In order to fully understand the ramifications of the 5-day restriction, **PPS leadership must sit down with teacher leads Matt Bacon-Brenes and Kojo Hakam**, who can explain with expertise how these programs fit into the student 8th grade academic experience, the overall immersion experience and why the residencies are designed as they are. Anything short of doing so is simply inadequate.
- *“All foreign-based travel must be approved annually.”* This is unnecessary bureaucratic micro management of annual programs approved year after year without exception, and creates an unnecessary burden on teachers and administrators. Adding a simple statement that exempts annual trips that have no substantive change in scope or practice, would address this.
  - Foreign study programs like the JRR and CRR have classroom curriculum built around their foreign travel. Does this mean that by proxy, every year the board will also be deciding on whether the curriculum built around the residency will be used?
  - What measurements will the board be using as criteria to approve or deny travel? Will it just be the whim of the board?
  - If two programs are very similar and one is denied but the other approved will there be a documented process stakeholders can use to appeal?
- *“District staff may not develop, plan, and/or supervise off-campus activities represented as “school, class, club, etc.”* Clarification is needed - this language is much too vague, and the use of “etc.” is open to interpretation.
  - Does this mean that teachers may be involved in planning as long as the program clearly states it is not affiliated with PPS?
  - If something other than the above, what specifically is the district prohibiting during non-teaching hours?
  - Does the District have the authority to restrict the activities teachers may participate in on their personal time? The PAT should be consulted on this matter.
  - Teachers are an integral part of our summer exchange programs for their language expertise, cultural competence in country, and as ambassadors of the Japanese community in Portland when interacting with their counterparts in other countries. Preventing their ability to participate - significantly dilutes the legitimacy, efficacy and authenticity of the exchange experience.

## **Proposals weaken PPS value of creating global citizens**

The elimination of foreign travel and study directives and policies represent a weakening of PPS purported goals of creating global citizens and respect for multiculturalism. This implies a PPS attitude of anti-culturalism. The below statement - lost with the rescinding 6.50.022-AD - is a devastating blow to our students, families, and community partners, who see the development of young global citizens as the hope for a future that embraces many cultures, many faiths, many minds.

It is the responsibility of public schools to prepare their students to live and work successfully in our rapidly changing international society. For this reason student will need a solid base of understanding of the world's social, political, and ethnic diversity. An excellent and cost-effective teacher tool to pursue this goal is well-planned foreign travel-study. To control costs and expand opportunities, the district will benefit by an established system of mutual cooperation with private and governmental agencies involved in established relationships with foreign governments.

Rescinding, rather than refining, our foreign study and sister-city administrative directives and policies do not increase the potential for greater student opportunities or educational outcomes. However, they do have the potential of causing great harm to long-established and hard-earned positive relationships between our district and countless communities throughout the world with whom we have cultivated friendships and partnerships.

### **Policy revisions create more problems than they solve**

As stated previously, these policy revisions get us no closer to improving weak programming or improving educational outcomes for students. They do not build new opportunities for some, but simply take away extraordinary opportunities for hundreds. We implore PPS administrators, directors and educators to lean in and do the hard work of creating more and better. ONK offers you the sincere help and support of parents who are deeply invested in this effort, not because we want to save a program for our own children, but because we believe in public education and we want to raise up all children.