PORT TOWNSEND SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 50
School Board Retreat
February 22, 2016, 2:00 – 5:00 p.m.
"Discover the Power of Learning"

Mission:
In partnership with home and community, Port Townsend School District provides a learning environment where each student develops the knowledge and skills to become a creative, successful and engaged citizen.

01. Location/Time

01.01 Gael Stuart Building, 1610 Blaine St., Board Room S-11, February 22, 2016, 2:00 p.m.

02. Call to Order

03. Agenda

03.01   Agenda Approval

04. Connecting Activity, Discussion and Review 2:00 – 3:00

05. Future Direction Benchmarks, Activities, Learning   3:00 – 3:30
05.01 Strategic Goals
05.02 Small Schools Reconsideration

06. Board Self-Assessment Activity – WSSDA Online Assessment Survey 3:30 – 4:00

07. District Leadership Planning, Leadership Model 4:00 – 4:30

08. Wrap-Up Activity and Celebration   4:30 – 5:00

09. Executive Session (If Necessary)

10.   Next Meeting

10.01   Regular Meeting, February 22, 2016, 1610 Blaine St., Room S-11, 6:00 p.m.

11.   Adjournment

2013-2017 STRATEGIC GOALS –The Port Townsend Public Schools will **continue to develop** its public education system with a focus on the following:

Teaching and Learning

Develop and support reflective thinkers and citizens who are well equipped for life beyond high school. In service of this goal, Port Townsend educators will design and model standards-based learning that is challenging and engaging, developmentally appropriate and relevant to all learners, grounded in relationship, and focused on understanding.

- Maritime Discovery Schools Initiative underway

- TPEP implementation

- PD Wednesdays

- CCSS and NGSS implementation

- Project-based and place-based learning planning supported at all grade levels

Technology

Use data and technology to individualize student education by providing equity of access, by sharing appropriate community access to technology resources, and by utilizing periodic third party technology integration audits to incorporate new learning into educational design.

- Modernization of district and school websites

- VOIP installation completed across the district

- District-wide Chromebook distribution and Google school apps program implementation

- Technology plan implementation

- Online infrastructure in place for implementation of Smarter Balanced Assessments

- Project Lead the Way: Gateways to Technology project at Blue Heron

Community Engagement

Engage families and the greater community in quality reciprocal communication, service learning, and student internships that develop and support citizens who will be successful in their pursuits beyond high school.

- Maritime Discovery Schools Initiative (presentations, branding and fund-raising efforts) in place

- Facilities planning process (public forums) underway to support future building recommendations

- Hour of Code events sponsored at Blue Heron School

- Engineering and robotics program in place at PTHS

- STEAM Advisory Team in place

- Maritime Discovery Schools Advisory Council in place

- Four-year levy approval (2015)

Facilities

Build, operate, and maintain flexible and user-friendly learning spaces in a responsible, environmentally sensitive way. In service of this goal, we will seek LEED or equivalent certification in future facility development and will sponsor energy-efficiency audits that lead to cost effective retrofitting projects.

- Active long-range planning process in place

- Capital Projects (capital projects levy funded)

    o BH track repaved

    o Energy retrofitting (state grant-McKinstry partner)

    o Summer building projects completed

    o Technology upgrades and student device deployment

Financial Stability

Provide sound, responsible financial stewardship by managing and maintaining adequate financial reserves and by aligning resources and facilities to meet these strategic goals.

- Balanced budget (approx. 3% cash reserve)

- Full utilization of CPF

- External resources through MDS fund-raising, PT Education Foundation grants and PT Booster Club donations

Culture of Wellness

Focus on supporting active, healthy lifestyles for its students and staff through an improved food service program and through the development of school infrastructure that encourages physical activity in multiple arenas.

- Bicycle Safety curriculum at Blue Heron

- Enhanced funding for Food Services to support Farm to School initiatives

- Director of Kitchens position funded to provide strategic food service planning (new menus implemented at all schools)

- Arran Stark as district consultant to improve kitchen design and food preparation practices

- Long-range facilities planning to design infrastructure that supports increased activity and improved food service options

Core Principles:

- Access to knowledge from multiple disciplines

- Learner-focused education for each student

- Community-based relationships and connections

- Accountability—set high expectations and achieve them

- Continuous improvement informed by data and research

- Life-long learning

- Culture of common purpose and interdependence

- Culture of wellness

Small Schools: The Edu-Reform Failure That Wasn't
By Jack Schneider Education Week Feb. 9, 2016
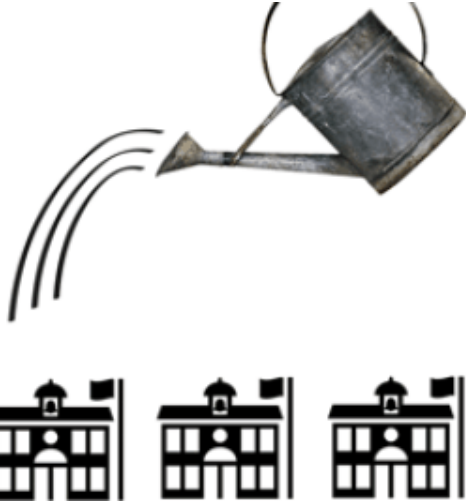
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What ever happened to the small-schools craze? A little over a decade ago, philanthropists and policy leaders, believing they had identified the key to student performance, threw their collective weight behind an effort to redesign the nation's large high schools. They spent over a billion dollars and transformed hundreds of large schools into smaller ones. Then, as suddenly as it began, the effort was declared a failure and brought to an abrupt end.

Now, post-mortem research indicates that small schools appear to promote several important outcomes, such as higher graduation rates.

So were small schools just another failed school improvement effort? Or do they actually work? The answer, it turns out, is not an all-or-nothing proposition.

Several years ago, I told the story of the small-schools push in a chapter of my book *Excellence for All*, which sought to identify the core assumptions and beliefs of contemporary school reformers. I included the small-schools movement because it seemed a perfect case in point of a modern school-change ethos guided by common sense, entrepreneurialism, and ambition. Several high-profile organizations—the Annenberg Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and, most prominently, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—along with the U.S. Department of Education, through its Smaller Learning Communities grants, spent aggressively on small schools, with little attention to the myriad other factors affecting school quality. The backers appeared to believe that by making the neediest schools look more like their high-performing counterparts, they could produce equal outcomes.

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Creating smaller schools wasn't a bad idea, per se. But as a large-scale school improvement strategy, the movement was destined to fail. The theory of action—that wholesale reproduction of a particular structure would lead to equal learning outcomes—simply didn't make sense. To

paraphrase the policy scholar Richard Elmore, schools are vessels "into which educators and communities" can "pour whatever content and pedagogy" they want. In other words, the size of a school building is a limited tool that leaves most of the instructional core untouched.

But the ambitious and deep-pocketed backers of the small-schools movement, like other high-profile policy elites of the past few decades, had a different way of seeing things. From their vantage point, small schools were a potential moonshot. That is, until they weren't. Yet, failure to achieve goals didn't cause backers to re-evaluate their approach. Instead, the experience seemed to prove the need for more of the same. As Bill Gates put it in 2009, the letdowns of the small-schools movement "underscored the need to aim high and embrace change in America's schools."

In the eyes of Gates and company, the problem was with small schools as a particular policy fix rather than with the thinking behind the fix. Collective faith in silver bullets—in finding "what works" and "taking it to scale"—remained absolute. Never mind the obvious disregard for the importance of context or inescapable complexity of improving schools. The backers declared small schools a failure and moved on.

But were small schools really the problem? A decade later, we have fairly robust evidence suggesting otherwise. A 2014 study by the nonpartisan research organization MDRC, for instance, found that graduation rates in New York City improved by 9.5 percent at small schools, with effects across every student group—a tremendous increase that also led to higher college enrollments. Another study, by a team at Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research, found similar increases in high school graduation rates in Chicago's public schools, despite the fact that small schools generally served a more disadvantaged population in the city.

As it turns out, small schools do exactly what you might expect. Smallness can create more opportunities for young people to be known, both by one another and by the adults in the building. The relative intimacy of small schools can foster trusting, caring, and attentive relationships. Deborah Meier, the godmother of the small-schools movement, consistently made this argument in the 1980s and 1990s when explaining the importance of size. As she put it in a 1989 op-ed essay, small schools offer young people better opportunities to learn forms of participation" necessary to becoming a member of a democratic society." But they are, at best, only one piece of a complex puzzle. And early proponents of small schools were clear about that. As Meier, who also writes an opinion blog for *Education Week* , prudently observed: "Small schools are not the answer, but without them none of the proposed answers stand a chance."

Making schools smaller was not an inherently unsound strategy. It was a poorly shepherded one. Had policy elites thought more about their plan, developed a more nuanced theory of action, set more reasonable goals, or taken a more holistic approach to measuring outcomes, the small-schools movement might have turned out differently. The movement's leaders might have built upon their work or developed a more coherent approach. Instead they folded, threw in their cards, upped the ante, and reshuffled.

And the small-schools movement was no anomaly. The dominant approach to improving schools in the "excellence for all" era emphasizes common sense over research, transformation over

tinkering, scale over fit, simplicity over complexity, and measurement over trust. It sets sky-high expectations, produces simplistic strategies, and ensures disappointment, even in the case of modest successes like the small-schools movement. In short, it is a recipe for policy churn.

Policy churn is problematic at face value. It means that what might otherwise be a constructive process is cut short, with potential dissolving into distraction. But churn has deeper consequences as well. It erodes public confidence, as change advocates make the case— repeatedly, and with greater urgency—that our schools need fixing. And it further cements the idea among educators that school improvement is irrelevant and ephemeral—a process to wait out, rather than engage with.

Perhaps most problematically, policy churn draws us away from more-productive conversations about how to strengthen our schools. In one camp are those ready to seek out the next big thing—those who want to churn away. And in another are those committed to resisting simplistic, wholesale solutions—those who want to apply the brakes. We are left with a false choice between doing what won't work and doing nothing at all.

There is, however, another way. Focusing on the cultivation of healthy educational ecosystems—envisioning schools not as problems to solve, but as gardens to cultivate— might encourage particular conditions that improve school communities piece by piece.

Yet if that is going to happen, we need to reimagine the role of the education change-maker. Our schools don't need disrupters, armed with grand notions about transformation; they need facilitators capable of building capacity. Rather than deciding what works and taking it to scale, we need donors and policy leaders who are interested in helping to strengthen schools and districts, encouraging experimentation, and facilitating the kinds of small changes that add up to big ones.

Assisting in the cultivation of gardens may not be as sexy as finding scalable solutions. "Small change" is a less enchanting battle cry than "paradigm shift." But being right, even if only moderately so, is always better than being wrong. And gradual progress, frustrating though it can be, is infinitely preferable to perpetual churn.

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