

Report on Closure of Hunt Middle School

May 11, 2010

Introduction

Based on student performance on standardized math and reading tests over the last three years, Hunt Middle School ranked among the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools in Washington state.

As a result, Hunt qualified for a School Improvement Grant program from the U.S. Department of Education. The program allows school districts with low-performing schools to choose one of four options for school improvement.

Rationale

Tacoma Public Schools chose the temporary closure option because:

- Hunt has the lowest enrollment (336) of any district middle school. Enrollment at Hunt has declined every year from a high of 841 in 2001 to a projection of about 300 for the next school year. That limited enrollment with a limited number of teachers doesn't make Hunt a good, flexible candidate for two of the other federal models, which require robust infusions of new academic programs. That lack of critical mass simply puts the district in a position to be unable to provide an academic program equal to the other middle schools even if Hunt were reformed for the next school year.
- With voter approval of the capital levy Feb. 9, Tacoma Public Schools knows that funding is available now to build a new Hunt. The current plan calls for the construction of a new Hunt Middle School to reopen in September 2014 with new leadership, new teachers and new academic programs. Before that reopening, the district will redraw its middle school boundaries to better ensure a more equitable enrollment among all the schools. During the interim period, the district plans to use Hunt's buildings as temporary general storage.

Effects

The federal School Improvement Grant process requires – upon the closure of a school – that the district transfer students to higher performing schools.

Consequently, Tacoma Public Schools has redrawn the middle school boundaries.

Current Hunt students and incoming fifth graders who traditionally would attend Hunt, have been reassigned to attend either Mason or Truman middle schools for the 2010-2011 school year based on their home addresses. All these students will receive district bus transportation to and from their newly assigned school.

In addition, Hunt students and incoming fifth graders who live in the southern portion of Hunt's traditional school boundary also will be allowed – if their parents choose – to attend nearby Gray Middle School and receive district bus transportation.

As a result of the reassignments, 207 additional students will attend Truman, 88 students will attend Mason and 48 will attend Gray.

As part of the transition support for families of Hunt's general education program, the district has:

- Communicated by letter in March to parents and families regarding next year's school assignments.
- Opened a special Optional Enrollment window to give families flexibility in assignment if they preferred a school assignment other than Truman or Mason middle schools.
- Provided Hunt teachers to work with students during Navigation 101 to answer questions.
- Sent counselors and principals from Truman and Mason middle schools to Hunt for meetings with each grade level to answer questions, share information and begin the course registration process.
- Offered information and support to parents during student-led conferences.
- Planned open houses this spring at Truman and Mason for parents and students to tour their new schools, meet staff and talk to current students.

Hunt also has served as a hub for 44 students in two special education programs – Adjustment and Developmental/Autism. For the 2010-2011 school year, the Special Education Department has reassigned students in Hunt's Adjustment program to existing programs at either Jason Lee or Gray middle schools – depending on which program is closest to the students' homes. Meanwhile, the district has transferred Hunt's two Developmental/Autism classrooms – one to Jason Lee and one to Gray.

The parents of Hunt's special education students received personal notification phone calls from the Special Education Department. Later in May, the department will send confirmation letters with reassignment details to all families of Hunt special education students.