



**Parkrose
School District**

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Dr. Karen Fischer Gray,
Superintendent

April 1, 2014

Clare and Sharon Mershon
3809 NE 136th Place
Portland, OR 97230

Dear Clare and Sharon,

As superintendent of the Parkrose School District, I felt it was important that I address the concerns stated in your March 22, 2014 letter to the School Board. You expressed two major concerns from Oregonian articles regarding graduation rates and attendance.

1. **Graduation rates.** The last paragraph of Beth Slovic's article about PHS graduation rates did not tell the whole story. While our 4-year cohort rate is fairly flat and we are changing that, our 5-year graduation rate was almost 80%. I was frustrated with the fact that that was left out of the article. Kids in Parkrose don't always get what they need within 4 years and they graduate after 5 years much more ready for college success. Our girls graduate at higher rates than our boys and our kids who are white and Asian graduate at higher rates than our kids of color. That is the part we have to fix more than anything else. Race and graduation is an equity issue in Parkrose SD. Our program called AVID is helping all kids to do better in school and to graduate at higher rates. Our kids in AVID graduate at the 97% and all of them go to college. We also have a program called Elevate Oregon that serves kids at risk for not graduating and their graduation rate from last year was 95%. Our statewide academic scores are higher than ever with more than 75% of the students passing their reading tests before the 12th grade. I think we are on the right track. Finally, twice as many kids are on track to graduate right now than were on track last year. It's far from perfect but moving in the right direction.
2. **Attendance.** Currently, PHS has an attendance rate of 91%. We want it to be higher and we are working on it. The high school administration has changed the overall attendance policy and kids have to be on time to every class no matter what. There is no being in the halls without a pass from a teacher. Discipline rates are down as well. We have a secretary whose time is nearly fully dedicated to attendance issues and contacting parents and families when kids are absent without an excuse. We are working closely with community organizations to mentor our students and encourage them to stay in school. Our extra curricular activities help kids stay in school and our athletic programs are very popular with about 2/3 of our students. We also have a School Uniting Neighborhoods program in the high school and a new one is starting at the middle school in fall 2014. These programs connect the kids and families with resources to help students succeed. Finally, the county is working on an attendance initiative to put an attendance outreach worker in every school district including Parkrose next year. I hope it happens.

While we are yet far from where we need to be for all of our kids, we are making positive strides in a mindful, thoughtful, and strategic way during a time when the state has decreased our funding for years and years. We constantly seek to increase both our attendance and graduation rates for all students. Positive adult mentorship is a key strategy for keeping kids in school.

Thank you so much for being SMART Readers for more than a decade in our most needy schools. What a gift!

Please feel free to continue this correspondence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen Gray".

Karen F. Gray
Superintendent
Parkrose School District
503-754-5783