

GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL



# *The Schools Portland Students Deserve*

Portland Association of Teachers  
July 2015







# Introduction

No matter which part of town they live in or what school they attend, every student in Portland Public Schools deserves a first-rate education. This will only happen if PPS leaders shift their priorities, to focus on what's been proven effective, by both academic research and the hands-on experience of classroom educators.

Fulfilling this promise to all Portland students means reducing class sizes, especially in the lower grade levels. It means a rich, well-rounded curriculum that includes physical education, shop, world languages, art, and music. It means additional resources and support targeted to English Language Learners (ELLs) and special education students, and the wrap-around services that make learning possible for so many of our students.

Portland students deserve more than the treadmill of high-stakes tests and narrow, standardized curricula. They deserve equitable offerings and diverse electives at every school. The District should respect educators' professional judgment to choose the best methods and materials for their classrooms, including assessments that really measure individual student progress.

All this requires allocating resources to the right places. PPS leaders should track staffing and expenditures that pull resources away from the classroom and student-supports, whether to central office managers, mushrooming administrative initiatives, or the staff and computer systems required to administer standardized tests like the Smarter Balanced Assessment.

Administrators, particularly principals and vice-principals, must collaborate with educators, parents, and community members to foster the creative, respectful working and learning environment necessary for these goals to take root and flourish.

Two years ago the Portland Association of Teachers (PAT) brought together a diverse group of Portland educators to develop a vision for Portland's public schools and a plan of action to make it a reality.

The Schools Portland Students Deserve continues to guide our work, and we hope it continues to inspire and galvanize the community.

The schools our students deserve cost money, but the money to fully fund these schools is readily available. In recent years Oregon's largest corporations have seen their profits soar. They can afford to pay their fair share to fulfill the promise for every student in Portland.

We hope you will join our ongoing campaign for *The Schools Portland Students Deserve*.



# *The Portland Association of Teachers Believes*

## ***Smaller Classes***

Small class sizes are the linchpin of better education. They create space for individualized instruction and richer teacher feedback. Smaller classes foster stronger relationships between teachers and students, as well as regular communication between teachers and families. The same is true for guidance counselor caseloads and the student loads of other support professionals. Portland students deserve a school system focused on smaller classes, particularly for our neediest students.

## ***Educate the Whole Child***

Every student in Portland should get recess, with appropriate physical education equipment as well as opportunities for free play. Students should be able to take classes in art, theater, dance, and music, and there should be equitable offerings in every school across the district, including world languages and a rich selection of electives. Every school should have a library, with certified librarians to staff it.



## ***Educate Every Child***

We cannot allow students with special needs or English Language Learners to receive a second-rate education. We need stronger programs for ELLs and a full spectrum of services for special education students, including additional targeted funds for the individualized attention these students require to advance academically.

## ***Wrap-Around and Support Services***

Portland students deserve dependable access to a wide range of support professionals, including school nurses, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and speech pathologists. PPS is far below the staffing guidelines recommended by various professional associations. We must expand the number of support professionals so that students and their families can get academic and social services they need. More resources should be directed to schools in high-poverty neighborhoods, to equalize some of the advantages students with more financial resources already enjoy.

## ***More Teaching, Less Testing***

There is too much emphasis in PPS on narrow, culturally biased standardized tests and cookie-cutter curricula. Portland teachers are experienced professionals with high expectations for their students. They need the freedom to choose a variety of techniques to assess individual student performance, and provide the kinds of feedback that lead to real progress. Portland students deserve more time for real learning, and less time spent on testing.

# *that Our Students and Families Deserve:*



## ***More Funding for Classroom Instruction and Direct Support Services***

Every year PPS is creating new central office positions and siphoning money out of classrooms to support everything from more high-stakes testing to an unending series of administrative initiatives. It's past time for PPS to account for these non-classroom expenditures, and for the community to get a chance to evaluate whether these priorities are worth depriving students of classroom resources, direct services, professional educators, secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, maintenance workers, educational aides, library assistants, or campus monitors.

## ***Transparent, Collaborative, and Respectful School Administration***

Schools work best when decision-making is transparent, when members of the school community can regularly collaborate, and when the work environment is based on mutual respect

and professionalism. Strengthening school Site Councils is a first step. Building administrators must also recognize the unique role of professional educators in decision-making, and invest joint councils and committees with real authority.

## ***Professional Autonomy and Academic Freedom***

Great schools require more than just great teachers. Educators must be free to exercise their professional judgment and to collaborate with members of the school community openly and respectfully. They need time to plan their lessons, and the autonomy to choose the best methods and materials for their classroom. They also need the freedom to decide the most appropriate ways of assessing individual student progress. And just like no student should be evaluated based solely on their standardized test scores, no professional educator should be evaluated based on how their students perform on a single standardized test.

# Smaller Class Sizes

Small class sizes are the key to a better education. Around the country, when school districts are striving to improve learning, they make smaller classes a priority. This is borne out by academic research, the most widely cited example coming from Tennessee's Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio). Studies of Project STAR found that students in smaller classes in grades K-3 graduated at a much higher rate, graduated with honors more often, and dropped out far less than students from regular-sized classes.

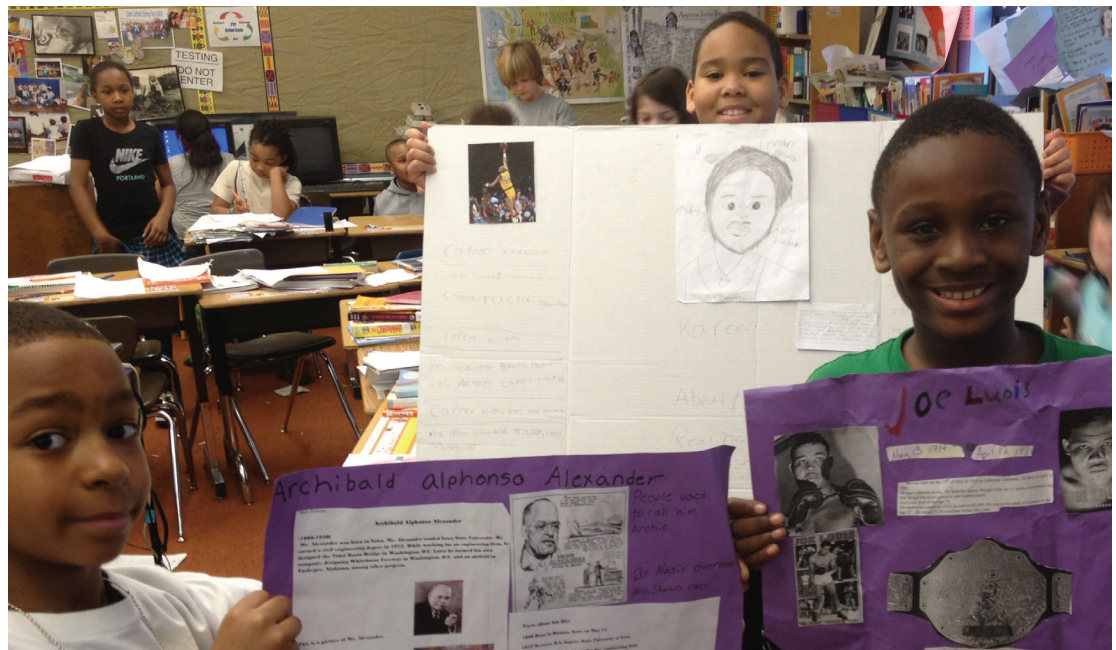
## **Low-Income Students Benefit Most**

These benefits were strongest for low-income students and students of color. Subsequent analysis has shown that smaller classes increase important skills such as attentiveness and engagement, as well as increasing the likelihood of attending and finishing college.

These findings line up with the hands-on experience of classroom educators. Smaller class sizes give teachers space for individualized instruction, for example to provide more challenging assignments to students who are excelling or more one-on-one contact to those who are struggling.

## **Better Feedback, Family Engagement**

Smaller classes allow richer teacher feedback, which sustains learning. And smaller classes enable teachers to foster strong relationships with students, which is crucial to promoting equity and closing the racial achievement gap. Smaller classes also allow more frequent communication between teachers and parents, boosting family engagement.







The benefits from smaller classes ripple through a student’s educational experience. The same is true for lower caseloads for support professionals such as guidance counselors, school psychologists, and speech pathologists.

---

***Smaller classes enable teachers to foster strong relationships with students.***

---

Lower caseloads allow counselors, for example, to spend more time one-on-one with students and build deeper connections with families. This individual attention allows them to evaluate and address students’ social and emotional needs. After years of underfunding, Portland’s schools are far below the recommended standards advanced by national professional associations.

Portland students deserve a school system focused on smaller classes, particularly for our neediest children.

***Our Class Size and Caseload Ceilings:\****

<b>PK-3:</b>	No more than 22
<b>4-5:</b>	No more than 25
<b>6-8:</b>	No more than 27
<b>K-5 Physical Ed:</b>	No more than 27
<b>K-5 Music:</b>	No more than 30
<b>6-8 Physical Ed:</b>	No more than 30
<b>9-12:</b>	No class load per day over 150
<b>9-12 Physical Ed:</b>	No class load per day over 225
<b>9-12 Music:</b>	No class load per day over 225

**Speech and Language Pathologists:**  
No more than 45 students

**Counselors:**  
No less than 1:500 students

**School Psychologists:**  
No less than 1:900 students

**Librarians:**  
No less than 1:900 students

No more than 8 special education students in a general education classroom

No more than 15 special education students in a learning center classroom

---

\* In determining class loads, General Ed students will carry a weight of 1.0, Talented and Gifted and English Language Learners 1.5, and Special Needs students 2.0.

# Educate the Whole Child

Two decades of education “reform” have instilled a preoccupation with standardized tests and student test scores in our District, narrowing our curricula and shortchanging our students.

---

***A rich curriculum provides students more opportunities to discover a passion for learning.***

---

The clearest example is the proliferation of scripted learning programs and canned curricula, often promoted by for-profit interests such as Reading Street from Pearson or the Scantron Performance Series, both currently in use in PPS. Portland students deserve better.

## ***Inspiring Passion***

The research is clear that a well-rounded curriculum, with time for recess and free play as well as music and the visual arts, enhances creative thinking and abstract reasoning. It also builds social skills and deepens emotional growth. A rich curriculum provides students more opportunities to dis-

cover a passion for learning, whether in chemistry, trigonometry, dance, or drama. Students who find that spark stay engaged, and they stay in school.

## ***Equitable Offerings***

This is why PPS must address the lack of equitable offerings across the District. It’s a matter of basic fairness. And how else can we expect to close the gaps between our wealthiest schools and those most in need? The fact that these disparities are hitting Black and Latino students the hardest makes it an especially urgent issue.

If students at Woodlawn, Vernon, or George are only offered an extra math class or an additional test prep period, while West Sylvan students can choose from a smorgasbord of electives including Mandarin, Arabic, and Japanese, how can we hope to excite and engage everyone equally? In fact, we know that our neediest schools are precisely where a rich array of electives and extracurricular activities can make the most difference.

## ***Libraries And Technology***

A rich curriculum includes media and technology instruction. Every school should have a library, with certified librarians to staff it, and computers dedicated to more than taking standardized tests. Research has shown that adequately staffed libraries improve achievement, especially for students in poverty. Librarians work with teachers to integrate technology and other media into classroom activities. They also inspire kids to read, introducing them to books that fit their interests and excite their imagination.





# Educate Every Child

We cannot allow students with special needs or English Language Learners to receive a second-rate education. We need stronger programs for ELLs and special education students, including additional targeted funds for the individualized attention these students require to advance academically.

Special education students in PPS have a wide spectrum of issues and require an equally broad spectrum of services.

## **Restore Spectrum Of Services**

Unfortunately PPS has been hollowing out its special education services, eliminating intermediate options such as behavior classrooms and discouraging resource-intensive approaches like one-on-one assistance.

---

## ***We cannot allow students with special needs or English Language Learners to receive a second-rate education.***

---

Special education teachers have been burdened with caseloads that make it impossible to follow a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). And the caseloads for counselors and school psychologists make it difficult to provide thorough initial assessments, much less ongoing social and emotional support. Our special needs students deserve better.

## **Honest Assessments, Adequate Staff**

Teachers, together with counselors and school psychologists, must be allowed to identify a student's unique needs. And special educators and support professionals should have caseloads or



class sizes that allow them to follow the plan to meet those needs. This includes adequate time for lesson planning plus the paperwork and documentation requirements associated with IEPs.

The District must restore services in the middle of the service spectrum, and provide the support staff and resources to ensure that students in learning center and behavior classrooms get adequate monitoring and follow-up. Students who need one-on-one assistance should get it, whether it's to practice and reinforce key concepts already introduced by a teacher, to help manage their behavior, or for the student's own safety or the safety of other students in the classroom

# More Teaching and Less Testing

PPS students are losing as much as a month of classroom instruction preparing for and taking standardized tests like the Smarter Balanced Assessment recently introduced across Oregon. Many of these tests, including Smarter Balanced, have not been proven valid, reliable, or free from cultural or linguistic bias.

**Portland students deserve more than this treadmill of high-stakes tests and narrow, standardized curriculum.**

What's worse, most standardized tests are no use to teachers when it comes to improving instruction or assessing individual progress because the results are not available until months after the school year ends!

Portland students deserve more than this treadmill of high-stakes tests and narrow, standardized curriculum.

And Portland teachers deserve to be recognized for the experienced pro-

fessionals we are. We maintain high expectations for our students, and are not against tests.

Teachers invented tests!

## Multiple Methods

But as the research has made clear, educators need a variety of methods to really assess learning or measure progress. We need to be free to choose the methods best suited to our specific students and classroom settings.

We know that the best assessments are grounded in the classroom experience, and that we can get a much richer understanding of what students have learned from sharing group projects, making in-class presentations, constructing models, or submitting written reflections. These frequent, classroom-based assessments are the best way to provide the kind of feedback that leads to real progress.

Portland students deserve more time for real learning and less time spent on testing.





# Wrap-Around Services and Supports

When students come to school hungry, or tenuous housing has them bouncing from place to place, they can't focus. Learning new material is tough. When chronic illnesses like asthma go untreated attendance suffers. And if students aren't in school they aren't learning.

That's why Portland students deserve dependable access to a wide range of academic and social services in our schools as well as support professionals like school nurses, guidance counselors, speech pathologists, and school psychologists. With half of PPS students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, the need is growing.

## **More Counselors And Nurses**

To meet this need, PPS should have at least one full-time counselor and one full-time nurse in every school. School nurses are the only healthcare provider some students see on a regular basis. They help with everything from identifying and addressing hearing or vision problems to connecting students and their families with additional healthcare and social services.

---

## ***We know if students aren't in school they aren't learning.***

---

And counselors play an important role, along with school psychologists, in evaluating students' social-emotional states and connecting them and their families with a range of social and mental health services.

PPS is far below the staffing guidelines recommended by various professional



associations, which means we must expand the number of support professionals so that students and their families can get the academic and social services they need.

## **Equity A Priority**

More resources should be directed to schools in high-poverty neighborhoods, to equalize some of the advantages that students with more financial resources already enjoy.

# More Funding For Classroom Instruction and Direct Student Services

Learning happens face-to-face, whether in the classroom or through the array of services that support our students. But every year PPS is creating new central office positions and siphoning money out of the classroom to support high-stakes testing and a mushrooming series of administrative initiatives.

## **More Transparency**

Most Portland residents send their children to public schools, and they deserve to know how PPS spends its budget, especially when it comes to non-classroom expenditures. PPS should produce an annual report accounting for non-classroom expenditures, so that community members can evaluate PPS priorities for themselves.

Are these initiatives worth depriving students of more classroom resources? Are they worth depriving schools of not just professional educators but also secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, maintenance workers, educational aides, library assistants, or

campus monitors? This level of transparency from PPS is long overdue.

Even before a complete accounting, there are steps PPS can take immediately to restore time and resources to classroom instruction and student services.

## **Fewer, Focused Initiatives**

For example, educators are experiencing a blizzard of uncoordinated requirements and Central Office initiatives. In some schools teachers have been bombarded with new textbook adoptions, new grading programs, new email systems, and a half-dozen new training requirements, all the same semester.

Rather than having time to collaborate with each other and really master new systems or materials, educators are hustled through a patchwork of trainings that pull time and attention away from the classroom and away from student engagement. With so many uncoordinated efforts, programs are set up to fail. The district must reverse this pattern and focus on two or three new initiatives at a time, so that educators can do them really well before moving on to something else.

## **No Shortcuts**

PPS must also stop short-circuiting professional staff capacity by opting for quick fixes, epitomized by the steady stream of outside consultants and non-profits hired to implement new programs and initiatives. Instead of diverting money out of our classrooms, PPS should collaborate with its professional educators to develop new programs and the internal staff capacity to make them last.





# Transparent, Collaborative, and Respectful School Administration

Administrators are key to fostering a strong learning environment for students and continued professional growth for educators. But success requires authentic collaboration with the whole school community, including students, parents, professional educators, and support staff. Trust and mutual respect are necessary ingredients.

---

## **Students should be at the center of Portland's public schools.**

---

Students should be at the center of Portland's public schools, the focus of parents, educators, and administrators. But the District's school-site management methods and incentives for administrators that have everyone looking over their shoulders instead of concentrating on students.

### **Focus On Developing Great Educators**

Compliance with top-down mandates and following textbooks and pacing guides have become too important. Too many administrators are preoccupied with data metrics and driving policy by whatever means necessary, rather than developing great educators.

The research is clear—top-down administrators, no matter how deep their subject-area knowledge or teaching expertise, will never help educators improve student performance as much as those who give educators the autonomy and time to help each other. A collaborative, rather than punitive, environment is key.

Like educators, PPS administrators need support and mentoring. The District should establish a formal mentoring program for principals and vice principals. The administrator feedback loop must expand to include students, parents, professional educators, and support staff, with the goal of creating an environment grounded in mutual respect and professionalism.

### **Rebuild Site Councils**

This reinforces the urgent need to rebuild Site Councils in each of Portland's schools, so that all the members of the school community have a real voice in the school's direction. Site Councils are also an important space for providing feedback to administrators and holding them accountable to the entire school community.

The School Board should also form a Community Task Force, drawing on Site Council representatives, to delineate a clear chain of command from the Superintendent to each principal to clarify who has ultimate responsibility for administrator conduct.

### **School Closings, A Last Resort**

The School Board should also review enrollment balancing and school closure policies. The District should prioritize maintaining neighborhood school enrollments and avoiding closures. Closing a school due to under-enrollment should be a last resort, reserved for the most extreme circumstances. Educators, school staff, and the rest of the community, should be given at least six months notice prior to closing a school.

# Professional Autonomy and Academic Freedom

Great schools require more than just great teachers. Educators must be free to exercise their professional judgment and to collaborate with members of the school community openly and respectfully.

## **Bring In The Real World**

When educators are given this latitude it opens up enormous possibilities to bring the real world into the classroom and making our instruction more culturally relevant—whether we’re discussing Europe’s current economic difficulties or connecting current housing patterns in Portland to the Vanport flood and the city’s history of redlining and racial segregation.



To spark students’ interest or connect with their curiosity, educators need the freedom to respond to what’s happening, both inside the classroom and out, and the time to share what we learn with our peers.

## **Draw From Student Experience**

If hail starts falling outside the classroom window, do we want teachers to close the curtains so students can

concentrate on their packaged reading lesson? Or should they capitalize on students’ natural curiosity and discuss what hail is, how it forms, and whether students see a connection to other recent weather patterns, and possibly more permanent changes in our climate?

---

## **Portland educators need the autonomy to choose the best classroom methods.**

---

Will students better learn writing by following a narrow series of pre-determined prompts, or by completing a writing assignment that grew out of that day’s classroom discussion?

## **Culturally Relevant Material**

The educator’s discretion and professional judgment is particularly important when it comes to introducing culturally relevant material. The District’s increasingly relies on canned curricula that promotes standardization and uniformity, the opposite of what’s required to tailor content and pedagogy to students’ experiences.

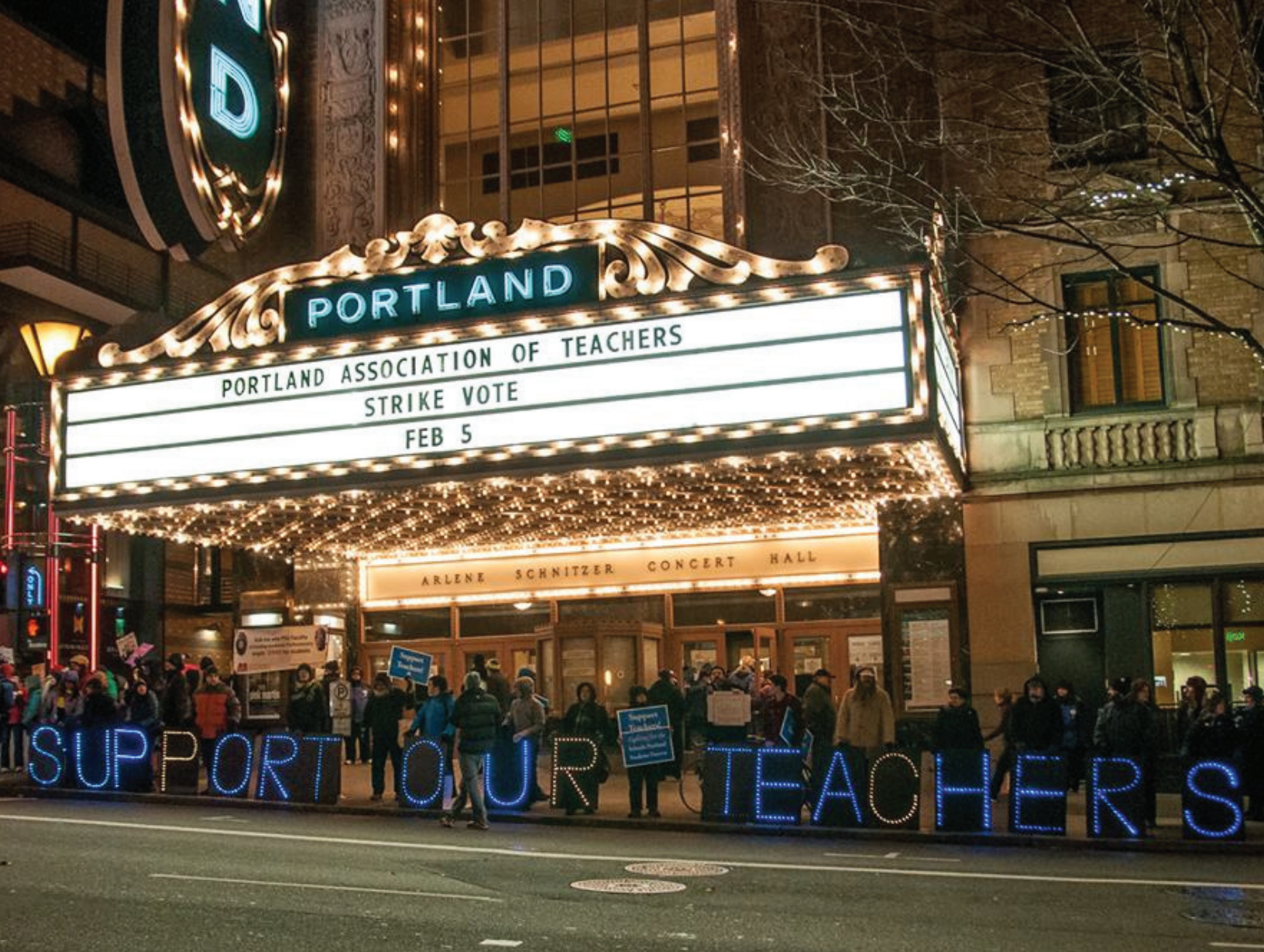
## **Multiple Assessment Methods**

Portland educators need the autonomy to choose the best methods and materials for their classroom. We also need time to plan our lessons and collaborate with our colleagues. Educators need the freedom to decide the most appropriate ways of assessing individual student progress. And just like no student should be evaluated based solely on standardized test scores, no professional educator should be evaluated based on how their students perform on a single test.









*The Portland Association of Teachers is dedicated to creating great public schools for all Portland Students. In 2013 PAT brought together a diverse group of Portland educators to identify the barriers to and opportunities for reaching this goal. We laid out our vision for the District and the community in *The Schools Portland Students Deserve*.*

**Portland Association of Teachers**

