

## **GATEWOOD RECAP**

This is a response to concerns and questions voiced by a number of community members about the recent events at Gatewood Elementary School. After the School District withdrew funding for one Gatewood teacher due to lower-than-expected enrollment, the community united to support the school's staffing model by raising about \$90,000 in five days.

### **The district will not reimburse funds for the teacher's salary.**

I've looked into the possibility of the district reimbursing Gatewood for the teacher salary that the Friends of Gatewood and the Gatewood PTA have agreed to support.

As I feared, there are no funds available for this.

### **District leaders have acted responsibly and thoughtfully**

I have gathered enough information to tell you that, in my opinion, the Seattle Public School District was not remiss in its action of surplus-ing a Gatewood teacher. There are several other schools which are slated to reduce the number of staff, based on enrollment. In cases where significant numbers of students unexpectedly move from a school, funds follow the students, according to state law. Whenever possible, the district uses its small mitigation budget to offset such losses. Factors that influence allocation of these monies have to do with equity and are listed in the second paragraph below.

[Further information from a letter by Superintendent Nyland: This year our school board has highlighted resource stewardship as a board priority, refocusing the district on the importance of assuring responsible management of our limited funding. While we have more students this year, the number is still lower than we projected, which has left us with \$3 million less than we anticipated. With less revenue district wide, we will have to reduce the staffing budget from schools with lower enrollment and add staffing budgets to schools with higher enrollment to assure our class sizes and support personnel are equitably distributed to best support all students' teaching and learning.]

### **Several schools need to surplus teachers; others need to add teachers.**

There are several staffing adjustments currently being made district-wide; because there was early clarity in some locations in West Seattle, changes were implemented in these schools early, before all of the district's October enrollment calculations were complete. As more precise enrollment figures have been finalized, other schools will have to make changes. Thus, additional schools are surplus-ing and adding teachers in other buildings in the district; that process is occurring now. In cases of surplus-ing, schools will have five days to reconfigure their building staff and/or resources, as did Gatewood; the window of time will end on October 24th. Building staffs will need to make cuts, and may choose a variety of ways to do so.

### **The District cannot justify supporting staffing at Gatewood at a level above other schools with similar characteristics.**

Schools are given scarce mitigation funds with consideration of a variety of factors. In weighing how these funds are used, equity implications enter in, for example, relative numbers of English Language Learners, free and reduced price lunch qualifications, numbers and needs of special education students, and grade and program configurations. In light of all those factors, Gatewood's overall teacher to student ratio is higher than that of similar schools.

### **Timing of the decision.**

Because it was clear very early in September that Gatewood had lost enough students that a staffing adjustment would definitely be necessary, the district proceeded to make this adjustment for Gatewood before other schools which had less definite numbers, so that Gatewood could stabilize as quickly as possible. Like Gatewood, Fairmount Park's higher than expected enrollment also was very clear early on, and district staff moved to advertise for the added position in order to stabilize FP as quickly as possible.

The transfer of the teacher from Gatewood to FP would have been a solution to the overall disparity, however the unprecedented efforts of the Gatewood community to retain one teacher who could no longer be funded by the district was successful, and so the district's process of advertising/interviewing for the position at Fairmount Park has continued.

I appreciate the fact that district leaders have moved to make needed changes as quickly as possible. Gatewood and Fairmount Park will benefit from the fact that needed adjustments are being made expeditiously.

### **Gatewood families who changed schools in August have reported that they did so because they needed transportation, and transportation was only offered to the neighborhood assignment school.**

I have been assured by staff members that, after the August enrollment counts, none of the Gatewood students who were added to Fairmount Park had been taken off the Fairmount Park waitlist for out-of-area students. Rather, they were students who were *in the Fairmount Park zone*, and guaranteed a seat at FP because of their address. Their families had to choose between providing their own transportation to Gatewood or not doing so for Fairmount Park. It is regrettable not to be able to offer transportation to the preferred school, but our school district does not have the luxury of doing this.

### **Uncertain enrollment predictions.**

Uncertain enrollment predictions are a given – these are always subject to unknown factors. In order to plan for the coming year, staff members of Enrollment Services make projections based on all the available information. Enrollment Services has no way of knowing ahead of time whether parents will change schools at the beginning of the school year. Given the guarantee of student placement at neighborhood assignment schools, Seattle Public Schools must place students at their neighborhood schools if requested. The district could not reliably predict what number of Gatewood families would choose to move to their newly opened neighborhood school, Fairmount Park, based on the lack of district transportation to Gatewood, or other reasons.

### **Enrollment at Fairmount Park was handled responsibly by the district.**

The number of families from the neighborhood assignment area who chose to attend Fairmount Park was larger than anticipated. The enrollment projection had been a difficult one, because of several factors, some mentioned above, also: uncertainty of how many parents of qualified students would choose to leave other neighborhood schools in favor of APP and Spectrum programs, the unknown effect of the FP principal's very active recruiting efforts, as well as the ability of parents to provide continued transportation to Gatewood and other affected schools if they wished to do so. The newly expanded Fairmount Park school building has ample classroom space, and when attendance was larger than predicted, the addition of another teacher was necessary and appropriate.

**Lessons learned.**

I was spoke too hastily in agreeing with some parents that the district ought to repay the monies that the community raised. As I said above, I now believe that district leaders acted responsibly in initiating the needed changes caused by losing students and state funding from one school, and gaining students and state funding at another. It would be much better for our students if the district had funds to accommodate the unusual staff to student ratio at Gatewood; that is not the present reality.

**In closing**

I believe the recent loss of district funding for one teacher at Gatewood was unfortunate, but unavoidable with SPS's limited resources. The resulting, truly remarkable, show of solidarity by Gatewood staff and its community has arisen from the extraordinary commitment of staff and parents to their vision for a supportive school environment for every student. If all Washington communities could get behind their children's education with such dynamic conviction, I believe our state legislators would be inspired to address the funding deficits our schools face.

Thank you to all who contributed to this inspiring effort. You are people who passionately believe in, and strive for, an excellent education for all students. I've been told that many of you, if not most, are people of modest means for whom your generous donations were far from trivial. You understood what was at stake, and stepped up to save a teacher for the sake of students. I hope that this unity and strength will spread to more and more members of our communities, who will be more and more insistent: our legislature must fund schools fully!

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