

May 6, 2025

Dear Directors of the Portland Public Schools Board of Education,

The Center for Black Excellence and the more than 35 undersigned organizations represent a broad coalition of community and nonprofit leaders committed to ensuring the successful and timely identification and acquisition of a site for the Center for Black Student Excellence (“CBSE”). We are originators, co-designers, collaborators, and—because many of us are also parents and caretakers of current and future students—beneficiaries of the CBSE.

We write today to urge the District to:

1. Provide a public presentation and accept public comment on the status of the CBSE site acquisition at a meeting of the Board of Directors on or before May 20, 2025;
2. Publicly identify a viable site for acquisition by June 30, 2025, and complete the purchase of a site by December 1, 2025; and
3. Assign adequate staffing to complete the transaction and oversee core building functions.

As we make these requests, we also reaffirm our unwavering commitment to a deep and genuine partnership with the District to bring the CBSE to life. The CBSE will be more than a beautiful building bearing a powerful name. We envision a living, breathing place where educational excellence takes root and spreads throughout the District to the benefit of every child, at every school, in every neighborhood.

Together we can make the CBSE and Portland Public Schools a model for the state and the nation for how schools, in partnership with the communities they serve, can transform the educational experience and outcomes of students, as well as the lives of parents and educators.

A. Our Commitment to the District to Activate the CBSE

The CBSE was always envisioned as a community-powered place, activated by partners working in alignment with District goals. Since 2020, we have honored that vision and stood firmly on its foundation—participating in countless design sessions, diverting internal resources to support the District’s planning, and answering the call whenever needed.

We reaffirm our commitment to activate the CBSE by providing a combination of on- and off-site after-school, weekend, and summer programming aligned with the Graduate Portrait; supporting professional development for school and community-based educators; engaging families; connecting students to wraparound services; and advancing research that improves student outcomes.

We also understand the budgetary dilemma the District is facing, and so commit to engaging in collaborative and independent fundraising efforts to expand CBSE offerings. But the District must demonstrate commitment to its stated values through its budget, even in these times, and identify at least one staff member whose core responsibilities are to ensure the District completes a transaction for the CBSE this year, and to direct and coordinate CBSE operations once the site has been acquired. Given that

the CBSE will serve as a hub for educational excellence and innovation, we also expect to see strong collaboration between relevant District departments and programs to maximize its impact.

B. Acquiring an Existing Site and the Fierce Urgency of Now

The cost of new construction has risen significantly since the District passed its bond measure in 2020. In contrast, the cost of acquiring existing property has drastically declined. For this reason, we urge the District to acquire an existing building in Albina to house the CBSE. Doing so is the most fiscally responsible path forward. It also shortens the runway to implementation and would enable the CBSE to open months, rather than years, after the site's acquisition.

This is more than a pragmatic proposal; it is a call to action that recognizes the fierce urgency of **now**. Student outcomes are scarcely better in 2025 than they were five years ago. The CBSE will house and connect students to critical programs and services—tutoring, career exploration, wellness, professional development, and wraparound services—that are needed now more than ever. While the District works to implement new curricula, train educators, and ensure fidelity to its plans, too many children are underserved in the present. Our children need targeted resources immediately. Acquiring an existing high-functioning building is the most expeditious path to delivering them to students quickly.

Public reporting indicates that viable acquisition options exist. We implore the District to act decisively.

We also firmly reject the premise that the CBSE is duplicative of in-school District initiatives and the work of community organizations that provide programs outside of schools. We expect and support the success of in-school initiatives. The CBSE is not intended to replace classroom learning, but to supplement it. It is predicated on the research-backed fact that for *students* to thrive, they need significant inputs after school, on weekends, and over the summers; they need opportunities to explore careers as early as possible; they need intergenerational relationships that ground them in their local and cultural contexts; they need socio-emotional inputs that prepare them to overcome challenges; and they need to see what community looks like in action, so that they can learn early how to be a part of one.

While we honor and seek to build upon the historical and ongoing work of community-based organizations that serve our children—and in fact, the undersigned include many of those organizations—we also know that in order to achieve our shared goals we must collectively expand our reach to serve the thousands of Black children who remain disconnected from critical out-of-school supports. The CBSE will help us do so.

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Over the years, Portland Public Schools has pointed to many reasons for why its progress on the CBSE has been stalled: the realities of responding to a global pandemic; the need to complete various high school building projects; labor disputes; and significant staff leadership changes that led to starts and stops. But given recent steps taken under the leadership of the new superintendent, and the curiosity and rigor with which the Board has reengaged with the CBSE in recent months, we are now *cautiously* optimistic.

Our only interest is in ensuring the District fulfills the promise it made to students, families, educators, and taxpayers in 2020. That promise was simple: to work with our community to make Portland one of the best places in the United States for a Black child to receive a public education. This letter explicitly provides a path forward. Following this plan will yield tangible, measurable results that transform lives across our city.

Thus, we respectfully and firmly ask the District to:

1. Provide a public presentation and accept public comment on the status of the CBSE site acquisition at a meeting of the Board of Directors on or before May 20, 2025;
2. Publicly identify a site for the CBSE this June and complete a transaction by year's end; and
3. Commit to providing the staffing necessary to support the CBSE's development in fiscal year 2025-26 and beyond.

This is not only a matter of justice for our children—fulfilling the District's promises made to Portland's students, families, educators, and taxpayers is a matter of public trust and governmental accountability.

Sincerely,

Center for Black Excellence

Albina Head Start*

Albina Vision Trust*

Black Parent Initiative*

KairosPDX*

POIC*

REAP Inc.*

Self-Enhancement, Inc.*

4Fathers

African Youth Community Organization

BE Group

Be the Healing

Black Educational Advancement Movement

Black Business Association of Oregon

Black Futures for Perinatal Health

Building Blocks 2 Success

Center for African Immigrants and Refugees

Organization (CAIRO)

Coalition of Black Men

Elevate Oregon

ELSO Inc.

Go Girl Ride

Gordly Burch Center for Leadership & Civic
Engagement

I Am M.O.R.E. (Making Ourselves Resilient
Everyday)

Microenterprise Services of Oregon

NAACP, Portland Branch

NAMC-Oregon

Okojie Wellness

Oregon Alliance of Black School Educators

Oregon Black Pioneers

Sankofa Wellness

The Blueprint Foundation

UNCF Portland

Urban League of Portland

Village Resiliency

Williams & Russell CDC

Word Is Bond

World Stage Theater

Youth Organized and United to Help
(Y.O.U.TH)

**Center for Black Excellence Steering Committee Member Organization*