

Strategic Planning Update: Optimal School Size

For the past three months, members of The Philadelphia School community have been hard at work drafting a new, five-year strategic plan. Through the process of preparing this plan, one topic has emerged as the issue upon which all other key decisions are predicated: school size. For this reason, a Committee on School Size was formed in March 2008, and what follows is a summary of the committee's proposed model, which was approved by the Board of Trustees at the April meeting.

After careful study of a previous board report on school size at TPS, recent admission data, enrollment trends, and Center City's changing demographics, the Committee on School Size concluded that the optimal size for The Philadelphia School is 450 students and that, with planned, incremental growth, this optimal school size could be achieved by the year 2016.

In order to achieve this optimal school size over the next seven years, the committee recommended a number of significant changes:

- Beginning in September 2009, the primary entry point for incoming TPS students will be the four-year-old program, which will continue to consist of team-taught classes.
- TPS will no longer have a program for three-and-a-half year old students.
- A second entry point for eight additional new students will be established in kindergarten, in first grade, or in some combination of the two grades.
- The creation of a secondary entry point for eight additional students will require that we create a fourth vertical classroom of twenty-four students for the first and second grade, which will prevent overcrowding in the PU-ABC classrooms.

Of these changes, perhaps the most significant is the change in the preschool entry point. We believe that this new policy will enhance the TPS preschool program because experience has shown that four-year-old students are better suited developmentally for our program, which involves numerous transitions throughout the day. This change will also improve the preschool admission process. Currently only three-and-a-half-year-old children are eligible for the "3s" program. For this reason, students who are born in the spring and summer cannot apply. These children, therefore, are at an unfair disadvantage because they can apply to the preschool only once. We also feel that the three-and-a-half-year-old entry point has been confusing for incoming parents in recent years in part because the cut-off date for this program has been changed more than once.

The recommended changes also will reinforce The Philadelphia School's commitment to preserving and protecting small class sizes throughout the school. For example, entry points in Junior Unit and Middle School will be managed based on attrition, which will simplify and enhance planning in all areas, including space management, future construction and renovation, and marketing.

In the weeks ahead, the school will be communicating with you again about the strategic plan as a whole. At this time, however, it is important that the entire school community know about and understand the changes that will be stemming from the new strategic plan, particularly that the entry point for preschool now will be age four and that TPS will be managing enrollment toward an optimal school size of 450 by the year 2016.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.