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## QuickPoint! – Portland Needs More Than a New Superintendent

By John A. Charles, Jr.

Portland school superintendent Carole Smith [announced her resignation this week](#) after nine years on the job.

The next steps are predictable: The school board will conduct a national search for a successor and eventually sign someone to an expensive contract. After a short honeymoon, the new leader will sink into the bureaucratic quagmire and leave after a short and forgettable tenure.

Management experts know that if system results are disappointing, you need to change the system, not the people. The single most important change Portland could make would be to redesign how the money flows.

Right now, tax dollars go to school bureaucracies, regardless of results. Students are assigned to schools like widgets in a factory, and few families have a “Plan B” if they are unhappy.

A better option would be to enact Educational Savings Accounts (ESAs). This would allow every family to have their share of per-student revenue diverted from the bureaucracy to the student’s ESA, where alternative services could be purchased. Families would instantly have dozens of exciting options.

Equally important, ESAs would incentivize school administrators to make each school perform at a high level, thereby benefiting all students, including those not using ESAs.

Carole Smith made her share of mistakes, but the Portland school district needs institutional change more than it needs a charismatic new leader.

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*John A. Charles, Jr. is President and CEO of Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market public policy research organization.*