

April 28, 2026

Portland Public Schools
Bond Accountability Committee (BAC)
c/o schoolmodernization@pps.net

Re: PPS April 28 Board Meeting, [Agenda Item #5: Bond Update 2026-04-28](#)

In preparation for BAC April 29, 2026, Meeting

Dear BAC members:

The [PPS Board is meeting tonight](#) in a work session, and the bond construction program is listed as [Agenda Item #5](#).

On p. 13 of the staff presentation there is a list of projects underway with funding from the 2020 bond. The third project is referred to as the “CEE”, with a budget of \$60 million. The spreadsheet shows expenditures of \$16.2 million with a remaining balance of \$43.8 million.

On p. 28 there is a summary of something called the “Grice-Adair Center for Educational Excellence”, also with a construction budget of \$60 million.

Unfortunately, the [2020 bond](#) included no language referring to a CEE or a Grice-Adair Center for Education Excellence. The only \$60 million project in the bond was the [Center for Black Student Excellence](#) (CBSE). **That project no longer appears in bond reporting documents because the PPS Board decided to change the CBSE to the CEE without voter approval.**

This is the issue I discussed with the BAC at the [January meeting](#). Oregon bond law does not allow school districts to take money from one voter-approved project and move it to something else. This bait-and-switch should be disallowed by the BAC.

There is legislative history associated with the CBSE that cannot be ignored. The concept was first mentioned on June 25, 2020, at a PPS sponsored [Town Hall](#) regarding the planned bond measure.

Albina Vision Trust board chair Rukaiyah Adams walked the Board through a [slide show](#) for a “Center for Black Excellence.” As she summarized it:

The point of the Center would be to create an intentional and comprehensive learning infrastructure in Albina anchored at Jefferson, in order to unify and elevate Black learning from pre-K through higher education.



The Board included this concept in the 2020 Bond by adopting [Resolution 6150](#) on [July 28](#). The resolution stated in part:

The modernization of Jefferson High School and the community-inspired Center for Black Student Excellence, as a physically built environment, and as a designated hub for culturally responsive education, immediate and long-term plans, and culturally specific partnerships to advance Black student achievement in PPS.

The bond measure was put before District voters and approved in [November 2020](#) with a \$60 million appropriation for capital construction.

Every presentation made to the Board regarding the CBSE since 2020 has emphasized Black student excellence. The CBSE website continues to state the following:

The Center for Black Student Excellence comprises a constellation of academic programs, strategies, supports, and experiences reinforced by **physical infrastructure**. Each of these elements work in coordination to create a transformational Approach to Black student learning.

Mission:

- Advance a culture of Black excellence while meaningfully integrating joy and healing;
- Unify and elevate the Black educational experience; and
- Improve outcomes for Black students.

The mechanism:

The Center for Black Student Excellence

The PPS Board cannot rename the CBSE on a whim. Bond advocates collectively spent thousands of hours developing a vision for the CBSE, described in a [191-page vision document](#) published in 2023.

In contrast, the Board has revealed little about the Grice-Adair Center for Student Excellence. There is no mission statement, curriculum, schedule of programming, or operating budget.

In [Board Resolution 7237](#), which authorized the renaming of the buildings at One North, there is no mention of Black students at all. Instead, there are vague references to “honoring student brilliance”, creating a “space rooted in joy, identity, and creativity”, and “collaborative learning grounded in belonging.”

What we do know from due diligence documents is that the newly purchased buildings “will not be a school” and “few students” will ever visit.

If the PPS Board now wants to sell that concept to voters in lieu of the Center for Black Student Excellence, they should go ahead and try. **But in the meantime, the BAC should disallow the use of 2020 bond funds for the CEE.**

The BAC clearly has the authority to do this. The [most recent bond audit](#) urged the Board to “strengthen the BAC’s role in oversight...”.

At the [FIOC meeting held in January](#), Vice Chair DePass [said](#): “I would be in favor of making the BAC’s job more simple. ‘No, you can’t spend the money on this; voters approved X, you need to produce X.’”

The district’s legal counsel told the Board: “You want to make sure that the BAC is fulfilling the representation and commitment made by the Board in the bond referral language.”

This should be an easy call for the BAC. Voters approved a Center for Black Student Excellence. The \$16 million spent to purchase the One North buildings for some other purpose should be deemed non-compensable from bond funds.

Sincerely,
John A. Charles, Jr.
President & CEO
Cascade Policy Institute