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Summary: Portland Public Schools' bond update obscures the mention of the voter-approved Center for Black Student Excellence and redirects its \$60 million allocation to a renamed project never authorized by voters. Amid federal civil rights scrutiny and missing program details, Cascade urges the Bond Accountability Committee to reject the update and require new voter approval.

Word Count: 731

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The \$60 Million Question: Where Did the CBSE Go?

A vanished project, a new name, and \$60 million in limbo raises serious questions for the BAC.

By Naomi Inman

Cascade Policy Institute President John A. Charles, Jr., submitted [Testimony](#) this week urging Portland Public School's Bond Accountability Committee (BAC) to reject the district's proposed [Bond Update](#) and repurposing of 2020 bond funds originally approved for the Center for Black Student Excellence.

In his testimony, Charles warned the BAC that the bond update appears to be a “bait-and-switch” by diverting the \$60 million earmarked for the CBSE to a different project. “That project no longer appears in bond reporting documents because the PPS Board decided to change the CBSE to the CEE without voter approval,” he writes. “It has [disappeared](#) from current reporting.”

The district's newly adopted name, the Grice-Adair Center for Educational Excellence, does not appear in the 2020 bond language. Nor does the bond appear to have authorized a generic “CEE.”

This matters because bond measures are not blank checks. Oregon bond law does not allow school districts to take money approved by voters for one capital project and spend it on a different one. Voters approved a Center for Black Student Excellence. PPS should not be allowed to convert that promise into a different project under a new name.

Behind the Name Change

The bond update and website updates raise serious questions and have all the appearance of a ruse to escape scrutiny by the federal government. After a [civil rights complaint](#) was filed against the CBSE last year, the PPS board rushed a January [Resolution](#) to [rename](#) the One North building acquired for the CBSE and remove all references to race. By mid-February, the CBSE came under formal scrutiny by the Department of Education [Office for Civil Rights](#) for its racially-preferenced program.

Cascade has observed changes in the pps.net landing pages which have obscured references to the CBSE or convoluted connections between the CBSE, race, and the newly purchased One North Building. A search on pps.net for the “Center for Black Student Excellence” now lands on a [page](#) in large red letters, “Website Under



Construction.” The remaining graphics that refer to the CBSE no longer contain links to its original vision [document](#).

A search for “Grice Adair Center” on pps.net leads to a page with primary colored juggle balls spelling out “[FACE](#)” (Family and Community Engagement). Its nebulous tag line reads, “When YOU move, WE move - Just like that!” The FACE page makes no connection to Black student excellence, the Grice Adair center, or academic achievement.

They’ve lost the plot. Six years, thousands of hours, and millions poured into implementing the bond has little to show for it because the project violates both Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

In May, 2025, OPB [reported](#) on 42 education and community organizations who called on PPS to purchase a building or site for the center. After five years believing they had voter-approved bonds for a CBSE, they expected a place to focus on Black student achievement.

This is not that. And somewhere along the way these 42 voices have been strangely silent. There’s nothing in this bond update about student achievement. As Charles points out, “There is no mission statement, curriculum, schedule of programming, or operating budget.” A disjointed landing page called FACE with juggle balls seems to indicate there is no “there” there.

This shell-game has little to do with voter intent behind a center for Black student achievement and everything to do with whether a publicly funded school district may lawfully operate programs that appear to prioritize students by race. If the district now believes it cannot legally or practically deliver the CBSE it promised voters, it should say so plainly and seek voter approval for any new use of the funds.

The CBSE is a Worthwhile Private Venture

From the start, Cascade has not opposed the CBSE concept but has questioned its jurisdiction within a public school district who must serve all students equally. That is why the CBSE has always presented a difficult policy question. As we’ve [written](#) before, “The Center for Black Student Excellence Should Be a Private Venture.”

The BAC should make a clear finding: 2020 bond funds may not be used for the Grice-Adair Center for Educational Excellence. If PPS wants a different project, it should ask voters for permission and the district should be held to the bond language it placed on the ballot.

Naomi Inman is External Relations Manager at Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market public policy research organization. As a staff journalist and writer, Naomi helps Cascade make the case for free-market policies through media affairs and publications.

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