

P4P Testimony – PPS School Board – Oct 2019

LAURA HALL

Hello, my name is Laura Hall. I work in emergency management, and I'm the mother of a Kindergartener at Chief Joseph Elementary and a preschooler who will be there soon. I testified in front of this board in May, and I emailed a [written version of that testimony](#) to all board members yesterday. Thank you Ms. Brim-Edwards for your prompt reply.

I'm here with Holly Cook. Holly and I are members of a group called P4P - Parents4Preparedness. We're a group of parents, school staff, and community members working to make schools safer and more resilient to disasters. While we focus mostly on earthquakes, much of what we do pertains to other types of disasters, like the extreme weather and wildfires we will increasingly see due to the climate crisis. P4P has close to 200 members representing 50 schools, and we're seeing rapid growth as our community becomes more aware of the risks that our children face.

P4P has thoughtfully examined numerous ways that the district could increase student and staff safety during disasters. We see much room for improvement in making classrooms safer, improving drills, and ensuring that staff have what they need on campus to care for themselves and our children during an emergency, including one that extends past school hours. Yesterday, I sent you our [Lessons Learned](#) document. We'd love to talk more with you about those concerns and issues.

But today we want to talk about communication. We've learned that little if any work will get done at schools if the adults - parents and staff - are unaware of, unconcerned with, or overwhelmed by the risks that we face. We believe the first step forward is to make sure that everyone gets regular, consistent messaging that disasters are inevitable and we all have a role to play in preparing.

P4P has done its level best to get that message out. But we are mere parent volunteers. Our reach is limited, and, by and large, we represent schools of social

and cultural privilege. Our work does not impact the lives of all children in the district, which makes this an issue of inequity. We're here today to ask you to help ensure that all parents and staff in every school in the district get the message.

There is a large body of work pertaining to the effect of disasters on the lives of children. We know that children can suffer serious, long-term effects from disasters, which are intensely compounded by social vulnerabilities such as race, socioeconomic status, and language. And we know that during a disaster, acute stress can be alleviated by minimizing the amount of time children are separated from their loved ones. We also know that during a disaster, PPS staff will want nothing more than to return to their homes to care for their loved ones.

That's why we want to make sure that every parent in the district receives a regular, consistent message: Have some basic supplies on hand, but more importantly - have a family emergency plan and update it regularly. After a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake, we don't want *any* children to be left waiting to get picked up as the sun is setting.

HOLLY COOK

My name is Holly Cook. I'm an architect and the mother of two children at Sunnyside Environmental. P4P would like the district to commit to sending at least one paper flyer per year to parents on the topic of disaster preparedness. This is an incredibly cost-effective way to increase school and community resilience.

We have spent the past year trying to get a flyer into the hands of all parents. We drafted one that aligns with regional messaging being used by our partners at the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management and Multnomah County Emergency Management, and both offices have sponsored the flyer. PPS's own Security Services even translated the document.

We tried to get a paper copy of the flyer to all parents at the start of the school year. PPS Emergency Manager, Kyle Olsen, and Interim Director of Security Services, Molly Emmons, tried their best to help us. We're incredibly grateful for our relationship with them. But the paper flyer didn't fly. Next, we pursued having it

emailed directly to all parents, despite our reservations. Not all families have access to computers. That didn't work either. A few things did happen.

An article about the Great ShakeOut earthquake drill was in the latest Pulse newsletter, an email publication that is used to communicate non-essential messages to parents.

And the flyer we created is being sent directly to administrators who have the option to share it with parents and staff. But we're guessing many won't.

We understand that the district and school administrators are cautious of sending too many messages to parents. If they constantly receive messages, they will ignore them, and critical school-related information will get missed. We get that, but this **is** critical. It isn't a normal message. It's an extraordinary message, and it should be given a proper platform.

The newsletter article and the flyer emailed to administrators are a start, but we want to see direct communication on paper so that every family can receive the message. We're trying to influence and change culture in an equitable way, which requires a special delivery. Communication about preparedness must be strong and come from the top in order to distinguish the message from communications about parties and run-of-the-mill district news. Will you help get this critical message to ALL PPS families and staff?

The PPS Communications Department isn't being difficult - they're following district protocol. We're asking the board to make preparedness and resilience a district priority so that barriers like the ones we've faced can be removed. And we'd like to request a private audience with you and key staff members to discuss the details of this and a few other projects that have hit bureaucratic brick walls.

We know the size of this task at the district level may seem overwhelming, but it doesn't have to happen overnight. And we have many ideas about how to go after low-hanging fruit. Thank you for your time.