August 5, 2019

Dear Portland Public Schools families, staff and community members,

As you may be aware, the Portland Press Herald recently published a story about the shift in high school enrollment away from Deering High School to Portland High School. High school enrollment numbers fluctuate annually because we allow our students to choose which high school they want to attend, but the number of ninth-graders choosing Deering this fall is markedly lower than usual.

Our high schools offer a learning experience second to none in Maine. Our students are fortunate to attend diverse schools that prepare them for living and leading in an increasingly diverse society. Research shows that students who attend diverse schools are more empathetic, more creative and more engaged in civic life. Colleges recognize that, as evidenced by the Class of 2019’s more than $3 million in scholarships and grants and acceptance at some of our nation’s top colleges and universities. We fully expect similar or greater success from subsequent graduating classes and are determined that all of our schools will continue to provide learning environments conducive to such achievements.

Deering, specifically, provides an outstanding education to almost 1,000 students year after year. Deering serves the most diverse high school student body in New England north of Boston. The school has been recognized for its efforts to expand Advanced Placement programming for all students. It has the largest number of students of any high school in the region taking dual enrollment classes while in high school. Deering’s talented students excel in the arts and athletics. This reality does not come through in the Press Herald article.

As part of my goals for this year, the Portland Board of Public Education is asking me to lead a discussion about the high school selection process in Portland. As part of that conversation, we will strive to understand and account for the reasons why students select schools and consider options to prevent another single year swing of this magnitude.

I want to assure you that our school system takes the enrollment drop at Deering very seriously. We are working to understand the root causes and address them in this new school year. I am personally committed to working with the Deering leadership, staff, students, and community to support and maintain the Deering High School that I described above as one of our three exceptional public high schools in Portland.

Sincerely,

Xavier Botana, Superintendent