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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Portland Children's Museum and Opal School will permanently close June 30**

**Portland, OR** — After nearly 75 years of serving children and families in Portland and beyond, the board voted to close Portland Children's Museum, which is comprised of the Museum and Opal School, effective June 30, 2021. Due to the coronavirus and resulting shutdown for health and safety, the Museum experienced devastating attendance and revenue losses. The impacts from the pandemic have compounded a funding model that is largely reliant on paid admissions to the interactive museum.

"This was an incredibly difficult decision for the board. We've all experienced so many wonderful memories at the Museum with our loved ones, and we are forever grateful to the vibrant community of play that the Museum and Opal School have cultivated during these last 75 years," said David Peterson, Board Chair of the Museum. "Its lasting impact will live on through the creativity of countless families, children, educators, artists and musicians who called Portland Children's Museum and Opal School their second home."

During the last year, leadership and the board considered a multitude of options, including the concept of a mobile museum and enhanced digital offerings. Due to new cleaning protocols, state guidelines limiting capacity and the need to refill 48 staff positions due to layoffs, opening the Museum's doors to the public would be an insurmountable financial deficit. The question of when families and caregivers will feel comfortable returning further complicated plans to reopen. Ultimately, these options were not financially viable and would have mandated a substantial, long-term investment without the revenue to support the organization.

"We are heartbroken by the closure of Portland Children's Museum, a longstanding member of the Association of Children's Museums and a leader in our field. Sadly, the museum is not alone in facing unprecedented operational distress as a result of the pandemic. The high-touch, interactive nature of children's museums is one of our greatest strengths – but it has made us especially vulnerable during the pandemic," said Laura Huerta Migus, Executive Director, Association of Children's Museums. "Children's

museums across the country are reporting average losses of more than 70 percent of the income they had received in years past, and relief from public sources has not been adequate to relieve the impacts of the pandemic on cultural institutions. The closure of a children's museum is devastating to the social fabric of a community, and the loss of Portland Children's Museum will be felt for years to come."

This year marks the Museum's 75th anniversary, Opal School's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and Washington Park's 150th anniversary. The Museum welcomed 4.8 million visitors through its 75-year history and recently hosted more than 250,000 visitors each year – many of whom first visited as children decades ago and returned as parents or grandparents.

Since 2001, Opal School of the Portland Children's Museum has been a learning collaborative and included a tuition-funded preschool, public charter elementary school and a professional development program for educators around the world. The learning approach Playful Inquiry was developed and practiced by Opal School as well as the Museum.

The first charter school authorized by Portland Public Schools, Opal School established itself as a living laboratory for children and adults to research environments and learning conditions that promoted critical thinking and strengthened democracy. Opal School has served more than 500 students and 10,000 educators, who in turn have reached one million children locally and globally.

"Portland Children's Museum is a special place and is the only children's museum in North America to incorporate a research center, an onsite preschool and onsite K-5 charter school," said Tom Kelly, longtime supporter and friend of the Museum. "I do hope that in the future our region will once again have a place where these innovative practices in education are shared alongside a museum where children and families can learn and play together."

Museum staff will spend the next few months winding down the organization and, where possible, will donate supplies to mission-aligned nonprofits in the community.

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### *About Portland Children's Museum*

Portland Children's Museum develops innovative problem-solvers through playful learning experiences that strengthen relationships between children and their world. The Museum uses familiar materials to craft open-ended opportunities for children to learn

through play. Developed by Opal School, the Museum's Playful Inquiry learning approach is inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach and influenced by a strong image of children as intelligent, creative and resourceful. In 1946, the Museum was founded by Dorothea Lensch as part of Portland Parks & Recreation and was particularly dedicated to meeting the needs of Portland's underserved communities. The Museum has continued its longtime collaborative partnership with Portland Parks & Recreation throughout its 75-year history.

#### *About Opal School*

Founded in 2001, Opal School of Portland Children's Museum is a tuition-funded early childhood program and public elementary school. Opal School's classroom experiences inform its professional development work with an estimated 1,000 educators annually around the world both in person and online, who continue to touch the lives of over one million students.