

News Clips

Headlines

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DPS reforms may seek bids for new ideas

The "request for proposal" process, part of a plan up for a vote Nov. 19, targets specific groups of students.

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

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Denver Public Schools officials intend to seek help

from others in developing new schools in an innovative "request for proposal" process.

The RFP process - which asks groups to develop research-based proposals for targeted programs - is part of the reform plan that is to be voted on by the school board Nov. 19.

The reform plan calls for closing eight schools and redesigning five others.

DPS is following efforts in Chicago, New York and Oakland where similar processes have been implemented, said Ethan Hemming, deputy director of the district's new schools development office.

"Denver would be the first district in Colorado" with such a process, said Van Schoales, an education policy expert from the Piton Foundation.

In a school board planning session Monday, Hemming sketched out the RFP plan, saying the district could begin accepting proposals in January with the board voting on them in June. School programs would get 14 months to develop before opening, he said.

The district would likely focus on plans for students in grades six through nine, because those are the students facing the most challenges, he said.

"The performance levels in the district at grades six through eight are very, very low and the student loss

is extremely high," Hemming said.

Possibilities could include a school program for high-performing middle-year students, a program for students in their middle years who are behind in credits or older than their peers, and the same program for English-language learners, he said.

The RFP process differs from the district's current charter school program because the district actively would seek out specific programs. Plus, the programs could be developed by internal and external groups, meaning teachers who want to develop their own school programs could apply, Hemming said.

"It's truly anybody," Hemming said. "It should be open to anyone with a promising research-based proposal for a school that is in one of those target groups that the district will be developing."

Getting those types of proposals may be difficult, said Schoales of the Piton Foundation.

"It's going to be challenging to have people internally and externally pull off high-quality proposals," said Schoales. "This has been the problem in other cities."

DPS officials are examining the programs in other districts, such as Chicago Public Schools, where the district's Renaissance 2010 plan that began in 2004 seeks to create 100 high-performing schools in

needy communities by 2010.

The program is halfway there, said Jeanne Nowaczewski, Chicago Public Schools' senior manager of recruitment of new schools.

"It's worked very well," she said. "We're just creating new schools as a key part of transforming the district."

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