

## News Clips

### Headlines

#### Denver Post

Friday, November 9, 2007

- School closures to cost DPS millions
- Grant to aid Montbello High revival

Thursday, November 8, 2007

- Montbello High School custodian wounded

#### Rocky Mountain News

Friday, November 9, 2007

- Private educators eye Denver school

#### 9 News

Thursday, November 8, 2007

- Montbello High turnaround lands \$855,000 grant

# Denver Post

## Friday, November 9, 2007

### School closures to cost DPS millions

By Jeremy P. Meyer  
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 11/09/2007 01:26:47 AM MST

Costs to close eight Denver schools and reconfigure five others would total \$7.6 million to \$8.7 million over two years, administrators told the school board Thursday.

The board will vote Nov. 19 on the reform plan, which was unveiled last month as a way to reduce unused classroom space and improve student achievement. The closures are expected to save the district \$3.5 million in annual operating costs, the district has said.

However, construction work to retrofit eight schools for the new students would cost an estimated \$4.15 million, including about \$1 million to prepare six schools for preschoolers, said David Suppes, Denver Public Schools' chief strategy officer.

"It's an investment," he said Thursday, the first time the costs of the reform plan have been unveiled.

Most of the expenses would be the facility improvements.

Suppes said the most of the money would come from the district's capital reserve fund, which the district hopes to repay through the sale of properties.

## **Grant to aid Montbello High revival**

**"Culture of change" bolstered**

By Jeremy P. Meyer  
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 11/09/2007 01:35:06 AM MST

Montbello High School principal Antwan Wilson speaks with students Manuel Barraza, 15, left, and Courtney Dorsey, 18, on Thursday. An \$854,700 federal grant announced Thursday was welcome news after a shooting Wednesday night. (Post / Helen H. Richardson) Montbello High School will receive a federal grant to support its ongoing revitalization effort - a bit of good news announced Thursday in the wake of a shooting that left a custodian slightly injured.

Principal Antwan Wilson said the shooting Wednesday night points to the necessity for continued improvement at Montbello, which he wants to transform into an "early college."

"We have some kids where that type of thing is the reality for them," Wilson said about the violence. "That speaks to the need for us to be a place to challenge them so that's no longer a reality."

Wilson, in his third year as principal of the 1,600-student northeast Denver school, has

led a transformation that has built from a low point in January 2005, when a student was stabbed to death in the cafeteria, to Thursday's announcement of an \$854,700 grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

This year, Wilson established a strict school uniform policy. He has seen numbers of suspensions drop by 40 percent and attendance at parent-teacher conferences increase from 5 percent to 45 percent.

Two minutes before class bells ring, students are nudged by the theme song from "Rocky" over the loudspeaker to remind them they need to be on their way.

"This speaks to the culture of change," Wilson said during Thursday's news conference as the trumpeting sounds of "Gonna Fly Now" began playing.

Wilson said further evidence of that change is in the decreasing numbers of unsatisfactory scores on Colorado Student Assessment Program tests, although the school still struggles academically.

"I'm excited to see what Montbello's future will be like," said senior Victoria Simpson, 17, who has been accepted at two Southern universities.

Simpson said she does not believe Wednesday's incident will change the public's perception of Montbello.

Denver police have no suspects in the shooting, which they believe was an act of vandalism, said police spokesman Sonny Jackson.

The gunshot, which police say was from a low-powered shotgun, shattered windows but didn't break the skin of the victim - who worked for 20 minutes before she realized she had been shot. She was treated at a hospital and released.

Wilson on Thursday wanted the focus to be on the grant and what it means for the future of Montbello. The grant will help establish three small learning academies at the school - a ninth-grade academy, an early college academy and a technology innovations academy.

Wilson said the goal for 2010 is to have 80 percent of Montbello students successfully complete college-level classes while in high school.

The school is working with Community College of Aurora to develop a dual-enrollment program, in which freshmen would sign up to go to school for five years and graduate with a high school diploma and college associate's degree.

"This is a model," said City Council President Michael Hancock. "If we can keep this high school moving forward, we can really rejuvenate this community."

"This will send ripples throughout Denver Public Schools," said Superintendent Michael

Bennet

# **Thursday, November 8, 2007**

## **Additional local news briefs:**

### **Montbello High School custodian wounded**

Denver police are investigating a peculiar shooting at Montbello High School on Wednesday night.

About 8:30 p.m., police received a call from people working inside the school that a custodian had possibly been shot. The woman had been working in the school when she felt a burning in her shoulder, Denver police spokesman Sonny Jackson said.

She ignored the pain and continued working for about 20 minutes, before she asked her supervisor to take a look at her shoulder.

Jackson said the supervisor noticed a hole in the woman's clothing and a red mark on her shoulder. After investigating further, the workers found that a window in a door leading into a hallway had been shot at.

The custodian was taken to the hospital with superficial injuries.

# **Rocky Mountain News**

## **Friday, November 9, 2007**

### **Private educators eye Denver school**

## **Hallett is on list of eight that DPS proposes to close**

**By Nancy Mitchell, Rocky Mountain News  
November 9, 2007**

Leaders of a local private school toured at least one of the eight Denver Public Schools proposed for closure, weeks before an official vote on the closings.

Last month's tour of Hallett Elementary in northeast Denver by the Denver International School, which is leasing space in the Park Hill neighborhood, has upset parents preparing to protest the closure of Hallett.

"That definitely raises some deep concerns with our group because . . . DPS apparently has already decided not only to close the school, but also how to profit from the closing of the school," said the Rev. Bryce Rodgers, founder of the Black Parents' Alliance.

"Parents are under the impression they have a voice in the decision-making process," Rodgers added. "If that's not the case, we have a problem."

DPS Superintendent Michael Bennet said last Friday that he wasn't aware of the private tour, but that he has put a stop to any other look-sees at the eight schools.

"I'm letting our facilities management people know that until they hear otherwise, nobody should be in the facilities," he said. "We are not doing anything with the buildings that are being considered for closure now . . . until we run an extensive process with the community."

### **30,000 empty seats**

Bennet pledged, when announcing his school-closure proposal Oct. 1, that the eight buildings, if closed, would remain empty until DPS and the surrounding communities had decided how best to use them.

That could mean re-use, lease or sale, he said then.

But if the viewing raises questions about the sincerity of that promise, it is also raising the issue of who gets access to the 30,000 empty classroom seats in Denver schools.

For at least two years, some charter school applicants in DPS have publicly requested the use of empty district buildings for their schools - and been politely rebuffed.

Marcos Martinez asked DPS last year to consider allowing his proposed charter, the Ricardo Flores Magon Academy, to locate in a district school. At least two schools were empty - Rosedale Elementary and Gove Middle.

DPS declined and school board members refused Martinez's charter application, partly because he did not have a building lined up.

"They never promised us anything, but they said they would work with us. Nothing ever came of it," said Martinez, whose school opened this fall in Westminster. "I don't see why not. Why would you let an open building just sit there?"

### **Charters seek space**

Martinez said he now pays \$8,000 to \$10,000 in rent each month to a private landlord. And while the Magon Academy receives some private grant money, the bulk of its budget as a public charter school is state per-pupil education funding.

This year, two of three charter school applicants in DPS sought use of district space. Amy Slothower, executive director of one of those, the Denver Venture School, said her school has been indicating interest in a building for at least a year.

"We certainly have not gotten a no," she said, "but we continue to hear they are not ready to have that conversation."

Meanwhile, the DPS accountability committee reviewing charter school applicants has recommended her school be approved "on the condition that the applicant is able to secure an appropriate facility," the report reads.

So with a Nov. 19 vote looming on the Denver Venture School charter application, Slothower and her board of directors have been looking elsewhere. Still, they'd rather be in a DPS building, or part of one.

"Our view is, we are serving Denver students and we are doing that with Denver taxpayer money, and the buildings owned by the district are taxpayer resources," Slothower said. "It seems to us to be the best use of everybody's resources if the (Venture) school can be located in a school the district already owns."

### **Bottom-line differences**

Money factors into the issue in a couple of ways. One, DPS must pass about 95 percent of the per-pupil funding it receives for each charter school student to the charter school. So charter schools are seen by some as a drain on the district's finances.

And two, state law says that a school district cannot charge a charter school rent for use of its buildings. The district, however, can charge for maintenance and other upkeep.

"Why would you charge a public school rent to occupy a public building?" said Jim Griffin, president of the Colorado League of Charter Schools. "So it does seem rather absurd that a charter would be asked to pay rent."

No such restriction exists for private schools.

Sybil Kisken, a member of the board of trustees for the Denver International School, said the school's lease will expire soon, so officials are exploring options, including DPS schools. She declined to identify which sites they were interested in. DPS officials confirmed they had been to Hallett for an after-school look.

### **High interest in schools**

"DPS has been very cordial," Kisken said. "But DPS has also been very clear that they cannot engage in any formal discussions about leases until after Nov. 19 when the school board votes on closures."

DPS officials say they receive about five calls a day from groups interested in schools or school space. The district's accountability committee is urging DPS board members to create a plan for building use.

Bennet said the district is not opposed to any particular type of school in its buildings, whether it is charter or private.

"Our objective with respect to our buildings to try to have A, as many successful schools as possible," he said, "And B, to use the real estate in the most efficient way possible."

### **Estimated closure costs for Denver Public Schools**

**Denver Public Schools board members** will vote Nov. 19 on a proposal to close eight schools and change five others. Part of the reason: It's estimated to save \$3.5 million annually. But it also will cost some. Thursday, board members got their first look at the estimated expenses:

#### **TRANSITION COSTS** (most are one year only)

- Retention bonuses for staff in closing schools.....**\$351,000**
- Moving and storage costs.....\$214,000
- School choice counselors for displaced students..... \$147,000
- Project leaders for changing schools.....\$100,000
- Contingency.....\$100,000
- Support for two principals designing two new/changed schools.....\$99,000
- Other - half-year salaries of principals at new/changed schools, materials inventory, etc.....\$239,000

TOTALS \$1.25 million.....2007-08 \$362,000.....2008-09

**RETROFITTING EXISTING SCHOOLS** (two years)

- Horace Mann Middle - grades preschool through 8.....\$664,000
- Gilpin K-6 to become a Montessori school.....\$232,000
- Cole Middle - grades preschool through 8.....\$481,000
- Place Middle - grades preschool through 8.....\$548,000
- Merrill Middle - to accommodate a special needs classroom.....\$43,000
- Philips Elementary - to accommodate preschool students.....\$43,000
- Stedman Elementary - to accommodate preschool students.....\$31,000
- Smith Elementary - to accommodate preschool students.....\$34,000

**TOTAL: \$2.07 million each year for two years**

**MATERIALS, FURNITURE, EQUIPMENT** (each year for two years, then dropping)

- Montessori materials, etc. ....\$600,000 to \$900,000

**GRAND TOTALS**

- 2007-08.....\$3.9 million to \$4.2 million
- 2008-09..... \$3 million to \$3.3 million
- 2009-10..... \$250,000 to \$400,000 (materials)
- 2010-11.....\$250,000 to \$400,000 (materials)
- 2011-12..... \$50,000 to \$100,000 (materials)
- 2012 and beyond .....\$150,000 to \$250,000 (materials)

**SIX-YEAR GRAND TOTAL: .....\$7.65 MILLION TO \$8.7 MILLION**

**Reorganization proposal**

DPS is considering closing eight schools and remaking five others - while expanding

preschool seats and creating a pathway for innovative new schools.

#### **WHAT WOULD CLOSE**

- Del Pueblo Elementary, west Denver
- Fallis Elementary, southeast Denver
- Hallett Elementary, northeast Denver
- Mitchell Elementary, north Denver
- Remington Elementary, northwest Denver
- Smedley Elementary, northwest Denver
- Whiteman Elementary, southeast Denver
- Wyman Elementary, north Denver

#### **WHAT WOULD CHANGE**

- Cole Middle, northeast Denver. Would serve preschool through grade eight.
- Gilpin Elementary, northeast Denver. Would serve infants to grade eight with a Montessori program.
- Horace Mann Middle, northwest Denver. Would serve preschool through grade eight.
- Kunsmiller Middle southwest Denver. Would become a performing arts school for grades six through 12.
- Place Middle, southeast Denver. Would serve preschool through grade eight, with extra support for new immigrants. *Source: Denver Public Schools*

[mitchelln@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:mitchelln@RockyMountainNews.com)

<<mailto:mitchelln@RockyMountainNews.com>> or 303-954-5245

# 9 News

## Thursday, November 8, 2007

Written by Nelson Garcia  
created: 11/8/2007 6:17:03 PM  
Last updated: 11/9/2007 6:27:12 AM

## **Montbello High turnaround lands \$855,000 grant**

DENVER – When Antwan Wilson first walked into the halls of Montbello High School, he saw students who refused to go to class. He saw gang members donning their colors. The new principal also saw potential.

"We needed to make sure the school was clean and we needed to make sure the school was safe," said Wilson.

For years, Montbello had the reputation as a rough school. In January 2005, 17-year-old Contrell Townsend was stabbed to death in the cafeteria during a fight with another student, Marcus Richardson. Richardson was later convicted of manslaughter.

In the halls where gang colors used to run rampant, the only colors students wear are the ones approved by Wilson. He instilled set of strict guidelines to establish a strong culture at Montbello.

"The culture makes a difference," said Wilson. "We put in uniforms. We put in structure. We put in consequences. We put in higher expectations."

Wilson says he tapped into the passion of the teachers who had been at Montbello for years. They collaborated to turn things around at Montbello and change the mindset of students who used to just pass the time at school.

"We had a few years that we had some turmoil," said Tim Gianulis, head of the arts department. "It's a lot better now. It is a lot better just because mainly our kids want to learn."

Wilson swept out the bad element, the gang influence.

"We needed to help decide whether or not they wanted to be a part of the program or if it would be better for them to be somewhere else," he said.

Wilson says students had to follow the rules or they were out. However, instead of losing students over the past two years, the school's population has gone up by nearly 300. Wilson says disciplinary actions have gone down dramatically. After years of handing out hundreds of suspensions, Wilson says this year he's on pace for less than 100. Plus, the number of students accepted to college went up from around 40 percent to more than

83 percent of the senior class.

"When students don't feel safe, education doesn't happen and college isn't at the top of the list because surviving is," said Wilson.

The efforts at Montbello have drawn the attention of the U.S. Department of Education. Thursday, it awarded the school with a grant of \$855,000. The money will be used to support Montbello's new learning academies.

Freshmen enter a 9th Grade Academy which helps them learn the skills needed to succeed in high school and beyond. Students are also offered an Early College Academy to prepare them for the next level. A Technology Innovations Academy helps students learn about computer sciences, television broadcasting, and the arts.

"It's been huge in helping people understand how serious we are about the reform," said Wilson.

The money will be used to train teachers and purchase equipment needed for the academies.

The halls are cordial these days at Montbello. Wilson says he doesn't see problems anymore. He sees students.

"All in all, it's been a lot more difficult than I had thought," said Wilson. "We don't have the hardcore trouble makers. We don't have those kids. The kids are coming here. They want to get an education."

Top of Form

Bottom of Form