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Denver Post

Friday, November 16, 2007

School-closure foes raise ruckus to DPS board

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

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Denver school board members Thursday got an earful from about two dozen people over the plan to close eight schools and redesign five others.

Unlike the previous public hearing a month ago, Thursday's meeting was more confrontational.

At times, crowd members clapped in unison, scolded Superintendent Michael Bennet and even unveiled a banner that asked: "What's the plan?"

"If Mr. Bennet accepts these closures, shame on you," said Curtis Dotson, a member of the Black Education Advisory Council.

The school board will vote Monday on the plan.

A month ago, a public hearing was nearly split between those in favor of the proposal and those against. But Thursday, the tone was decidedly against the proposal - with only a few voicing their approval.

Groups from northeast and northwest Denver urged board members to save their schools - specifically Hallett Elementary in northeast Denver and Smedley Elementary in the northwest.

They said that their schools have been neglected and doomed for failure by a constant shuffle of principals. Others in the two-hour meeting questioned the district's reasoning for opening preschool-

through-eighth-grade programs at Cole and Horace Mann middle schools.

Cole has had a history of closures that has bruised the community, some said.

Horace Mann has been a low-performing school, and some who spoke Thursday said it is an unsafe school.

Members of Metro Organizations for People said the Cole reopening would be too fast with too many grades at once.

But Thursday, district officials defended the plan, telling the board members that the main goal is to send students to better schools with proven leaders.

Denver Public Schools officials say closing eight schools will save the district \$3.5 million a year that will follow students to their new schools and help low-performing schools.

Metro Organizations for People says the savings would be doled out unfairly, but district officials say the community group based its calculations on current students and not the same formula that the district says is more accurate.

"It takes time and it takes proving," Brad Jupp, senior policy adviser, said. "There's not a way to close a school and please everybody."

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School health centers get a boost

By Mike McPhee The Denver Post

<<mailto:mmcphee@denverpost.com?subject=The%20Denver%20Post:%20School%20health%20centers%20get%20a%20boost>>

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Following the same reasoning of a famous bank robber, Jim Martin says you put health care centers in schools "because that's where the kids are."

Martin, director of the Colorado Department of Health and Environment, and other officials announced this morning that a private foundation has donated another \$1 million to the state's school-based health centers, which now total 40 across the state.

The gift by the Colorado Trust Inc. will boost a struggling program to put doctors and nurses into schools, particularly low-income and rural schools where many of the state's 180,000 children who don't have health insurance can be found.

"It's hard to find physicians and nurses in some parts of the state," Martin said. "So we're putting the primary-care and preventive-care programs right into the schools."

Martin said four new school-based health centers will open this year in Durango, Montrose, Lamar and Basalt. In Denver, six high schools and six middle schools have their own health centers, including Lake Middle School, where officials gathered this morning to announce the \$1 million grant.

"Kids do better when they have a nurse or a doctor they know and trust," said Lt. Gov. Barbara O'Brien, the state's champion for children. "The longer they have a health center, the more it becomes a safe place for them. This is particularly true for mental health concerns, which are just as important as health care needs."

Lake Middle School principal Hans Kayser said the well-equipped center, which has five health care workers, also takes care of the neighborhood's children, regardless of whether they attend Lake.

Lake Middle School is at West 18th Avenue and Lowell Boulevard, on the north shore of Sloan's Lake and only a few blocks from St. Anthony Hospital, which supplies some of the health care workers.

"We want the school to become the center for the community," Kayser said.

The state's 40 school-based health centers operate on a budget of \$1.2 million, which is augmented by in-kind contributions from Denver

Public Schools, Denver Health Medical Center, St. Anthony and other hospitals, as well as private donations.

"A lot of these centers have been limping along without the resources they need," said Bruce Guernsey, director of the school-based program. "This grant is a huge boost.

"These centers provide a lot more than the traditional school nurse is able. They give mental-health counseling, as well as physical health care, for things like asthma, diabetes. They also provide dental screenings and preventive care."

Sabine Kortals, spokeswoman for Colorado Trust, said the trust is a nonprofit foundation that was endowed in 1985 from the proceeds of the sale of St. Luke's Hospital.

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Double dose of Spartan spark

By Neil H. Devlin
The Denver Post

<<mailto:ndevlin@denverpost.com?subject=The%20Denver%20Post:%20Double%20dose%20of%20Spartan%20spark>>

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No commercial opportunities appear forthcoming unless CEOs for Doublemint or other products suddenly decide twins who aren't a carbon copy in appearance are hot.

Matthew and Michael Mankoff are proof lookalikes aren't everything.

"They come from the same gene pool, but there aren't a lot of similarities," Thomas Jefferson High School football coach Tim Owens said of the twins.

However, looks can be deceiving.

Michael is blond, 6-feet-2 and 180 pounds, and Matthew is darker, 6 feet and 230. But what's a couple of inches, 50 pounds and different hair color between twin brothers?

"I kind of like it that way," Matthew Mankoff said.

What the seniors lack in physical resemblance is covered through allied excellence in athletics, academics, character and a commitment to their excited TJ teammates, who stand 11-0 and host Douglas County in Friday Night Lights (7 p.m.) at All-City Stadium as part of Colorado's Class 5A state quarterfinals. TJ was the most recent Denver Prep League team, in 1989, to win a big-school championship before a citywide slide began in the early 1990s and continues to spiral downward.

The Mankoff twins literally have their hands on Denver's best hopes - Matthew is the Spartans center who snaps the ball to his brother, Michael, the quarterback.

It's probably a good thing Owens has never seen the brothers argue. And the Mankoffs long have realized any attempts at masquerading as the other would be ludicrous.

"We could never really do that," Michael said. "But we could always do the same activities."

And each had a playmate who has been a constant in their lives. Into their teens, the twins are there to share responsibility, pick up each other from bad days in school and celebrate great games on the field.

Michael has a combined 18 touchdowns rushing and passing, and operates a Spartans running game that has produced upper-end victories over a powerful suburbanite such as Grandview, also a quarterfinalist; Fort Collins' Poudre, co-Front Range champion; and rival East, which opened the playoffs by downing Aurora's Overland, then fell to TJ in last week's second round.

Matthew snaps the ball and blocks ... with added personal incentive.

"As a lineman, you never want anybody to get to your quarterback, but it's little bit special when your brother's back there," Matthew said.

The Spartans have been preaching family for a reason. "We're always

together. They're a blast and they're always joking around," said Devon Fitzgerald, TJ's top rusher (1,873 yards) and scorer (22 touchdowns).

Michael is more likely to dress up and comb his hair; Matthew will be there in a T-shirt. "Michael's the quarterback and Matt's the lineman, and it's exactly like that," Fitzgerald said.

Owens regularly sees the differences of Michael "always trying to look good" and Matthew, "It's, like, 'I have my sweats on today.'"

Color the Mankoffs predictably good in the classroom, too - among TJ's 235 seniors, Matthew ranks fourth in the class (with a 4.6 grade-point average) and Michael sixth (4.4).

"They're great kids," said TJ athletic director Lani Nobles.

Area attention has come from colleges in the range of Northern Colorado and Colorado Mines, and every TJ foe in recent years - the Mankoffs, part of a freshman class in 2004 that immediately drew raves from the staff, have suited varsity for four seasons.

The Spartans' next opponent, Douglas County, is aware of what the Mankoffs bring to a determined TJ squad.

"They're very similar in how they play, and they play very well," Huskies coach Jeff Ketron said. "You can see they play like they love the game."

Feeling will be required for TJ to come out on top immediately and longer term. Douglas County, the 2005 state champion, is bidding for a third consecutive trip to the final four and second finale, and the likes of defending champ Columbine and 2006 runner-up Mullen are alive in the bracketing. Plus, the city woes of lower enrollment - more than half of league members dropped to 4A - less experience gained on youth levels, smaller staffs, and a dwindling talent base have caused the DPL big problems in the big-school playoffs for big periods.

Including this year's combined East-TJ playoff mark of 3-1, the DPL is just 9-39 since 1992. It has had one semifinalist (TJ, in 2002) since Montbello finished runner-up in 1990. Denver playoff losing streaks have totaled 15, seven and six games. All time, city schools have won only six big-school football titles - just two since 1974.

Lifelong Denver Public Schools students and proud of it, the Mankoffs crave to be part of ending dark history and beginning a much brighter trend.

They are determined to ultimately make their final TJ football team look unlike so many others in the DPL.

"It's definitely important to us. It hasn't been done in so many years," Matthew said. "We think about it and we'll try to do it for the whole city. The East kids told us to go and try win a championship for DPS."

Michael concurred, albeit in a quarterback's way: "We want to represent the city well. We're aware of that history. We wouldn't characterize ourselves as a regular city team ... it's hard to say ... we're just one of the elite programs. We're in the final eight, so we must be doing something right."

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Twin towers

Senior twins Matthew and Michael Mankoff, unlike in looks but strikingly similar and strong athletically, academically and in character, hope to help the Thomas Jefferson Spartans end Denver futility in the big-school state football playoffs.

Matthew Mankoff: 6 feet, 230 pounds, brown hair, center, 4.6 grade-point average.

Michael Mankoff: 6-2, 180, blond, quarterback, 4.4 GPA.

TJ Spartans: 11-0 in 2007, champions of the Class 5A Denver Prep/Southwest League. The city's only semifinalists since 1990 (TJ made the final four in 2002), and intent on ending Denver's big-school championship drought (it hasn't won a title since 1989; won by TJ) that includes a combined mark of 9-39 since 1992. TJ hosts Douglas County today at 7 p.m. at All-City Stadium in the Class 5A quarterfinals.

Cherry Creek

News

Thursday, November 15, 2007

Denver - A Model for After-School Programs

Written by Doug Linkhart

Thursday, 15 November 2007

Denver is one of three cities being showcased at the National League of Cities (NLC) annual conference this month. I had the honor of presenting our success stories to the rest of the country.

Our city has been working with NLC to do an inventory of after-school programs. A map and description of the programs are now available on the city's web site, at www.denvergov.org (click on the 'Schools and Youth Programs' button on the left). The inventory identified over 200 programs operating throughout the city at over 600 locations. As part of the effort we also analyzed crime and other issues by neighborhood and identified nine neighborhoods in which more after-school programs are needed.

The city is a partner in a coalition called Lights On After School, which has shown that programs help improve school attendance and grades. The kids participating in the after-school programs studied by the coalition showed improvements in attendance of 2-4% and standardized test scores that were 5-10% higher after three years in the programs. National studies have shown more dramatic differences in these and other measures.

Light On After School has programs throughout Denver including at Knight Academy and Hill Middle School. There are a host of other programs like Science Matters at Bromwell Elementary and Junior Achievement of Rocky Mountain at Carson Elementary.

After-school programs also keep kids safe. The hours between 3:00-6:00 p.m. on weekdays are the worst hours of the week for both crime and teen pregnancy. In addition, these programs help make it possible for parents who might not otherwise be able to work to have a job.

Each year the Lights On After School coalition provides more than \$1.5 million to fund after-school programs throughout the city. The Lights On After School coalition is made up of the City, Denver Public Schools, the DPS Foundation and Mile High United Way. Together, these organizations fund grants for most DPS schools, a prep league for most middle schools, homework help and literacy programs.

Our goal at the city is to work with schools and nonprofit groups to create more after-school opportunities for Denver kids especially in neighborhoods identified as those with the highest need. Then we can truly be the pride of the country

Rocky Mountain News

Friday, November 16,
2007

School-plan opponents take last shot; board will vote Monday

By Nancy Mitchell

<<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/nancy->

[mitchell/](#)> , Rocky Mountain News

Friday, November 16, 2007

Dozens of opponents to a Denver Public Schools proposal to close schools made a last-ditch effort Thursday to persuade school board members to vote no.

Several came armed with data: charts and graphs showing either progress at their schools or inequities in the DPS plan.

Some brought only their eloquence. "If the school board accepts these closings, shame on you," said Curtis Dotson with the Black Educators Advisory Council, launching into a rhyme, "Shame, shame, double shame, everybody knows your name."

But with the board vote slated for Monday, it's unclear how much influence the speakers carried. Board members did not respond during the two hours of public comment, which is typical during their public hearings.

It was clear that some speakers, at least, believe board members already have made up their minds. The Rev. Bryce Rodgers, representing parents at Hallett Elementary in northeast Denver, tapped the microphone a couple of times before speaking.

"Is this on?" he asked twice before directing his remarks to board members. "Because you know what? It seems like we're not being heard."

More than 25 speakers addressed board members on the closure proposal, with only a handful speaking in support of the plan.

Scores of observers filled the board meeting room and, at one point in the evening, an overflow crowd of 40 was seated upstairs watching the meeting on a large TV. Thursday's public hearing was the last chance for comment before the board vote on Monday. As in meetings past, parents and neighbors from Smedley Elementary in northwest Denver and from northeast Denver - Hallett, Wyman and Mitchell elementaries - were most vocal.

"It clearly seems to be a done deal," Smedley mom Maria Reyes said through an interpreter. "Any board member would have to be fooling themselves to believe this is a public process."

As she spoke, her young daughter and niece, both Smedley students, held up a sign reading, "Where is the plan? Is the plan to experiment with our kids?"

After the hearing, board members reconvened their meeting and spent more than an hour questioning DPS staff about the proposal. DPS Chief of Staff Sarah Hughes said a final draft of the motions to be voted on Monday will be completed this weekend.

DPS proposal

***Closing:** Del Pueblo, Fallis, Hallett, Mitchell, Remington, Smedley, Whiteman and Wyman elementaries.

***Changing:** Cole, Gilpin, Horace Mann, Kunsmiller and Place middle schools.

***What's next:** DPS board votes Monday on the proposal.

Thursday, November 15, 2007

Private educators eye Denver school

Hallett is on list of eight that DPS proposes to close

Nancy Mitchell, Rocky Mountain News

Friday, 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 Kiskan, 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," Kiskan 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*

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