

News Clips

Headlines

Denver Post

Monday, November 19, 2007

- No bonus for schools chief

Sunday, November 18, 2007

- DPS school vote Monday may not close arguments
- Teacher's aide at Steele faces sex-assault charge

Rocky Mountain News

Monday, November 19, 2007

- DPS to vote on closings

Saturday, November 17, 2007

- DPS enrollment highest in more than 30 years
- Popular Polaris school won't be replicated for fear of controversies

9 News

Saturday, November 17, 2007

- Teacher's aide arrested for sexually assaulting student

7 News

Saturday, November 17, 2007

- Denver Teacher's Aide Accused Of Sexually Assaulting Student

Fox 31

Sunday, November 18, 2007

- Teacher's Aide Out on Bond After Sex Assault Arrest

Denver Post

Monday, November 19, 2007

No bonus for schools chief

Denver Public Schools Superintendent Michael Bennet failed to earn a \$40,000 annual bonus because state assessment scores did not adequately improve for third-, fourth- and fifth-graders, according to the school board's evaluation released last week.

For Bennet to receive the bonus to his \$160,000 annual salary, students would have had to show 5 percent improvement above proficient on the Colorado Student Assessment Program. Scores for the 2006-07 CSAP were flat.

It was the second year Bennet did not receive his bonus, and he has eschewed any cost-of-living raises, according to Alex Sanchez, DPS spokesman.

Sunday, November 18, 2007

DPS school vote Monday may not close arguments

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 11/18/2007 02:09:00 AM MST

In districts across the country where schools have been closed, the announcements have been met with protests, marches and upheavals of school boards and leadership.

But Denver's proposal to close eight schools and rework programs in five others hadn't elicited much of a response until last week - in the remaining days leading up to Monday's school board vote.

On Wednesday, a group held a rally at Cole Middle School, decrying the plan. Another group pleaded with board members to save Smedley Elementary. And Thursday's two-hour public hearing featured the sharpest criticism yet of the plan.

"This is a recipe for disaster," said David Gonzales, a parent of a child at Smedley and one of two dozen people to speak before the board.

"There appears to be no logic to this and no transparency," said Nola Miguel of the community group Metro Organizations for People, which has questioned how the money will follow students and how the district plans to reopen Cole.

Despite last-ditch efforts to sway the district from the reforms, the plan has not been altered and the board is expected to approve the district's largest closure plan ever.

"There is no process or conversation that I have been a part of that has been as hard as this one," Superintendent Michael Bennet said Friday.

The process has been more than a year in the making.

Only 68,000 students attend Denver Public Schools, which has room for 100,000 - leaving 30 percent of the classroom space unused.

17 meetings led to the plan

In April 2006, Bennet suggested convening a blue-ribbon citizens committee to address the district's underused facilities and how to improve student achievement.

That group, called A-Plus Denver, featured some of the most powerful figures in Denver, including former mayors Wellington Webb and Federico Peña.

The group met 17 times to develop the principles and criteria for closure, held public meetings and provided the district with a thorough checklist to consider before closing schools.

The criteria suggested as many as 40 schools could close, but on Oct. 1 Bennet announced only eight elementary schools would be considered - Hallett, Mitchell, Wyman, Whiteman, Fallis, Del Pueblo, Smedley and Remington. And he recommended changing programs in five schools - Horace Mann, Place and Cole would become preschool through eighth-grade schools; Gilpin would become an infant through eighth-grade Montessori; and Kunsmiller would be an arts academy.

The controversy that has accompanied school-closure proposals in other cities never really developed in Denver - except for a vocal disagreement by many Smedley parents.

Concerns focus on timeline

The lack of discord was attributed to the thorough A-Plus process as well as a plan that cut the number of closures to under 10. Some believed the district learned from the problems encountered in other cities.

"Denver did a good job," said Tony Lewis, director of the Donnell-Kay Foundation and a member of the A-Plus committee. "Some of it was the A-Plus committee, some of it was

the district applying the criteria. Why wouldn't you look at those (schools) for closure?"

As Monday's vote neared, though, criticism grew. A-Plus Denver's final report contained some concerns, especially over the relatively fast timeline for opening new schools. Metro Organizations for People sent letters to the board members saying plans appeared to be unclear.

"The challenge for us is to provide options for kids, but not make every decision of what the schools are like before engaging the community," Bennet said.

"You hear from people who say, 'Well, why didn't you just make this school better instead of closing it,'" Bennet said. "There is a certain logic to that. It's hard for people to understand the consolidation approach will be better for kids."

If the board votes yes Monday, Bennet said, the onus will be on the district - which has promised community meetings and help with transitions.

"The most important piece is the execution and being able to make good on the promise that the new schools will be better than the ones they are leaving," Bennet said. "The only answer I have is, we have to do whatever it takes to make sure it does succeed."

Jeremy P. Meyer: 303-954-1367 or jpmeyer@denverpost.com
<<mailto:jpmeyer@denverpost.com>>

Teacher's aide at Steele faces sex-assault charge

DENVER — A teacher's aide at a Denver school has been charged with sexual assault on a child.

Gary Wade, a paraprofessional at Steele Elementary School in Denver, was arrested last week after a Denver police investigation, police spokesman Sonny Jackson said Saturday.

Wade, 59, was charged with sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust. No other details about the case were available Saturday, Jackson said.

Rocky Mountain News

Monday, November 19, 2007

DPS to vote on closings

Outcome for kids an issue weighing on all involved

By [Nancy Mitchell](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/nancy-mitchell/) <<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/nancy-mitchell/>> , **Rocky Mountain News** ([Contact](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/nancy-mitchell/contact/) <<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/nancy-mitchell/contact/>>)

Monday, November 19, 2007

Denver school board members worked through the weekend to finalize a historic plan to close eight schools and change five more, with some members still undecided Sunday on how they will vote tonight.

Board member Jeannie Kaplan spent Saturday in the North Park Hill neighborhood around Hallett Elementary, one of the eight schools that could be closed.

Kaplan said she wanted to see for herself the safety concerns raised by Hallett parents if their children were to be sent to nearby Smith and Stedman elementaries.

"I only have one more sleepless night to go through," Kaplan said Sunday afternoon as she wrestled with how she would vote on the proposal that has sparked protests.

"I know school reform is messy," she said. "The bottom line is, is this better than doing nothing? Are we really providing something better for kids?"

Historic proposal

If board members approve the proposal, their vote will set into motion the largest number of school closings that Denver Public Schools has undertaken at one time, eliminating 3,000 classroom seats. Even then, the district would have more than 25,000 empty seats.

How successful Superintendent Michael Bennet is in closing the eight schools - and the proposal is expected to pass - likely will set the stage for future reform.

Handle it well and it will be much easier to deal with all the rest of that empty space not so well, and it will not be so easy.

Already, the public vetting of the school-closing proposal during the past six weeks has highlighted key areas of concern for how Bennet and his staff operate.

Some school board members have complained that it has been difficult to get their questions answered. And residents of some of DPS' most fragile communities, such as the families living around Cole Middle School in northeast Denver, worry that their concerns are not being taken seriously.

"We felt like we were being made fun of," parent Karla Loaiza said last week, after she and other parents met with DPS staff to talk about proposed changes at Cole.

Reform, again

Last Wednesday, as dozens of families gathered on the steps of Cole to protest the closing plan, Jeremy Simons walked up with his two young daughters.

"I feel like deja vu here," said Simons, who worked at Cole before it was taken over by the state in 2005. "I was standing on these steps three years ago, saying the same thing."

Few Denver neighborhoods have endured the kind of whip-saw reform efforts that have tumbled through this sprawling school in one of the city's poorest areas.

In 2001, when state test scores showed Cole was the lowest-performing middle school in Colorado, Padres Unidos or Parents United put a reform plan together.

Two years later, with Cole still at rock-bottom, former Superintendent Jerry Wartgow rallied the community to tutor students on Saturdays.

When scores still didn't rise, the state took over Cole and turned it into a charter run by the Knowledge Is Power Program. Achievement rose, but many neighborhood children scattered. Then KIPP pulled out of Cole, leaving the school dormant this year.

Different, better?

So when Bennet unveiled his closing plan Oct. 1 that closed nearby Mitchell and Wyman elementary schools and funneled those children into a new Cole for children in preschool through eighth grade, parents were skeptical.

When they found out the new school didn't - and still doesn't - have a principal, they marched, carrying signs declaring, "No more experimenting with our children."

"We don't want just something different," Loaiza, who has a child at Mitchell, told DPS staff last week. "We want something better."

Loaiza and other members of the advocacy group Metro Organizations for People are urging DPS to conduct a national search for a principal and to give that person a year to plan - before reopening Cole.

DPS board members said Sunday that they are responding to those concerns by adding deadlines for hiring a principal in their proposal for tonight's vote.

"I think they're trying," Loaiza said Sunday, but added, "I don't know if I can say whether we were heard until I see what the final motion is."

A larger voice

Lonnie McCabe, who served on the A+ Denver citizens panel that advised DPS on school-closing criteria, said it's not hard to understand why some communities don't have a lot of faith in DPS.

Cole, for example, was a sought-after school when it housed the Denver School of the Arts program. Then DPS moved the program elsewhere.

"It just looks like once a wonderful idea hits these communities, it is taken from them and placed in affluent communities where the children are not in as great a need as the children from Cole and Mitchell," McCabe said.

McCabe, a nonprofit consultant whose children attended Hallett, said that A+ Denver and DPS need to get the community more involved in decision-making. A+ Denver, for example, is weighted more heavily with business and community leaders than typical DPS parents, he said.

"I think the people who are going to be affected by this should have a larger voice," McCabe said. "If there had been more DPS parents involved, the outcome may have been a little different."

Board questions

Details about the closing plan were sometimes slow in coming even for school board members. They did not receive financial estimates of the plan until Nov. 8, five weeks after Bennet announced his proposal and 11 days before the vote.

Even then, the data was condensed into a single sheet containing items such as "Facility Improvement - Horace Mann - \$664,000," with no details.

The list omitted any mention of the costs of retrofitting Kunsmiller as an arts school. Later, in response to a *Rocky Mountain News* open-records request, DPS provided a "draft" estimate listing the cost as \$384,065 over four years.

It's uncertain when school board members received the Kunsmiller data. Board meetings are required to be public only when more than two members attend. Since at least Oct. 1, DPS staff have met privately each week with some members - two at a time - to field concerns about the closing plan.

Still, last Thursday, four days before the vote and after the board's last public hearing on the closing plan, board members spent more than an hour quizzing DPS staff.

"This is really the first opportunity we've had to comprehensively look at this plan and address all the questions," said board member Jill Conrad, reading off a long list.

Sunday, Conrad said she would have liked to have had the question-and-answer session a week earlier since she was spending part of the day working with DPS staff to craft the final proposal.

Still, Conrad said she was satisfied with the information she had received and planned to vote yes.

'90 percent sure'

Other board members, such as Kaplan, were uncertain. Board member Michelle Moss said she was "90 percent" sure she would vote yes.

"I think the biggest reason is that I keep asking myself, will kids be better off if we do this than if we don't do it," she said. "I keep coming back to the fact that I think they will."

Moss said she would have preferred a more extensive reform proposal. But she noted the five schools slated for change will be in the spotlight.

"It's clearly a beginning for me because I think we have so much work to do," she said. "But in the long run, I do think these schools will have the attention and the focus on them that is needed for improvement. And I'm not sure they would have gotten it any other way."

Proposal

Denver school board members will vote tonight on a plan to close eight schools and change five others.

Which schools would close? Del Pueblo, Fallis, Hallett, Mitchell, Remington, Smedley, Whiteman and Wyman elementaries

Which schools would change? Cole Middle, Gilpin Elementary, Horace Mann Middle, Kunsmiller Middle and Place Middle

When would the changes happen? The eight elementary schools would close at the end of this school year; the changed schools would open in fall 2008.

Where would the students in the closed schools go?* Del Pueblo to Greenlee Moore, Fallis and Whiteman to the new Placeo Hallett to Smith and Stedman elementaries Mitchell and Wyman to the new Coleo Remington and Smedley to the new Horace Mann

Saturday, November 17, 2007

DPS enrollment highest in more than 30 years

By **Nancy Mitchell** <<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/nancy-mitchell/>> , **Rocky Mountain News** (**Contact** <<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/nancy-mitchell/contact/>>)

Saturday, November 17, 2007

Enrollment in Denver Public Schools this fall hit its highest point in more than 30 years, as the city schools appear to be continuing their gradual rebound from the family flight that came with mandated busing.

The total number of students in Denver schools this fall was 73,873, up 474 from the fall of 2006 and the highest since fall 1976, when enrollment reached 75,551.

"It's very, very good news," DPS chief operating officer Tom Boasberg said Friday. "It's a real credit to the reform efforts and to the outstanding efforts of our teachers and our principals."

District records dating back to 1962 show that DPS enrollment hit a high of 97,849 students in 1969. That was the year that a federal judge ordered limited busing in Park Hill to desegregate schools.

Enrollment dropped in 1970 and continued to decline to a low of 58,312 in 1989, as busing spread across the city and families - many of them white - fled to the suburbs. White students, who were 65 percent of enrollment in 1968, now make up about 20 percent of DPS students.

By 1995, when a judge ordered the end of busing, student numbers had inched up to 64,358. Between fall 1995 and fall 2007, enrollment has grown by more than 9,500 students.

Winning families back to DPS has been a goal of DPS Superintendent Michael Bennet. So he and Boasberg welcomed this year's enrollment count.

"It's incredibly encouraging," Boasberg said.

But pulling apart the numbers shows that DPS still has work to do. As in recent years, the growth is coming in two areas - charter schools and preschool programs.

In fact, enrollment in traditional Denver schools in grades kindergarten through 12 actually dropped 180 students from fall 2006 to fall 2007.

Where the growth is occurring is important for financial reasons. DPS receives about \$7,000 per pupil for full-time students in its traditional schools. But most preschool or early childhood education seats are for half-day students and, by law, the district passes on about 95 percent of its per-pupil dollars for charter students to their charter schools.

Still, Boasberg said, "we obviously think the growth of ECE students is extremely important both for the kids . . . and also, very good for DPS, because many of them will continue on in the district schools."

Because DPS has closed relatively few schools since the 1960s, the district has 30,000 empty classroom seats. Monday, school board members will be asked to vote on a proposal to close eight schools, eliminating about 3,000 seats. As part of the package, they also will be asked to expand the number of full-time preschool seats from 400 to between 3,000 and 4,000.

Some traditional DPS schools are defying the trend of losing enrollment. Abraham Lincoln High School increased its numbers by 157 students to 1,602.

Popular Polaris school won't be replicated for fear of controversy

By [Nancy Mitchell](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/nancy-mitchell/) <<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/nancy-mitchell/>> , Rocky Mountain News ([Contact](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/nancy-mitchell/contact/) <<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/nancy-mitchell/contact/>>)

Saturday, November 17, 2007

One of Denver Public Schools' most successful and sought-after programs will not be replicated next fall, in part because DPS leaders are worried about potential controversy.

The school, Polaris at Ebert Elementary in the Five Points neighborhood, is the district's only stand-alone school for gifted and talented children. Its principal, Diana Howard, has long wanted to add a school and to make both more

economically and ethnically diverse.

Howard liked Hallett Elementary in northeast Denver, which is proposed for closure.

Denver school board members voted in February to support the replication of Polaris in fall 2008 but did not specify a location. This week, Howard was told that would not happen.

"There's too much controversy," she said Friday. "They cannot move a school like this into a school being closed, where children are perhaps not being sent to more wonderful options."

Hallett is in a minority neighborhood and is close to Stapleton, home to a number of Polaris families - and those who would like to be.

"These kinds of programs are the ones that will help bring in kids who are not going to DPS now," said Brian Weber, vice president for education at the Stapleton Foundation. "I just hate seeing this missed opportunity."

Brad Jupp, DPS senior academic policy adviser, admitted the district was concerned about controversy if the program opened next fall in a newly closed school.

"What we didn't want to do was to make a . . . miststep and put the school in a place that wasn't appropriate," he said.

9 News

Saturday, November 17, 2007

Teacher's aide arrested for sexually assaulting student

written by: [Nelson Garcia](mailto:nelson.garcia@9news.com)

<mailto:nelson.garcia@9news.com?subject=RE:Teacher's%20aide%20arrested%20for%20sexually%20assaulting%20student> , Reporter

updated by: [Colleen Locke](mailto:colleen.locke@9news.com)

<mailto:colleen.locke@9news.com?subject=RE:Teacher's%20aide%20arrested%20for%20sexually%20assaulting%20student> , **Producer**

DENVER – Police have booked a teacher's aide on a charge of sexual assault on

a child by a person in position of trust. Investigators say there's at least one victim, but there may be more.

Fifty-seven year old Gary Wade works at Steele Elementary School, located at the intersection of Alameda Avenue and Marion Parkway in Denver. This is a school with a preschool through 5th grade program meaning that nearly all the students are 10 years old or younger.

"It had been brought to the attention of the faculty there that he had some inappropriate, had done something inappropriate with a student," said Sonny Jackson, Denver Police spokesperson.

On Friday, November 9, the Denver Public Schools Safety and Security Department contacted police. Five days later, investigators arrested Wade who later posted bond.

Steele Elementary Principal Katherine Pullen sent a letter home to parents. She asked for anyone with information to call the investigator. The letter did state the arrest was for "alleged sexual assaults on students."

Jackson would not elaborate on the investigation.

"It's not completed as of yet," he said.

David Rudder is a parent of a student at Steele Elementary.

"We love this school. My daughter's in kindergarten. My son will be joining ECE next year," said Rudder.

Rudder says these allegations are surprising.

"And, I guess this sort of thing does happen and that's too bad, but it won't stop us from going to the school," he said.

Another parent thinks Wade is being falsely accused.

"Gary Wade is a very loving man," Kim Sutherland said. "He's a dedicated father. His son has a traumatic brain injury and he's given up his whole entire life and his whole entire career to dedicate his life to his son."

The district issued the following statement Saturday: "The safety and well-being of our students is of utmost importance to Steele Elementary and Denver Public Schools. Denver Public Schools contacts the proper authorities whenever there's any allegation of misconduct of an adult involving children."

"I know this school and I know that if it has been happening, it hasn't been

happening a long time," said Rudder. "They would be vigilant about this." Police are looking for any other potential victims.

"(I) should know if my daughter has run into him, check to make sure everything's OK," said Rudder.

Wade does not have an extensive criminal record, but over the past few months he amassed a series of traffic violations and had a warrant issued for his arrest for failing to show up in court for his traffic issues.

Jackson says schools are not the place for allegations like this.

"In a place that they should be considered the most safe, should be the next place close to your home would be basically the schools," said Jackson.

"Children are your most vulnerable ones in our society. Anytime you hear about someone taking advantage of, or possibly taking advantage of one of our children or doing something to them, it's very troubling."

7 News

Saturday, November 17, 2007

Denver Teacher's Aide Accused Of Sexually Assaulting Student

School Asks Parents To Contact Police With Information

POSTED: 9:13 pm MST November 18, 2007

UPDATED: 6:18 am MST November 19, 2007

DENVER, Colo -- Denver police arrest a teacher's aide after allegations that he sexually assaulted a student at Steele Elementary School, 320 S. Marion Pkwy.

They booked Gary Wade, 57, last week on a complaint of sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust.

Police said the school contacted them on Nov. 9 about the allegations, but that it is still early in the investigation.

"We don't take these allegations lightly. We dive into it and see what exactly happened here, what did transpire," said Sonny Jackson, Denver police spokesman. "We launched an investigation into those allegations and determined that there was something

inappropriate here.”

The Steel principal sent a letter to parents stating a paraprofessional had been arrested for "alleged sexual assaults on students", but police would not comment on how many students could be involved.

The letter also asked anyone with information on the allegations to contact the police investigator at 720-913-6068.

Copyright 2007 by TheDenverChannel.com
<<mailto:dennews@thedenverchannel.com>> . All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Fox 31

Sunday, November 18, 2007

Teacher's Aide Out on Bond After Sex Assault Arrest

Last Edited: Sunday, 18 Nov 2007, 9:05 PM MST

A Teacher's aide accused of sexually assaulting an elementary school student has bonded out of jail.

Police charged Gary Wade, 59, with sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust.

Wade worked as a para-professional at Steele elementary school.

Investigators say it's an active case and will be presented to the District Attorney.