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Denver Post

Tuesday, November 20, 2007

DPS school closure plan passes

Eight elementary buildings will be shuttered and five will have revamped programs after Monday night's 7-0 vote.

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 11/20/2007 06:07:18 AM MST

Denver Public Schools will close eight elementary schools next year and develop new programs at five other schools under a sweeping reform plan approved 7-0 by the school board Monday.

The district has 30,000 empty classroom seats because of declining enrollment, and closing the schools reduces that number by about 3,000. It also will free up about \$3.5 million annually in operational costs, which the district says will be directed back to classrooms to help boost achievement.

Last week, community groups marched and appeared at a board meeting to plead for a change of course.

On Monday night, several students from Smedley Elementary entered the board room in their school T-shirts and sat on the floor - hoping their northwest Denver school would be spared.

It was not.

Each board member and Superintendent Michael Bennet explained in passionate terms why DPS must move ahead with the largest school closure in its history.

"We have to do something better for our kids with a sense of urgency," said Kevin Patterson, who represents the area in which three schools were closed and two are getting new programs.

"The question becomes is doing nothing better than what we have proposed," said Jeannie Kaplan, whose district includes two closed schools and one school being changed. "The reform plan does have the potential for better opportunities for our kids."

And Lucia Guzman, who ended her final term Monday, said she was touched by the Smedley children.

"Looking at them face to face ... it really does put a personal feeling on what we are doing," she said. "If we do not move forward and educate these children, all the work of Martin Luther King Jr. has been in vain, all the work of César Chávez has been in vain. ... We are changing history. Not just for ourselves, but for our children."

The district will close Fallis, Whiteman, Wyman, Hallett, Mitchell, Smedley and Remington elementary schools next school year. The program at Del Pueblo Elementary ended this year, and the building was closed as part of the vote.

New programs will be developed at Horace Mann, Place, Cole, Kunsmiller and Gilpin.

The district said it must close buildings because it has too much space and not enough students.

"This plan will lead us to success," said Theresa Peña, who was reinstated as board president.

The administration used criteria developed by the citizen's group A-Plus Denver to decide which buildings to close - with the top goal of sending students to better schools than the ones they are leaving.

Of the \$3.5 million saved by closing buildings, the district says \$2 million will follow students from their closed schools. Another \$1 million will support 10 underperforming schools, and about \$400,000 will fund development of new high-performing schools through a request-for-proposal process that also was approved Monday.

Board members said community concerns raised over the past two months helped them craft a package they say will hold the district accountable.

Specifically, a principal for the new Cole must be hired by Dec. 20. Also, Cole will start next year as a preschool-through-seventh-grade program, adding eighth-graders in the future.

The district also will develop new programs using a new development plan that will have conditions and milestones to be monitored by the board.

Bennet, who has led DPS and its reform effort since June 2005, spoke eloquently about the district's mission.

In every elementary school, Bennet said he sees students who believe they can achieve anything and that the color of their skin or their family's economic status are mere curiosities rather than what defines them.

"We have a responsibility to those students and the 70,000 students who go to Denver Public Schools," he said.

The goal is to make it so children do not have the odds stacked against them, to enable them "to pursue their dreams."

"This effort will take more," he said. "It's going to take the energy of the entire city."

Members of the Metro Organizations for People, who criticized the plan and offered their own reforms, said in a statement that they were encouraged by the changes put in place but hope the district will be vigilant in tracking students and making sure reforms work.

"We are a little disappointed that they didn't apply a better thought process to a lot of it," said Jennifer Gonzalez, of the Metro Organizations for People. "I believe they have good intentions. We'll find out. They say the path to hell is paved with good intentions."

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Rocky Mountain News

Tuesday, November 20, 2007

DPS board OKs closure plan

Savings to help low performers, spur innovation

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/>>)

Tuesday, November 20, 2007

Denver Public Schools board members unanimously approved a plan Monday to close eight schools and change five others, launching the district's largest closure plan in its history.

One by one, board members explained their vote on a proposal that will displace more than 3,000 students next fall.

"It is not the closure of the children, it is not the slamming of the door in the parents' faces . . . it is really the opening of the door for these families and their children," said the Rev. Lucia Guzman, who was attending the final board meeting of her eight-year tenure.

"It is for them," she said. "For too many years, the children of the district have not been able to receive the quality of educational opportunity that they need and deserve."

The plan, outlined Oct. 1 by Superintendent Michael Bennet, will funnel the \$3.5 million annually in savings from the closures into schools with the displaced students and into the district's 10 lowest-performing schools as ranked by the state.

It also will help seed a schools development office intended to foster innovative programs, with an initial emphasis on middle and high schools.

Bennet acknowledged the plan may be "imperfect" but said it will move the district forward in its goal of becoming the best urban school district in the nation.

'Odds are stacked'

In every city in America, he said, "the odds are stacked against you if you are poor, the odds are stacked against you if you speak a different language, the odds are stacked against you if your parents aren't educated.

"We are going . . . to do everything we can to make sure our children's destinies are secure, that there is equality, that they will be able to pursue their dreams."

About a dozen students and parents from Smedley Elementary in northwest Denver staged a small protest, all wearing blue "Smedley Stars" T-shirts and unfurling a sign.

They entered the board room during the vote, turning to stand in the middle of the room to face board members.

But there was no time set aside for public comment, and the Smedley families and others from the closed schools quietly left the building after the vote.

"I'm tired of seeing the kids being used for their experiments," said Jennifer Gonzalez, who has five children in northeast Denver schools, the area perhaps most affected. "They're the ones who suffer in the end. What are they going to do for these kids if this plan fails?"

Several board members thanked Smedley parents and those, like Gonzalez, who belong to Metro Organizations for People, another group that protested.

School Board President Theresa Pena agreed leaders "have not delivered on that promise" of a better education for all Denver students.

But she and other board members said the closure proposal begins to do so.

"I want to thank you for holding us accountable," Pena told parents. "Please don't lose that - we need your help. We need more of the community to engage."

Other pieces of the reform plan approved Thursday include expanding full-day preschool seats for Denver families and pursuing the stabilization of the district's budget through refinancing its pension plan

<http://www.postnewsautos.com/>

DPS gives go-ahead to two charter schools

Denver school board members on Thursday approved two new charter schools to open next fall, including an expansion of the popular Denver School of Science and Technology.

The school will open a middle school to complement its existing high school.

DSST is consistently among the city's top schools on annual state exams.

Denver Public Schools also approved the creation of the Denver Venture School, which will open to 120 ninth-graders in August. The school will combine a college prep curriculum with the project-based learning model Expeditionary Learning. As part of the curriculum, students will start and run businesses.

School board members denied a charter application from the private Escuela de Guadalupe, after staff raised legal concerns. State law prohibits a private school from converting to a charter unless substantial changes are made.

DPS board votes 7-0 for closure plan

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

Originally published 06:19 p.m., November 19, 2007

Updated 06:35 p.m., November 19, 2007

Members of the Denver School Board tonight voted 7-0 in favor of an historic plan to close eight schools and overhaul five others.

The plan is expected to save the district about \$3.5 million annually, which will be

funneled into improving other schools.

It also will eliminate about 3,000 of the district's 30,000 empty classroom seats.

The vote sets into motion the largest number of school closings that DPS has undertaken at one time. Even so, the district will still have an estimated 25,000 empty seats once the eight closures take place.

How successful Superintendent Michael Bennet manages the closures 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.

Criticism about the DPS closure plan was relatively mild until last week, when parents protested on the steps of Cole Middle School in northeast Denver.

Cole is not slated for closure, but it will be taking displaced students from nearby Mitchell school.

Since Cole has been subjected to repeated - and mostly unsuccessful - reforms, Mitchell parents worry Cole still won't be up to snuff academically.

"Enough is enough," Karla Loaiza, whose children attend Mitchel, told the crowd. "No more experimenting with our children."

"We don't want just something different," she said. "We want something better."

Loaiza and other members of Metro Organizations for People, a community organizing group, say the plan needs more time.

DPS has yet to hire a principal for the new school - Bennet said he hopes one can be hired by month's end - and many details about how the school will operate remain vague.

After Bennet unveiled the plan Oct. 1, some school board members complained it was difficult to get their questions answered in the ensuing weeks.

And parents like Loaiza believed their concerns were not being taken seriously.

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 didn'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 probably should have gotten 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.

"If there had been more DPS parents involved, the outcome may have been a little different."

9 News

Monday, November 19, 2007

DPS board votes to close 8 schools

written by: [Jeffrey Wolf](#)

<<mailto:jeff.wolf@9news.com?subject=RE:DPS%20board%20votes%20to%20close%208%20schools%20>> , Web Producer

created: 11/19/2007 1:56:04 PM

Last updated: 11/19/2007 9:49:40 PM

DENVER – The Denver Public School Board voted to approve a plan that would close eight schools and reform five others on Monday evening.

The plan, called the Denver Plan, was proposed by DPS Superintendent Michael Bennet in early October after a study was finished by a separate committee called A+ Denver. The independent group was formed back in April 2006.

"I want to thank the school board for taking on this difficult decision," said Bennet during Monday night's meeting.

The following schools will be closed:

- Remington Elementary School, 4735 Pecos St., Denver
- Smedley Elementary School, 4250 Shoshone St., Denver
- Del Pueblo Elementary School, 750 Galapago St., Denver
- Whiteman Elementary School, 451 Newport St., Denver
- Fallis Elementary School, 6700 E Virginia Ave., Denver

- Mitchell Elementary School, 1350 E 33rd Ave., Denver
- Wyman Elementary School, 1690 Williams St., Denver
- Hallett Elementary School, 2950 Jasmine St., Denver

Del Pueblo Elementary School was already closed at the beginning of the school year.

The district has about 30 percent of its classrooms empty and Bennet says consolidating programs is expected to save \$3.5 million per year. The money saved will then be pumped back into classrooms to help struggling programs.

"This effort is going to take much more, as we've said, than anything the Denver Public Schools can do by itself or a school can do alone," said Bennet. "It's going to take the energy of an entire city."

As part of Bennet's plan, five schools will undergo major reforms:

- Horace Mann Middle School, 4130 Navajo St., Denver
- Place Middle School, 7125 Cherry Creek North Dr., Denver
- Gilpin K-8, 2949 California St., Denver
- Kunsmiller Middle School, 2250 S. Quitman Way, Denver
- Cole Middle School, 3240 Humboldt St., Denver

Horace Mann and Place will become pre-school through 8th grade schools; Gilpin will be changed to a Montessori program; Kunsmiller will become an arts academy for grades 6 through 12; and Cole will reopen as a pre-school through 8th grade school after closing and being leased to a charter school three years ago.

"I am pleased we had the full support of the board," Bennet said after the vote. "We will now concentrate our energy on pursuing the six proposals (in the plan) and ensure families and students affected by the changes are supported well."

Kara Loaiza has children that currently go to Mitchell Elementary. She says she is not sure where they will go next year when the school is closed.

"I'm trying to be very calm. I just don't know what to do at this point," she said. "I think it's really difficult for our families to just soak that in. I think they could have given it one more year."

However, Loaiza says she is optimistic.

"The decision's been made," she said. "We're willing to work with Denver Public Schools and to see what the options are out there for our children."

DPS has had several meetings with parents of students at the schools scheduled

for closure since Bennet announced the plan in early October.

"The board considered the recommendations, feedback and input gathered during one of the most extensive community processes any urban school district in this country has undergone," said Board President Theresa Peña.

The DPS board started its meeting around 5 p.m. and voted around 6:15 p.m.

The schools will start closing next fall.

[Click here for more information about The Denver Plan and the school closings](http://www.9news.com/pdfs/DPS_school_closures.pdf)
<http://www.9news.com/pdfs/DPS_school_closures.pdf> .

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7 News

Monday, November 19, 2007

Board Of Education Unanimously Approves School Closure Plan

Proposal Will Close Largest Number Of Schools At One Time In Denver's History

POSTED: 2:34 pm MST November 19, 2007

UPDATED: 11:10 pm MST November 19, 2007

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[**DENVER** -- Voting 7-0 the Denver Public School Board approved a plan to close eight schools in under-enrolled or poor performing Denver elementary schools Monday night.](http://www.thedenverchannel.com/den/sh/toafriend/index.cfm?page=http://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/14642095/detail.html%22,%22width=450,height=250%22);><javascript:popUp(%22http://cf.thedenverchannel.com/den/sh/toafriend/index.cfm?page=http://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/14642095/detail.html%22,%22width=450,height=250%22);></p></div><div data-bbox=)

The schools to be closed include: Hallet Science & Technology Academy, Wyman, Del Pueblo, Mitchell, Fallis, Whiteman, Smedley and Remington.

The plan also calls for closing several schools, then reopening them with different curriculums or grade levels. The schools in that plan are Horace Mann, Gilpin, Place, Kunsmiller and Cole.

Cole Middle School, which is in one of Denver's poorest neighborhoods, will be shut down and reopened for preschool through eighth grade.

Many people, from parents to principals to board members, said they have lost sleep over the proposal.

Some of these schools have been open for more than 100 years.

"It is controversial, but I think what's important is that we're doing the best thing for kids and making sure that kids have quality public schools," said Kim Ursetta, president of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association.

It's timing that couldn't be worse for Lora Shangreaux, who just moved into the area.

"The reason why I chose this school is they told me they have a lot of programs for Native American kids," said Shangreaux.

The idea of closing eight schools is a historic proposal that has weighed heavily on board member Michelle Moss.

"We are really trying to move forward academic achievement in this district, to close the achievement gap," Moss said.

The reorganization plan has also tortured parents and teachers.

"Making sure there's transportation, clear options for kids, additional resources for struggling schools," Ursetta said.

And while there is optimism, there is also great angst in neighborhoods that stand to lose a part of their identity.

"This is not a better option. Not for my kids, not for any of the kids or any members of this community at all," said one parent at Smedley, where parents and students held a protest last week.

There is still much uncertainty among parents and teachers about who their principals will be and what their educational programs will look like next year.

If you have questions about why Denver Public Schools is making these changes or what the new programs will look like or even the qualifications of the new principals, check out the [list of frequently asked questions and answers from the school district](http://www.dpsk12.org/district_reform/FAQs/FAQ_111507.pdf) <http://www.dpsk12.org/district_reform/FAQs/FAQ_111507.pdf> .

Fox 31

Monday, November 19, 2007

DPS Board Unanimously Approves School Closures

Last Edited: Monday, 19 Nov 2007, 8:45 PM MST
Created: Monday, 19 Nov 2007, 6:35 PM MST

By KIM POSEY, Reporter

DENVER - Students and parents from Smedley Elementary School showed up at the DPS Board meeting Monday night hoping their school would be taken off the chopping block.

But the board voted unanimously to close eight schools and create five new schools in existing buildings.

The schools that will close the end of this school year are Del Pueblo, Fallis, Hallett, Mitchell, Remington, Smedley, Whiteman and Wyman.

"Their new schools will be substantially better than the ones they left," said DPS Superintendent Michael Bennet.

The problem, according to DPS, is these schools have low enrollment, extra space and not enough resources.

Bennet says, "This is not going to be an incremental solution, but the transformation of the Denver Public Schools into the best big city school district in the country."

Eight DPS Schools Face Closure

Last Edited: Monday, 19 Nov 2007, 10:39 AM MST

DENVER - The Denver Public School board is scheduled to vote Monday on a controversial plan to close eight elementary schools and change programs at five others.

The meeting is scheduled for 5:00 p.m. at DPS headquarters, located at 9th and Grant.

There are eight elementary schools on the list of recommended closures:

- * Remington
- * Smedley
- * Del Pueblo
- * Whiteman
- * Fallis
- * Mitchell
- * Wyman
- * Hallett

FOX 31 News stopped by one of those schools, Smedley Elementary. Even though things don't look too promising, parents and students there still held out hope that Smedley would not close.

The recommendation also includes dramatic changes in the academic programs at five other schools.

Place Middle School would cease operations and be changed to a magnet school for pre-schoolers through eighth-graders with a focus on immigrants and English-language learners. The new Place would become the neighborhood school for Whiteman and Fallis students.

Gilpin K-8 would become a Montessori school, serving infants through eighth grade.

Cole would reopen for pre-schoolers through eighth-graders and become the neighborhood school for Mitchell and Wyman students.

Horace Mann Middle School would cease operations and become a new preschool through eighth grade school.

Kunsmiller Middle School would cease operations and become a new sixth grade through 12th grade arts magnet program