

News Clips

Headlines

Rocky Mountain News

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- State to hand out 'report cards' today

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## JOHNSON: Escuela de Guadalupe finds funds to stay open

By [Bill Johnson](#)

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I would not have bet five pennies that David Carr could pull it off.

"The last time I was sitting here talking with you," the 38-year-old man said, looking exhausted, leaning back hard in his chair and running his fingers through his hair, "I didn't really think I would, either."

All that he had to do that day in mid-October was to somehow come up with about \$250,000 over the next four weeks to keep academically outstanding but financially strapped Escuela de Guadalupe elementary school on Denver's northwest side from shutting its doors.

Desperate parents that week were planning garage and bake sales. Maybe they could cobble together some tamales, cakes and the like and sell them door to door. The effort seemed as sad as it was doomed to failure.

And then, Christmas arrived a month early.

Word of the school's plight in this space and elsewhere triggered a flood of unexpected cash, including four separate gifts of \$50,000 each.

"Three of the four had never given to the school before, and I'm pretty sure none of them had known virtually anything about us," David Carr, the school's president, said.

The school tried everything, and as of Halloween, had raised about \$20,000. Its "SOS" entertainment event Nov. 19 at the Museo de las Americas was attended by about 150 people and raised another \$18,000.

Remember the parents?

"Our parents set the tone," David Carr said. "They engaged at a much higher level than ever before, higher than even I expected they would."

People he had never heard of began dropping off money.

He tells of a group of parents, all of them housekeepers, who for the first time approached their employers. Could they help?

"That, alone," David Carr said, "resulted in over \$7,000 of donations."

The sale of tamales and menudo at nearby Our Lady of Guadalupe Church raised \$1,200. A parent-organized garage sale at the school took in another \$1,400.

"The parents knew we were exploring charter school plans, and it just horrified them," he said. "They knew they had to face up to the fact that this school may not be in existence next year. They went to work."

It was a good move. Denver Public Schools on Nov. 19 denied Escuela de Guadalupe's charter application because of legal concerns.

The school's board of trustees on Friday agreed after a five-hour meeting to keep the school open another year.

The school, after all, in just over one month, had raised slightly more than \$320,000.

The faculty and staff were notified of the decision on Monday, David Carr said. There were tears.

"In a lot of ways, I still can't believe it," he said. "Everything happened so fast. Each of our major donors told us separately, 'Here is a school that works, and those that work ought to stay around.' "

The school at 34th Avenue and Pecos Street, a tiny, two-story brick structure, was created 10 years ago to serve children of the poorest in the neighborhood, the idea being to get them out of the circle of poverty by directing them away from the educational and social pitfalls that lurk in many urban schools.

Today, 71 percent of those enrolled qualify for the free or highly subsidized school lunch program. Only a handful pay full tuition.

Each of the 103 students is taught in English and Spanish. Thanks to a withering academic workload, most students test well beyond grade level.

It is, in short, a marvelous school. For it to have been shuttered, well, that would have been tragic.

Yet, what of next year?

The board of trustees, David Carr said, agreed Friday to three steps aimed at avoiding the need for another miracle. It would expand the board from 12 to 20, increasing the number of people doing fundraising work.

The school will hire a staff member whose sole job will be coordinating fundraising. And it will open a few more spaces for families whose children can afford full tuition.

Yes, there is a waiting list at Escuela de Guadalupe.

"In the past," David Carr said, "we turned some of those families away as part of our mission to be in service to those with financial difficulty."

Yet the board, he added, is committed to its core of low-income families. In other words, Escuela de Guadalupe will never become an elitist school.

"No, when our donors stepped forward, they liked our commitment. And they put the ball back into our court. We never want to go through this again. We think our plan commits us to succeeding."

As we say our goodbyes, David Carr stops me and tells me how the kids all went to church on Thursday, just to pray that the board on Friday would make the right decision, whatever that might be.

"And on Monday when the announcement that we were staying open was made, for our kids who had put so much into this, the day was, well, just school.

"The focus has never gotten off that."

# State to hand out 'report cards' today

*Ratings for 1,800 schools, programs available online*

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**Wednesday, December 5, 2007**

State "report cards" rating more than 1,800 schools and school programs will be released this morning.

The annual school accountability reports, compiled by the state Department of Education, will be posted at 11 a.m. at

RockyMountainNews.com.

Ratings are based on results of statewide achievement tests administered in the spring under the Colorado Student Assessment Program.

Ratings for 11th-graders incorporate results on the ACT college admissions test.

The report cards also show a variety of other statistics for each school.

The figures are intended for use by parents to determine if their child's school is doing a good job or if they want to choose another one under the state's open-enrollment law, said education commissioner Dwight Jones.

The ratings have shown slow but consistent progress since the first report cards were released in 2002.

That year, 38.6 percent of students were in schools rated "high" or "excellent," and 25.3 percent were in schools rated "low" or "unsatisfactory."

By last year, 47.7 percent of students were attending top-rated schools, and the number of low-performing schools was down to 19.3 percent.

But CSAP scores released in August showed little gain over last year's numbers.

That will be reflected in the report cards today, some superintendents said.

In previous years, the report cards were heralded by news conferences led by former Gov. Bill Owens.

This year, Gov. Bill Ritter hasn't scheduled a news conference.

The report cards have come under criticism from some educators who say the school ratings are misleading.

The report cards give the impression that teachers in schools with low ratings are not doing a good job, the educators say.

They say the one-word ratings don't reflect the effort teachers make to help troubled kids, especially in poor neighborhoods.

"It doesn't tell you about the young man who worked all year just to be able to read the (CSAP) test or a girl who saw her mother killed last week," said Barbara Clementi, an eighth-grade teacher at Heaton Middle School in Pueblo and an executive committee member of the Colorado Education Association.

Jones said the reports aren't intended to show that level of detail. He said parents should talk to teachers before making judgments.

"I encourage them to visit schools," Jones said.

### **Academic checkup**

Results available at 11 a.m. today, including:

- \* **Searches**, by grade, school, district
- \* **General information** on each school, including enrollment, ethnic makeup and student-teacher ratios
- \* **Test scores**, including CSAP and ACT results
- \* **Discipline**, including dropout rates and drug incidents
- \* **Staff information**, including average teaching salaries and teacher experience