

News Clips

Headlines

Rocky Mountain News

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DPS would order fewer suspensions for
problem kids

By Nancy Mitchell

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Members of a youth advocacy group braved Monday's chill to protest delays in changing the discipline policy in Denver Public Schools.

About a dozen members of Padres and Jovenes Unidos, or Parents and Youth United, carried signs and waved at motorists outside North High School, in northwest Denver, after school let out for the day.

Juan Evangelista, 21, was a North High student when he and other members of Jovenes Unidos began investigating why so many DPS students were being suspended from school, a path that often leads to dropping out.

They later produced a report documenting a rise in out-of-school suspensions in DPS and the harsher penalties of expulsion and referrals for legal action.

That work eventually led, this fall, to proposed discipline policy changes that were focused on working with kids to keep them in school.

But last month, as DPS board members were preparing to vote, district legal officials pulled the changes off the table, saying more work needs to be done.

Evangelista, who now works for Jovenes Unidos as a student organizer at Montbello High School, in northeast Denver, said the district is trying to rewrite the proposed policy change.

"We wrote this and came up with strict guidelines for why students can get suspended," he said after the protest.

"The whole idea was to keep students in school."

Theresa Pena said she and other school board members agree with that goal.

But she said DPS lawyers believe some pieces of the proposed policy change conflict with state statute and the DPS teachers union contract.

"This has nothing to do with the real meaty part, which is trying to keep more kids in school," said Pena, who described the changes as minor and technical.

Jeanne Price, a DPS parent who serves on the discipline policy review committee, said Monday that she had yet to see the final revisions by DPS.

"It was a surprise and it was a frustration," she said of the delay in voting on the policy.

"I think everyone realizes it's better to do it right than to do it rushed," Price added.

"I just want to make sure we're doing it as rapidly as possible."

Pena said the board could vote on the new discipline policy at its Dec. 20 meeting but that it may be delayed until January.

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