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# Rocky Mountain News

## Friday, December 14, 2007

### DNC may affect school calendar

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**Friday, December 14, 2007**

Denver Public Schools leaders are asking for public input on whether to delay school next fall for two weeks because of security surrounding the Democratic National Convention.

The convention, slated for Aug. 25-28 at the Pepsi Center, is a public relations coup for the city. It is expected to draw 35,000 people.

But plans to lock down a mile-wide radius around the center for security reasons could wreak havoc with busing and activities at nearby schools.

Two dozen DPS schools are located within a mile and a half of the Pepsi Center, and the Emily Griffith Opportunity School is within a couple of blocks.

DPS board members, mulling school calendar options on Thursday, were given

one proposal to start school on Aug. 18 and another with a start date of Sept. 2, after Labor Day.

School started Aug. 20 this past fall.

Joe Sandoval, DPS executive director of education services, who put the proposals together, said even the Sept. 2 start date would mean Emily Griffith students would be registering for classes while the Democratic convention is ongoing.

"We will have to work with the DNC regardless of whether we're starting before or after Labor Day," Sandoval said.

Board member Michelle Moss asked whether DPS would have any role in the convention. For example, she asked, "Will they be using our buses?"

"It's a good question," said Superintendent Michael Bennet, jotting it down, "and I don't have an answer."

Sandoval said he's received e-mails from DPS employees and families who favor a later start next fall so they can participate in the convention.

"It is an educational opportunity for our teachers and our children," said board member Jeanne Kaplan.

"It will be an opportunity for people to volunteer and learn how our wonderful political system operates."

Board members directed Sandoval to note the convention dates on the calendar options in blue and to include a statement about the convention in a survey of parents, staff and students. The calendars and survey will be available, in English and Spanish, next week on the DPS Web site at [www.dpsk12.org](http://www.dpsk12.org).

The board is expected to vote next month on the 2008-09 calendar.

If members choose the later start date, it will be the first time in seven years that DPS has started school after Labor Day.

Then, the school board voted to start classes earlier so students would have more time in school before taking state exams in March and April.

Both calendar options include an extra day of school for students and two more days for teachers if DPS successfully refinances its pension debt. The transaction would free an estimated \$15 million more per year for instruction. Bennet has said the timing of the transaction depends on market conditions.

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## DPS proposals

**Denver Public Schools board members will vote next month on the 2008-09 calendar.**

\* **Option 1:** Students return to class Aug. 18 and finish with a half day of school May 28.

\* **Option 2:** Students return to class Sept. 2 and finish with a half day of school June 9.

One day for students would be added in both cases if DPS is successful this school year in refinancing its pension debt, a move that would free up to \$15 million for classrooms. To view the calendar options in more detail or to comment, go to [dpsk12.org](http://dpsk12.org). A survey will be posted on the Web site Tuesday. The calendars and survey will be available in English and Spanish

# Denver Post

## Listen to schools, not union whines

By David Harsanyi

*The Denver Post*

<<mailto:dharsanyi@denverpost.com?subject=The%20Denver%20Post:%20Listen%20to%20schools,%20not%20union%20whines>>

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Permitting teachers, administrators and parents to control their own schools and, in turn, their children's destinies, is hardly controversial.

Or rather, it shouldn't be.

It's a given that Colorado teachers unions continually fight against parental school choice. We know they whine about accountability. We know they're not crazy about charter schools, either.

Now, many people are trying to offer *public schools* the flexibility and independence to improve and compete and guess what?

Unions still oppose reform. So what does that tell you?

"It's gotten to the point where I am tired of trying to make sure everyone is happy but students — when they should be the first ones on the list," says Peter Groff, a Democrat and the new state Senate president.

The issue of school independence was brought to the forefront recently when Bruce Randolph School in Denver, attempting to save its school from failing grades and closure, requested sovereignty from the bureaucratic muddle imposed on it by the district and the union.

The idea of allowing all Colorado schools to control their own budgets, hiring and curriculum is growing.

Groff will be bringing forward such progressive legislation this session.

Unions, naturally, already oppose the idea. Where Gov. Bill Ritter — who likes to tell us he's "fighting for children" — will fall should tell us more about where his loyalties lie.

Groff says it's something he's been thinking about for a while. "I think this idea will give the principal and teacher the ability to craft programs that will directly impact the students they have in the classroom. The principal may say, 'This is what we need to do for these kids to bring them up to proficiency and above.' Second, it gives parents the ability to pick and choose schools in the district that work for their kids."

How will Groff, who unlike many of his party's counterparts isn't beholden to the Colorado Education Association (CEA), overcome entrenched interests in the legislature?

How will Groff slide such an idea past Sue Windels, the Democratic chairwoman of the Senate Education Committee?

After all, Windels' notion of an independent thought consists of slightly altering the wording of CEA talking points.

"I would hope that anyone who has the best interest of education in Colorado in mind would support autonomy for schools," explains Groff. "Listen, no one said that we're going to blow up the unions. No one said we're going to tear down agreements that were made. It just gives the district the prerogative to create 'innovative zones' and help kids."

Bipartisan support for such a bill is sure to come. Just how many Democrats in the legislature will be willing to stand up to the CEA is unclear. And those reform-minded Democrats who do stand up should be careful.

When Denver school board president Theresa Peña and vice president Bruce Hoyt got behind some mild restructuring of failing Denver schools, they soon made enemies.

Denver Classroom Teachers Association president Kim Ursetta put the organization's dollars behind two fringe candidates and challenged Peña and Hoyt. Ursetta claimed her candidates "best matched what our values are, and that includes listening to teachers."

Which tells us plenty about the DCTA's values. They stink. Values that attempt to inflate the organization's membership, coddling a broken system all the way.

Then again, Peña and Hoyt both survived.

Meanwhile, Groff and other Democrats nationwide are forging ahead with reform.

Does this mean times are changing? It's yet to be seen.

What we do know is that allowing schools to work more independently will undermine the counterproductive centralization of the No Child Left Behind Act and also weaken the teachers unions here in Colorado.

In other words, a win win.

Best of all, it may actually help some kids.