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Scholarship program for DPS grads beefing up

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A scholarship program for Denver Public Schools graduates is expanding to all city high schools and increasing its scholarship dollars per student.

The Denver Scholarship Foundation, launched in November 2006 by Denver oilman Tim Marquez, will award scholarships of up to \$6,000 based on family need. Last year's pilot program set a "soft cap" of about \$3,000, Marquez has said.

Marquez and his wife, Bernadette, seeded the foundation with a \$50 million gift. Their goal was to build a \$200 million endowment that would eventually assist every DPS graduate who needed money for college.

Last school year the program was piloted in three high schools - Abraham Lincoln, Montbello and South - with 170 scholarships totaling \$154,951 awarded to graduates now in their first semester of college. The same amount is expected to be awarded in their second semester.

In total, the foundation helped 330 eligible graduates secure more than \$1.3 million in financial aid for college and gave away 235 laptop computers to students.

This year's changes are based on lessons learned from the pilot, said executive director Cindy Abramson. For example, students last year had to apply for all other types of financial aid before asking the foundation to fill in any remaining gaps in college money.

This year, the foundation is offering a base scholarship amount based on expected family need, with up to \$6,000 per year available for students attending state universities and private colleges in Colorado. Students graduating from any DPS high school in 2007 or later are eligible.

Abramson said the foundation also has a new set of application deadlines, beginning with the March 15 deadline for federal aid and a March 31 deadline for the foundation scholarship application, which will be available online Jan. 31.

Interested students can visit the "Future Centers" located in each of Denver's nine traditional high schools or log on to denverscholarship.org to learn more. Students must be U.S. citizens or otherwise eligible for federal financial aid to participate in the program.

Denver Post

Wednesday, December 19, 2007

Scholarship program shifts to "first dollar in"

The change by a foundation that helps DPS seniors get to college should make students' planning more predictable.

By Allison Sherry

The Denver Post

[<mailto:asherry@denverpost.com?subject=The%20Denver%20Post:%20Scholarship%20program%20shifts%20to%20'first%20dollar%20in'>](mailto:asherry@denverpost.com?subject=The%20Denver%20Post:%20Scholarship%20program%20shifts%20to%20'first%20dollar%20in'>)

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A scholarship program that promised to help students at three Denver high schools get to college has decided to be the "first dollar in" for students as the program takes effect citywide.

The Denver Scholarship Foundation will give between \$2,000 to \$6,000 to any Denver Public Schools high-school senior who qualifies for federal student financial aid and gets into an in-state college, university or trade school.

The rest of the money will have to come from government aid or private help.

The announcement is the latest policy change the program has implemented since it was unveiled to about 800 jubilant seniors from Abraham Lincoln, Montbello and South high schools a year ago.

Foundation officials initially told kids the foundation money would be the "last dollar in," closing the gap left between the cost of college and other available financial aid for the eligible students. They also said they would "soft cap" gifts to \$3,000. Since that time, foundation officials have also decided to exclude undocumented immigrants from receiving aid.

Denver Scholarship Foundation executive director Cindy Abramson said the "first dollar in" change should make the program easier — and more predictable — for students. This past summer, dozens of students were scrambling just weeks before college classes were starting, trying to figure out what the Denver Scholarship Foundation was going to contribute.

"Waiting until everyone else came through felt tentative," Abramson said. "That didn't feel like as strong of a commitment as they needed."

Charles Dukes, a foundation coordinator at Montbello High, said there were "little wrinkles" in the first year, but that more students were interested in college, thanks to the program.

More than 150 Montbello seniors have applied or been accepted to a college so far this

year — more than the previous two years combined, Dukes said.

The new formula gives more money to students going to state universities and private schools.

In-state tuition at Colorado State University runs about \$6,000 a year, excluding room and board. Community-college tuition is usually about one-third of that.

Almost all of the private and public in-state colleges and universities participate in the program.

The \$6,000 annual cap will not deter students who still need more money to attend their choice college, said Montbello High principal Antwan Wilson.

The most crucial piece to college accessibility is the work high schools need to do before students get there, he said.

"I think if we do that part right, any new policy that they (the Denver Scholarship Foundation) implement isn't going to deter kids," Wilson said. The foundation was started by oilman Tim Marquez and his wife, Bernie. The couple said they will match each dollar contributed to its endowment up to \$50 million.

The foundation has given about \$154,900 to tuition costs this semester. Of 500 applicants last year, 170 are now enrolled in a college.

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Opinion

Union or not, teachers care about students

Steve Laudeman, Denver

Re: "Principal is a rebel with a cause," and "Listen to schools, not union whines," Dec. 10 and Dec. 14 David Harsanyi columns.

In two recent columns, David Harsanyi makes frequent reference to his perception that public schools are "failing our children."

I have four children in Denver Public Schools, and many friends whose children are also in DPS, and I have never heard a single complaint that DPS has "failed our children." As a matter of fact, I have found DPS teachers — whether they are union members or not — to be universally dedicated to the education of our children.

Could it possibly be that, even though some teachers are members of the union, they are also committed to the education of their students? There are many problems facing our public school system. The fact that some teachers have decided to join a union is not one of them.

A good public school system is an essential part of any community. It is everyone's responsibility to look hard at the complex problems and support those who want to make real improvement. Shrill ideologues do not add anything useful to the debate.

Denver Business Journal

Tuesday, December 18, 2007

Denver scholarship fund changes rules

A foundation launched last year with the ultimate goal of providing a college scholarship to any Denver Public Schools graduate who needs one said Tuesday it awarded 170 scholarships totaling \$154,951 in its first year, and plans to change its policies for awarding future grants.

In addition to granting college money, the **Denver Scholarship Foundation** <http://www.bizjournals.com/denver/related_content.html?topic=Denver%20Scholarship%20Foundation> (www.denverscholarship.org <<http://www.denverscholarship.org/>>) said it awarded laptop computers worth \$210,000 to 235 Denver students, and assisted 330 students apply for and receive \$1.3 million in scholarship money from other sources.

The foundation (DSF) was unveiled last fall after Denver oilman Tim Marquez and his wife Bernadette offered a \$50 million challenge grant -- funds realized through the initial public offering of **Venoco Inc.** <http://www.bizjournals.com/denver/gen/Venoco_Inc_3A2FDD6BD8744E41ADB9A83C31751A15.html> , an oil and gas company founded by Tim Marquez.

The scholarship program was featured in the Denver Business Journal on Oct. 5.

In its first-year pilot program, DSF offered scholarships and laptop computers to graduates of three of the city's high schools -- Abraham Lincoln, Montbello and South.

The program has now expanded to all Denver public high schools. DSF is gathering additional funds to establish an endowment large enough to make scholarship money

available to any Denver student who needs help.

The scholarships can be used at accredited universities, colleges and technical schools within Colorado.

DSF said it has also established "future centers" -- staffers stationed at high schools who advise students and parents on financial aid and college admission -- at nine schools.

In a statement Tuesday, DSF said it would revise its policies for awarding scholarships to more closely align the foundation with state guidelines for needs-based financial aid.

"The new policy directs larger scholarship awards to students who qualify for smaller federal and state grants, and therefore have larger gaps of unmet need. It also adds a fifth year of eligibility for students enrolled in state and university baccalaureate programs," the statement said.