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Friday, December 21, 2007

DPS board OKs autonomy plan

Union approval needed for change at Bruce Randolph

By **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/>>)

Friday, December 21, 2007

Denver Public Schools board members on Thursday unanimously - and enthusiastically - approved a historic proposal to unleash a Denver school from district and union regulations, a vote some predict will prompt a flood of similar requests.

"My hope is we will have 20 proposals like this on our desks," board President Theresa Pena said before voting in favor of the autonomy agreement for Bruce Randolph School in north Denver.

The only hesitation - a yes "with an asterisk" - came from board member Jeanne Kaplan, whose qualms were not about the proposal itself but rather how it might work for more of DPS' 150 schools.

"There isn't a school in our district that probably wouldn't benefit," Kaplan said. "So how do we get from this point to that?"

While other DPS schools have successfully sought waivers of selected union or district rules, the Bruce Randolph plan is unique because it is comprehensive.

Principal Kristin Waters and her staff asked for a waiver of most provisions of the contract between the district and its teachers union and freedom from any district policies that, as the agreement puts it, "impede their progress."

Specifically, the school sought control of its budget, staff, time and incentives while agreeing to adhere to the instructional tenets outlined in the Denver Plan, the district's strategic reform effort.

Teacher seeks vote delay

"They want a real fresh start," said board member Jill Conrad. "We as a district need to learn from their innovation."

The autonomy agreement must still be approved by the 22-member governing board of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association, expected to vote Jan. 8.

DCTA President Kim Ursetta did not mention the proposal in brief remarks to the board. She has repeatedly said the union has some questions about the plan and is working with Bruce Randolph staff to get answers.

Margaret Bobb, a science teacher at Bruce Randolph, was a lone voice of caution among a dozen speakers urging board members to back the plan. Bobb did not speak against the proposal, but rather urged the board to wait until January to vote.

"This is an impassioned plea," she said, "for thoughtful and reasonable deliberation on a profound change."

Bobb said she wanted the board to identify the policies and contract provisions that impeded progress at Bruce Randolph, noting other schools face similar issues.

"It is not the powerful, reforming tool that it could be for all the children of Denver Public Schools," she said.

Similarly, teachers from Slavens K-8 School in southeast Denver asked the board to consider changes to the practice of directly placing certain teachers in schools with vacancies.

The practice, dictated by union and district policies, forces schools to accept DPS teachers who have been unable to find jobs elsewhere in the district.

Slavens parent Andrea Gordon, along with two Slavens teachers and Principal Kurt Siebold, described how most of the directly placed teachers have hurt the school.

Member sees urgency

"This policy is broken," Gordon said. "I hope you do approve Bruce Randolph's request, but to stop there would be like putting a Band-Aid on a broken leg."

Siebold, after the board vote, said he would talk to his staff and parents about requesting a waiver from the direct placement practice.

Kaplan and other board members agreed they need to create a policy or framework for determining which schools are ready for the sort of autonomy sought by Bruce Randolph.

"We do need to think about that . . . so we can figure out how to replicate it," said board member Kevin Patterson.

But Patterson said Waters and her staff, who have successfully raised test scores at Bruce Randolph, once rated among the lowest-performing schools in Colorado, deserve their shot at autonomy.

"I understand the need to think things through . . . but we have to talk about the sense of urgency we have for our children today," Patterson said. "They don't get another chance to be 9 or 10 years old . . . we don't have one day to waste, we don't have one life to waste."

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Examples of autonomy for Bruce Randolph

Denver Public Schools board approval Thursday of autonomy for Bruce Randolph School frees the North Denver school from what staff described as stifling school district and union contract rules. The plan must still be approved by the Denver teachers union governing board, expected to vote Jan. 8. If that board signs off, here are some likely changes:

1 Immediate and national recruiting for teachers. Principal Kristin Waters is most concerned about finding an 11th-grade chemistry teacher for the fall. Under current district and union rules, she can't officially recruit outside DPS or interview out-of-district candidates until late April. The autonomy proposal would let her decide when, and from where, she hires teachers. Waters said Thursday that she'll start recruiting as soon as the Denver Classroom Teachers Association board agrees.

2 Control over hiring. Current district and union rules mean Bruce Randolph, and every other DPS school, must accept DPS teachers with more than three years of experience who are unable to find jobs elsewhere in the district. The autonomy proposal would exempt Randolph from those so-called direct placements: "We would be in control of who works at our school," Waters said.

3 Flexibility in teacher pay. Middle and high school teachers typically teach five classes per day under current district and union rules. They cannot be required to teach a sixth class and cannot be paid for doing so. Waters and a science teacher this year wanted to add a chemistry class for advanced students, offering it before or after school. But the contract doesn't allow Waters to pay the teacher for the class, so they nixed the idea. Under the autonomy proposal, Waters and her staff could work out such arrangements.

Bruce Randolph School

* **Enrollment:** 680 students in grades 6 through 10. It is adding a grade a year to become a school serving grades 6 -12.

* **Demographics:** 95 percent of students are eligible for federal lunch assistance, an indicator of poverty; 87 percent of the students are Hispanic, 11 percent are black and 2 percent are white.

<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/news/opinion/>

Thursday, December 20, 2007

Bruce Randolph gets DPS OK to operate autonomously

Originally published 08:59 p.m., December 20, 2007

Updated 08:59 p.m., December 20, 2007

Denver Public Schools tonight approved Bruce Randolph School's proposal to operate autonomously from the district.

"This is unprecedented for Denver Public Schools and an incredible opportunity to further improve student achievement at the school," said Theresa Peña, president of the DPS Board of Education.

If the proposal is also approved by the Denver Classroom Teachers Association, Bruce Randolph, a middle school at 40th Avenue and Steele Street, will have control of its budget, staff, time and incentives.

"If granted, these waivers will build on the momentum we have gained in the last two years and help us to raise our student achievement," said Kristin Waters, principal of Bruce Randolph. "We are pleased that the board recognizes what we have accomplished over the last two years and believes in what our team can do in the future for our kids."

Denver Post

Friday, December 21, 2007

DPS OKs easing school's reins

Bruce Randolph now needs union approval for control of budget, hiring

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 12/21/2007 01:41:02 AM MST

Cheers and hugs greeted the Denver school board's unanimous approval Thursday to free one school from district policies that teachers and staff say are impeding student performance.

Educators and administrators at Bruce Randolph School in northeast Denver want more control of the school's budget, teacher time, incentives and hiring decisions.

They say cutting through red tape of district policies and union rules will allow them more time to teach and make it possible to hire and retain the best teachers.

Board members and district administrators applauded the proposal, calling it bold and radical and just what the school and the district needs.

"I've been in education 21 years, and this is the moment I've always been waiting for for a school's staff and leadership to come together and demand excellence and flexibility," said district chief academic officer Jaime Aquino. "If I die tomorrow, I can die peacefully knowing that I saw this happen."

Board president Theresa Peña said she hopes to see 20 similar proposals for schools around the district.

Thursday's approval was only a step in the process. The teachers union board will vote Jan. 8 on whether to allow a waiver from the union contract.

"Our board is really trying to think about the future and how this could affect our students," said union president Kim Ursetta.

Tuesday's school board vote came after nearly two hours of commentary, mostly from people urging approval

Thursday, December 20, 2007

DPS takes step towards Randolph autonomy

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 12/20/2007 10:15:10 PM MST

Cheers and hugs greeted Denver school board's unanimous approval tonight to free one school from district policies that teachers and staff say are impeding student performance.

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control of the school's budget, teacher time, incentives and hiring decisions.

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Thursday's approval was only a step in the process. The teachers' union board will vote Jan. 8 on whether to allow the school a waiver from the union contract.

"I love surfing, and one thing you learn is to look out and anticipate the next big wave," said teacher Greg Ahrnsbrak. "This is a big wave. It's big enough for all of us to get on and ride."

On Tuesday, Bruce Randolph's teachers voted 67 percent in favor of the proposal.

The next step is getting the OK from the teachers' union, which will likely vote on the proposal Jan. 8, CQ said Denver Classroom Teachers Association President Kim Ursetta.

"Our board is really trying to think about the future and how this could affect our students," said union President Kim Ursetta.

"We want to talk about how we can create more innovative schools in a thoughtful manner."

Tuesday's school board vote came after nearly two hours of commentary, mostly from people urging the board's approval.

The vote was unanimous, except board member Jeannie Kaplan placed an asterisk on her vote, saying she wanted to develop a process in case other schools came forward.

The proposal has generated attention over the past weeks — being discussed on editorial pages and sparking proposed legislation to create a statewide autonomous plan for schools.

There have been supportive e-mails and flowers, a tour of the school by Mayor John Hickenlooper and allegations of disinformation surrounding the proposal.

Some on the board wondered what would happen if all the district's 151 schools requested similar proposals, opting out of the board policies.

"Maybe we need a paradigm shift on this board," said board Vice President Michelle Moss. CQ "If it is our policies that are holding children back, we need to reevaluate."

Bruce Randolph had been rated one of the worst in the state but has steadily improved under Principal Kristin Waters.

The school's autonomy proposal, that was approved by 67 percent of teachers on Tuesday, would allow teachers more money for teaching taking on more classes. It would relieve the school from adhering to the district's calendar or set hours.

It also would allow the school to hire before the district's mandated timeline and not accept the district's direct placement of teachers.

"We're not asking for additional money, but creative use," Waters said.

Parents, teachers and the principal of Slavens School spoke to the board before the vote, saying the Bruce Randolph proposal identified a problem in the district — that unsatisfactory teachers are shuttled throughout the district and policies keep them employed.

"Teacher hiring policies are hurting all schools," said parent Andrea Gordon. CQ "This policy is broken. To stop (at Bruce Randolph) would be like putting a Band-Aid on a broken leg. The broken leg needs to be fixed."

Superintendent Michael Bennet thanked the school's staff and leaders for the proposal.

"You have issued an important invitation to think differently about the choices we make and how we organize ourselves," he said. "You have given us an example. ... I have not felt more optimistic about Denver as I do tonight."

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Cherry Creek News

Friday, December 21, 2007

Board Approves Bruce Randolph School's Autonomy

Proposal

Denver, CO – Denver Public Schools (DPS) Board of Education tonight approved Bruce Randolph School’s proposal to operate autonomously, the Bruce Randolph Professional Autonomy Agreement. With the Board’s action, Bruce Randolph moves a critical step closer to receiving waivers from relevant board policies and procedures, including portions of the DPS/DCTA Agreement, that impede the implementation of the Bruce Randolph 2010 plan. "This is unprecedented for Denver Public Schools and an incredible opportunity to further improve student achievement at the school," said Theresa Peña, President of the DPS Board of Education. Teachers and administrators from Bruce Randolph were following procedures set by the Agreement between DPS and their teachers union, the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA). The Agreement also calls for them to request the waivers from the Board of Directors of the DCTA. They presented their request to the DCTA Board on December 4th.

If the proposal is approved by DCTA, Bruce Randolph will have control of its budget, staff, time and incentives. Bruce Randolph will adhere to the Denver Plan and be accountable for doing its part so Denver can lead the nation’s cities in student achievement, high school graduation, college and career preparation, and college matriculation. When approved by both DPS and DCTA, the Bruce Randolph autonomy will take effect immediately. “If granted, these waivers will build on the momentum we have gained in the last two years, and help us to raise our student achievement,” said Kristin Waters, Principal of Bruce Randolph School. “We are pleased that the board recognizes what we have accomplished over the last two years and believes in what our team can do in the future for our kids.”

“Bruce Randolph is seizing for itself the direction we set in the Denver Plan,” said Michael Bennet, Superintendent of Denver Public Schools. “The team at Bruce Randolph has demonstrated leadership, shared commitment to improving student learning and accomplishment. They warrant our confidence as they move forward in this direction. We congratulate them for their gains in student achievement this year, and encourage them to pursue their goals with even more vigor.”

-The Cherry Creek News-

CBS 4

Friday, December 21, 2007

School Board Approves Bruce Randolph Control

[Karlyn Tilley](http://cbs4denver.com/bios/Karlyn.Tilley.Reporter.9.567921.html)

<<http://cbs4denver.com/bios/Karlyn.Tilley.Reporter.9.567921.html>>

DENVER (CBS4) —

A middle school in northeast Denver that was once the worst performing school in the state was given permission Thursday night by the Denver Public Schools Board to set some of its own rules on spending and hiring.

School leaders at Bruce Randolph Middle School think they can do a better job educating students if the school can set its own hiring schedule, pay increases and performance standards.

"Which includes paying our teachers more," said Kristin Waters, the principal at Bruce Randolph. "We currently can only pay teachers the negotiated amounts for extra work."

Three quarters of the staff support the move as well as Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper, who met with Waters and said he gives solid approval to the plan.

"It's not going to work in every school, but if it works here, that's planting a flag for our kids that we aren't going to accept mediocrity, that we are going to keep trying innovations and find a way to succeed," Hickenlooper said.

"We feel to get them to the next level, and to continue their success, we need to be released from some of the things that are holding us back," Waters said before the meeting.

Some board members expect other schools in the district to now make similar requests.

"I think this School Board said it's committed to transformational change in way we do business," said Michael Bennet, DPS superintendent. "We know incremental change is not going to make enough of a difference for kids in Denver and I think we need to not be scared of that."

The teacher's union still has to approve the plan. Denver Classroom Teachers Association President Kim Ursetta said the school's request needs some detail before any votes will take place.

"I wouldn't say that there's necessarily resistance, but just surprise at the magnitude of the waiver they're asking for," Ursetta said.

Ursetta said the other problem is most of the rules Bruce Randolph wants to break are federally mandated rules that local boards don't have the authority to

change.

"A lot of the things that Bruce Randolph teachers talk about are things that we've proposed at the bargaining table and have not been successful in negotiating," Ursetta said.

The earliest the union will make its decision is at the next meeting on Jan. 8.

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