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# Rocky Mountain News

**Tuesday, January 8, 2008**

## **DPS eyes plan for pregnant students**

*New moms could get 4 to 6 weeks off school by studying from home*

By [Nancy Mitchell](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/nancy-mitchell/) <<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/nancy-mitchell/>> , Rocky Mountain News ([Contact](#))

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**Tuesday, January 8, 2008**

Denver Public Schools officials are putting together guidance for schools on the attendance of pregnant students, crafting a plan expected to give them four to six weeks after childbirth to recover.

The new mothers would be expected to complete work from home to keep up with their classmates.

"We're all in agreement we want these young ladies back in school and catching up," said DPS board president Theresa Pena. "We also need to be very mindful of the time they need for bonding with their babies and for healing."

Board members sought the clarification after hearing complaints that new moms were being told to report to class the day after they're released from the hospital - or begin racking up "unexcused" absences that could hurt their grades.

"I was shocked," board vice president Michelle Moss said after a pregnant East High School student and two East counseling interns spoke to the board Dec. 20.

The group from East, which also included a pediatrician and a psychology professor, suggested maternity leave of at least four weeks to allow new moms to recover.

#### **No clear answers**

Graduate student Nicole Head, one of two counseling interns who ran a weekly group for pregnant students at East in the fall, said efforts to help the girls were stymied by uncertainty about what would happen after they gave birth.

"Nobody wanted to talk to me about this," said Head, describing "weeks" of unreturned calls to DPS offices.

A school nurse at East, while supportive, told her that central district staff decided this past summer that girls were not to be given time off after giving birth.

"You can't have maternity leave," Head said she was told to tell her group. "If you have your baby on Wednesday, you better be back on Thursday."

DPS spokesman Alex Sanchez said the district does not have a separate policy on maternity leave and there were no changes to its attendance policy this summer.

"The administration and certainly also the board would agree that if . . . a teen

mother got an unexcused absence because they didn't go to school two days after giving birth, that should not happen," Sanchez said.

DPS does not plan to create a separate policy on maternity leave, he said. Instead, staff is preparing procedures for school officials faced with pregnant students. They're expected within the month.

### **Some schools work with moms**

Principals at other DPS schools said they had not been told to require new moms return to school within a time limit.

"We have not had a specific number of days that we say to a girl, you're allowed this many days," said Thomas Jefferson High School Principal Sandra Just. "We really just try to work with the young lady . . . on a case-by-case basis."

At Florence Crittenton, DPS' alternative school for pregnant girls and new moms, the school year is divided into quarters - rather than longer semesters - so students can more easily take time off for childbirth.

"We really encourage them to take at least six weeks off because that's what's best for the mom and the baby to have a healthy start together," said Principal Donna Campanella.

Similarly, officials in Jefferson County, Cherry Creek, Douglas County and Adams Five-Star school districts say schools work with pregnant students individually to keep them in school.

Nationally, school districts such as Minneapolis and Seattle say they also have maternity leave policies in favor of individual attention. In Seattle, pregnant students can qualify for homebound education services, which are reimbursed by the state.

Jill Lewis, nursing supervisor for Seattle Public Schools, said new moms typically receive up to six weeks postpartum care for normal deliveries.

### **Counselors support girls**

Head and Celia Gruzalski, the other counseling intern at East, said they don't know if any girls were actually given unexcused absences after they give birth.

But they said the girls already face enough obstacles without that uncertainty.

The 11 pregnant students and two new moms in their group drew both support and snide remarks.

Head recalled one teacher at East who refused to accept doctors' notes from students who had to miss classes for prenatal care. An administrator finally had to talk to the teacher.

"There were a lot of battles for some of these girls because they miss a lot of school and different teachers had different feelings about whether to excuse their absences or not," Gruzalski said.

Kayla Lewis, 18, who spoke to the DPS board and whose baby is due in April, has completed her classes at East. She starts at Community College of Denver this month and will graduate from DPS in May, with college classes already under her belt.

She scoffed at the idea, put forth by some, that maternity leave for students will somehow encourage more pregnancies. "I don't really think that's true," Lewis said. "What we want is, we want to take care of our responsibilities and get our education as well."

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### **DPS and birth control**

A recommendation to make birth control available in some Denver schools is expected to be discussed at a Feb. 5 Denver school board meeting.

That recommendation is one of many contained in a task force report on school-based health clinics released in October. Board members are scheduled next month to hear from the authors of the report.

"We can accept or reject any of the recommendations," said DPS board vice president Michelle Moss, "and so can the Denver Health board."

Denver Health Medical Center operates the health clinics in 12 city schools. Hospital spokeswoman Dee Martinez said the board has not discussed the recommendations.

Moss was among the 43 members of the task force, including representatives from medical, state, city and foundation communities, who spent nine months working on the report.

# **Denver Post**

## **Tuesday, January 8, 2008**

## **DPS offers students grief counseling**

By Jeremy Meyer  
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 01/08/2008 12:59:15 AM MST

Crisis teams will be available today at three Denver schools as students return from winter break, during which two tragedies involved Denver students, school officials said.

Angelica Martinez, a sixth-grader at Lake Middle School, was shot to death in her house on New Year's Day. And Katy Parr, a 17-year-old senior at East High School, was the sole survivor of a Wyoming highway crash that killed her family.

"We have activated crisis teams for grief counseling," said Alex Sanchez, spokesman for Denver Public Schools. Counselors will be at Lake Middle and East High and at Cowell Elementary, where Angelica had previously attended.

*Jeremy Meyer, The Denver Post*

## **Green light needed for Randolph school reforms**

**Union leaders meet tonight to consider a reform plan crafted with the help of teachers at an innovative Denver school.**

The Denver Post Editorial Board

Article Last Updated: 01/07/2008 06:40:15 PM MST

Tonight, the Denver teachers union can become a full-fledged partner in an ambitious and promising reform plan at Bruce Randolph School.

Or it can become an obstacle, to the benefit of no one.

We hope the union board votes in favor of the plan put forward by many of its dues-paying members at the northeast Denver school. It will send a strong and important message that the union wants to continue building upon the reform efforts it has already put forth.

Just three years ago, Bruce Randolph was rated as the worst school in the state. Now, a new direction has produced impressive gains in student achievement, but school officials — including union leaders in the classrooms — believe they have hit a ceiling. To hear them tell it, they've done what they can within the parameters set up by the district and

the union.

The school has asked to be freed of many of the entanglements that well- intentioned district and union officials have placed on them.

The school is searching for autonomy. They want decisions about hiring to be made by the principal, not the district. They want more control of the school's budget and teacher time.

In short, they want to slash some of the bureaucratic red tape that encumbers student achievement.

The Denver Public Schools board voted unanimously last month to free the teachers from district policies that may be impeding student performance. The vote wasn't a slam-dunk. Members asked tough questions throughout the process but ultimately decided it was good for students.

Unfortunately, Bruce Randolph's plight has become a political football, as Greg Ahrnsbrak, teacher and school union representative, noted earlier. "The union is concerned we are opening Pandora's box. Others are saying this is a great thing. Our position is . . . we are just trying to do what we do best. And that is teach the children."

The teachers union has said it wants more specifics about the waiver, and it's certainly entitled to them. But it's also incumbent upon the union to look for ways it can help the process.

"If there are things impeding student achievement at Bruce Randolph, we want to make sure we can remove those barriers for Bruce Randolph and every other Denver public school," Kim Ursetta, president of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association, told the Rocky Mountain News.

For starters, it can help end the process that now places teachers, good or bad, at a school — even if the principal doesn't want them.

Union leaders have approved other, less sweeping waivers in the past. Given their trepidation this time, we have suggested the union approve the request with a sunset provision — meaning it would expire at a certain date unless renewed — to alleviate concerns.

Ultimately, we hope the DCTA board sees this request simply as a new way to better serve kids.

## CW2

# Monday, January 7, 2008

## Schools mull maternity leave for girls

### **Should teen mothers have to return to classes immediately after their child is born?**

by Colin Campbell, News2

January 7, 2008

DENVER (KWGN) — In the working world, it's not considered controversial, it's law: Women often receive up to six weeks maternity leave after childbirth.

Now, some are asking for the same consideration for high school students.

"I feel like they need it for the bonding with their child," said Laurie Green, a case worker for Parent Pathways. "I feel like the child needs it back from their mom."

Laurie Green is a case manager who works with at risk teens. "A lot of these girls are there to get their education and unfortunately you know they ended up pregnant and they did the right thing and had their child and they end up being penalized," Green said.

The proposal, brought up at a school board meeting by an East High School student, also seems to be winning the support of peers.

"I know there are a couple of girls at east who have dealt with pregnancy," said Marissa Latta. "I would assume it's a difficult situation to juggle school and what they're going through."

This issue is of particular concern to colorado legislators and educators because Denver has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the country.

According to health statistics, out of 1,000 girls between 15 and 17, 55 of them will get pregnant in Denver. That number drops to 24 in a statewide comparison.

Denver public schools says girls are given time off in accordance with a doctor's note.

"Those are excused absences," said Alex Sanchez of Denver Public Schools. "What we are looking at is making sure these policies are friendlier to students concerns."

The idea is still under review, but soon could bring up another interesting debate of "paternity leave."

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# Fox News

**Monday, January 7, 2008**

## **Pregnant High School Students in Denver Ask for Maternity Leave**

Monday, January 07, 2008

**Teen mothers-to-be attending a Denver high school are asking for at least four weeks maternity leave, saying they don't want to be penalized for absences while healing and bonding with their new babies, The Denver Post reports.**

The current policy at East High School requires new mothers to return to school the day after they are discharged from the hospital or be penalized for unexcused absences, the paper said.

Two of the school's counselors told the school board last month that the current policy is unfair and inconsiderate, according to the report. Kayla Lewis, a senior at East High School who is five months pregnant, also asked the board to consider a maternity leave for students at a Dec. 20 public hearing.

"My initial reaction is if we are punishing girls like that, that is unacceptable," Nicole Head, one of the counselors who brought the matter to the school board last month, told The Post. "We've got to do something."

District officials are reviewing the policy on absences to make it "friendlier" to new moms, DPS spokesman Alex Sanchez told The Post. The Denver Public Schools don't have a policy regarding pregnant students, allowing schools to set their own policy.