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Wednesday, January 23, 2008

Union waiver stalled for school

Bruce Randolph sought break from DPS, union rules to boost learning

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 01/23/2008 09:02:25 AM MST

A request by teachers at a northeast Denver school to be released from parts of the union contract was not supported Tuesday by union officials, who instead offered a limited counterproposal and denied any other school from attempting future proposals.

Teachers and staff at Bruce Randolph school wanted autonomy from district and union rules, saying constraints on time, staffing and the school calendar hinder student achievement.

The school board had approved the proposal last month, and it was up to the union for final approval.

On Tuesday, after a five-hour meeting, the board of directors of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association released a two-page statement that both praised the Bruce Randolph proposal and expressed

Extras

"I honestly don't understand it," said Denver Public Schools Superintendent Michael Bennet. "The Bruce Randolph proposal seemed to me to be a great idea for our kids, for the district and for the union."

The statement said the union's board would grant the school a few waivers but not the extent being sought by Bruce Randolph teachers and its principal.

"In good conscience we cannot grant the extensive waiver requested that would favor Bruce Randolph teachers and students at the expense of other teachers and students in the district," the statement read.

Specifically, said union president Kim Ursetta, "the board granted waivers for time people and incentives."

But a document that clearly outlined what exactly was waived could not be distributed because of a computer problem, she said.

Additionally, Ursetta said, the union wants to work out a framework with the district on how autonomy will look for other schools, and no autonomy proposals will be entertained

in the meantime.

"Our real interest is to sit down with the district to talk about a framework for allowing all schools more flexibility to address their needs," she said. "What Bruce Randolph has put out there gives us a good start."

But leaders at Bruce Randolph were not pleased with Tuesday's result.

"We're pretty outraged that they can't give us a straight answer and accept the fact that we want to move forward with our proposal," said Greg Ahrnsbrak, physical education teacher and union representative from the school. "They want us to move back to square one, and that is unacceptable."

Bruce Randolph had been ranked as one of the worst schools in the state, but recent reforms have improved the school.

Foundations offered more than \$100,000 to the school if the proposal was put in place and legislation was proposed to bring similar waiver possibilities to all of the state's schools.

Last week, Denver's Manual High School submitted an autonomy proposal and other schools are expected to follow.

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Tuesday, January 22, 2008

Union revisits school waiver

Leaders will weigh a contract exemption again for Denver's ailing Bruce Randolph school

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 01/21/2008 11:29:25 PM MST

A bid for autonomy at Denver's Bruce Randolph school faces another test today, when union leaders meet for the second time to vote on whether to accept a waiver from the teachers contract.

The union, so far, has balked at the request — which despite the uncertainty of ever going

into effect has drawn intense interest.

The school board approved its part of the waiver last month, and a majority of teachers at the school voted for the proposal. Last week, Manual High School in Denver made a similar request.

State Senate President Peter Groff may introduce a bill to encourage other schools to do the same, and more than \$100,000 from nonprofit organizations has been offered to Bruce Randolph if the move goes forward.

National education experts are watching the Bruce Randolph proposal that would give the school control over its budget, teacher time, calendar, incentives and hiring decisions.

"It is going to be fascinating," said Andrew Rotherham of Virginia, co-founder and co-director of Education Sector, a national education policy think tank. "This is what progress looks like, messy and contentious."

Today, the leadership of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association meets about the proposal, which two weeks ago was tabled on a 19-2 vote.

The union wanted Bruce Randolph to clearly explain what parts of the contract should be waived. Last week, teachers submitted a five-page response, outlining each article and subsection they want waived or retained.

Union President Kim Ursetta said she discussed the proposal with representatives from the school Saturday.

"We want to be able to look at what contract provisions, if any, impede student achievement at Bruce Randolph," Ursetta said.

Tony Lewis, director of the Donnell-Kay Foundation, said problems could result if more and more schools come forward with individualized waiver proposals.

"Let's say you say 'yes' to Randolph, and Manual wants a different waiver," said Lewis. "Then 143 schools come with different proposals. You have a level of chaos. Rather than create a whole bunch of one-off negotiated agreements, the district and union should be saying, 'Our big, thick agreement is causing more problems than it's solving.' "

The union should be flexible, said Rotherham.

"If (unions) see this as an opportunity to redefine their roles, they will thrive," Rotherham said. "If they don't get in the game, it will pass them by."

Bruce Randolph in northeast Denver had been one of the worst in the state, repeatedly ranked as unsatisfactory on state report cards.

After getting an ambitious principal, Kristin Waters, who put in a plan called Challenge 2010, the school began making gains.

Improved scores on the 2007 Colorado Student Assessment Program tests allowed the school for the first time to rise from the bottom.

"We took the worst middle school in the state and brought it to a low ranking," said Greg Ahrnsbrak, a teacher at Bruce Randolph and the school's union representative, who helped craft the waiver plan.

"We were thinking, 'How can we take it to the next level? What are the problems we are having?' We started looking at the district policies and teacher contract," he said.

The model is similar to the innovative pilot school program implemented in Boston more than a decade ago.

That plan, which has grown to 20 schools, gave each school complete autonomy over budgets, hiring and curriculum.

In Boston, the district collaborated with unions to craft the plan they believed was a way to keep students from leaving the district.

"We were saying it was good for everyone to provide for change within the system to counter the allure of the (state-authorized) charter schools," said Tom Payzant, former Boston superintendent.

Aurora Public Schools also is developing a pilot model with hopes of having one in place this fall.

A recent four-year study by the Center for Collaborative Education shows Boston pilot schools outperform district averages across every indicator of student performance and engagement.

"Historically, school districts have determined the practices for schools, and teacher unions have determined working conditions," said Dan French, director of Center for Collaborative Education. "We may have seen that the time has come that we will see better progress in schools if we turn that power over to the teachers," he said.

Manual principal Rob Stein said he respects the union and its contract but will go through the process to get an autonomy agreement, regardless of today's vote on Bruce Randolph.

"It conjures an image of Gandhi," he said. "How many people are you going to knock down before you submit to the will of the people? These are union teachers in a union school."

Rocky Mountain News

Wednesday, January 23, 2008

Union board opts not to vote on school's autonomy plan

By Nancy Mitchell ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

Board members governing the Denver teachers union wrestled into the night Tuesday before reaching consensus on a struggling school's historic attempt to free itself of union and district rules:

Maybe. But not just yet.

After a two-week delay and five hours of talking, the 22-member union board opted not to vote on the autonomy bid by Bruce Randolph School in north Denver.

"We have no position at this time on the autonomy agreement," said Kim Ursetta, president of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association. "Our hope is to continue conversations with Bruce Randolph and the district."

A two-page statement from the DCTA said the union "will support (Randolph) in exploring the concept of an autonomous neighborhood school functioning within a public school system."

But it adds, "In good conscience, we cannot grant the extensive waiver requested that would favor Bruce Randolph teachers and students at the expense of other teachers and students in the district."

Instead, the union board agreed to a "limited variance" to contract language, allowing the school to add more teaching and learning time provided teachers are paid for it and provided new hires are aware of extra work.

The other variance allowed by the union is for Bruce Randolph "to experiment with a

different staffing scenario,” though no more details are provided. Ursetta said more specifics would be released today.

“We’re really confused,” said Randolph teacher Greg Ahrnsbrak, one of the authors of the proposal. He was among a dozen Randolph teachers who waited in a restaurant near union headquarters downtown to learn of the board decision.

He described their reactions as “from disappointed to outraged,” particularly since 67 percent of Randolph teachers approved the autonomy bid for greater freedom in areas such as hiring staff and school budgeting.

“They’re taking steps to block educational reform in this district,” Ahrnsbrak said. “That makes no sense to us.”

Ursetta said union board members also decided not to consider any other school autonomy requests while they work with Randolph and DPS to create “a framework to determine when and how schools are granted more flexibility.”

Already, Manual High School staff has asked the DPS board and the union board — both necessary stamps of approval — for autonomy similar to that requested by Randolph. Last month, the DPS board unanimously approved the Randolph request.

“I honestly don’t understand it,” said DPS Superintendent Michael Bennet. “The Bruce Randolph proposal seems like a great idea for the kids of Bruce Randolph, for the district and for our union.”

Ursetta said she hoped to meet today with Randolph staff. Ahrnsbrak, the school’s union representative, said he’s willing to keep talking.

“Our impression is they’re asking us to move back to square one,” he said. “That is not acceptable to us. The message we feel we’re getting is, we need to look at other options.”

Parent and community groups had voiced support for the plan.

“Our hope would be that, instead of shutting the door right now, that it would be a time to answer to the needs of our children,” said Jessica Buckley, a DPS teacher and member of

Metro Organizations for People. "Our children can't wait. The time is now to do something different."

9 News

Tuesday, January 22, 2008

Teacher's union denies school autonomy question

posted by: [Jeffrey Wolf](#)

[<mailto:jeff.wolf@9news.com?subject=RE:Teacher's%20union%20denies%20school%20autonomy%20question%20>](mailto:jeff.wolf@9news.com?subject=RE:Teacher's%20union%20denies%20school%20autonomy%20question%20) , Web Producer

updated by: [Sara Gandy](#)

[<mailto:sara.gandy@9news.com?subject=RE:Teacher's%20union%20denies%20school%20autonomy%20question%20>](mailto:sara.gandy@9news.com?subject=RE:Teacher's%20union%20denies%20school%20autonomy%20question%20) , Web Producer

DENVER – The governing board for a Denver teacher's union met Tuesday night to decide whether to approve a school's bid to become independent from the district and the union.

The Denver Public School Board unanimously voted last month to grant autonomy to Bruce Randolph School. It would be the first time in the country a school would be granted that type of independence.

However, the union leaders denied teachers requests to be released from parts of the union contract.

Teachers and staff say the constraints on time, staffing and the school calendar prevent student achievement.

Tuesday night's meeting lasted five hours and the union responded with a limited counterproposal and rejected any other school from attempting future proposals.

The governing board of the Denver Classroom Teacher's Association said in a statement, "In good conscience, we cannot grant the extensive waiver requested that would favor Bruce Randolph teachers and students in the district."

Administrators at Bruce Randolph say being autonomous would help its students achieve without any district or union rules getting in the way.

Manual High School was also examining whether it may ask to be autonomous.

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7 News

Tuesday, January 22, 2008

Middle School Principal Charged With Failing To Report Abuse

Attorney Says She Did Nothing Wrong

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<<http://www.newsvine.com/tools/seed?popoff=0&u=http://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/15108732/detail.html>>
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DENVER -- The principal of Denver's Skinner Middle School faces a misdemeanor charge of failure to report an allegation of child abuse or neglect.

Principal Nicole Veltze has asked for a temporary reassignment while the investigation is under way. She will work out of district headquarters in downtown Denver.

The charge involves a student claiming sexual harassment by another student during class. Veltze was conducting an internal investigation of the allegation when the parents of the alleged victim contacted police independently.

The case may come down to semantics.

Denver police believe the case falls under the category of inappropriate sexual contact.

The principal's attorney said the charge is simply a sign of a turf battle over reporting requirements between Denver Public School and the Denver Police Department.

Lawyer Rich Caschette said that Nicole Veltze has been unfairly made a scapegoat in an ongoing debate between the two sides.

Tuesday morning he told 7NEWS that Veltze had followed all procedures and had notified the administration as soon as possible.

Parents were notified about the case in a letter sent home Tuesday afternoon.

Former Kepner Middle School principal Deborah Lanman will serve as acting principal for the time being.

Parent Crystal Flores is standing by Veltze. She told 7NEWS that Veltze had done an, "awesome" job at the school and earned the respect of students at the school.

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KJCT8 News

Tuesday, January 22, 2008

Denver principal accused of not reporting sexual harassment case

Associated Press - January 22, 2008 11:24 AM ET

DENVER (AP) - A Denver middle school principal is facing a misdemeanor count of failing to report an allegation of child abuse or neglect.

But the woman's attorney says the charge is simply a sign of a turf battle over reporting requirements between Denver Public School and the Denver Police Department.

Lawyer Rich Caschette says principal Nicole Veltze has been unfairly made a scapegoat in an ongoing debate.

Veltze says she was completing an investigation of a sexual harassment claim that one student made against another when police called, wondering why the incident hadn't been reported.

Caschette says Veltze was trying to wrap up her probe at the time.

A DPS spokesman says Veltze has been temporarily reassigned at her request.

Police declined comment.

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