

News Clips

Headlines

Denver Post

Monday, January 28, 2008

- DPS presents new preschool program
- Letter to the editor: Teachers union always acts in students' interest
- Letter to the editor: Less "reflexive" thinking, more reflective thinking

Rocky Mountain News

Saturday, January 26, 2008

- Financial lessons
- Program gives aid to teenage parents

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DPS presents new preschool program.

The Denver Post

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Denver Public Schools will roll out its revamped preschool program today, the day people can begin filling out applications for next year's classes.

The district expects to offer classes for 1,400 more students and add many more full-day offerings using money collected through a city sales tax.

About 4,000 children now attend preschool classes in the district — with 3,500 children in half-day classes. The district will add 25 to 35 classrooms across the region to increase the number of full-day classes and more the following year.

Applications for preschool may be picked up at the district's elementary schools and should be completed and turned in by Feb. 22.

Applications for full-day kindergarten must be completed by Thursday.

Monday, January 28, 2008

Letter to the Editor

Teachers union always acts in students' interest

Re: "Teacher union missed a chance," Jan. 24 editorial.

Michael Seymour, Denver

As someone who has taught at Bruce Randolph School for three years, I have been following recent events at the school closely. After reading the editorial about the school last week, I was disappointed to read your response to the Denver Classroom Teachers Association's decision not to grant every request to the school.

The DCTA was accused by The Post of "looking like an organization ... concerned about maintaining its power and its relevancy."

The notion that the DCTA is selfish shows no understanding of what the DCTA represents. The DCTA is primarily made of teachers in Denver Public Schools. As a teacher myself, I can attest every teacher is in the profession to help children. It makes no sense to think anyone would work that hard for such little financial compensation if they were selfish. The DCTA (teachers) always acts with the best interest of children in mind. Not agreeing to every request from Bruce Randolph is no exception.

Letter to the Editor

Less "reflexive" thinking, more reflective thinking

Carolyn K. Plummer, Arvada

Re: "A lesson in union power," Dec. 25 David Harsanyi column.

It didn't take more than the jerk of a knee to have David Harsanyi's column appear in Friday's Denver Post.

I would agree that the Denver Classroom Teachers Association's response to a school's

request to be released from some contract rules was a knee-jerk response to new ideas.

I do not, however, agree with Harsanyi's assertion that all teachers union block educational reform. Just as Harsanyi would probably not appreciate being labeled as just another journalist with a liberal bias, teachers union members don't appreciate having their organizations tagged as opposing reform.

Harsanyi and other journalists who cover education could avoid falling into this trap by educating themselves about the leadership of the American Federation of Teachers in education reform in places where there is a long-standing representation of teachers by AFT. Even though AFT's presence in Colorado is less visible, there is evidence of that same reform leadership that has existed for decades in our own state.

I would hope to see both the DCTA and local journalists exercise less "reflexive thinking" and more reflective thinking as attempts to reform our schools goes forward.

Rocky Mountain News

Saturday, January 26, 2008

Financial lessons

Pledging college aid for DPS students becomes just first step in 'overwhelming' process

By [Nancy Mitchell](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/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/>>)

Yadi was 4 years old when she came to the U.S. with her family, and 14 when she sat in the Cole Middle School auditorium in north Denver and heard Mayor John Hickenlooper promise he would help her pay for college.

"Are you for real?" she remembers thinking. "I think you're lying, but OK."

Yadi wasn't sure if Hickenlooper meant it because, one, he is a politician, and two, she doesn't have legal residency papers. Hickenlooper has been uncertain over the past four years whether his promise would cover undocumented students.

But these days, the mayor is saying it will. Yadi, via cell phone and MySpace, is

helping make sure that her former Cole classmates and current high school seniors know the mayor came through and that the money is there.

"I even called some people who have dropped out and who want to come back because of the scholarship," she said.

Hickenlooper's promise was the first of three such pledges in Denver Public Schools, until every student who graduates from a traditional city high school is eligible for college help, starting this spring.

What the mayor and two philanthropic millionaires who made the promises have learned themselves is that standing on a stage before auditoriums filled with students and offering them money was the easy part.

What's harder:

- * Keeping track of kids. Of the 108 to 113 Cole students who should now be seniors - the exact number depends on whom you ask - fewer than 40 are still in DPS. A community group trying to contact all 542 Cole students is finding about half. The school was taken over by the state after the mayor's promise and kids scattered.

- * Getting them to apply and go. Of the 609 graduates of Lincoln, Montbello and South high schools, the pilot recipients of the Denver Scholarship Foundation, 500 applied, 330 of those were deemed eligible and 235 of them actually enrolled. But only 170 showed up for classes.

- * Deciding whom to help. Because DPS does not track undocumented students, it isn't known how many are in Yadi's position.

The *Rocky Mountain News* is not using Yadi's last name because she fears repercussions for her family. Undocumented students can go to college but must pay much higher out-of-state tuition rates. Two out of three college promises include them - Cole and a similar promise made at Horace Mann Middle School by oilman Alex Cranberg.

The Denver Scholarship Foundation, the much larger program that is expanding citywide this spring, does not. Hickenlooper, a DSF board member, said he does not see a contradiction between his Cole promise helping undocumented students and the foundation deciding not to.

He said private donors volunteered to help with the Cole students. DSF received legal advice saying it should not.

"They're two different things," the mayor said of the Cole promise and DSF. "The law is the law. To do something like this on a large scale, you need a foundation.

The Cole kids, there's so few of them that you don't need to go out and raise \$100 million."

Money is not enough

In a former classroom at South High School, Yessica Holguin sat beside a girl with fingernails painted turquoise and scrolled through screenfuls of available scholarships.

"Do scholarships usually go by merit?" said the girl, senior Caren Martinez. Holguin, who was up until 11 the night before reading over students' personal essays, noticed Martinez's anxious face. "The most important thing is to be able to show them, if you have fallen, you've gotten up," she counseled. "It's not if you fell, it's how you got up."

Holguin is coordinator of South's Futures Center, one of nine college prep resource centers rolled out last year in traditional city high schools through DSF. They're designed as drop-in centers, where students can use computers, learn about scholarships and get help filling out the lengthy federal financial aid forms.

"The process can be so overwhelming," Holguin said. "If you don't have someone to guide you, it's easy to give up."

That's especially true for those who will be the first in their families to go to college. In DSF's pilot class of 170, 72 percent are first-generation students.

Holguin, herself a first-generation student, remembers the struggle all too well. Though she had a 4.2 grade point average at John F. Kennedy High School, she was referred to a cosmetology program. Instead, she had earned her MBA by age 21.

"My main purpose is to see every student achieve their full potential," she said on a recent Wednesday as teens buzzed around her desk. "I was very lucky . . . but we cannot leave our children's education to luck."

For senior Asmaa Basha, Holguin read and re-read the personal essays required in her applications.

"I needed help so bad," said Basha, who came from Egypt at age 9 and was worried about her language skills. "My parents don't really speak English."

For senior Alfredo Reyes, Holguin created a grid of scholarships, materials needed to apply and due dates.

"The hardest part is just finding time to do this and keeping me on track," he said. "Yessica was putting so much time into helping me, I just saw it as my part of the

deal to get straight A's and meet the deadlines."

The next big challenge

Those are things that South's regular guidance counselors don't necessarily have time to do. Their workload, like most DPS counselors, is heavy - four counselors for 1,400 students.

"The money is good," South High Principal Bill Kohut said of DSF, "but the support is just awesome."

There are early indications that the college promise is spurring more interest in DPS, one of the goals of Tim Marquez, the Lincoln graduate who launched the program with a \$50 million donation.

Kohut said that the number of private-school students touring his school has doubled, from 30 to 60, since Marquez announced his gift in 2006. Enrollment also is up at Lincoln and at Montbello, the other pilot schools.

Marquez said he wants to see the program grow to the point that it is supporting 6,000 students at a time.

DSF already has made a major change in its program, switching to awarding students set dollar amounts based on family income and college they plan to attend.

That replaces a system of "last dollar in," where DSF money filled in gaps remaining after other aid and scholarships. That was confusing and the gaps often weren't figured out until summer or nearly fall.

The next big step for DSF, and for the Cole and Mann promises, is already in front of them. "The next big challenge is keeping them in college," said Cranberg, who made the Mann promise and who once served on the board of Metropolitan State College of Denver. "The majority of kids who enter college don't matriculate."

Of the 170 DSF recipients who entered college this past fall, "several" have not made satisfactory academic progress in the first semester, said executive director Cindy Abramson.

Others are doing just fine, such as Isra Ahmed, a South grad in her first semester at the University of Colorado-Boulder.

"I had so many college choices to choose from, but I narrowed it down because, with a DSF scholarship, you have to go to school in Colorado," she said. "Money-wise, I got other scholarships . . . but I knew about them through the Futures

Center. So without it, I wouldn't have gotten any of them."

Money for college

The city's mayor and two Denver oil millionaires have promised to help Denver Public Schools students find money for college. Those promises are coming due. Here's a closer look:

The Cole Promise Mayor John Hickenlooper made his promise in January 2004, surprising sleepy students at Cole Middle School in north Denver who had gathered for an early- morning test score rally.

* **What he said:** "I guarantee we will find the resources and you will go to college. If you go to college . . . you can do anything you want."

* **Who's covered:** 542 students were enrolled at Cole on that date. Of those, 108 are - or should be - high school seniors. As of last week, 38 were still in DPS. Staying in DPS isn't required but it is up to students to let the city know where they are. Call the Mayor's Office for Education and Children at 720-913-0900. Undocumented students are covered.

* **What's covered:** Same as the Denver Scholarship Foundation.

Hope at Horace Mann Denver oilman Alex Cranberg made his promise in May 2004 to students enrolled at Horace Mann Middle School in northwest Denver.

* **What he said:** "If anybody tells you that you can't afford to go on to college, you tell them you've got a school fund . . . and you can't afford not to."

* **Who's covered:** Of the 550 enrolled at the time of the promise, 178 are - or should be - high school seniors. Cranberg has tracked 110 over the past four years. Of those, at least 38 have completed college applications. Call ACE at 303-573-1603 to learn more. Undocumented students are covered.

* **What's covered:** Cranberg promised to cover at least the cost of tuition at Metropolitan State College of Denver, where he was a board member, for four years. This year's Metro tuition is \$1,518.57 per semester. Students can take the money to any private or public college or university in the country.

Denver Scholarship Foundation Tim Marquez, a graduate of Lincoln High School and founder of two start-up oil companies, took the college promise citywide in November 2006, seeding the Denver Scholarship Foundation with a \$50 million donation. He unveiled its formation before an auditorium full of South High students .

* **What he said:** "We're going to provide you the means to get to college anywhere in the state of Colorado. We're providing you the money, but I can't do the studying for you. It's really up to you. All we can do is make out the checks."

* **Who's covered:** All DPS graduates beginning this spring. In its pilot year, 2006-07, the foundation wrote checks for 170 of a total 609 graduates of Lincoln, South and Montbello high schools. Undocumented students are not covered.

* **What's covered:** Students must meet certain requirements, such as a 2.0 grade point average, to receive dollars based on family income and the college or university the student wants to attend. Learn more at

www.denverscholarship.org <<http://www.denverscholarship.org>> .

Program gives aid to teenage parents

By Bill Gallo , Special to the Rocky

One dramatic effect of the counseling Parent Pathways provides to teen parents and their families has been the increasing involvement of young men in the well-being of their children.

Parent Pathways provides alternative schooling, direct housing assistance and family education to teenage parents, most of them Hispanic. About one-fourth of fathers get and stay involved. Nationally, statistics show that only one in 10 teen fathers takes any responsibility.

"If we can foster the idea of a father being engaged in a positive way, we want to do that," said Executive director Noreen Keleshian.

In this interview, Keleshian and Pathways community relations coordinator Kari Buchanan discuss their educational and counseling programs. Their remarks have been edited for space and clarity.

The agency has applied for Season to Share funding.

What is the basic tool of your agency?

Education is the key, so we aim at a high school diploma or a GED, primarily through the Florence Crittenton School for Teenage Mothers, 96 S. Zuni St. At any one time we have about 170 pregnant and parenting teen moms attending. We have on-site child care for about 60 babies and the outreach program for the young fathers and/or husbands of the young women in school. We have a private/public partnership with Denver Public Schools (DPS), and under their guidelines a student can be up to 21 years old.

How does your housing program work?

We help young parents with transitional housing and supportive services when they reach an age to live on their own. They tend to be post-high school; some are working on a GED or taking community college classes. Most of them are 18 or older, legal age to have their first apartments; the age range in our housing, which landlords agree to provide at low market rates, is 16 to 25. The residents may stay up to two years.

Any changes in the client profile?

Not really. The population we serve is 80 percent Hispanic; that's the specific niche we are helping. But over the last two or three years we have begun seeing more immigrant families, for whom Spanish is their first language and, in some cases, their only language. The language problem increases the difficulty in working with their families, and, because some are undocumented workers, they are unable to get public support. In recent years we've also seen an increase in young parents who don't have safe places to live - more tenuous living situations for these young women.

How do you encourage the dads?

We work individually with them, one-on-one. Some young men need to get back into school, a GED program or vocational training. Sometimes they've been through vocational programs they don't have skills for. Some need to establish paternity; others need a break from gang involvement.

How effective is your reach? How many young mothers are you not getting to?

A few statistics: In the calendar year 2006 there were 1,160 babies born to mothers ages 13-19 in Denver County, according to the Colorado Department of Health and Environment. Of the 18 and 19 year-olds, only 37 percent had a high school diploma. Our usual profile: the girl doesn't have strong support from family and is probably behind in grade level; more than 50 percent have dropped out of school. Frequently, it's the pregnancy or the birth of the baby that drives them over the edge. We kind of become the family.

Parent Pathways

* **Mission:** Helping teen parents raise healthy families.

* **Founded:** 1975

* **People helped:** 550-600 young parents each year

* **Staff:** 54

* **Volunteers:** 600

* **Budget:** \$3.7 million

* **Web site:** parentpathways.org