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Denver Post

Tuesday, January 29, 2008

DPS kicks off early-education expansion

By Jeremy P. Meyer

The Denver Post

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Four-year-olds at Columbine Elementary had just finished dancing and singing about peanut butter and jelly on Monday before men in ties interrupted.

A news conference with some of Denver's top leaders took place in Michael Conlon's preschool classroom to announce an expansion of Denver Public Schools' preschool and kindergarten programs. The district wants to increase the number of preschool slots by as much as 40 percent and full-day kindergarten slots by up to 30 percent.

"The fate of empires depends upon the education of youth," Mayor John Hickenlooper told the class, quoting Aristotle. "That's why we're all here for you guys, so that we won't get left in the dust."

The district wants to tap into \$10 million a year already being generated by a voter-approved sales tax for preschool.

The tax money is a subsidy for Denver families with preschool-aged children, regardless of income level — helping pay for quality private or public programs.

The standard cost of preschool in DPS is \$195 a month for half-day programs. However, only 17 percent pay for classes because poor students receive state and federal financial help.

"There is an incredible unmet need in Denver for the education of 4-year-olds and kindergartners," said DPS Superintendent Michael Bennet.

"The data (are) absolutely clear," he said. "If we don't get kids started off right, if they are not ready to learn by the time they come to the first grade, sometimes they never catch up."

DPS plans to spend \$1.6 million to improve facilities and increase capacity — adding up to 1,800 more half-day preschool slots next school year, making full-day classes a possibility. Those slots could mean preschool classes for up to four times as many students.

The district also wants to provide full-day kindergarten for up to 1,400 more students next year, using mill-levy taxes and state funds, officials say.

"Our ambition is to make sure every 5-year-old in Denver has access to full-day kindergarten and every 4-year-old that wants it has access to full-day (preschool)," Bennet said.

The registration process for next year's preschool and kindergarten classes is underway. Classrooms and programs must get a rating before they can be considered an approved provider under the Denver Preschool Program.

Only 112 classrooms have been rated so far, said James Mejia, chief executive officer of the Denver Preschool Program. He said he has been in talks with the governor's office about expanding preschool programs throughout the state.

"Hopefully what we learn between Denver Public Schools and the Denver Preschool Program will be translated in communities throughout the state," he said.

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Rocky Mountain News

Tuesday, January 29, 2008

Education brief, January 29

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"This is one of the many things going right with Denver Public Schools."

DPS Superintendent Michael Bennet in announcing a record expansion of preschool and kindergarten seats across the district for fall. Monday marked the beginning of registration for preschool; kindergarten registration began Jan. 7. Log on to www.dpsk12.org to learn more.

And if your family needs some help paying for preschool, in DPS or elsewhere ...

"Money's available right now, it's available immediately."

Denver Preschool Program CEO James Mejia, who joined Bennet for Monday's press conference, encouraging families to check out www.denverpreschoolprogram.org to take advantage of the tuition credits available via a sales tax increase approved by voters in November 2006. He said fewer than 70 children are currently enrolled.

9 News

Monday, January 28, 2008

Parents can now register for pre-K, kindergarten programs

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DENVER – Open registration is underway for preschool and kindergarten programs in Denver Public Schools.

For the 2008-2009 school year, DPS is creating 1,500 to 1,800 additional half-day preschool slots. In addition, between 1,200 to 1,400 kindergarten students are expected to attend full-day classes next school year.

The goal is to eventually change half-day preschool programs into full-day programs.

"The research is absolutely clear on the positive impact both of those programs have of closing the achievement gap prior to children even entering into Denver Public Schools and getting them at a level where they can achieve," said DPS Board of Education member Bruce Hoyt.

"We still have tremendous unmet need," said DPS Superintendent Michael Bennet. "Every kid in Denver that's not getting the benefit of full-day kindergarten or full-day EC isn't getting what they deserve in this city and for that matter, in this state."

The expansion of the early childhood education program is the result of the "yes" vote to Referendum 1A in November 2006. The measure raised the sales tax in Denver by 12 cents for every \$100 spent within city limits. That money is used to fund a program creating a tuition credit system to help every child in Denver attend preschool.

Open registration continues through Feb. 22. To sign up, contact your child's school.

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