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New DPS budget plan advances

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Denver Public Schools board members on Wednesday informally approved a new way of budgeting that gives more money to poor kids and cuts the funding gap between elementary and high schools.

Formal approval of the 2008-09 budget will come this spring, but DPS leaders sought the go-ahead on major shifts in how dollars are allocated to schools.

DPS is adopting student-based budgeting, where dollars follow individual students wherever they go, and abandoning its old method of funding schools based on classrooms of kids.

Under the old way, a school received resources based on a set number of students, such as one teacher for every 25 students. But that hurt schools when, for example, a class increased to 38 kids, still 12 pupils short of getting teacher No. 2.

Under the new system, principals would receive an amount per student, based on factors such as grade level and free lunch status, and would have greater flexibility in spending it.

Most changes are contingent upon DPS successfully refinancing its pension plan, expected to bring in \$15 million to \$18 million more per year. Among the changes getting the green light:

* High schools would receive \$157 more per pupil while middle schools would receive \$58 more per pupil. That's to bring them in line with the base funding amount of \$3,403 that elementary schools receive per student. In 2007-08, elementary schools received 22 percent more than secondary schools.

* Elementary students qualifying for the federal free lunch program, an indicator of poverty, would receive \$256 each while secondary schools would receive \$290 per pupil. The higher amount for older students is intended to offset the decline in free lunch participation seen in secondary schools.

Also, 16 of the lowest-performing and highest-poverty schools would receive \$100,000 each.

* Students identified as gifted and talented would receive \$95 per pupil, while high-performing magnet programs, such as the International Baccalaureate program, would see funding boosts of more than 30 percent.

DPS Chief Operating Officer Tom Boasberg said the district is attempting to balance the needs of children living in poverty while also increasing resources for programs that attract middle-class families.

DPS is banking on its proposed pension transaction, expected to be completed by early March, to supply the extra dollars. Even without it, though, Boasberg said the district will be able to balance its budget for a second year, after cutting \$83 million over five years.

The district also is counting on slight enrollment growth, projecting an additional 62 students in grades kindergarten through 12 and an extra 185 students if preschool is included. Only grades 6 through 8 are projected to decline, by 468 students, as DPS middle schools continue to struggle academically.

Principals will receive their budget figures on Feb. 8, and Boasberg said staffers are compiling budgets with the extra pension dollars and without them. With the

pension money, schools are expected to receive between 5 and 11 percent more per student. Without it, their budgets would stay much the same.

While the new budget attempts to right some inequities, Boasberg said few schools would lose money. That's because new dollars would go first to schools that have received less in past years. Schools that have received more would not get as much. For example, a school that has received extra dollars for a special program would subtract that amount from any new money it is due.

also must approve the changes.

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Newswise

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Bully Prevention Effort in Denver Schools Effective

Newswise — A large study of urban elementary school students has found that curriculum-based bullying prevention programs reduced incidents of bullying by 20 percent, twice as much as the study control group.

Jeffrey M. Jenson and William A. Dieterich of the University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work studied more than 1,100 fourth- and fifth-grade students in 28 elementary schools in Denver public schools. One group was exposed to a bullying prevention program called "Youth Matters" (YM). A second control group of students was not.

Self-reported bully victimization among students taking the "Youth Matters" curriculum decreased 20 percent compared to a 10 percent drop from students in the control group.

"By the end of the study, bully victimization was significantly lower in the YM group relative to the control group," Jenson reports. "This outcome is encouraging because the curriculum modules tested in the study focused on teaching the social and emotional skills necessary to avoid becoming a bully victim. Our findings suggest that exposure to skills training has a positive effect on reducing bully victimization reports among elementary school students."

The results are detailed in a paper, "Effects of a Skills-Based Prevention Program on Bullying and Bully Victimization among Elementary School Children," published in the

December 2007 issue of *Prevention Science* by the Society for Prevention Research.

Previous research has shown that about 25 percent of elementary students either bully or are victims of bullying. Studies also suggest that both bullies and victims are at risk for later mental health problems and involvement in anti-social activities. Educators have focused attention on bullying in the wake of school shootings over the last decade. In some of those cases there were indications that the shooters themselves had been bullied as young children.

Students in the Jenson-Dieterich study who participated in the “Youth Matters” curriculum received training in four 10-week modules over the course of two academic years. The curriculum focused on two themes: issues and skills related to bullying and other forms of early aggression.

In skills instruction, students learned how to use social and interpersonal skills to decrease the likelihood of being bullied by classmates. They also were taught ways to stand up for themselves and others, and instruction in asking for help when confronted by a bully. The goal of the training was to teach students how to use these skills to stay out of trouble, build positive relationships, make good decisions and avoid anti-social behavior.

“Understanding the consequences of bullying from both a bully and victim perspective is emphasized in training sessions,” Jenson reports. “Our findings point to the importance of social and emotional skills in reducing bullying.”