

News Clips

Headlines

Denver Post

Friday, February 8, 2008

- DPS gets \$4.75 million in grants
- No charges filed against ex-principal
- DPS takes different approach to ranking

Rocky Mountain News

Friday, February 8, 2008

- A new way of grading schools

Denver Business Journal

Friday, February 8, 2008

- Denver schools get \$4.7M for accountability effort

Denver Post

Friday, February 8, 2008

DPS gets \$4.75 million in grants

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 02/07/2008 06:54:13 PM MST

Denver Public Schools announced today that it received \$4.75 million in grants to help

the district improve its data collection.

The grants are from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation and will be delivered over the next 18 months.

"We are extremely grateful to the foundations for their confidence and support for DPS's efforts to become a national leader in empowering our staff with the tools and information to make our entire district as efficient and effective in serving students as possible," Superintendent Michael Bennet said in a statement.

No charges filed against ex-principal

By Howard Pankratz
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 02/08/2008 01:51:58 AM MST

Former Denver Public Schools principal Dave Debus has been cleared of any criminal wrongdoing in a case where a former student claimed Debus touched him inappropriately.

The student alleged that Debus, 47, touched him on his back, shoulders and legs, and ran his hands up and down his body.

But Lynn Kimbrough, spokeswoman for the Denver district attorney's office, said that a review of the case revealed no criminal acts by Debus.

"Our review of the facts of the case earlier this week showed no criminal conduct," Kimbrough said.

She said the case was presented to prosecutors Monday. After a review and the finding of no criminal acts, a decision was made not to file, she said.

Debus resigned from the district in December.

The student, who attended the Contemporary Learning Academy, an alternative school, claimed the incidents occurred during the second week of November.

He filed a notice that he intends to sue Denver Public Schools for \$150,000.

DPS takes different approach to ranking

The district's new scorecards will track student and school progress in a way that's more telling than the state's system.

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 02/08/2008 01:58:25 AM MST

Each Denver school will have an annual scorecard that rates how the school performed in dozens of areas, focusing heavily on how well students improve from year to year.

At the same time, thousands of dollars in incentives will be on the table for principals whose schools show the most improvement.

The district's self-assessment is a new approach to analyzing state data on schools and students, aimed at giving a more comprehensive picture than the state's traditional ranking system.

The state's School Accountability Reports typically are released in late fall, rating schools based on how students perform on the Colorado Student Assessment Program.

That report issued by the Colorado Department of Education ranks schools from "excellent" to "unsatisfactory" and lists whether their academic growth from the year before had improved, stabilized or showed a decline.

DPS's School Performance Framework takes a deeper look at the data — assessing student growth with cohorts from across Colorado, comparing schools with similar populations and even possibly assessing parental satisfaction.

"This is a much more thoughtful approach to data," Superintendent Michael Bennet said. "We are beginning to ask the right questions. . . . This is moving us from the anecdotal world. We're moving to a world where there is some slice of reality."

Grant money to help with data use

The framework was presented to school board members Thursday, hours after the district announced it had been awarded \$4.75 million in grants to further improve its use of student data to improve achievement.

The district plans to refine the framework and release the final reports to schools in April, complete with a single overall rating compiled from all of the measures.

Perhaps the most inventive use of data is a measure that looks at how students compare with others in the state.

Here's how it works: A Denver student, for example, scores 500 in 2006 on the math portion of the CSAP, 420 in 2005 and 390 in 2004. That student's "growth percentile" is determined by finding students across the state with similar scoring patterns during those years.

Then the Denver student's 2007 score is compared with how those other students did.

"For a long time we have been comparing apples to oranges," Bennet said. "This compares apples to apples. It provide a more useful picture. It ultimately will give our community a much more accurate picture."

The scorecard also looks at how well the school is narrowing the achievement gap, how it is performing compared with others in the district with similar makeups and how the school is preparing kids for college and attendance rates.

Each measure gets a score and a corresponding color — red for not meeting standards to green for exceeding them.

"The purpose of this is to give teachers, principals and kids a richer view of how the school is performing from different angles," said Robert Good, director of assessment and research.

Administrators hope principals will assess what is working and what is not, compare results with other schools that are having success and figure out how to fix the problems.

Rewarding principals

Administrators also introduced a pay-for-performance system for principals and assistant principals that would pay thousands of dollars to the leaders who work in hard-to-serve schools, improve student achievement and become one of the top-performing schools.

The framework doesn't let high-performing schools off the hook. It also judges them on whether their students have improved.

Bromwell Elementary principal Jonathan Wolfer, whose school is typically one of the highest-performing in Denver, says he welcomes the information and says the raw numbers on his school that he received this week showed him areas that need to be improved.

"It's a good assessment," he said.

Jeremy P. Meyer: 303-954-1367 or jpmeyer@denverpost.com
<<mailto:jpmeyer@denverpost.com>>

Rocky Mountain News

Friday, February 8, 2008

A new way of grading schools

DPS system focuses on growth, value to students

By [Nancy Mitchell](#)

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

Denver Public Schools leaders on Thursday released a comprehensive new system of measuring their schools that could be duplicated across Colorado.

The system focuses on how much growth schools are fostering in their students and it groups schools of like demographics to compare progress.

"For the first time, we're going to have a comprehensive body of evidence about the progress that schools are making - or not making," said DPS Chief Academic Officer Jaime Aquino. "We're really focusing on growth, what is the value we're adding to students every year?"

Its most innovative piece compares DPS students with students statewide who have similar performance histories on state exams. With the Colorado Department of Education, the district will track how DPS pupils do compared to those peers and judge their schools based on jumps or drops in performance.

A multitude of other factors will fold into the new DPS school ratings, including non-academic indicators such as whether families are returning to the same schools from one year to the next.

DPS Superintendent Michael Bennet said the district will submit the system to state officials in June, and there's talk of replicating it elsewhere.

"It is much less about labeling and much more about identifying strengths and weaknesses," Bennet said, referring to ratings such as 'Average' that federal and state accountability systems assign to schools.

DPS schools will receive an overall rating, based on up to 42 indicators, but Bennet said those rating names have yet to be determined. It's also unclear exactly when parents will see the new report cards, though it likely will be before the end of this school year.

Principals earlier this week received sample reports for their schools which included colored "stoplight" indicators, allowing them to easily see their school's strengths and weaknesses.

Bennet said what parents see may differ.

"I want parents to know as much about our schools as possible," he said. "The question is, what format will that take?"

Educators have long criticized school report cards based solely on student performance. That's largely because schools filled with affluent students nearly always outperform schools with more diverse student bodies.

But they've also debated how best to measure growth.

DPS' new method considers 15 different growth measures. Altogether, they account for more than 60 percent of the overall rating the school will receive.

Three of the measures compare schools of similar demographics based on poverty and ethnicity. DPS schools were grouped based on those factors.

"It's no mystery that certain schools face more obstacles than other schools to increase student achievement," said Montbello High School Principal Antwan Wilson. "You need to compare apples to apples, not apples to oranges."

Aquino said the new system likely will show some schools in a different light. For example, a school may have an 'Excellent' rating from the state, but its DPS rating may be less glowing if its student growth is not strong.

Similarly, a school rated 'Low' by the state, but showing strong student growth, could shine under the DPS system.

Ultimately, he said the goal is to get to the point where principals in similar

schools compare notes and tap each other for help.

Tuesday, Aquino handed out the new report cards and watched as two assistant principals moved together to share.

"We're having issues in math," one said to the other. "You're not. Why is that?"

Denver Business Journal

Friday, February 8, 2008

Denver schools get \$4.7M for accountability effort

Two foundations have given grants totaling \$4.75 million to Denver Public Schools to support a "performance management" and accountability initiative.

The program is part of a DPS effort to focus its staff on student achievement and hold them accountable for their results.

The funds -- \$2.9 million from the Austin, Texas-based Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and \$1.85 million from the Los Angeles-based Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation -- will be received over the next 18 months, DPS said Thursday.

The new program will "empower staff with critical information that can be used to improve student achievement and district performance," a DPS statement said.

Among other goals, the funds will be used to provide more information on grades and attendance to teachers and other staff members online.

That data, for example, could be used by teachers to better cater their teaching strategy to individual students.

The program also will deliver data to DPS operations departments, such as food service, human resources and transportation, to improve their efficiency.

"By taking a new approach to how information is used in the district and the classroom,

teachers and administrators can take action based on what's working and what's not working to influence student achievement and graduation rates before the child fails a grade level," Janet Mountain, executive director of the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, said in a statement released by DPS.