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# Denver Post

# Wednesday, February 13, 2008

## 2 schools gain some freedom

**Teachers union frees Manual, Bruce Randolph from key parts of contract**

By Jeremy P. Meyer  
*The Denver Post*

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Denver's teachers union will allow two schools to break from key parts of the contract, ending weeks of haggling and allowing the schools some autonomy.

Bruce Randolph Middle School and Manual High School in northeast Denver sought control over pay, length of the school day and year, and hiring procedures in an effort to improve student achievement.

The Denver school board already had voted for the necessary waivers from district rules for Bruce Randolph, and plans to vote on Manual later this month. But the union had not agreed to free the schools from many parts of the contract.

After weeks of negotiations — during which the union got the schools to specify exactly what parts of the contract they felt hindered student achievement — the union's executive board voted Monday on a compromise.

"This is something that we have been working for for 15 weeks now," said Greg Ahrnsbrak, a physical-education teacher and union representative at Bruce Randolph. "We feel this allows us and gives us the freedom to move forward."

The debate over whether the two schools should be allowed to get waivers from both the union and Denver Public Schools drew attention from national education experts interested in how Denver is trying to reform its schools.

Debate was also sparked about unions and schools. State Sen. President Peter Groff, D-Denver, introduced a bill allowing all Colorado schools an easier path to waivers.

Bruce Randolph principal Kristin Waters took advantage of the agreement on Tuesday when a math teacher asked to take on six classes instead of the mandated five.

"In the past I would say, 'No, I can't pay you,' " she said. "Now I can pay that teacher to work that extra class. It's going to benefit the teacher and the students."

Manual's effort was more private than Bruce Randolph's, but principal Rob Stein intends to immediately start hiring for next year when the school, which now has only freshmen, adds sophomores.

"We know we need 10 teachers," he said. "The current procedure would allow us to start hiring in April. We want to get going on that now."

Both Manual and Bruce Randolph will be able to pilot the "rolling posting process," which allows the schools to post and hire immediately when the positions open. In the past, schools had to adhere to a hiring cycle that lasted through the spring.

Denver Classroom Teachers Association president Kim Ursetta said Monday's resolution shows what can happen when opposing sides work together.

"By having everyone sit in the same room together is how we were able to come to an agreement," she said.

At least one critic said the union's agreement was a little late to save face.

"After 10 weeks, it seems like the DCTA finally stopped hitting itself in the head with a hammer," said Alan Gottlieb, vice president of the Public Education & Business Coalition. "They deserve praise for altering their stance and doing the right thing."

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## **HOPES HANG ON WEST DENVER PREP LOTTERY**

### **Kids anxious to attend charter**

*By Joey Bunch The Denver Post*

Rosa and Lindsay Gomez sat on the front row at West Denver Prep on Tuesday night, clutching each other and fidgeting in unison as though their lives depended on the enrollment lottery. Finally, deep in the drawing of 150 future sixth-graders from 189 families, Lindsay's name was called and worried grimaces turned to relieved sighs and ebullient smiles.

"It's a really good school," said the beaming 10-year-old, who wants to be a lawyer.

"It's the best," her mother added.

A room full of loving parents wanted the best for their kids. They wanted them to attend a

charter school that has taken students from the poorest region of the city and turned them into academic stars, with no excuses and one goal: college.

Parents of current and future students said the modest building at South Federal Boulevard and West Jewell Avenue recruits passionate, dedicated teachers, allows them to help draft the curriculum, then puts its passion behind teaching rather than riding herd on behavior

Darren Rivera, 11, got in last fall. At his old school he was constantly treated as failure, he said. His mother, Tommy Rivera, said she felt like a failure as a mother because her son couldn't learn as fast as others.

"I didn't get much help," Darren said. "They didn't even really offer help when I asked for it." But that all turned around this year. "He feels a sense of success, and it helps make him successful," Tommy Rivera said. "At other schools, teachers don't have the time or resources." And that's the academic success Magda Figueroa Sugey, 10, is looking for on her way to becoming a doctor. The tiny girl in the pink outfit grabbed her mother and squeezed so tight that her mother gasped when Magda's name was called. Magda seized her mother's cell phone and raced outside to call her father at work. Her mother, Magdalena, speaks no English, but her tears said volumes. Chris Gibbons, the head of school at West Denver Prep, watched the joy children exhibited when they were chosen. "Kids don't get enough credit for understanding their future," he said.

"They know this matters." He also kept watch on parent Sabrina Gutierrez, as she become more agitated and tearful as the lottery wound down. "If her child doesn't get in, it's going to be bad," he whispered. But when Briann Gutierrez was chosen, her mother called out loudly, "Praise the Lord," and raised her hand to heaven as her tears began to flow. "All parents want the best education for their children," she said. "And this is the best."

# **Rocky Mountain News**

## **Wednesday, February 13, 2008**

### **DPS boss dips 'nervous' toe into subbing pool**

**Rocky Mountain News**

**Wednesday, February 13, 2008**

Michael Bennet may run Denver Public Schools, but it doesn't mean he has all the answers.

When asked Tuesday how he felt before his first day as a substitute teacher at East High School, he responded with one word:

"Nervous."

Sure, Bennet graduated from Yale Law School and turned around bankrupt companies for Philip Anschutz and was the right hand to Mayor John Hickenlooper.

But the prospect of teaching a couple of classes of Advanced Placement world history - that's college prep stuff - had him fretting for days.

The overall goal was to publicize the DPS substitute teacher shortage and encourage community members to help out. Here's how he thinks he did:

The lesson was about the Atlantic slave trade . . . I focused on two primary sources. One, an account by someone who worked in the French slave trade, and two, an account by a slave who had purchased his freedom.

The thrust of the lesson: I wanted them to come out with a sense (that) each actor was engaged in trying to describe history as they saw it and trying to persuade.

Other than that, my objective was not to bore the kids to death.

I've learned a lot in the last 21/2 years about how to be a principal. I think I'm almost to the point where I could be a candidate. I think I couldn't possibly be an effective teacher yet. To be able to learn about that is something I'm interested in.

The more important reason is we need substitute teachers in the Denver Public Schools, and it could be a real opportunity for people in the community to help our kids.

I'd love it if we saw more of our central administrators subbing to help with our vacancy rates. It's not a comprehensive solution. It would be fun to see people from other professions coming in to help.

I really enjoyed it. I think I was probably better, a little more effective, in the first class than the second. I don't know. I might have been worn out by the second class.

In both classes, I was surprised by how specific the kids were in their references

to the texts. In neither class were students saying, "My opinion

is . . . " I was impressed by that

. . . their textual analysis looked a lot more like my law school experience than my college experience.

(Subbing) is a great opportunity to interact with our kids in a wonderful way and to go into the Denver Public Schools.

I think it would surprise a lot of people to know they could get a substitute teaching license. We've got a lot of people in our community with subject- area expertise.

My sense of humor was not really in evidence. Probably because I was nervous. I didn't want to waste their time.

### **Help wanted**

To learn how to become a substitute teacher in Denver, log on to **www.dpsk12.org** and click on "Careers," or log on to **www.cde.state.co.us** and click on "Educator Licensing." To sub in DPS, even if you're the superintendent, you have to obtain a substitute license from the state.

## **Two DPS schools gain freedom in hiring**

By [Nancy Mitchell](#)

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**Wednesday, February 13, 2008**

Denver Public Schools and its teachers union on Tuesday announced a compromise that will grant historic freedoms in hiring, staffing and scheduling for two city schools that sought to break free of union and district rules.

Bruce Randolph and Manual schools in northeast Denver will be able to post job vacancies and hire at will, among other freedoms outlined in the agreement.

"It was a very positive resolution and came rather quickly after we all sat down

together to talk about it," said Kim Ursetta, president of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association.

Bruce Randolph Principal Kristin Waters said she was "ecstatic. It's great for kids, for the teachers, and I think it's good for the union."

The news came as the principals of 18 schools in far northeast Denver put the final touches on their own autonomy proposal, which they'll present to DPS board members Tuesday. Any agreements also must be OK'd by the union governing board.

"We definitely want to begin this conversation," said Montbello High School Principal Antwan Wilson, one of the 18 schools in Montbello and Green Valley Ranch that have been working together.

Waters and her staff made the first autonomy request in December, saying they needed waivers from some district policies and union rules to improve student achievement.

DPS board members said yes, but teachers union board members delayed a vote, then issued limited approval of some waivers.

That prompted the Bruce Randolph staff to consider other options, including conversion to a charter school. The delay also helped shape a bill that would have allowed schools to gain autonomy without union approval.

"We didn't change our minds," Ursetta said. "We just have had continual conversations trying to get clarity about what Bruce Randolph and Manual were asking for."

Waters said she will now talk with her staff to see who wants to stay. What happens next in DPS, as more schools are expected to seek autonomy, is less clear.

The superintendent and school board have pledged support for such efforts. But some union board members say they need to set some common criteria by which to evaluate such bids.

### **Freedom for Bruce Randolph, Manual**

**Denver Public Schools and its teachers union on Tuesday announced an agreement on autonomy bids from Bruce Randolph 6-12 School and Manual High School. Both schools had sought waivers of union and district rules. Some examples:**

#### **Hiring teachers**

\* The two schools now can post job openings for teachers and hire as vacancies become known. Other schools typically must wait until the spring staffing cycle begins. This "rolling" posting system will apply to all schools next spring.

\* Bruce Randolph teachers will work on annual contracts, meaning they can be asked to reapply for their jobs every year. Manual did not request this waiver.

### **Working overtime**

\* Both schools can select their own summer school teachers and can deviate from the contract pay rates for summer and evening work. Randolph school leaders had objected to rates that were higher for curriculum developers than after-school tutors.

\* Bruce Randolph and Manual can decide their own school calendars. Before the spring staffing cycle, teachers must be notified of the time requirements for the following year so they can request transfers.

### **Time in school**

\* Both schools can decide their own teaching loads or class sizes.

\* The two schools can decide how to allocate teacher time during the school day and how to use time on days when students do not attend school.

### **What wasn't waived**

\* Bruce Randolph and Manual are still subject to employee grievance procedures.

## **Tuesday, February 12, 2008**

# **More DPS students mean more funding**

By [Nancy Mitchell](#)

<<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/nancy-mitchell/>> ,  
**Rocky Mountain News** ([Contact](#)  
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**Tuesday, February 12, 2008**

Most principals in Denver Public Schools received good news last week with their budget numbers for 2008-09.

School leaders on Friday were given their estimated annual figures under the new student-based budgeting system, which attaches dollars to students based on factors such as poverty and grade level.

The proposed budget includes \$42.8 million more for schools, including the pension yield and an estimated increase of 486 students.

# **CBS 4**

**Tuesday, February 12, 2008**

## **2 Denver Schools Gain Autonomy**

DENVER (CBS4) — Denver Public Schools and the teachers union reached a deal Tuesday that gives two schools new freedom in hiring, staffing and scheduling. Bruce Randolph Middle School and Manual High School asked to be freed from union and district rules.

The schools will be able to post job openings and hire staffers without consulting district administrators.

Bruce Randolph's principal first made a proposal for autonomy in December. The DPS School Board said yes, but union leaders delayed a vote.

That had Bruce Randolph looking at other options, including becoming a charter school. Lawmakers at the state Capitol also proposed a bill to allow schools to get autonomy without the union's okay.

Tuesday's deal changed all that.

Eighteen other schools in far northeast Denver including Montbello High School are now creating their own autonomy proposal.

The superintendent and school board have said they'll support those ideas. Union board members say they need to set some common criteria by which to evaluate such bids.

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# 9 News

Tuesday, February 12, 2008

## Superintendent teaches class for first time, highlights shortage

written by: [Nelson Garcia](#)

<mailto:nelson.garcia@9news.com?subject=RE:Superintendent%20teaches%20class%20for%20first%20time,%20highlights%20shortage>, Reporter

DENVER – Michael Bennet runs the school district. He was chief of staff for the mayor. He worked for the governor of Ohio and in the U.S. Attorney General's Office. Bennet even handled \$500 million in business accounts for a corporation. But, he's never had to lead a classroom – especially high school students.

"It's nerve-wracking," said Bennet, superintendent of Denver Public Schools. "It's hard to get up in front of a group of teenagers and try to make it interesting for 50 minutes or an hour. Our teachers have to do that everyday."

Bennet recently obtained his substitute teaching license. He and other district administrators decided to do that last year so they could help in the classroom if needed. Tuesday, Bennet taught two periods of an AP World History course at East High School.

"I thought it was really cool," said Emily Gosche, a junior. "I thought he was well-prepared, which was kind of surprising."

Bennet substitute taught for two reasons. One, he wants to broaden his experiences especially since he is in charge of schools. Two, Bennet wants to highlight the district's problem of a shortage of substitutes.

"It's hard to say how short we are, but we know we're short," said Bennet. "There are some steps we are taking to try to deal with this."

The district is considering proposals to increase the pay rate of substitute teachers with a big increase for those who teach at least 60 days within the district.

"We're able to pay them 50 percent more than we were paying them just last year," said Bennet.

Bennet says the shortage is so bad; sometimes schools have trouble filling classrooms for teachers who are out.

"But, our teachers and our principals find a way to cover classes," said Bennet. "It's not ideal for anybody."

Gosche says usually the subs she sees are pretty good. However, she says she does notice there is a problem.

"We'll have subs who have no idea what's going on and a lot of those times either kids leave or just sit there," she said. "I just do class work from other classes."

Bennet says the district will also start recruiting aggressively to find good, qualified substitute teachers. He wants to appeal to local professionals who have some extra time. The only requirement to getting a substitute teaching license is a bachelor's degree and background check.

"Anybody can be a sub and I think it's a great thing to do," said Bennet.

Gosche says as subs go, Bennet gets a passing grade.

"He brought up good points. He contradicted us. He was afraid to have an opinion so that was really nice," she said. "I know it's probably intimidating to come to class full of kids who've been studying this a lot longer than he has. So, I thought it was very – he did very well."

Bennet says he loved it.

"I've never done it before. I have never taught before. Today was my first day. I'm sure I wasn't terribly good," said Bennet.

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# **Catholic News Agency**

## **Wednesday, February 13, 2008**

### **Critics claim radio program on school buses is dangerous for kids**

Denver, Feb 13, 2008 / 05:16 am (CNA <<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com>> ).- A radio show delivered exclusively to school children riding the bus to and from school has drawn sharp criticism from bus drivers and parents for undermining parental rights and introducing bus riders to indecent musicians.

BusRadio is free radio programming that promotes itself as an alternative to AM/FM radio and is designed for children. The BusRadio website advertises that it gives students the music they want “minus the offensive lyrics, with 1/3 of the sponsorships per hour of AM/FM and positive safety messages and PSAs.” The company has designed age-specific programs for elementary, middle and high school students.

In addition, the site states that “with BusRadio on board, noise levels drop, kids stay in their seats and the bus ride is safer and more fun than ever!”

However, not everyone is convinced. Littleton, Colorado bus driver, Danny Kenny is protesting the use of BusRadio in his school district.

Kenny told Colorado News 9 that while the songs may be “technically clean,” that are played on BusRadio, the content and themes of the songs are often too mature for the school children.

Kenny wants all parents to be aware of the door BusRadio opens for kids. He says while "clean" versions may be played on the busses, students can find the "explicit" versions online.

"Do you want to introduce a kid to, Ne-Yo and say, 'Hey this guy is a great singer. He's a great artist and this is a great song.' And then when he buys the album, you find out there are other songs on there you don't want them listen to," said Kenny.

Ne-Yo, a featured artist on BusRadio, raps about having sex with his girlfriend in one track on his album. He also has had graphic sexual photos of himself posted on the internet.

Another criticism leveled at the company stems from the advertisements being broadcast to a captive audience of school children.

Susan Linn, a psychologist told the Boston Globe that “What these corporations want to do is be in children's faces 24 hours a day, and they're getting close to that.”

In a conversation with CNA, Danny Kenny said that the incentive for school districts to carry BusRadio’s programming is that they receive money for allowing the broadcasts in their buses.

The issue at stake, says Kenny, is a parenting issue, since parents are losing control of

what their children listen to.

So far Kenny has succeeded in getting the Littleton School District (where he is a bus driver) to suspend their plans to subscribe to BusRadio's service. He hopes to raise awareness in Denver to prevent Denver Public Schools from following through with their plans to launch the service in the spring.

BusRadio currently reaches over one million students in 23 states each day.