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Tuesday, February 19, 2008

DPS's junk food plan bears fruit

Elementary school goes all out, making most sweet treats taboo

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 02/19/2008 02:47:31 AM MST

The healthiest elementary school in Denver has a fruit bowl for visitors in the front office, a giant poster of an apple outside and an all-out ban on sweets and junk food.

A group of parents at University Park Elementary set an example for the district when it adopted a healthful eating code that encourages fruits and vegetables instead of cupcakes and Cheetos.

"My goal is to create a healthy program in Denver Public Schools that other schools could take a look at," said Rainey Wikstrom, the parent leading the health charge.

Not all parents appreciate the extreme emphasis on junk-free eating. Sweet treats, in moderation, have their place in a happy childhood, they say.

But that place is not University Park, where students celebrate birthdays with books and poems, have watermelon socials and soon will have a garden in the playground.

Health awareness has seeped into kindergarten poetry: "Thank you for carrots . . . thank you for fruits and vegetables . . . thank you for not killing animals," reads a poem posted on the wall outside of teacher Judy Cárdenas' room.

On Valentine's Day — a celebration that was once a sugar-crazed bender of candied hearts and pink-and-red frosting — students dipped strawberries, apples and pineapples into cups of yogurt.

"I used to dread Valentine's Day," said Cárdenas. "This is the healthiest we have ever had."

Some kids did lament the good old days of cupcakes, but 6-year-old Will Gonnella said he also understood Valentine's Day is not just about sweets.

"I just like having lots of Valentines (cards) in my bag," Will said.

In 2006 Denver's school board set the district's federally mandated wellness policy

requiring that food and beverage offered by schools be "nutrient dense per calorie." Junk food can't be sold during school hours.

Food brought in by parents and teachers, however, is not regulated. The policy merely recommends it be healthy. Parents from University Park worked with principal Dennis Thompson to write guidelines. That didn't go down well with all parents.

"We were all labeled cupcake Nazis," Thompson said.

Among the objections: schools shouldn't dictate every detail of a kid's day. And a total ban on treats takes things a little too far.

"It's a totalitarian, 100 percent, zero tolerance on sugar," said Tami Patzer, whose daughter goes to the school. "Very few of us asked for that. For Valentine's Day, someone brought cookies. I don't know who. Someone had to sneak them in."

Wikstrom, who pushed the guidelines, is working with other schools on similar policies and also got Wild Oats to donate weekly bundles of food for disadvantaged children to take home every weekend.

She understands some of the resistance.

"Food is love, sugar is love," she said. "It's really emotional, steeped in history and family tradition. People don't like to be told what you can't have."

Yet, DPS administrators are pleased at how the school is interpreting the wellness policy.

"What's valuable there is they are helping to change the norms," said Bridget Beatty, DPS's school health specialist. "Usually there is some push back in the beginning because people are used to rituals. They like what is familiar. Once it's been implemented, everyone knows what to expect."

As for the students, they'll have to get used to it as well.

"I'd rather have cupcakes and sweet candy," said 6-year-old Joy Bedford summing up the school's holiday party last week.

"But I like getting Valentines."

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Rocky Mountain

News

Monday, February 18, 2008

SPEAKOUT: DPS favors some at expense of others

By Tom Anthony

Monday, February 18, 2008

Two weeks ago I heard about "weighted student funding" being considered by the Denver Public Schools board, and since I'll be writing a big property tax check to the city and county in a couple months, most of which will go to DPS, I thought I'd learn who was throwing the weight where.

Enlightenment came when I learned that the current DPS "per pupil" allocation for Edison Elementary, which my 5-year-old attends, is \$4,312 this school year and the average child in my 3-year-old's school, Valdez Elementary, has been allocated \$5,099. So the "tuition" is already vastly unequal, primarily on the premise that kids whose parents don't make (or declare) enough income and don't speak English should receive more money for their education than kids whose parents pay taxes and do speak English.

This was news to me, who ignorantly thought the pupil funding was even-steven.

The news got more interesting as the newly seated DPS board has now undertaken to increase the "weighted" student funding allocations by between 300 percent and 500 percent. In dollars and cents, that means my child at Edison will still be looking at \$4,312 in district resources, but the average child in Valdez will be looking at \$5,620 in educational resources from DPS, not counting the state and federal "weights" already in place. This is mainly due to the declared income level of the parents and the fact that 76 percent of children at Valdez are "English Language Learners" while only 6 percent of kids at Edison are. (At East High School, 2 percent ELL, the funding per student is \$3,624!)

Since my kids are so young, I assume they're still learning the English language. However, in the eyes of DPS, they are not, since my wife and I both speak English at home. And because we do, and because we pay taxes, our children in

DPS are going to have to give up thousands of dollars in educational resources that will be granted to those who don't. Is it wrong to think my kids should receive their fair share of our education tax dollars?

Last summer, the *Rocky Mountain News* published "Leaving to Learn," a series of articles discussing reasons why about 20,000 children that could qualify for enrollment in DPS had moved to other schools and districts. Low enrollments in certain neighborhoods resulted in the district deciding to shut down at least eight schools recently. Eligible student attrition has no doubt affected the current ethnic demography of DPS: 18 percent Anglo, 19 percent black, 1 percent "other" and 62 percent Latino. It's clear that the overwhelming majority of ELLs are Spanish speakers.

While I do believe in a helping hand where needed, I thought I was doing that with the first \$4,500 per student or so. Now it turns out my own kids have actually lost equal standing in educational resources to children of non-native residents. Furthermore, the longer DPS students remain ELL, the longer their school of choice gets the extra "weighted" cash payment. This is a disincentive to teach English, funded by a mechanism to divert educational dollars from English-speaking children.

A recent study by Stephen Raudenbush published by the National Academy of Sciences following children in Chicago for six years concluded that individual poverty was less influential on a child's learning success than the fact of being embedded in a segregated, poor community. The direction DPS has chosen to take in penalizing native English speakers by cutting their educational dollars by somewhere in the neighborhood of 40 percent, while attracting non-English speakers by increasing their funding commensurately, will obviously have the result of further segregating Denver Public Schools.

While neither result - that is, failing to learn English and failing to integrate with the natives - will likely benefit the ELL students long term, one consequence of hobbling Johnny to help Jose is clearly in focus: Deliberately or not, DPS has adopted the goal of replacing Anglos with Latinos in Denver County. Even Latinos should be concerned about this.

Tom Anthony is a resident of Denver.

Saturday, February 16, 2008

Northeast DPS principals

joining forces

By [Nancy Mitchell](#)

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

Saturday, February 16, 2008

Separated from the rest of Denver Public Schools by miles of interstate and acres of flatland, principals of the 18 schools in the city's far northeast sometimes feel they're on their own.

Friday, after working together for nearly three years, they took their first step to make it official.

Principals in Montbello and Green Valley Ranch unveiled a proposal to become their own autonomous network, a plan they'll present Tuesday to DPS board members.

"We want to make sure we are aligned in our efforts," Montbello High School Principal Antwan Wilson said at a news conference. "We want to make sure our students receive a consistent message - whatever your dreams are, you can do it."

Wilson is chairman of the Principals Leadership Council or PLC, composed of the 18 principals, which would serve as the governing structure of the proposed network or "zone of innovation."

The PLC is proposing to report directly to Superintendent Michael Bennet, to set its own academic goals as a network and to provide regional educational programs for students from birth to age 5.

The group also wants to boost college readiness of the nearly 12,000 students in its schools.

In return, Wilson and the principals want increased autonomy in staffing and budgeting and more flexibility over what's taught in their classrooms.

Parts of what the far northeast schools are seeking resemble the autonomy proposals from Bruce Randolph and Manual schools. DPS and its teachers union recently announced a compromise that gives those schools more freedom,

particularly in hiring teachers. But the far northeast proposal goes beyond even those autonomy bids, calling for satellite offices for human resources, budgeting and enrollment in their area.

"We are a community; we're not 18 separate schools," said Ruth Frazier, principal of Greenwood K-8 School. "I pledge my kids are ready to go to Montbello High School and be on grade level as ninth-graders. . . . The point of all this is to maximize these resources to make it happen."

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Zone of innovation

Eighteen schools are joining together to create a "zone of innovation." Here are examples of what they hope to achieve:

* **Teachers:** Establish a satellite DPS human resources office in far northeast Denver to focus on recruiting, hiring and training teachers for the 18 schools. The office also will create its own substitute teacher pool.

* **Budgets:** Create a satellite budget office in the area to support the 18 schools in maximizing financial resources and coordinating grant initiatives.

* **Enrollment:** Maintain an enrollment center for the schools to ensure students are distributed evenly in the fast-growing area.

* **In the zone:** The schools are: Amesse, Archuleta, Barney Ford, Green Valley, Marrama, Maxwell, McGlone and Oakland elementaries; Noel Middle School; Greenwood, Howell and Waller K-8 schools; Martin Luther King Jr. Early College and Montbello high schools; CCI, Northeast Academy, Omar D. Blair and The Academy at High Point charter schools.

Education Week

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

Denver Public Schools to hear recommendation on contraceptives

DENVER (AP) — The board of Denver Public Schools is scheduled Thursday to listen to recommendations on whether health clinics in the city's high schools should dispense

birth control.

Contraceptives have been banned in Denver schools for 22 years, but if board members do away with the ban, contraceptives could be made available to students without parental consent.

Board member Michelle Moss says the birth control issue is one of several being addressed as the board looks for ways to improve service at school clinics.

The clinics are run by Denver Health Medical Center.

Moss says board members will only listen to a presentation, and that no final decision on contraceptives is expected at Thursday's meeting.

Information from: Lance Hernandez/KMGH-TV,

<http://www.thedenverchannel.com/index.html>

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7 News

Friday, February 15, 2008

DPS To Hear Recommendations On Birth Control Availability

District, Health Officials Trying To Combat Teen Pregnancy

By [Lance Hernandez](#)

<mailto:lance_hernandez@thedenverchannel.com>, *7NEWS Reporter*

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DENVER -- The Colorado Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting and Prevention says a baby is born every four hours to a Colorado teen between the ages of 15 and 17.

Many of those teens attend Denver Public Schools.

On Thursday, the school board will listen to recommendations from a task force on whether to dispense birth control in high school health clinics as a means of combating teen pregnancy.

"I think it (teen pregnancy) is a big deal," said 18-year old student Xavier Jennings, while leaving the East High campus for lunch Friday.

"I think they should have birth control in the schools," Jennings said, "because it could stop kids from having kids."

When asked if birth control in the schools would encourage kids to have sex... a 15-year old friend of Jennings told 7NEWS, "It might, but it will stop the pregnancy. That's what birth control is for."

But former student, now parent Lolita Hanks said the focus should be on self control, not birth control.

"I was one of those people that went to Denver Public Schools. I graduated in '90 and I was instructed how to have sex safely and all that nonsense," Hanks said. "I ended up being a teen mom and it did destroy my life in a lot of ways."

Hanks, now a spokesperson for Colorado Right to Life, said, allowing birth control in schools sends the wrong message.

"If we don't start teaching them self control now," Hanks said, "when are they going to learn it? They're not going to learn it when they put on a white wedding dress and a wedding ring. It's not going to happen."

School board member Michelle Moss said the birth control recommendation is one of several being presented on how to improve services at the school based clinics, which are operated by Denver Health.

She said there will also be recommendations on dental care, nutrition and exercise.

Moss said no decision will be made at the board meeting. She said there will simply be a presentation.

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KRDO Channel 13

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

Public Schools to hear recommendation

on contraceptives

Associated Press - February 19, 2008 10:04 AM ET

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