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School asks teacher-placement waiver

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

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Officials from Denver's Grant Middle School on Tuesday asked the school board to allow them to opt out from certain hiring processes — specifically, accepting direct placement of teachers.

The school joins a handful of others in Denver Public Schools that have sought to bar direct placement of teachers.

The board will vote on Grant's waiver request at Thursday's meeting, as well as a number of waivers being requested by Manual High School. Manual officials also presented a proposal to the board Tuesday, seeking to become an "autonomous school."

The board already has granted Bruce Randolph Middle School in northeast Denver autonomy from several district policies.

Rocky Mountain News

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

Union plans to pitch own school to DPS board

By Nancy Mitchell ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

Denver's teachers union plans to submit a proposal this spring to create its own school, hoping to launch a teacher-led demonstration site for how to improve student achievement.

"Teachers are supportive of reform," Kim Ursetta, president of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association, said Tuesday. "We have ideas how to improve student achievement and we want an opportunity to put our ideas forward."

Ursetta, a bilingual elementary teacher, said the union is still working out details. But she said the plan would be submitted as part of Denver Public Schools “request for proposal” process.

In that process, also known as an RFP, DPS leaders are inviting educators inside and outside the district to submit proposals for new schools. A deadline for the proposals has not been released.

News of the DCTA plan came on a day that 20 other DPS schools presented plans for varying levels of autonomy in hopes of speeding reform at their sites.

Manual High School Principal Rob Stein asked school board members to approve his school’s autonomy proposal, already approved by the DCTA, at Thursday’s board meeting.

The union’s governing board and the school board must approve the autonomy plan because it includes waivers of district policy and the union contract. Grant Middle School Principal Greta Martinez also sought board approval to allow the school to skip the district’s drawn-out hiring schedule. Instead, the school could post jobs at will and hire, from inside and outside the district, as they see fit.

The union has approved Grant’s waiver. DPS board members are expected Thursday to approve the requests from Manual and Grant.

But board members want more time to consider a more comprehensive request from 18 schools in the far northeast Denver neighborhoods of Montbello and Green Valley Ranch.

Montbello High School Principal Antwan Wilson outlined the request from those schools, including asking DPS to create a satellite human resources office devoted to staffing the 18 schools. Ursetta said the union has yet to approve any waiver requests from those schools.

DPS advisory group will

monitor reform

By [Nancy Mitchell](#), Rocky Mountain News ([Contact](#))

A citizens' group advising Denver Public Schools will spend the next year ensuring that students displaced by recent city school closures are well-served and monitoring other district reform efforts.

In addition, A+ Denver will study district efforts to recruit and retain teachers and will look at how the district plans to dispose or make use of its empty schools.

"There is so much more work to be done," former Denver Mayor Federico Pena, one of three A+ chairs, told group members Tuesday.

Part of their work will include a citywide survey about DPS: "It's their school district," said A+ staff member Donna Middlebrooks. "What do they want to see?"

To learn more about A+, log on to www.aplusdenver.org.

9 News

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

Aurora school becomes 3rd in Colorado to get autonomy

posted by: [Jeffrey Wolf](#), Web Producer

written by: [Carrie McClure](#), Anchor/Reporter

AURORA - The Aurora School Board of Education made history Tuesday night by approving one of the district's high schools as its first autonomous school.

Starting in July, William Smith High School will be governed by its own leadership committee, rather than the district.

The vote makes William Smith the Aurora Public School District's first autonomous campus.

The school's leadership committee, made up of teachers, the principal, parents, community members and students, will control the school's curriculum, calendar, and policies.

The move comes after two other schools in Denver recently got autonomy.

Denver Public Schools has granted Bruce Randolph School and Manual High School autonomy.

Montbello schools are also interested in setting up "zones of autonomy," where smaller groups of schools can decide what works best for them.

Like William Smith, all autonomous schools must maintain a certain level of student achievement - from test scores, to graduation rates.

Dr. George Straface, who's been a principal and a superintendent virtually all over the state, says there are pros and cons to school autonomy, but in order for the concept to grow, there must be results.

"There's always the desire of a parent or a school administrator or teacher to say, 'Give me more flexibility,'" said Straface. "What they don't realize is there's more accountability with that as well, so I think they have to perform they have to show there's dramatic, significant differences in student achievement in that school's design, as compared to others."

Autonomous schools are still funded by taxpayer dollars, and like other public schools, autonomous schools still have to balance a budget.

Straface says autonomy can help raise student achievement by giving schools the power to create policies and procedures that cater to that specific student body - rather than the district deciding what's best for everyone.

However, he says there are drawbacks.

If parents disagree with a school's decision they'll have less recourse to appeal that decision.

Autonomy can also open the door to illegal discrimination in hiring and firing practices.

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Medical News Today

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

Colorado: The board of Denver Public Schools this week will discuss whether to remove a 22-year-old regulation that prohibits school-based health centers from offering birth control to students, the *Denver Post* reports. A health task force has proposed making birth control available at health clinics based in six Denver high schools as a way to reduce teen pregnancy. Elaine Gantz Berman, chair of the task force, said, "The feeling was if the school community wants it and parents say yes and we have health professionals who have the expertise, then we should provide it." However, Denver Health, which runs the school-based clinics, has determined that it cannot provide birth control unless the ban is lifted. John Kechriotis, Denver public schools attorney, said, "There are two major issues. One is the decision on whether you distribute contraceptives in a school clinic. That is a big issue that needs to be resolved. Beyond that decision, there is the whole other issue of the parental consent." If the school board repeals the ban, contraceptives would be available to high school students without parental consent. Colorado Right to Life has voiced its opposition against the proposal, saying it would promote sex. Colorado Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting and Prevention supports the task force recommendation as a way to prevent teen pregnancy (Meyer, *Denver Post*, 2/14).