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# Denver Post

Wednesday, February 27, 2008

## DATA'S CLOSURE DOESN'T COMPUTE

Kindergartners Shane Horn, left, and David Deane hold signs they made to protest last week's vote to close the Denver Arts & Technology Academy, 3752 Tennyson St. Principal Ray Griffin estimated that more than 400 students, family members and school staffers marched Tuesday against the Denver Public Schools' decision to close the 8-year-old charter site after this school year. Administrators promised to appeal the decision to the state board. Craig F. Walker, The Denver Post

## Students inspired by Little Rock Nine

**Two of the nine speak at a luncheon about what they did and what lies ahead.**

*By Jenel Stelton-Holtmeier The Denver Post*

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Keith Hill, 14, was certainly looking forward to Tuesday's luncheon honoring the Little Rock Nine:

It was, for him, a chance to attend an event at the Adam's Mark Hotel.

"I've never been to a place like this before," he said.

Fellow Manual High School student Linelle Whitmill, 15, said she knew what her counselor had told her: "I mean I know they went to school and they were spit on, right?"

What a difference 90 minutes can make.

Two of the nine students who made history 51 years ago when they entered the all-white Little Rock Central High School spoke to 600 people at the luncheon about what they had accomplished and what lies ahead.

The appearances of the Little Rock Nine this week in Denver are the group's fifth since graduation and will raise money for a scholarship fund for the Iliff School of Theology's Peace, Justice and Restoration program.

"I'm so thankful for what they did," Linelle said afterward. "They've encouraged me to go to school more. I mean they fought for us to have the right to attend.

"I'm going to go home and tell my family about this," she said.

That it has remained such a touchstone surprises Ernest Green, one of the Little Rock Nine who went on to become managing partner and vice president of Lehman Brothers in Washington, D.C.

“I never thought I’d spend the next 50 years talking about why I went to high school,” Green said.

Carlotta Walls LaNier, who lives in Englewood, said she hopes that their struggle inspires students to stay in school and get the education that could help them improve the world.

“I’m here to emphasize the importance of action on the smallest scale,” she said. “We might not be able to do much, but each of us can do something.”

## **Achievement No. 1 goal**

**A new study finds that the Mapleton District school is among the state’s best at beating the odds and getting low-income kids to succeed.**

*By Jeremy P. Meyer The Denver Post*

In Valley View Elementary School, students walk the halls with their hands behind their backs, miss recess if they fail to turn in homework and sign contracts with their parents to uphold school rules and culture.

“They come here with a little suitcase of problems that life has dealt them,” said second-grade teacher Susan Leggett. “We try to make it a safe environment and make them know that they are here to learn.”

Valley View K-8 in the Mapleton School District on Denver's outskirts is among the state's best at getting low-income kids to succeed, according to a study released Tuesday by Donnell-Kay Foundation and Augenblick, Palaich & Associates Inc. It was funded by the Donnell-Kay and Piton foundations and released in collaboration with the Colorado Department of Education.

The study identified 10 characteristics among Colorado schools that are beating the odds — getting poorer students to outperform their richer peers.

These schools, among other things, have small learning environments, teachers engaged in decision-making and high expectations for all students, said Amy Berk Anderson, director of strategic partnerships at the Donnell-Kay Foundation and co-author of the study, "Profiles in Success. "

"Kids walk into the doors of these schools and are expected to achieve ...," she said. "And everything is being done at these schools to make sure they get there."

At Valley View, teachers say they get 100 percent of parents to attend twice-annual parent-teacher conferences — even if they have to go to a student's home for the meeting.

Every inch of classroom walls is covered with numbers, words and concepts. Teachers work together to align their lessons. And new teachers are guided by veterans about the school culture.

"It would be possible in other schools, but they've got to get the buy-in from the staff, parents and administration," second-grade teacher Deanna Blunt said.

The study focused on eight Colorado schools where students from low-income families performed better than the state average in at least two areas of the Colorado Student Assessment Program for three years in a row.

The schools were in districts around the state — Pueblo City, Fountain-Fort Carson, Delta, Widefield and Mapleton.

Only one Denver school, CEC Middle College of Denver, a magnet, was found to be beating the odds.

State Education Commissioner Dwight Jones said he hopes the report will become a best-practices model for Colorado schools seeking to narrow the achievement gap between poor and wealthy students.

Jones said he intends for every Colorado school district to get a copy of the study. He said he will post its findings on the state website.

“Having pockets of great schools for some kids is almost an injustice,” Jones said. “What we have to do is make sure we create great schools for all 800,000 students in this state. ... This becomes an excellent guide and a model.”

# **Rocky Mountain News**

## **Wednesday, February 27, 2008**

Editorial

### **First things first**

## **Time for lawmakers to endorse English competency**

Google “prepare students global economy” and you get 3.38 million hits. The first links go to articles from leaders in education, business and politics preaching the need to provide today’s students with skills that will let them compete in a world that’s “flat,” to borrow author Thomas Friedman’s much-hyped term about international competition.

A 2008 high school graduate entering the work force indeed faces daunting intellectual challenges that his or her parents and grandparents did not. A teenager needs more than a strong back and a sound work ethic to assure a stable, decent-paying career.

That quest must begin, it seems to us, with students acquiring a facility in the language upon which most of those careers depend. That’s why it’s encouraging to see the legislature again consider a bill requiring graduates from Colorado high schools to demonstrate competence in English.

This year, unlike 2007, the measure is likely to reach Gov. Bill Ritter, whose proposal for school reforms announced earlier this year include English competency as a graduation requirement.

Senate Bill 98, by Sen. Shawn Mitchell, R-Broomfield, does not explicitly define competence, leaving that to individual school districts and the state’s charter school institute. It does suggest that every graduate should be able to understand government and commercial documents; a student should at a minimum be able to fill out a voter registration form or open a bank account.

The bill would also let districts choose how students would demonstrate competency. It may be that most students will

require no additional testing. We hope so. Even for those who do need a test, it should not have to be time-consuming. (Colorado Student Assessment Program scores could not be used, because CSAPs aren't given past 10th grade.)

The mandate would not kick in until 2013, giving districts plenty of time to comply.

Expecting graduates to show basic competence in English should not be too much to ask of Colorado's K-12 schools, though clearly some in the educational establishment believe it is. A nearly identical measure died in the House after passing the Senate 33-1 last year.

At the time, critics urged lawmakers to kill last year's version and wait until Ritter's P-20 task force recommended comprehensive reforms covering preschool through postdoctoral studies. Those who hoped that delay would derail plans to require English competency for graduation must be disappointed; the mandate is part of the school reforms outlined by Ritter in January. Indications are that the language of SB 98 may be largely incorporated in the bipartisan legislation that would implement the governor's reforms.

Let's hope so. The most recent CSAP scores show that a third of Colorado 10th graders can't read at grade level. Before we expect these students to compete with budding engineers in Bangalore, the least we should do is demand that they understand a traffic sign in Boulder.

## **9 News**

# Tuesday, February 26, 2008

## School marches to stay open

written by: [Heidi McGuire](#) , Backpack Journalist

DENVER - There likely hasn't been, or will ever be a day, at the Denver Arts and Technology Academy (DATA) when all students get the same assignment.

However, it came close on Tuesday.

"We want to save our school," explained one kindergartner of their newest task.

Less than one week after learning their school would close due to administrative turn-over and poor performance, DATA teachers, students and parents made their pleas to stay open, public.

"Don't close our school," said one group outside the new Denver Highland's building.

After the Denver Public School Board voted last week 4-3 to close the school, Principal Ray Griffin started a school-wide plan of action to reverse the decision.

"We're going to make a statement and let everyone know this is a school that needs to be open," he said.

Tuesday afternoon, more than 430 students, 30 staff members and parents carried signs in front of the school.

"For them to close it is a big shock," said former DATA student Erika Brown.

Yuko Joyner said it took her two years to find a good school for her daughter, and cries at the thought of having to tell her the bad news.

"I'm not sure how to say to my daughter that her school is closing," said Joyner.

Griffin says the charter school's board voted to hire an attorney to fight the case for them. They're hoping to resolve the matter with the Denver Public School Board. As of Tuesday, no one with DPS had commented as to whether that would even be an option.

The only other step to reverse the decision would be filing an appeal with the State Board of Education, which will be costly and time consuming.

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