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DPS, teachers begin talks

By Nancy Mitchell, Rocky Mountain News (Contact)

Monday, March 31, 2008

Denver Public Schools and its teachers union begin formal contract talks today with an optimistic May 1 deadline, an apparent attempt to avoid the contentious negotiations of recent years.

Last year's talks stretched into October and included a declaration of impasse, failed mediation and a request by the union for the state to intervene. State labor officials declined.

This year, the entire 98-page contract is open for discussion, instead of the usual annual talks focused on pay and benefits.

Kim Ursetta, president of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association, said the May 1 goal to conclude negotiations on a new contract reflects the union's desire to spend the summer "working with the district on moving forward."

Superintendent Michael Bennet said the district would welcome a quick resolution to the negotiations.

"Every year, including this one, we would much rather be done sooner rather than later," he said Sunday. "We're very glad that the union has set the goal of May 1."

Already, union members and the Denver school board have approved contract changes to increase substitute teacher pay and to allow schools, beginning in spring 2009, to post jobs and hire staff as needed.

"We have quite a few big issues already completed," Ursetta said, "but we still have a lot to go."

The union's recent survey of 1,878 teachers - about two of every three were union members - show lingering concerns about time to prepare for and teach classes.

Only about 15 percent of teachers say they have adequate planning time, a drop from 32 percent last year and 42 percent in 2005-06.

Bennet said preparation time is a concern for the district as well.

"Time is clearly an issue, and we all have a common interest in ensuring that our teachers have time to plan their lessons as well as to collaborate with their colleagues and principals," he said.

Discipline also continues to be a top concern for teachers, the survey found, with half saying inappropriate behavior is "the major impediment" to student achievement in their schools.

Most schools have a discipline plan, teachers said, but they're not always followed.

Salary and benefits for 2008-09 also will be negotiated, but Ursetta declined to discuss a specific goal. She would say only that DPS should be competitive in pay with other metro-area districts.

Westminster School District in Adams County last year became the first Colorado district to hit \$40,000 in starting teacher pay. DPS' starting salary is \$35,568.

Survey highlights

From 1,878 teachers in Denver Public Schools:

- * 15 percent say they have adequate planning time, down from 42 percent in 2005-06.

- * 75 percent say time is inadequate to administer, grade and analyze required tests.

- * 63 percent say interventions for habitually disruptive students are inadequate.

- * 70 percent say discipline is not managed well enough so they can spend virtually all of their class time on instruction.

* 24 percent say the DPS literacy program is improving skills of students below grade level; 73 percent say it is helping students at grade level.

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Denver Post

Tuesday, April 1, 2008

DPS Foundation earns "A" for "Achieve"

By Joanne Davidson
Denver Post Staff Writer

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Had a grade been issued, the Denver Public Schools Foundation would have earned an "A" for its 2008 fundraiser. In fact, with 1,300 guests and a record \$1.18 million profit, it'd even be OK to say that co-chairs **Cole Finegan**, managing partner at Hogan and Hartson, and **Donna Lynne**, Kaiser Permanente Colorado's president and CEO, are teacher's pets.

The money raised at "Achieve," held at the Hyatt Regency Convention Center, is going to help the DPS implement its first standardized elementary school science curriculum; fund middle-school sports and districtwide after-school tutoring and enrichment programs; and enable more principals to enroll in classes that will enhance their leadership skills.

Gov. **Bill Ritter** and Mayor **John Hickenlooper** were the honorary chairmen and attended with their wives, **Jeannie Ritter** and **Helen Thorpe**. Lt. Gov. **Barbara O'Brien** was accompanied by her husband, Dr. **Richard O'Brien**, while Superintendent **Michael Bennet** arrived with his wife, **Susan Daggett**. **Bruce Benson**, who had earlier stepped down as chair of the DPS Foundation board after being named president of the University of Colorado, was there, too, along with his successor, **Kristin Richardson**. Benson had chaired the foundation board since 2002.

Richardson joined the foundation board in 2003. A past chair of the annual gala, she has served on the development, governance and School Partners committees. "Kristin is an able and proven advocate for DPS," says DPS Foundation President **Barbara Berv**.

Richardson's professional background includes work in bond trading and institutional fixed income sales for E.F. Hutton. After earning degrees in Spanish and biology from Randolph Macon Women's College, she did post-graduate work in business at Marquette University.

"I come from a family of educators," Richardson notes. "My mother taught first grade for 35 years, and my father was a high school teacher, so the educational process has been an important part of my life for as long as I can remember." Her goal with the foundation is "To see DPS rise to the top of urban school districts in the country."

Other gala-goers were Dr. **Steve** and **Elaine Gantz Berman**; **Leslie Mitchell**; **Francisco Garcia**; **Scott Binder**; **Joe Blake**; **Scott** and **Sara Carpenter**; **Linda** and **Don Childears**; **Cathey** and **Dick Finlon**; **Heidi** and **Bruce Hoyt**; **Mariner** and **Megan Kemper**; **Rich Rainaldi** and **Martha Records**; **Lola** and **Rob Salazar**; **Mark** and **Meredith Smith**; **Ron** and **Cille Williams**; **Erna Butler**; **Polly Baca**; **Odell Barry**; **Sheila Bugdanowitz**; **Lisa Farber Miller** and **David Miller**; **Cathy** and **Peter Dea**; **James Perez Foster**; **Margo** and **Marc Pinto**; **Mary Pat Link** and **John Strohm**; Dr. **Dean Prina**; and **Arlene** and **Barry Hirschfeld**. **A winning combination**

Supporting the arts makes good business sense, and four entities that've gone that extra mile were recognized at the 21st awards luncheon put on by Colorado Business Committee for the Arts.

Six hundred-plus community leaders were on hand for the event held in the Donald R. Seawell Grand Ballroom, rewarding the following recipients with thunderous applause:

Philanthropy Award: GE Johnson Construction Co. for spearheading the renovation and expansion of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center and for support of groups including Salon d'Arts, Arts Street and the Pikes Peak Center.

Innovation Award: Kaiser Permanente for its use of live theater and the arts to promote community health. The HMO employs 13 actors who produce plays and offer skills-building workshops that reach some 30,000 students per year.

Workforce Award: ripcord, LLC for encouraging creative thinking in underserved youths and for staging a successful benefit for Arts Street.

Workspace Award: Anchor Center for Blind Children, particularly its new headquarters that embraces all the senses and functions as a teaching tool, thanks to its design that incorporates color, texture and sound.

In addition to the awards, the lunch also featured entertainment by Curious Theatre, Ballet Nouveau Colorado, The Dutch Hop Music Makers and jazz singer **Rene Marie**.

Denver Business Journal Monday, March 31, 2008

Richardson replaces Benson as board chair at DPS Foundation

Philanthropist and community activist Kristin Richardson was named Monday to replace Bruce Benson as board chair of the **Denver Public Schools Foundation**, the fundraising arm of Denver's school district.

Benson left the post to become president of the University of Colorado.

Richardson has been on the board of the DPS Foundation since 2003 and has served on several of its committees. She is a past chair of the foundation's gala.

She has organized fundraising events for several nonprofits, including Colorado Ballet, Central City Opera, Opera Colorado, The Children's Hospital, the Denver Museum of Nature & Science and the Denver Art Museum.

Her husband is Blair Richardson, a private equity investor and managing partner of the investment fund Bow River Capital Partners.

The DPS Foundation raised \$1.18 million at its March 5 gala. It recently announced receiving a \$3 million, three-year grant from Denver-based Janus Capital Group to support a new teacher recruitment and retention program, the largest single corporate gift ever to the Denver schools.