



Board News

Denver Public Schools Board of Education
board.dpsk12.org

Mill Levy Initiatives Starting To Roll

District staff presented to the Board of Education this week a process to quickly organize efforts to deliver the six initiatives proposed in the \$20 million mill levy package that was approved by voters Nov. 4.

The process includes organizing a task force comprised of both district staff and community members to shepherd each initiative from the drawing table to reality.

"These task forces really need to be representative," said Chief Academic Officer Sally Mentor Hay. "When there are representative bodies that were instrumental in helping us define the issue...we want them to participate in the planning (now)."

She added that the task forces would be organized soon. Proposed Board action dates on plans are set for late January, late February and early March in time for

implementation with the next school year.

Each task force will be given the relevant campaign information along with information about each specific plank of the mill levy platform. Each task force also will be asked to gather input from principals, teachers, parents, community members and the district's educational leadership team. A draft of the plan will come back for feedback from the Board of Education, Mentor Hay added.

The six mill levy initiatives are expanding the capacity for kindergarten and early childhood education; adding art and music teachers to elementary schools; revitalizing neighborhood schools; beefing up the supply of textbooks; increasing high school graduation rates; and expanding repair and maintenance work throughout the district. ■

2004-2005 Calendar Considered

After months of collecting feedback on proposed calendars for next year, the DPS calendar committee this week presented the Board of Education with drafts of the 2004-2005 calendars for both the traditional and continuous year schedules.

The two draft calendars align as many vacation, parent conference and teacher professional development days as possible. Both allow for one parent conference day per semester and 173.5 total days of school. They also include for the first time a Cesar Chavez holiday on Monday, March 28, 2005, which aligns with spring break. The Board of Education requested that DPS add the holiday without creating a new vacation day.

If approved, the first semester for schools on the traditional calendar would begin on Monday, Aug. 16, 2004. The last day of school would be a half-day for students on Friday, May 27, 2005. The calendar includes a new four-day fall mini-break Oct. 16-19

and repeats the current three-day break during Thanksgiving in November and two-week winter break in December.

For continuous year schools, the first semester would begin on Monday, July 26, 2004. The last day of school would be a half-day on Friday, June 10, 2005. The calendar is similar to this year's schedule, with a two-week fall break and three-week winter and spring breaks.

Additional holidays include Colorado Day in August; Labor Day in September; Veterans Day in November; Christmas Day in December; New Year's Day and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in January; Presidents Day in February; Memorial Day in May; and Independence Day in July.

The draft calendars are accessible online at www.dpsk12.org/calendars. The Board will hear public comment on Dec. 4 before adopting the final 2004-2005 school year calendars on Dec. 18. After final approval, the calendars will be posted online. ■

Overall Enrollment Down Slightly; Kindergarten-12th Grade Up 393

The Denver Public Schools student population dipped slightly (almost 0.2 percent) overall for the 2003-2004 school year, according to data released today from the district's Department of Planning.

The largest drop by far was due to a reduction in state funding for four-year-old students who attend Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs.

Including ECE students, the district's enrollment dropped by 128 students to 72,489. Looking only at students in kindergarten through twelfth-grade, the district's enrollment grew by 393 students to 69,035.

"Had the state funding not been reduced, our overall enrollment would have continued to show steady growth," said

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Oct. 1 Eligibility Date Eyed

The Board of Education this week agreed to consider moving to Oct. 1 the eligibility date for incoming youngsters. If approved at the Dec. 18 meeting, the date would go into effect with the 2004-2005 school year.

The eligibility date is used to determine whether a child is eligible for Early Childhood Education (four years old), kindergarten (five) or first grade (six).

Last year, the Board approved a pilot program that allowed some schools to test moving the date to Nov. 15. Sixty-six schools opted to try it.

But recent state decisions make clear that funding will only be available for students who reach the age of five by Oct. 1 to be included in the kindergarten student count.

While DPS and other districts continue to work with the state in considering a later date, Superintendent Jerry Wartgow said it's prudent now to follow the state, especially from a financial point of view.

The staff recommendations include a provision for early entrance testing for a few exceptional children for whom beginning school early may be an appropriate educational option and also for children who have already begun or completed a grade level outside the district or state.

The enrollment season for 2004-2005 has begun. Magnet schools and gifted and talented education programs have deadlines in mid-December; the district's open enrollment process begins Jan. 5, 2004. For complete information, visit the district's website and look for "DPS Today" enrollment information.

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Skateboard Use At Schools among Proposed Policy Changes

The Board this week considered a series of policy revisions that keep the district current, reflect recent district changes and align with current state statutes.

- Policy JLID - Student Bicycle/Skateboard/Rollerblade/Roller Skates/Scooters and Other Similar Devices Use (Prohibits use of skateboards, etc. on school grounds in accordance with local ordinances. The current policy covers only bicycles.)
- Policy IMDB - Flag Displays (Calls for schools to display flags only when school is in session.)
- Policy BDF - Advisory Committees/Councils (A new Joint Advisory Council proposed in September will serve as a forum for councils to provide updates of their activities. This umbrella policy would make obsolete seven separate policies that currently cover individual advisory councils.)
- Policy DBD - Determination of Budget Priorities (Updates language to replace Collaborative Decision Making committees with Collaborative School Committees.)
- Policy DGA/DGB - Authorized Signature/Check Writing Services (Updates language to reflect current staff job titles.)
- Policy DID - Inventories (Aligns deadlines and practices with state statutes and makes obsolete five separate current financial policies.)

Employees and community members are invited to offer input at the Dec. 4 public hearing; the Board is slated to make a decision about the revisions at the Dec. 18 meeting.

Proposed policy changes are accessible online at this link — www.dpsk12.org/board/meetings — following the Nov. 20 meeting agenda.

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Wayne Eckerling, Assistant Superintendent for Research, Planning and Special Projects.

The high school population grew by 336 students, the middle school population grew by 88 students, and the overall elementary school population, including ECE, dropped by 552.

The percentage of Hispanic students in the district continued to climb. Last year, students who identified themselves as Hispanic represented 56 percent of the student population. This year, Hispanics represent 57 percent (41,339) of the district.

The white student population dipped

from 20.3 percent in 2002-2003 to 19.7 percent this year. The black student population dropped from 19.3 percent of the population to 18.9 percent (13,733 students). The Asian population dropped from 3.3 percent to 3.1 percent and the American Indian population held steady at 1.2 percent.

The report from the Department of Planning cited a number of key factors directly affecting DPS enrollment, including net migration to Colorado decreasing from almost 80,000 in 1999 to 14,500 in 2003, according to state demographers. ■

Accountability Council Recommends More Public Meetings

The DPS School Improvement and Accountability Council (SIAC) recommended to the Board on Thursday that the district provide more systematic opportunity for public input prior to making major budget decisions.

The council, directed by state statute to provide recommendations to the Board about prioritization and budget expenditures, advised that major budget alternatives be presented to the public for discussion and comment at televised forums as the budget is developed over time.

In the report analyzing the 2003-2004 district budget, SIAC said it believed “that decision-making without public input has the potential to alienate both staff and parents.”

On the plus side, the council applauded the district for not using one-time funding sources to fund continuing DPS programs. SIAC also commended the district for limiting the increase in employee salaries and benefits to the 2.8 percent increase in state funding to school districts. The 2.8 percent was allocated by employee bargaining groups as planned by association leadership and adopted by membership. The report notes that in previous years, the combined increases for cost of living, education and longevity in employee salaries and benefits have been larger than the increase in funding under the Colorado Public School Finance Act.

The Board will take the council’s recommendations under advisement. ■

List Shortens For Opportunity Contract Schools

The Board of Education denied the applications of three nonpublic schools that previously had been conditionally accepted to the 2004-2005 Colorado Opportunity Contract Pilot Program. Beth Eden Baptist School, Community School for the Gifted and University of Denver High School failed to submit required data by Nov. 1, 2003.

In all, DPS conditionally has accepted 71 nonpublic schools to participate in the new state program. A list of participating nonpublic schools is posted on the district’s web site, www.dpsk12.org, under “updates” on the main page. ■

Tom Stevens Hailed After 36 Years Of Service

Tom Stevens, the district’s Chief Technology Officer, bid farewell this week after 36 years of service to the district – he’s retiring. This week the Board of Education approved a resolution that acknowledged Stevens’ work as the “driving force” behind the vast number of technological improvements that have been brought to the district. “Whereas Tom Stevens has been a vocal, opinionated, determined, forceful, collegial, respected and loveable leader in the Denver Public Schools,” the resolution stated in part, the Board of Education “honors Mr. Stevens on this day and expresses its deepest gratitude for his many years of exemplary service and leadership.” ■