



Board News

Denver Public Schools Board of Education
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Citizens' Committee Urges Nine Schools For Revitalization...

The Mill Levy Revitalization Initiative Committee recommended nine schools this week to focus the first wave of effort.

They are: Brown, Ford, Gilpin, Montclair, Remington and Stedman elementary schools and Cole, Hill and Skinner middle schools. The committee noted that Cole's revitalization efforts started last year, but it urged that dollars from this mill levy initiative be used to support those reforms.

The revitalization concept was approved overwhelmingly by voters in November 2003 as part of a six-part, \$20 million package. The revitalization component included \$2.5 million of the total and was geared to improve student achievement and increase the attractiveness of schools to the community by providing significant resources to improve classroom performance and establish new programs.

The committee said the schools were chosen with an eye toward the specific guidance in the original mill levy proposal given to voters.

That proposal said schools would receive support for revitalization efforts if they were operating at or below 70 percent of student enrollment capacity, had academic underperformance as demonstrated by "low" or "unsatisfactory" state ratings, and had 35 percent or more of the children in the neighborhood opting to attend another public or private school.

...And District Staff Suggests Four More

Following the committee's presentation, district staff endorsed the nine schools and added four more – Bradley and Sabin elementary schools and Martin Luther King Jr. and Henry middle schools.

Chief Academic Officer Sally Mentor Hay urged the addition of Bradley, Sabin and Henry because they all provide opportunities to improve enrollment in district schools. And Martin Luther King Jr. should be added, she said, to boost its academic performance and because it's located far from the district's magnet and special

Under the proposal, schools that met all three criteria would be given priority; schools that met two of the three criteria would also be considered, particularly if they provided a special opportunity to establish a new program.

The committee urged staff to prioritize the recommended schools based on several factors, including the local community's readiness and whether agreement can be reached on proposed changes; staff resources available to support the initiative at particular schools; available revitalization dollars; and timelines associated with restructuring pursuant to the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

"We're really talking about schools in great need and so it was really hard to make these choices," said committee co-chair Steve Kaplan.

Kaplan urged the Board to focus on schools that are ready to begin implementation of reforms next school year and allow other schools to use next year to plan for future revitalization efforts.

"The recommendations you made to us make a lot of sense and there's rationale behind them," said Board member Elaine Gantz Berman. "This was an area of the mill levy that generated a lot of interest...we are very excited that this is moving as fast as it is."

programs.

Some of the 13 schools might proceed swiftly, said Mentor Hay, if parents and communities are ready. Other schools, she said, may need more time to plan changes carefully.

"The shame would be to spend the revitalization dollars and not address the issues that would bring people back to DPS," she said.

A March 18 Board decision is contemplated with the staff proposal so planning for 2004-2005 can begin. ■

Yellow Bus or RTD? Increased High School Flexibility Weighed

A broad cross-section of parents, students, teachers and principals weighed in this week on the pending proposal to eliminate the traditional yellow bus service for high school students and switch to the Regional Transportation District (RTD).

"I could run Montbello High School like a college with that type of creativity," said Montbello High School principal Hansel Gunn.

"I am having a hard time putting together a schedule to participate in sports ... and accumulate enough credits to graduate," said Thomas Jefferson High School parent Tami Pevey, who also predicted the proposal would hamper the ability of students to travel very far across the district to schools of choice.

"Personally, I have a job and I have to be there at 3 o'clock and if I'm getting out at 4 o'clock I can't be there," said East High School junior Evan Eskridge, one of dozens of speakers who opposed the plan.

The proposal was presented to the Board as a means to allow schools to start students later in the day – an idea based on research that shows adolescent students generally perform better at mid-morning than they do shortly after dawn.

Under the proposal, students who are eligible for a bus ride under district policy would be provided with bus passes on RTD and high schools, now locked into a 7:30 a.m. start time and a 2:45 p.m. end to the school day, would be able to provide a more flexible schedule for students. Athletic and other after-school activities could be accommodated by schools providing classes throughout the day, perhaps beginning at 7:30 a.m. for some students and 8:15 a.m. or 9 a.m. for others.

Of 17,000 high school students, about 3,000 are eligible for a bus ride and only about half of those students (1,600) actually ride the yel-

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low school bus on any given day. Currently, more than double that number (3,600) ride RTD to middle and high schools on a daily basis.

Board president Les Woodward pointed out that switching to RTD doesn't require a change in the school day schedule – but that increased flexibility at the high schools can't be accomplished without making the switch.

Many speakers expressed concern about the safety of riding RTD. But Allen Balczarek, program manager in the Department of Research and Planning, said RTD provides security with both uniformed and undercover security and police officers and that all buses and trains are equipped with two-way radios and emergency signaling systems. Many vehicles also have video monitoring systems and incidents reported from the 3,600 students now riding RTD is low, said Wayne Eckerling, Assistant Superintendent for Research, Planning and Special Projects.

Ari Gould, a parent at Lowry Elementary School, said on behalf of 35 parents that his group opposes a related change that would make Lowry one of the 34 elementary schools that would move their bell times from 9 a.m. to 8 a.m. Gould cited problems with afternoon day care and said elementary schools would not have the same choice of start times as high schools might. He also questioned whether research shows elementary students perform better earlier in the morning.

North High School principal Darlene LeDoux said student feedback is mixed but one student wrote a paper in favor of the change entitled "Sleep More Equals Learn More."

LeDoux said she is "dreaming about the potential of all the things that could happen at the school" with the change.

The Board of Education may formally consider the proposal Thursday, March 18.

Bryant-Webster K-8 Approved; Dual Language Discussed

Bryant-Webster Elementary School principal Pat Salazar discussed in detail with the Board of Education this week her school's plan to add three more grades (six through eight) and offer a dual language program. In addition, the school is proposing to add a new emphasis on the arts.

The Board of Education approved the expansion to K-8 and committed to discussing the dual language proposal.

Principal Salazar said the new elements would be added with care, supported by strong professional development for the faculty.

Sixth-grade would start next year (2004-2005 school year) and the dual language the following year if approved.

Under dual language programs, Spanish-speaking students learn English and English-speaking students learn Spanish while maintaining their native languages.

"It's a changing time. I'm faced with a changing community," said Salazar. "So

we need to make change – a positive change to attract students to our school."

Salazar said arts would be provided in an extended-day program at her northwest Denver school with visual art, music, choir and Mexican folk dancing alongside other activities such as sports, Earth Force and tutoring.

"Your results are tremendous and noteworthy and thanks for your efforts," said Board member Bruce Hoyt, noting that the new proposal includes a strong marketing component.

"Pat, as usual, you make us very proud for your work and for your dedication to the students," said Board member Lucia Guzman. Guzman pointed to research that shows dual language is an effective strategy for Spanish-speaking students. "We are a cutting edge city and we have an opportunity to provide cutting edge, top-of-the-line opportunities for Spanish speaking students," she added. ■

Textbook Needs Outlined

With the \$3.5 million boost from the November 2003 mill levy election, district staff this week recommended a plan to the Board of Education for how new funds for purchasing textbooks should be divvied up.

On top of the list – buying books and materials to support:

- Elementary and middle school literacy and mathematics programs
- English Language Development programs
- Required high school level courses in Biology, Geometry, American History,

Introduction to Literature and Composition, and American Literature

In addition, staff recommended that charter schools be allocated a per-pupil share of mill levy textbook funds (subject to agreement with charter schools that this is how the dollars will be used).

Under the new plan, the \$3.5 million revenue stream would be combined with \$1 million approved for the same purpose in 1998.

The Board is expected to take action on the plan Thursday, March 18. ■

KBCO Studio C Local Edition CD To Benefit DPS Music Programs

On Saturday, March 6 at 9 a.m. 97.3 KBCO-FM will release the latest installment of the charity CD collection, KBCO Studio C. The KBCO Studio C Local Edition CD will be available at Denver metro Best Buy locations and at the 97.3 KBCO Studios in Boulder. This limited edition release, priced at \$9.73 plus tax, is expected to sell-out quickly.

For the past five months, 97.3 KBCO-FM has searched for Colorado's best local musicians to perform in KBCO Studio C, the Boulder based radio station's in house

recording studio. Hundreds of submissions from local musicians were received by 97.3 KBCO. Highlights of these performances from local musicians have been compiled onto the first-ever KBCO Studio C Local Edition CD. The CD will feature exclusive recordings from both established and up-and-coming local musicians.

All proceeds from the sale of KBCO Studio C Local Edition CDs will benefit music education programs in Denver Public Schools. ■