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**Foundation Supports Student Achievement In Denver Schools**

**By Patricia Hawke**

The Denver Public School Foundation is a "portal" for community and business philanthropy for the Denver schools. Originally started in 1984, it played a passive role in the Denver schools, until it was revitalized in 2002.

The purpose of the Denver schools' foundation is to raise and manage funds in support of the district's ambitious plan to improve student achievement. The Denver schools leadership develops the funding areas, and the foundation drives community investment and builds partnerships with local businesses. The price tag for improving student academic achievement is much higher than the available monies provided through annual city, state and federal funding.

During the 2005–2006 school year, the foundation's accomplishments show it to be a vital arm of the Denver schools' scholastic achievement initiative. Here are the major highlights:

- The foundation raised \$750,000 to implement the first Principals' Institute that was held in June 2006. Leadership training, designed to improve student achievement, was provided to 130 Denver schools' principals, and new strategies were developed by the principals to transform their schools into effective learning organizations. The Denver schools principals will continue to be supported in their objectives in 2006–2007 by attending monthly professional development sessions that began in August.
- The foundation raised \$250,000 to implement DPS Success, which provides supplemental instruction in math and literacy to students in grades three through ten. During the 2005–2006 school year, 558 teachers provided extra tutoring instruction to approximately 8,400 students in 82 schools.
- The School Partners Program was launched with \$250,000 raised by the foundation. The program will create tailor-made partnerships between the Denver schools and Denver area businesses, raising even more support for the Denver schools initiatives in the future.
- The A to Z Fund was developed to provide funding support for individual school programs and projects, ensuring that every student has an equal opportunity to access the same types of activities and further enrich the learning experience of Denver schools students. The goal is to raise \$100,000

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by December 2006, with the first funding cycle beginning in February 2007.

- The foundation facilitated the requests of numerous donors, who wanted their donations to underwrite specific projects. Some of the projects were library improvement, health and safety education programs, new gymnasium scoreboards, and athletic equipment.

- The Lights On After School initiative was developed to advance the quality of after-school programs in support of the Denver schools students. The following accomplishments are from this program:

- o \$658,000 in grants was awarded to 87 elementary and middle schools to support their after-school programs that served approximately 8,500 Denver schools students.

- o Over \$260,00 ensured that 3,000 middle school students could participate in competitive after-school sports.

- o A study, released in April 2006, showed that multiple-year participation in quality and diverse after-school programs in the Denver schools does result in positive student achievement and school attendance.

- o Phillips Elementary School improved its reading test scores for third graders from 45 percent proficient or advanced in 2004 to 89 percent in 2005. The school attributes its successes to Lights On After School tutoring.

- o Tom Roberts, a Morey Middle School student, finished first at the Denver-metro Math Counts competition in March 2006. Math Counts at Morey is funded by the Lights On After School initiative.

During the 2006–2007 school year, the foundation will continue to support the above initiatives, as well as the following:

- Teacher Induction Program — support new teachers during their first three years of service in the Denver schools, and

- Science Program — enhance the current science program by supporting new elementary school science curriculum and providing high quality materials for the new Science Resource Center.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. For more information on Denver schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk-12.com/Colorado/Denver/index.html>

### **Many Denver Schools To Close Campuses During Lunchtime**

**By Patricia Hawke**

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Beginning with the fall of 2006 school year, many high schools in the Denver schools system will close their campuses during lunchtime. This means that Denver schools students will not be allowed to leave campus to eat at nearby restaurants, fast foods, and convenience stores.

Denver schools superintendent Michael Bennet introduced the final draft of the new policy, called the Denver Plan, in the spring of 2006. Bennet believes his plan will reduce the increasing afternoon truancy within the high schools.

The Denver schools plan has taken several drafts to reach implementation. The first draft was introduced to Denver schools principals in November of 2005, suggesting that schools could submit waiver requests by April to exempt the older students in 11th and 12th grades. A second draft was presented to the Denver schools principals in February 2006, amending the original policy by stating that more time was needed to determine how the policy would be implemented. At a March meeting of the Denver schools principals, administrators presented the final plan, which requires all freshmen to remain on campus. Waivers may be requested for the other grades of 10th, 11th and 12th.

After the meeting, principals scrambled to make the new Denver schools policy work. Since the lunchtime schedule dictates the classroom schedules, the new Denver Plan is causing an upheaval in many Denver schools, where they have a common lunchtime for all students and teachers. Small cafeteria capacity means multiple lunchtime schedules must be implemented. For example, Denver schools East High School enrolls 2,092 students with a cafeteria that seats only 258. If only the 750 freshmen are kept on school grounds during lunchtime, at least three lunch periods will be required. This also upsets the activities by possible by a common lunch period, such as club meetings, students meeting with classroom teachers, and students socializing with their friends and siblings who are in different classes.

The Denver schools principals must submit waiver requests for their schools before April of each prior school year, which will be granted based upon the quality of the school's truancy reduction plan. Principals consulted with staff and solicited input from students and the community before deciding for which grades to request waivers. To support their waiver requests, they included student data, such as attendance. Additionally, it is unclear whether Denver schools with current good attendance rates will receive special treatment; however, the plan has a 97 percent attendance rate goal for all schools.

Though Denver schools principals received the new policy with mixed reviews, the students vehemently oppose it. Hundreds of students attended a student forum on the topic and completed an online survey. It was the hottest topic at the end of the Denver schools 2005–2006 school year. Even the middle school children were hotly debating the subject, since the policy will affect them in the near future. Students are in total agreement that the Denver schools would be better served by targeting their anti–truancy efforts at the students with actual attendance problems. The students see the new policy as a punishment for all students.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. Patricia has a nose for research and writes stimulating news and views on school issues. For more on Denver schools visit

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