Multiple Pathways to Graduation – Creating Options for Life, Work, and Learning

Denver Principal’s Summit
April 14, 2008

Six Denver Public Schools high school principals and their leadership teams took part in a full-day summit in April 2008 to create individual school action plans for meeting the diverse needs of students struggling to stay in school. The Principals’ Summit, sponsored by the Mayor’s Office for Education and Children in partnership with America’s Promise Alliance, is part of an ongoing effort by Denver Public Schools (DPS) and the City of Denver to address the alarming rate of high school dropouts.

Remarks at the opening plenary by Dr. Jaime Aquino, DPS Chief Academic Officer, stressed the urgency of the dropout problem. Citing the personal and societal costs, he noted that high school dropouts are:

- 2 times more likely to be on welfare
- 3 times more likely to be unemployed
- 8 times more likely to be incarcerated

Sponsors of the Principal’s Summit surveyed each principal in advance of the event to determine how best to structure the day to produce optimum results. As a result, the majority of students had a facilitator to lead them through their individual work sessions.

Of the more than 70 attendees, 89 percent reported that the summit helped advance their schools’ specific plans. Another 87 percent rated the summit above average or outstanding in strengthening team relationships. When asked to evaluate the most useful aspect of the Principal’s Summit, team members’ comments included:

- “Sharing ideas and creating action plans and next steps to build a better learning community was great.” — North High team member
- “Having time to talk and plan. These are important issues that deserve great thought and planning.” — South High team member
- “Time to go beyond ‘discussion’ and actually get to the planning.” — Thomas Jefferson High team member
- “Working toward a common goal – graduating kids – and being able to network with other schools.” — West High team member
- “The concentrated time purely dedicated to strategy. It can be very difficult to take the time to strategize during the school year.” — East High team member
- “Concrete progress on our RTI process.” — Abraham Lincoln High team member

For more information contact:
The Mayor’s Office for Education and Children
201 W. Colfax Ave., Dept. 1101, Denver, Colorado 80202
720-913-0900 www.denvergov.org/education

SPONSORS

America’s Promise Alliance
The America’s Promise Alliance is a national collaborative dedicated to working together for the success and well-being of children and youth. Its national campaign to reduce high school dropout rates involves summit meetings in all 50 states and in 50 key cities to outline clear, actionable steps for significantly improving graduation rates.

Participating Denver High Schools

ABRAHAM LINCOLN
Principal: Antonio Esquibel
Team members: 2 assistant principals, 3 counselors, school nurse, special education teacher, social worker, restorative justice coordinator, community liaison, parent, school-based mental health therapist

EAST
Principal: John Youngquist
Team members: 5 teachers, AVID coordinator, math peer tutoring coordinator, 2 counselors, counseling intern, Denver Youth Development Initiative resource advocate, student assistance fund administrator, Future Center coordinator, assistant to the superintendent

NORTH
Principal: John Trujillo Hays
Team members: 2 assistant principals, humanities facilitator, counselor, 5 teachers, special education teacher

SOUTH
Principal: William Kohut
Team members: 2 assistant principals, academic dean, counselor, social worker, Futures Center coordinator, 2 teachers, AVID coordinator, AVID state director

THOMAS JEFFERSON
Principal: Sandra Just
Team members: counselor, teacher, social worker, social work intern

WEST
Principal: Pat Sanchez
Team members: assistant principal, counselor, teacher, West Career Academy director, 3 Colorado Youth for a Change staff, Colorado high school member, 2 middle school principals, restorative justice advocate

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Denver Public Schools
The Denver Public School District (DPS) student population of 73,000 is comprised of students from 74 countries and who speak 81 languages. DPS’s mission is to provide all students with the opportunity to achieve the knowledge and skills necessary to become contributing citizens in our diverse society.

The Mayor’s Office for Education and Children
The Mayor’s Office for Education and Children advocates for the children and youth of Denver, serves as the City’s liaison to Denver Public Schools, and develops policies and initiatives to help every child in the City grow up confident, strong, smart and skillful.

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The plan — The team from Abraham Lincoln set out to strengthen and expand its Response to Intervention (RTI) framework to:
- Improve daily attendance
- Increase the skill levels and academic performance of students at all grade levels
- More effectively deal with student behavioral issues

The team planned to develop communication and intervention strategies to be implemented by cross-disciplinary teams and aligned with other school programs.

The process — With the two assistant principals acting as co-facilitators, the team analyzed what was working or not among the attendance policies in place. The group then turned to designing specific strategies to integrate the RTI team into the school’s different departments. It also clarified specific accountability procedures for its withdrawal process. The issues of academics and behavior were tabled for another time.

Potential roadblocks — Creating staff and community ownership of the proposed strategies will require ongoing attention, as will professional development to improve capacity, maintain consistency, and assure accountability.

— Domenic Martinez, Assistant Principal

Individual High School Work Plans and Results

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL**

“The if real change is going to happen, it's got to start right here with us.”
— Domenic Martinez, Assistant Principal

**EAST HIGH SCHOOL**

“We need common commitment, but small evolving actions can have a tremendous impact.”
— Principal Youngquist

**NORTH HIGH SCHOOL**

“If we can change the kids’ habits when they’re young, it can solve the problems for when they’re older.”
— Principal Trujillo Hays

**SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL**

“We need to focus on the positive with our students, not always the negative or what’s wrong.”
— Principal Just

**THOMAS JEFFERSON HIGH SCHOOL**

“The necessary level of data on incoming 9th graders, given to us in a timely fashion, helps us build an intervention that is meaningful.”
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