

## **Rocky Mountain News – Editorial SPEAKOUT**

### **Give Bruce Randolph School a chance**

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**By Alan Gottlieb, Tony Lewis and Van Schoales**

Denver's Bruce Randolph School started a revolution last week. It's a revolution we enthusiastically endorse, and hope will spread to additional schools.

The school, which serves grades 6-10, asked to be released from many aspects of its union contract and freed from district bureaucratic constraints and monopoly control over school support services, and said why in plain language:

" . . . centralized, bureaucratic controls established by the district and by the Denver Public Schools Denver Classroom Teachers Association Master Agreement restrict our ability to hire staff, allocate our budget, align our incentives to our instructional mission, manage our own professional time, exceed the district's academic expectations, and, therefore impede our effort to improve learning for our students."

Increased autonomy must go hand in hand with increased accountability at the school level.

One piece of the plan that needs elaboration is how DPS will hold Bruce Randolph accountable for its performance, and how much time the school will be given to meet specific goals.

Current documents lack specificity about measurable outcomes the school must achieve. At least one year's individual student achievement growth per year should be the minimum standard applied, with an expectation that students will reach proficiency within a reasonable period of time.

It might be tempting to shrug and say this is simply an attempt by one innovative public school to win some of the freedoms state law gives to charter schools. But it's more than that, for the following reasons:

\* It tests whether the DCTA will be willing to let its behavior match its rhetoric. Just three months ago, DCTA released a document called "Promoting School Success," the organization's manifesto on how to improve urban education. The authors wrote:

"Reform measures have mostly centered on the critical role teachers play and what it will take to improve their craft, yet teachers are rarely included in decisions made about curriculum and professional development, two key factors in good schools."

Bruce Randolph's administration and teachers are asking for just this kind of authority for its staff. If the DCTA refuses to set the school free, its leadership will look, at best, hypocritical.

\* What Bruce Randolph is proposing is, in effect, a stripped-down contract, eliminating the excesses of many school district-union contracts across the country. Could this document serve as a model for other schools and, perhaps, other districts?

\* This new way of doing business will require all involved to think in new ways, which may pose some substantial challenges. Ultimately it will allow schools to determine the best providers of services (e.g. food service, payroll, transportation, teacher training) to support their students. Providers might include the school itself, the district or outside entities. We hope more schools seek this increased autonomy in exchange for increased performance, and urge the school board, district and the union to work with and encourage these innovative schools.

Bruce Randolph's move heralds a new phase in Denver's reform experiment, one that should be embraced by people of all ideological stripes. And assuming Bruce Randolph and other schools are granted their requests, people need to be patient. Authentic school improvement is a slow, steady process. Miracles don't happen overnight. But we need to be vigilant about student results, and expect steady progress.

If the union and the district grant schools the freedoms they say they need, then, within a few years, let's hope DPS has several more high-performing schools than it does today.

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