

DMPS Community Report

Fall 2009

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Schools Implement New Codes for Discipline and Activities

Every student attending Des Moines Public Schools has a new discipline code to follow this year.

“This is a positive step that will help students understand their obligations to others in the school setting and provide objective guidelines for assessing penalties for misbehavior and options for intervention,” said Dr. Nancy Sebring, superintendent of Des Moines Public Schools.

There are three levels of offense (Level I, II, and III) in the discipline code. Level I is violation of classroom rules — violations that generally occur in the classroom and can be corrected by the teacher; Level II includes offenses that are more serious in nature or a continuance of Level I misconduct; and Level III offenses may result in a student being suspended or assigned to an alternate educational placement.

“Our staff works at communicating with families on a regular basis to build positive relationships, which we feel are critical to student success,” explained Jill

Burnett Requist, River Woods Elementary School principal. “The new discipline plan also calls for communication between school staff, students and families when addressing behavior issues. We, like others, believe that utilizing this type of ‘team’ approach for problem solving will ultimately reduce discipline issues building-wide.”

In addition to the new discipline code, an extracurricular/co-curricular code of conduct was developed and applies to students participating in any school-sponsored event, i.e., athletics, drama, music, and academic clubs. Students involved in these activities represent themselves and their school while they are away from or at school, so they are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful manner and set a good example.

“We revised the code of conduct with the best interest and safety of our students in mind,” said Ric Powell, East High activities director. “We want to educate students about proper behavior and also to prepare them for life after high school.”

As is the case with every other school district in Iowa, the DMPS extracurricular/co-curricular code of conduct is in place 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The code is intended to serve as a guideline and ultimately administrators will make final decisions regarding disciplinary consequences.

Violations of the code of conduct include possession/consumption of alcohol, drugs, controlled substances, or tobacco; intoxication; assault; robbery; gang activity; weapons; sexual harassment and hazing. Mere presence at an activity where illegal activities are taking place also constitutes a violation.

“Des Moines students are expected to leave any party where there is alcohol, drugs, or any controlled substance,” explained Doug Brinker, North High School activities director. “The student must leave immediately, which means within five minutes, or else they are subject to the code of conduct violation.”

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Sign-Up to Receive Newsletter Via E-Mail

Since the first *DMPS Community Report* was published last year, the district has experienced back-to-back across-the-board budget cuts. To help save on printing and postage, the newsletter will be available electronically **ONLY** beginning with the spring 2010 edition.

If you want to continue to receive the *DMPS Community Report*, please visit the home page of the DMPS Web site at www.dmps.k12.ia.us to subscribe. (If you use a Web mail interface like Google or Yahoo to subscribe, please be sure the word “Subscribe” appears in the subject line of your e-mail message before you hit Send.) Thank you for your continued support of Des Moines Public Schools.



Greenwood Elementary students enjoy lunchtime.

New School Meal Payment Procedures

New meal payment procedures are being implemented this school year in Des Moines Public Schools in an effort to ensure consistent collection procedures throughout the district and recover negative balances from school lunches totaling more than \$130,000.

In the past, the Food and Nutrition Department has found it challenging to communicate with parents about their negative meal balances — relying on students to take notes home or having inaccurate contact information — and there have been no consequences for non-payment. Phone calls on behalf of the district were made by district personnel over the summer, resulting in the collection of about \$20,000.

“With approximately 61 buildings and service of approximately 28,000 meals a day, it is important to have a consistent collection process,” explained Sheila Mason, executive director of Operations. “As part of this process, we formed a district committee to review our current process — as well as other school districts’ payment procedures — to develop new procedures and a better communication system between the district and parents regarding payment for meals.”

The committee developed new negative meal balance procedures for high school, middle school and elementary school levels. Implementation of the new procedures at the high school level began in August. Now high school students are required to have cash or money in their

account to purchase items (no charging is allowed). Students are notified of their balance verbally at the cash register when their balance falls below \$5. The Food and Nutrition Department moved significant negative balances to a past due account for any high school student who continues to pay for meals on time, and a payment plan was established for the past due account.

“So far, the new procedures at the high school level are working well,” said Mason. “Most students are aware of the procedures and we are working closely with them to communicate what their balances are on a daily basis.”

New procedures also were implemented at all middle schools in October. In an effort to recover money owed by middle school students, past due accounts were established and invoices sent to households with a negative balance greater than \$10. Charges are allowed for middle school students, but only up to \$15 and no ala carte items can be charged, including milk. At both the middle and high school levels, a phone call is made to parents when there is no money in a student’s account.

Procedures for the elementary level are still being developed, but will include calling all households with a negative balance of greater than \$25 and invoicing until a payment plan is established and the amount is paid in full.

“Most of the families with negative balances — 40 percent — owe less than \$100,” said Mason. “Seventy-five percent of the negative balances come from the

elementary level, 18 percent are at the middle school level, and 7 percent come from the high school level.”

The Food and Nutrition Department is an “enterprise fund,” which means the department is financed and operated in a manner similar to a private business enterprise. That is, the cost of providing meals is financed entirely by user charges. The department has to operate independently and be self-supporting. Therefore, if families do not qualify for free meals based on federal guidelines, they need to pay for meals served.

“Labor and benefits, along with food costs, have gone up considerably and we are trying to reduce expenses in all areas — negative meal balances are only one area where we are looking to reduce cost,” said Mason.

Families are encouraged to complete a free and reduced-cost meal application. Doing so in a timely manner will speed up the process and determine eligibility for the student. Until an application is filed and approved, parents are responsible for the cost of meals.

Please call the Food and Nutrition Department at 242-7636 with questions or assistance with completing forms. To view the new meal payment procedures in full, visit www.dmps.k12.ia.us.



Channel 12 staff members Chad Aubrey and Carl Sundermann talk to anchor Breezy Dillard about a news brief.

Channel 12 Celebrates 10 Years On the Air

This October marked 10 years of existence for Des Moines Public Schools' cable Channel 12 in its current format. Programming provided by DMPS has certainly evolved over the years — from broadcasting a 30-minute talk/news show several times a week in the 1990s — to broadcasting 24 hours a day and reaching more than 59,000 households in Des Moines and surrounding communities today.

“While at its core, the format of Channel 12 — being a loop of stories that play several times an hour— has stayed the same in the last 10 years, we have changed many of the ways we package our stories,” said Chad Aubrey, one of two video production specialists employed by DMPS Channel 12. “One example is our 'Spotlight' series, where we dig a little deeper into the story to give the viewers a more complete picture of the subject.”

Channel 12 is produced by two people in the district's Board and Community Relations Department, Aubrey and Carl Sundermann. DMPS high school students serve as on-air talent. The offices and studio are located in the DMPS administration building at 901 Walnut St. in downtown Des Moines.

Improvements have been made at Channel 12 over the past 10 years, including the introduction of high-definition video in 2008. The widescreen view has significantly changed the look of stories and impacted the way the staff shoots video.

“We've made technological advances and increased the skills of our staff members to create a more polished product, but our mission to tell the stories of the people and programs in the Des Moines

Public Schools is still the same,” explained Aubrey.

The school district does not pay to have Channel 12 on the local cable channel. Mediacom provides Channel 12 to the Des Moines Public Schools free of charge as part of its franchise agreement with the city of Des Moines. In the next few years, DMPS hopes to operate a low-power television station in high definition for Channel 12 as another way to reach community members even more.

To celebrate Channel 12's 10th anniversary, the staff held an open house in October. Viewers also can watch a feature story about Channel 12's 10th anniversary and see interviews with current and former Channel 12 staff on air or online at www.channel12.dmps.k12.ia.us.

Community Education Is for Everyone

Many people consider going back to school for a degree or just to expand their knowledge and experience. But the thought of returning to school can be frightening. For those who haven't been in a classroom for awhile or even since high school, it can be a little daunting. The Community Education Department of Des Moines Public Schools offers evening classes that are noncredit and nonthreatening, yet enriching, enlightening, and often just plain fun!

DMPS Community Education offers more than 200 different classes each fall, winter and spring in a variety of subject areas, such as computers, dance, sports and health. Classes are held evenings and weekends in school district facilities throughout the city.

How Channel 12 Has Evolved

- 2002** Second full-time Channel 12 staff member is hired.
- 2003** Change from tape-based playback method to digital solution.
- 2005** Launch of Channel 12 Web site.
- 2006** Channel 12 won its first Telly Award, being recognized by professionals in the television industry.
- 2007** Channel 12 moves into a 650-square-foot studio at 901 Walnut St.
- 2008** Started shooting high-definition video.
- 2009** Channel 12 won three more Telly Awards (seven total), continuing the tradition of excellence.

According to Ben Guise, longtime computer instructor, “Some people like the quiet and solitude of studying alone. But many prefer learning in a classroom among other people with similar problems, similar interests and creative resolutions. For those who prefer to be in class, that's where DMPS Community Education comes in handy. It offers a low-cost learning alternative.”

DMPS Community Education also offers online classes in a wide variety of subject areas. The classes are instructor-moderated, but available from the convenience of the student's home or office computer around the clock.

For more information about any Des Moines Public Schools Community Education class or program, call 242-8521, or visit www.dmced.org.



Destination Graduation



Des Moines Public Schools is serious about lowering the number of dropouts this year and the district has several new initiatives in place to keep students in school and bring them back.

“Destination Graduation is the district’s goal for all students. To achieve this goal for all students, the district provides different pathways and supports for them and their families on their journey to high school graduation,” said Bryce Amos, executive director for the northeast region.

Early Indicator System

The Early Indicator System is a new mechanism in place this school year that enables administrators to track student progress at the elementary and secondary levels every six weeks to check for behaviors that may lead to dropping out. At the elementary level, these indicators are low attendance; a score of lower than 41 on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills; failing more than one course during a grading period in grades 4-5; receiving more than one D and/or one F for a course during a grading period; or receiving more than three Level II or above discipline referrals in a grading period. The indicators for secondary students are failing more than one course during a grading period in grades 6-12; earning a failing grade for a semester; low credits in grades 9-11; low

attendance; receiving more than five Level II or above discipline referrals; or receiving more than one D and/or F for a course during a grading period.

Each school’s support team will help serve the students who are identified through the Early Indicator System as at-risk for dropping out of school.

Communities in Schools

DMPS is implementing the Communities in Schools (CIS) model. CIS is the nation’s largest dropout prevention organization, whose mission is to champion the connection of needed community resources with schools to help young people successfully learn, stay in school and prepare for life. CIS works to ensure students have a one-on-one relationship with a caring adult; a safe place to learn and grow; a healthy start and a healthy future; a marketable skill to use upon graduation; and a chance to give back to peers and community.

When the CIS model of comprehensive student services is effectively implemented, there is a strong correlation with positive school-level successes like lower dropout and higher graduation rates. This correlation is much stronger than when services are provided in an uncoordinated fashion.

CIS will utilize reports from the Early Indicator System to identify the most critical needs of students and families and coordinates community resources, dedicated volunteers and agencies to serve in partnership with DMPS, both during the day and after school.

CIS Schools Comparison to Non-CIS Schools

- 3.6 percent fewer students dropped out
- 4.8 percent more students graduated on time with a regular diploma
- 5.3 percent and 6 percent more students reached proficiency in fourth- and eighth-grade math, respectively
- 2 percent and 4.9 percent more students reached proficiency in fourth- and eighth-grade reading, respectively

“CIS is unique because it focuses on the individual student need,” said Ruth Wright, CIS district coordinator. “School support teams will take a look at the information provided by the Early Indicator System to see where the student is falling behind and decide which programs will best help the student succeed.”

Along with Wright, there is a full-time CIS school site coordinator at Carver Community School, East High School, Hiatt Middle School and Hoyt Middle School.

“We hope to add more schools into the CIS strategy next year, but that will depend on its success in these first four schools,” said Wright.

CIS is a joint investment of DMPS and United Way of Central Iowa.



Project Connect mentor Brian Soli meets after school with Roosevelt High School student Deante Cole.

Project Connect

The Project Connect Mentoring Program is a school-based mentoring program in the district's Learning Supports Department. The program started in 2004 and has expanded from seven to 23 DMPS schools serving children ages second through 12th grade. At-risk students are matched one-on-one with screened volunteers from the community who meet weekly throughout the school year and during the summer.

"Through Project Connect, we have seen increased academic performance, increased enthusiasm for learning, and improved attendance and social behavior in these students," said Jennifer Farley, dropout prevention specialist. "Struggling students need to know someone cares. Creating a one-on-one relationship with an adult mentor really makes a difference in their lives."

Project Connect mentors read with students, assist with homework and college/career planning, eat lunch together, and share hobbies. Mentors receive ongoing support and training. For more information, call 323-8609.

Reach Out to Dropouts Day

Des Moines Public Schools collaborated with United Way of Central Iowa for the first-ever Reach Out to Dropouts on Saturday, Sept. 26, 2009 — a school and community effort to re-enroll students in school.

Teams of volunteers from the school district and community walked door-to-door to 308 homes of students who had not enrolled in school by Sept. 9 and encouraged them to re-enroll. All

high schools also were open to provide information and begin the re-entry process for students. On the day of the Reach Out to Dropouts event, 23 students re-enrolled and 58 others made appointments to re-enroll or asked district representatives to follow-up.

Reach Out to Dropouts replicated an effort begun in Houston, Texas, in 2004 that has proven effective. The number of students who dropped out of school in Des Moines during the 2007-2008 school year was 710, an increase of 2 percent from the previous school year.

... Continued from page 1

Situations exempt from the code of conduct are activities related to religious events, activities identified in Iowa Code Section 123.47, and consuming alcohol in a foreign country where the activity is legal. However, if a student is traveling abroad with a school group or foreign exchange program, the code of conduct is still in effect.

The code of conduct does not prohibit a coach or sponsor from establishing his or her own rules for his or her sport or activity, and students are encouraged to talk to their coaches and sponsors about the code of conduct and other activity-specific rules.

"We want parents to understand the new code is in place and we will follow it, but at the same time, coaches and sponsors will probably have their own set of rules and regulations," said Powell.

The code of conduct consists of four levels of offenses. A student who commits his or

DMPS Efforts Prove Successful

The district has already met its goal of reducing the number of dropouts by 10 percent for the 2009-2010 year. Thanks to re-engagement efforts over the summer and this year:

- 115 students re-enrolled for the 2009-2010 school year; and
- 23 students re-enrolled during the Reach Out to Dropouts event Sept. 26

her first offense will be required to undergo an alcohol, substance abuse, or mental health assessment by an evaluation agency approved by the school district, and will be suspended from their extra/co-curricular activity for one-third of the season. If the student self-reports, he or she may receive a reduced penalty equal to suspension for 10 percent of the season or one event. Four offenses mean the student is suspended from competition for the remainder of his/her high school career.

Activities directors are responsible for reviewing all evidence and circumstances relevant to an allegation to make a decision regarding the alleged violation. An appeal process has been developed in the event a student/parent seeks to appeal the decision.

To view the complete discipline code and code of conduct, go to www.dmps.k12.ia.us.



Patrick Williams, history teacher at the Lincoln Ninth-Grade Academy, discusses a project with students.

DMPS Announces \$1.5 Million Teaching American History Grant

Des Moines Public Schools is the recipient of a \$1.5 million Project Clio Teaching American History grant, which is designed to improve student achievement through high-quality history instruction over a five-year period.

“Never has there been such a significant investment in history education in the state of Iowa,” said David Johns, humanities curriculum coordinator for Des Moines Public Schools. “Access to world-class historians will be the key to making history more relevant, exciting and engaging for our students.”

The Teaching American History Grant program is a discretionary grant program funded under Title II-C, Subpart 4 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Serving as partners for the project are the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, Iowa State University, the Center for Iowa Studies at Des Moines Area Community College, the State Historical Society of Iowa, Fort Des Moines Museum and Education Center, and Living History Farms.

Middle and high school social science and history teachers and the Teaching

American History partner organizations attended an event to celebrate the grant at the State Historical Building in August. Guest lecturer for the event was Professor Jeremi Suri, E. Gordon Fox Professor of History, University of Wisconsin.

Community Votes “Yes” on Revenue Purpose Statement

Des Moines Public Schools’ revenue purpose statement was approved by residents on Sept. 8, 2009, with about 74 percent of the vote.

In a five-year plan with a 10-year vision proposed by the superintendent’s Facilities Advisory Committee and approved by the board, priorities for the revenue purpose statement were established:

- Safety and security;
- Replacing obsolete, inefficient, or worn-out equipment or systems;
- Money-saving strategies;
- Improving buildings that have not yet received major improvements;
- Technology infrastructure upgrades;
- Installation of air conditioning/ventilation;
- Infrastructure improvements to enhance research-based student achievement or accommodate educational program changes.

One Newcomer and Three Incumbents Elected to School Board

Des Moines voters re-elected incumbents Connie Boesen, Patty Link, Teree Caldwell-Johnson and elected newcomer Margaret Buckton on Sept. 8, 2009, to serve four-year terms on the Des Moines Public Schools Board of Directors.

Boesen is entering her third term on the Des Moines School Board, the most consecutive years a school board member has served since 2000. This will be the second term for both Caldwell-Johnson and Link. Link’s first term was cut short last year due to a state law that changed the election process and established board members serve four-year terms and elections be held every two years.

The Iowa Legislature enacted a statewide one-cent sales tax to benefit school districts across Iowa in 2008 and the governor signed it into law that year. This is not a new tax; in Polk County, the statewide penny is meant to replace, but not increase, the one-cent local option sales tax approved by Polk County voters in 1999, which expires June 30, 2010.



King Academy principal Thomas Simmons assists retired teachers as they cut the ribbon.



King Academy Celebrates Renovations

King Academy of Math and Science held a ribbon-cutting ceremony and community open house at the newly renovated elementary school on Oct. 1, 2009.

Parents, former teachers, DMPS staff and community members had the opportunity to tour the building, see the new classrooms, and get a first-hand look at the school's technology upgrades, including ceiling projectors and wireless microphones located in every classroom.

"Along with technology upgrades, we now have walls separating our classrooms and new windows where we did not have walls or windows before, so everyone is really enjoying the natural lighting," said Thomas Simmons, King Academy principal.

King Academy's \$6.4 million renovations also include a new computer lab, enhanced security, and a geothermal heating and cooling system. The school was originally built in 1974 and is home to about 300 students in kindergarten through fifth grade.

DMPS Honored for Excellence in Financial Accounting

For the second year in a row Des Moines Public Schools was recognized by the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) and the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) for its excellence in financial reporting and accounting.

The district's Business and Finance Department was awarded the GFOA Certificate of Achievement for Excellence Award in Financial Reporting and the ASBO International Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting.

Both awards recognized the high quality and standards of the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report prepared by Des Moines Public Schools for the 2008 fiscal year.

"This recognition confirms the strength and reliability of our financial operations," said Patricia Schroeder, chief financial officer for Des Moines Public Schools. "We would not have received either award without the hard work and dedication of each and every staff member in our department — from the cashier to the staff accountants, from the accounts payable clerks to our controller to our audit firm."



According to GFOA, "the [DMPS] has been judged by an impartial panel to meet the high standards of the program including demonstrating a constructive 'spirit of full disclosure' to clearly communicate its financial story."

More DMPS News and Information Available Online and On Air

Des Moines Public Schools is the largest provider of public education in Iowa, which means one newsletter alone cannot provide all of the information or share all of the stories about everything taking place in your school district.

More news and information is always available online and on air.

ONLINE

You can find information on schools, news stories, data, contacts, and more on the DMPS Web site at www.dmps.k12.ia.us.

ON THE AIR

Tune in to Mediacom **Channel 12** at anytime to see stories about programs and events from throughout the school district. If you do not subscribe to cable television, you can still view Channel 12 stories on the Web at www.channel12online.org. And if you're in the mood for interesting talk and music, tune into Des Moines Public Schools' own radio station — **KDPS 88.1** — where your hosts are students from Central Campus and Grand View University.



... Value in Education

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Des Moines Public Schools DMPS COMMUNITY REPORT Fall 2009



The air is crisp, the leaves are falling, and we're off to an excellent start for the 2009-2010 school year.

That great beginning is reflected in the pages of this issue of the *DMPS Community Report*, where you'll find news about some of the district's most important initiatives. And even though Des Moines Public Schools faces challenges like budget cuts and the H1N1 pandemic, the business of providing unparalleled value in education to all Des Moines students remains the No. 1 priority.

Be assured that everyone in the district is dedicated to achieving the goals set by parents and the community, transforming challenges into opportunities, and opportunities into academic and personal growth for all our students.

Nancy Sebring
Superintendent
Des Moines Public Schools

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The Des Moines Public Schools prohibits discrimination in educational and employment programs and activities based on age, race, creed, color, sex, marital status, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, or disability. Complaints of discrimination may be filed with Mary Lynne Jones, the District's Compliance Officer, Title IX Coordinator and 504 Coordinator at 901 Walnut Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50309, (515) 242-7781.