

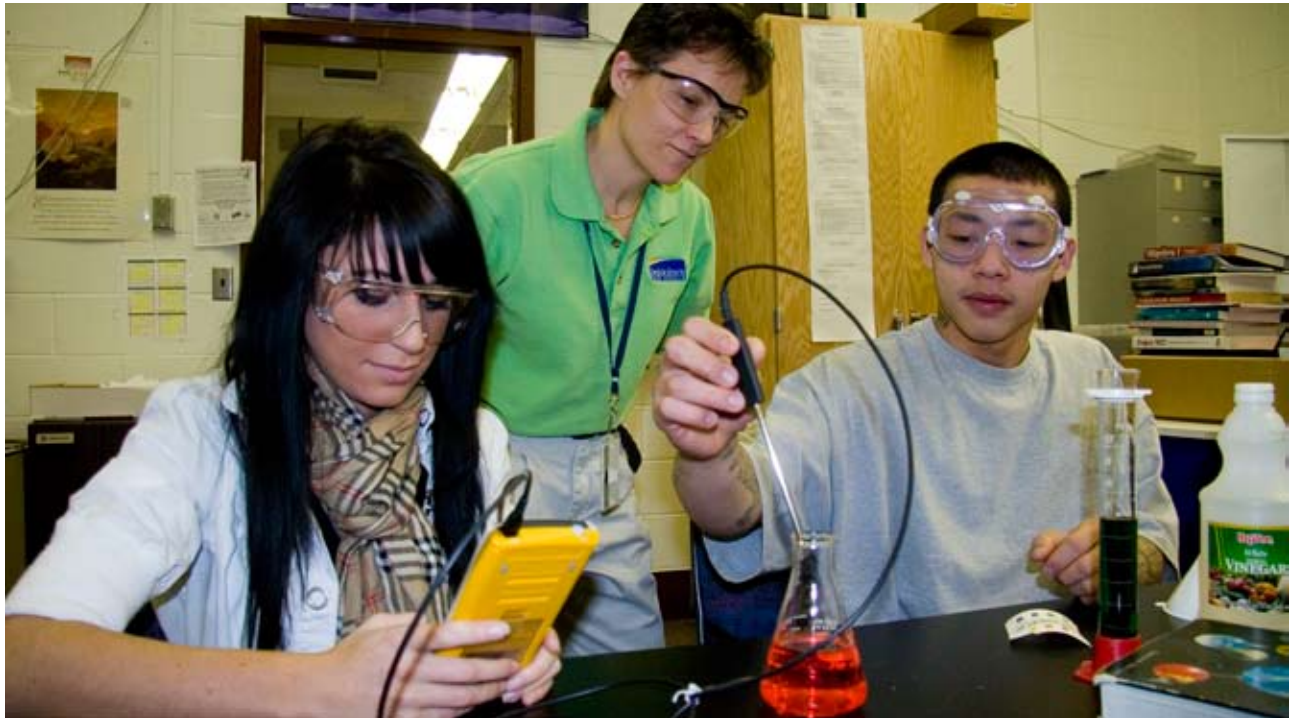
# DMPS Community Report

Spring 2009

THINK.

LEARN.

GROW.



Future Pathways teacher Sherrri Huff tests chemical compounds with seniors Elma Dedic and Max Cams.

## School District and Community Partners Tackle the Dropout Rate

Research shows that a single event rarely causes a child to drop out of school. Dropping out almost always is the result of a long process of disengagement that sometimes begins before the child enrolls in kindergarten.

The reasons for dropping out are multiple, and so are the solutions. In Des Moines, where 710 students dropped out during the 2007-2008 school year, the challenge is determining which dropout programs work the best, and how to inform families about these programs. Experts in Des Moines Public Schools and the community are working together to streamline coordination of all available programs so families get the most benefit to ultimately lower the dropout rate in Des Moines.

“We need to figure out how to knit together all of the separate agencies, organizations, programs, and initiatives in the community that are working with the schools and leverage all of the resources to provide a better outcome for students,” said Dr. Mary Chapman, vice president of Des Moines Area Community College’s Community and Workforce Partnerships.

In 2008, DMACC convened key community stakeholders who work primarily with students who drop out or are struggling in school. The Multiple

Education Blueprint Pathways Committee was formed to study the dropout situation and find ways to improve communication with students and families.

“It is not a school district problem — it is a community problem, so we are not only looking at the student, but also looking at their family and how education can advance their quality of life and help their youngsters see the value of education,” Chapman explained. “We’ve got to find a way to strengthen our outreach to students who are already disengaged, and get them back in the system again.”

“Flexibility is the key,” added John Spinks Jr., vice president of PACE Juvenile Center at Orchard Place. “We have been out to the high schools recently to talk to parents and find out their needs, but the challenge is getting the parents there and if they can’t get there, we need to figure out how to get to them.”

Recognizing the need for early intervention at the middle school level, the district’s dropout advisory committee has developed an early indicator system to help identify which students have risk factors that may lead to dropping out. The dropout advisory committee also is working on developing a middle school alternative-education program.

“We want to work with middle school students and get them prepared for that next step of high school and get them on track before they get to that level where there is a lot more independence for them to make decisions,” said Bryce Amos, executive director of Learning Services for Des Moines Public Schools.

The Project Connect Mentoring Program in Des Moines Public Schools is one service that reaches out to elementary and middle school students. Adult mentors are paired with students so the student has a relationship with a caring adult who is interested in their lives.

“We really see great results from our programs when we engage the community and help all students feel like they have an adult who cares about them,” said Jennifer Farley, dropout prevention specialist for Des Moines Public Schools.

Ninth-grade academies exist at East and Lincoln high schools in Des Moines, where ninth-graders attend school in buildings separated from the rest of the high school population. This change has made a positive difference over the last few years.



Ginny Strong, chair of the Des Moines School Board, and Dr. Nancy Sebring, superintendent, prepare for a board meeting.

## District Focuses on Graduate Ends

In recent months, the Des Moines School Board has organized panel discussions regarding the district's graduate ends (the new set of expectations for graduates). A few of the discussions that have taken place so far are highlighted below.

### Ends statement: Graduates demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a rigorous core curriculum.

- Graduates demonstrate proficiency in financial and economic literacy.

At the school board meeting on November 4, 2008, a panel of teachers and former students discussed how the Des Moines Public Schools prepares students to be able to handle their personal finances after graduation.

- Graduates demonstrate an understanding of the value of fine and applied arts in society.

At the school board meeting on November 18, 2008, a panel of fine arts experts discussed how the arts can make a long-lasting impact on a student's life and the community.

### Ends statement: Graduates demonstrate strategies for lifelong learning.

- They demonstrate critical thinking and problem solving abilities.

At the school board meeting on January 6, 2009, former Des Moines high school students discussed the challenges they faced while transitioning from high school to college and how high school prepared them for this transition.

"The School Board's preeminent work is to see that our students are well educated. For this to happen, we must 1) set high expectations for all students, 2) create conditions that support successful teaching and learning, and 3) hold the system accountable for student success," said Ginny Strong, school board chair. "These panels of experts engage us in deliberate conversation about the high expectations we have set for our students."

The board is planning panel discussions on creative and innovative thinking, and physical and mental well-being at upcoming meetings.

Students in Susan Krantman's personal finance class at Lincoln High School work on a project.



### Remaining board meeting dates for the 2008-09 school year are:

- April 21
- May 5
- May 19
- June 2
- June 16

The public forum precedes the board meeting from 5:45 p.m. to 6 p.m. Meetings are held in the boardroom at 1800 Grand Ave. beginning at 6 p.m.



Hillis Elementary third-graders Cora Johnston and Khalik Mokhtar read books donated to the school through a Prairie Meadows grant.

## Prairie Meadows Community Betterment Grants Awarded to 11 DMPS Programs

**G**rant money totaling \$105,000 from Prairie Meadows Race Track and Casino has been awarded to the Des Moines Public Schools to support school programs and improve facilities.

The Prairie Meadows Community Betterment Grants are given to projects in one of four categories: arts and culture; economic development; education; or human services.

Des Moines Public Schools grant recipients are Brody Middle School; Career & Workforce Connections; Cattell Elementary School; Central Campus Foundation; East High School; Des Moines Public Schools Library Support Group; Hiatt Middle School; North High School; North High School Alumni Association; Roosevelt High School; and Scavo Alternative High School.

“We are grateful for the generous contributions Prairie Meadows continues to make to the Des Moines Public Schools,” said Dr. Nancy Sebring, superintendent of Des Moines Public Schools. “The grant funds received by our schools and programs will provide wonderful resources for students, and in some cases, assist with much-needed improvements to our facilities.”

Brody Middle School received \$10,000 for Planet Brody, a school-wide study of energy conservation.

“These funds will help ensure every child at our school has the opportunity to learn about living in a sustainable way,” said Randy Gordon, principal of Brody Middle School. “Students will investigate green

practices and design projects to implement changes in their personal lives, school, family, and community.”

At East High School, the grant funds will go toward extra services for at-risk ninth-graders.



“The grant will allow us to implement academic assistance through tutoring, procuring community mentors and community learning experiences,” said Linda Baker, vice principal at East High School. “In addition, we will be able to provide equipment for low-income students to enable them to participate in extracurricular activities.”

Prairie Meadows has contributed more than \$399 million to promote education, economic development, agriculture, jobs and tourism in Iowa since 1996. A Grant Advisory Committee reviews all applications received. Grant applications are rated on demonstration of need, leverage of other funds secured and applied for, community support, community impact, population served, proposed evaluation of results, and strength of the organization.

### 2009 Prairie Meadows Grant Recipients

- Brody Middle School — \$10,000 for Planet Brody, a school-wide study of energy conservation
- Cattell Elementary School — \$10,000 to equip classrooms with instructional technology stations and interactive white boards
- Central Campus Foundation — \$10,000 for the marine biology aquaculture project
- East High School — \$10,000 to provide extra support for at-risk students in the ninth grade
- DMPS Career & Workforce Connections — \$10,000 to assist with student wages for a project where students provide minor home repair for low-income residents
- DMPS Library Support Group — \$5,000 to provide national award-winning and non-fiction books for elementary schools
- Hiatt Middle School — \$10,000 for their new fitness center
- North High School Alumni Association — \$10,000 to fund scholarship awards through the North Chapter of Dollars for Scholars
- North High School — \$10,000 for new seats in the auditorium
- Roosevelt High School — \$10,000 for improvements to their baseball field
- Scavo Alternative High School — \$10,000 for the Learn and Earn program proposal

A partnership between Prairie Meadows and Polk County provided donations totaling \$506,329 to Polk County Schools in 2008. Des Moines Public Schools used these monies for technology upgrades throughout the district.



## Superintendent’s Facilities Advisory Committee Provides Focus

**D**es Moines Public Schools formed a new committee last year to review facility and site needs throughout the district. The superintendent’s Facilities Advisory Committee, established in September, meets monthly with the objective to recommend goals for future projects funded by the statewide penny tax.

“Dr. Sebring requested there be a broad-based, diverse group of 12 individuals in the community to be on the advisory committee,” said Joel Doyle, chairperson of the committee. “Serving on the committee are parents, grandparents, people from public and private industry, school district employees, individuals from DMACC and Grand View University, and even the president of the city-wide PTA.”

The Facilities Advisory Committee has reviewed data related to school boundaries, enrollment, demographics, utilities and maintenance, vacant buildings, busing, and more.

This year, the district received \$30 million from the local options sales tax. The statewide penny tax, however, will be allocated on a per-pupil basis statewide, which means the money coming to Des

Moines Public Schools annually from the new tax is expected to be less than funding from the local option sales tax. Moreover, the current economic challenges mean there are no guarantees about the total amount that will come to the district from the new tax.

“If the revenue purpose statement is passed, we anticipate the district will have about \$22.5 million per year in sales tax dollars. If no purpose statement is passed, we will receive approximately \$15 million per year,” said Bill Good, chief operations officer for Des Moines Public Schools. “With fewer dollars we will need to prioritize our work to include basic needs so we can impact all unrenovated buildings.”

At the April 2 committee meeting, members decided to recommend to the superintendent that the district adopt a “five-year plan with a 10-year vision” that simultaneously provides similar renovations, as appropriate, to all 25 schools not yet renovated. Under this plan, more schools would see some improvements earlier and the district would save money by avoiding some construction fees and moving costs.

The committee’s recommendations will be formally submitted to the superintendent and the board in the next few months.

### The Facilities Advisory Committee’s recommends sales tax funds be prioritized and spent on:

1. Safety and security
2. Replacement of obsolete, inefficient, or wornout equipment or systems
3. Money-saving strategies
4. Improvements to buildings that have not received major improvements
5. Technology infrastructure upgrades
6. Air conditioning classrooms
7. Improvements to enhance research-based student achievement
8. Program-changing needs



Amalee Larson and Caleb Black, third-graders in Susan VandeHaar's art class at Jefferson Elementary, work on an art project.

## DMPS Proposes Budget for FY 2010

Despite mounting economic challenges, Des Moines Public Schools continues to move forward, striving to deliver a quality education to all students in fiscal year 2010. Expansion of the International Baccalaureate program and preschool education, preserving and advancing dropout prevention programming, and supporting the delivery of quality tools for teachers are district priorities for the coming academic year.

“Every effort was made to protect and build upon the progress made in the last several years in some key areas, and for the most part we were able to do that. But we also have to acknowledge our economic realities, so we’re recommending budget reductions, reassignments and funding realignments to maintain a balanced budget,” said Dr. Nancy Sebring, superintendent.

The executive summary outlining both the academic and financial details of the district’s proposed \$402 million budget for fiscal year 2010 was released by the superintendent in March. Overall, a 5 percent reduction in the number of administrators, an 8 percent reduction in central office staff, a 3 percent reduction in operations staff, and a 1 percent reduction in instructional staff were made to help



American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (federal stimulus money) or State Fiscal Stabilization Funds. Once those amounts are known, the final decisions will be made about how the funds will help finance the fiscal year 2010 budget.

Des Moines Public Schools must submit the certified budget for fiscal year 2010 to the County Auditor on April 15, 2009.

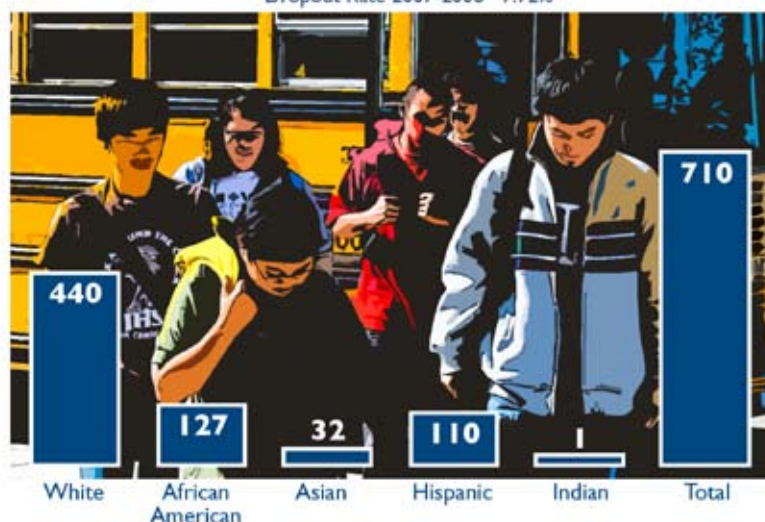
balance the budget, in addition to steps already taken in freezing all non-essential purchases and hiring, limiting travel, and reducing expenses.

At press time, the district had not yet received specific information about its allocation of funding from the federal



## 2007-2008 Student Dropout Numbers

Total High School Enrollment = 9,198  
Dropout Rate 2007-2008 7.72%



... Continued from page 1

“We have seen drastic drops in suspensions and an increase in attendance at the ninth-grade academies,” said Amos. “Credit-wise, our ninth-graders at those schools have a better record of being on track for graduation.”

Discussions will take place in the coming months to identify a central location or source for families to find out about all of the programs available for struggling students. A Reach Out to Dropouts Walk is being planned for September — where community members and school district staff will join in an effort to get teens to re-enroll in school.

### DMPS programs that work ...

#### Future Pathways Learning Process

**F**uture Pathways, launched in 2006, is a program for high school students who need to earn additional credits to graduate from their comprehensive high school. Students must have at least 10 credits going in to the program, and be at least 17 years old.

The Future Pathways Learning Process is grounded in current educational research. Students collaborate with their teachers to design co-curricular projects that promote deep understanding, honor their interests, and are relevant to their lives.

“Future Pathways is very progressive in nature,” explained Erin Stoen, supervisor of Future Pathways. “We have figuratively — and literally in some cases — removed the walls between content areas. Most projects weave more than one subject into the process and outcome.”

One reason the program works for struggling students is the flexible schedule. Students can arrive as early as 7:30 a.m. every day and can stay until 4 p.m. three

days out of the week. On Tuesdays, the doors are open until 7 p.m.

The Future Pathways English Language Learner program provides an ELL teacher for students whose first language is not English.

Graduates: In 2007, 109 Future Pathways students graduated from high school. In 2008, 166 students graduated.

### SUCCESS

**T**he SUCCESS program, established in 1990, is a school-based youth-services program offered year-round in 30 schools for children and families prenatal through age 21. The mission of SUCCESS is to connect schools with families and the community to expand opportunities for students to graduate. Students are referred by school support teams, school staff, community agencies, parents, or self-referred. School teams identify students who are struggling with academic, social, emotional, or behavioral issues.

“The SUCCESS program is unique in the district because it operates year-round, allowing continuity with student and parent relationships and offering transitional programming during the summer months,” said Margaret Jensen Connet, SUCCESS program manager.

One of the unique school and community collaborations exists at Carver Community School, where a Family and Community Specialist works with the SUCCESS case managers to provide a weekly parent group, a parent information center, parent advisory committee, case management with the highest need families, an after-school girls’ group, and several play-and-learn opportunities for families with preschool children.

The Way to Grow component of SUCCESS, a partnership with United Way, is a strategy to provide outreach to the most vulnerable families with children prenatal through age 6. Services ensure children are born healthy and receive

### Factors Affecting the Current DMPS Dropout Rate

- Increased rigor in the core curriculum
- Increases in the graduation credit requirements (21 from 18) over the past several years
- Learning disability or emotional disturbance
- Parenthood
- High-risk peer group/social behavior
- Low achievement
- Retention/over-age for grade
- Poor attendance
- Low educational expectations
- No extracurricular participation
- Low commitment to school
- School misconduct/early aggression
- Low socioeconomic status
- High family mobility
- Low education level of parents
- Low family contact with school
- Family disruption

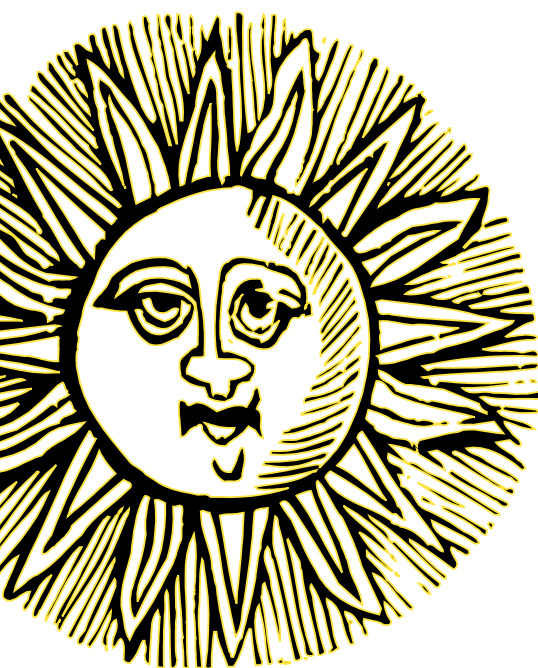
**For more information regarding dropout prevention programs, call 242-7660 or e-mail [bryce.amos@dmeps.k12.ia.us](mailto:bryce.amos@dmeps.k12.ia.us).**

### About the Dropout Walk September 26, 2009

DMPS and United Way will partner for a dropout prevention walk, an effort to re-enroll high school dropouts. Look for more details in the summer edition of the *DMPS Community Report*.

the necessary support to help them begin school ready to learn and to achieve success in the classroom.

In 2008, 95 percent of high school students receiving SUCCESS case management services stayed in school. Sixty-three percent of students receiving case management services in the comprehensive high schools had cumulative credits on target to graduate high school in four years.



### Summer School Opportunities

Several high schools provide summer classes in math, reading and writing for middle school students who need to develop proficiency in these subjects prior to entering high school. The classes are four hours a day, 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., beginning Monday, June 8, and continuing through Thursday, July 3. Students will receive a half high school elective credit in math and English for successful completion. Locations are at Hoover, Lincoln and East high schools. Students will be recommended by middle school administrators. Interested students and parents should contact their middle school principal.

Summer school for high school students will be held at East High School on June 11 through July 23. Interested students and parents should contact their high school principal.



### 2009 Des Moines High School Graduations

**East High School**  
Saturday, May 23  
2 p.m. at Vets Auditorium

**Hoover High School**  
Friday, May 22  
7 p.m. at Vets Auditorium

**Lincoln High School**  
Saturday, May 23  
9 a.m. at Vets Auditorium

**North High School**  
Thursday, May 21  
7 p.m. at Vets Auditorium

**Roosevelt High School**  
Saturday, May 23  
7 p.m. at Vets Auditorium

**Ruby Van Meter School**  
Tuesday, May 26  
7 p.m. at Roosevelt High School

**Scavo Alternative High**  
Friday, May 22  
10 a.m. at Hoyt Sherman Place

### 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 at the DMPS Web site:  
[www.dmps.k12.ia.us](http://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](http://www.channel12online.org) or their companion YouTube site [www.youtube.com/user/DMPSChannel12](http://www.youtube.com/user/DMPSChannel12).

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 GrandView University.



### The DMPS Community Report Spring 2009 Vol. 1 No. 3

The DMPS Community Report is published three times each year (fall semester, spring semester and summer) by the office of Community Relations.

Editor: Leigh R. McGivern, APR  
Writer: Sarah Taylor  
Designer/Photographer: Larry Castek

Des Moines Public Schools  
Board and Community Relations  
901 Walnut Street  
Des Moines, IA 50309  
(515) 242-7713

[www.dmps.k12.ia.us](http://www.dmps.k12.ia.us)



Des Moines Independent  
Community School District  
901 Walnut Street  
Des Moines, IA 50309

Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Des Moines, IA  
Permit No. 64

## Des Moines Public Schools DMPS COMMUNITY REPORT Spring 2009



We hope you enjoy this spring 2009 issue of the *DMPS Community Report*, which highlights a few of the projects currently underway. As the school year comes to a close, we can reflect on the great initiatives and activities taking place all over the district, but we also must prepare for the challenges that lie ahead.

Those challenges are more manageable with your help. It is the involvement of parents, families and community members that continues to make the difference in the lives of all the students who attend Des Moines Public Schools, and which allows us to provide a first-class education from preschool through 12th grade. Thank you for all you do!

Finally, please join me in saluting the thousands of seniors who are graduating from our seven high schools. Congratulations and best of luck!

Nancy Sebring  
Superintendent  
Des Moines Public Schools

THINK.

LEARN.

GROW.

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.