

New task force focuses on discipline reform

BY SARAH JONES
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A new Colorado school discipline reform task force is hoping to change the in-school zero tolerance discipline policies affecting the success of Colorado's students.

The Legislative Task Force to Study School Discipline met for the second time at the state capitol on Wednesday, Aug. 24, and heard presentations from the Colorado Department of Public Safety, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids and local law enforcement officials.

The task force is focusing on steering away from zero-tolerance disciplinary mandates and instead balancing school discipline by using administrator discretion, said state Sen. Evie Hu-

dak, D-Arveda, a member of the task force.

"There are a lot of incidences where zero tolerance policies have gone awry," Hudak said.

In the past 10 years, nearly 100,000 Colorado students have been referred to local law enforcement by their schools for disciplinary action, some for such infractions as bringing a toy gun to school or unknowingly having a knife in their lunch box in the cafeteria, Hudak said.

"There are all these different stories about these mandated discipline policies, and people don't have discretion, and we can't use any common sense," Hudak said about the current school discipline model.

Last year, more than 63,000

students received out-of-school suspensions, and 2,238 students were expelled.

"That puts them on the school-to-jail track, just like that," Hudak said.

During the task force's first meeting on Wednesday, July 27, the 16-person panel heard a presentation from Seema Ahmad of the Advancement Project, a Washington, D.C., based organization that focuses on school discipline.

Ahmad presented the definition of zero tolerance policies and also discussed their roots in occurrences such as the shootings at Columbine High School and the legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act and the Gun-Free Schools Act.

The task force initially

stemmed from the Padres Unidos organization, which conducted research in Denver Public Schools about the current discipline model. The organization wants to change to a more restorative justice model, Hudak said.

In addition to looking at the overall problems with discipline, the task force will also look at the disparity of discipline for minorities in school.

The task force will meet for six sessions and will have the ability to introduce up to eight bills as the conclusion of their research. The task force will be looking at both sides of the issue, Hudak said, and examining what is working in school discipline and what needs to be changed.

Mapleton approves receipt of grant funds

BY SARAH JONES
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The Mapleton Public Schools will soon receive more than \$1.6 million in grant dollars to put into the district this school year.

The board approved the receipt of funds for four Mapleton grants during its first official board meeting of the school year on Tuesday, Aug. 23.

"I think it's great to receive the grants," said board assistant secretary and treasurer Vic Domenico.

The district will receive \$280,000 worth of in-kind services from the Adams County Community Reach center to fund seven school-based

mental health therapists this school year. Due to budget cuts and restrictions last year, the district was forced to cut mental health therapists from schools, but thanks to the Community Reach donation students will still have access to these services.

The district will receive \$142,000 from the Colorado Department of Education Counselor Corps Grant to help with drop-out prevention and other student achievement at Mapleton Early College and the Global Leadership Academy. The funds will be used for educational specialists to help students in drop-out prevention and retrieval and also professional development for the certified staff at GLA

and MEC on dropout prevention.

The board also voted to accept a \$67,800 Colorado Health Foundation Physical Education Grant for districtwide curriculum assessment and development in physical education. It will help the district to develop a more effective and cohesive standard of physical education in the district. This grant will also lay the groundwork for the district to apply for a grant to fund physical education supplies and equipment.

The district will also receive a \$1.2 million Tiered Intervention Grant for the improvement of Meadow Community School. The grant money will be disbursed over three years and will be used to improve student

achievement at the school. School leaders at Meadow have developed a plan of improvement for the school which includes full-day kindergarten, student intervention instruction, professional development for staff members, a family literacy center and the extension of both the student learning day and year.

"A special thank you to those people helping us make a difference here," said board president Norma Frank.

Also during their meeting, the board heard presentations from Karla Kohman, director of assessment, on the improvements of the district in both the Colorado Student Assessment Program and the ACT.

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Lori Michelle Trembath received the Academy of General Dentistry's 2011 Fellowship award. Trembath earned this distinction by completing 500 hours of continuing dental education, passing a comprehensive exam and fulfilling three years of continuous membership in the AGD. Trembath graduated from Marquette University in 2004 and currently practices dentistry in Thornton.

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