Harris Neil

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Denver School Board

It is my pleasure to write this letter in support of creation of a Public Service Academy, within the Denver Public Schools. I can speak from my own experience when I say that a program like this can take a student destined for failure, and instead provide an avenue for success.

When I was in high school, I was always referred to as a student with “great potential”, yet a lack of focus and consequently interest; resulted in an abysmal academic record. It would have been unrealistic for me to consider continuing my education, first since my performance up to that point would have precluded it, and secondly since – without a change in my attitude – there would have been no point.

Then late in my junior year of high school, a counselor pointed out our school’s involvement in the Area Vocational Program (AVP), a cooperative effort between my high school, and Pikes Peak Community College. This program allowed me to begin studying Criminal Justice at the Community College half days, and completing high school course work the other half, during my entire senior year. The change was immediate and dramatic, I graduated high school with a GPA that ended not too bad, and continued to earn my degree. Now, I’ve spent my adult life in public service, where I can say I’ve been productive enough to support myself, and enjoyed the positive results of focusing on service to my community.

To say my enrollment in the program came just in the nick of time is no understatement, and I was a student who otherwise had every advantage: involved parents, a quality school system with small class sizes and a lack of distracting issues, and a community less burdened by crime, alcohol or drugs than some in Denver. Even with all that on my side I could easily have fallen through the cracks. If a program like the one proposed could be established; enabling enrollment of students earlier in their educational process, the students likely could find the focus earlier than I did, and consequently have a greater chance for success.

I remember distinctly hearing from so many that I had “great potential”. From my current perspective I recognize that all children have great potential, and we – more than they – have the responsibility to see it is not squandered. The cost of providing avenues for those students who cannot be reached with traditional education may be high. The cost of not providing those avenues – both to the student and to the community – can be immeasurable.

Sincerely,

Harris Neil

Office of Medical Examiner