

## **DPS grads' future brighter - Students at three schools will have college costs paid**

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Nancy Mitchell, Rocky Mountain News

Students graduating this spring from three **Denver** high schools will have their **college** costs covered under a new scholarship program that officials say will soon expand to all city high schools.

"What we're beginning today is creating a foundation that as it grows ... will be able to deliver the promise to every single kid in **Denver** Public Schools," Mayor John Hickenlooper told hundreds of high school seniors gathered Thursday at South High School.

"That's the vision, every single kid, if you're willing to work hard enough, you will go to **college**," he said.

Students from South, Lincoln and Montbello high schools - who will pilot the program - jumped to their feet in a standing ovation for oilman **Tim Marquez** and his wife, **Bernadette**, whose \$50 million donation is launching the private **Denver** Scholarship Foundation.

"I started crying because this means so much," said Dominic McGee, 17, a Montbello High School senior. "This gives everyone an opportunity."

**Marquez**, a 1976 graduate of Lincoln High School who earlier donated \$10 million to his other alma mater, Colorado School of Mines in Golden, told the students that the next steps are up to them.

"We're going to provide you the means to get to **college** anywhere in the state of Colorado," he said. "We're providing you the money, but I can't do the studying for you. It's really up to you. All we can do is make out the checks."

Thursday's announcement is the culmination of an idea first voiced by Hickenlooper in 2004, when he promised students at the former Cole Middle School that if they stayed in school, he'd find the money to send them to **college** .

It was a promise he said he wanted to give to every DPS graduate.

"A lot of people in the city have been talking for a couple of years now about this," the mayor said, adding of the Marquezes, "I can't think of any other couple ... who more embodies the selflessness by which great things happen."

Though initially limited to Class of 2007 graduates at Lincoln, South and Montbello, graduates of all DPS high schools starting in spring 2008 will be eligible for assistance. Current seniors at other DPS schools also can apply for help with post-secondary programs in fall 2008.

The foundation is targeting unmet need, or the financial gap left after a student applies for

government aid, loans, grants and scholarships. Every scholarship recipient also gets a computer.

"The most important part of it is trying to eliminate the financial barrier that too many of our kids either face or have the perception that they face," said DPS Superintendent Michael Bennet.

Several parents who attended a meeting Thursday evening at Montbello to learn more about the program were thrilled.

Cardenia Jones is raising three grandchildren, including Montbello student Tanya Vivens, 16.

"It opens up opportunities for her," Jones said. "Without this, she might choose to go to work knowing I didn't have the money for her to go to **college**. Or she might run into a financial situation where she would drop out, and I didn't want her to worry about dropping out."

**Marquez** said his goal is to improve the number of DPS students going on to **college** - one study found just 9 percent of **Denver** students entering high school go on to achieve four-year degrees.

But **Marquez** and his wife also hope the opportunity prompts more families to consider enrolling in DPS. The couple have three children, two currently at East High School and one an East graduate. And **Marquez** 's mom graduated from South.

"When I was in school, DPS had more than 100,000 students. We've lost 40,000 kids," he said, noting that bringing even half that number back, with state per-pupil funding at more than \$6,000 per student, would bring in millions of dollars to replenish **Denver** schools.

"Just think of the impact of that," **Marquez** said.

Similar **college** promise programs, such as one in Kalamazoo, Mich., have increased enrollment and even spurred home-buying in the city.

Janet Gullickson, executive director of the **Denver** Scholarship Foundation, said the goal for the pilot year is to sign up at least 600 students from the three high schools.

Eventually, the goal is to annually fund \$20 million in scholarships for nearly 6,000 DPS graduates. That would make the **Denver** plan one of the largest scholarship programs in the country.

But more donors are needed to fund the program, which will require a total endowment of \$200 million.

"We really believe there are resources we can tap," Gullickson said. "We talk about the million-dollar folks, but I may have \$500 laying around I can give. That \$500 can make a difference."

## INFOBOX

### A **college** promise for DPS

\* What is it? The newly formed, privately funded **Denver** Scholarship Foundation announced it will cover any unmet **college** costs - what's left after financial aid, scholarships, loans and grants - for graduates of **Denver** Public Schools. The idea is that a lack of money will no longer prevent any DPS graduate from entering post-secondary programs, whether it's vocational school or **college**.

\* Who is eligible? Initially, Class of 2007 graduates of Lincoln, Montbello and South high schools. Students must have been enrolled in the schools by Oct. 2. They must begin a post-secondary program within three years of graduation and have eight years from graduation to finish.

\* What if I go to another school? Class of 2007 graduates from other DPS schools will be eligible to apply for help for fall 2008. All DPS graduates in the Class of 2008 and beyond are eligible.

\* How do I apply? Requirements include filling out an application after Jan. 9, submitting financial aid forms to your chosen school and enrolling at least half-time.

\* Where can I go? Colorado technical **colleges** and two- and four-year schools. A total of 33 institutions are participating, including the University of Colorado and the University of **Denver**.

\* What's covered? In-state tuition, fees, books and supplies. The foundation also will give computers to first-time scholarship recipients.

\* Where do I learn more? Log on to [www.denverscholarship.org](http://www.denverscholarship.org).

How is this possible?

**Tim Marquez** and his wife, **Bernadette**, are contributing \$50 million to seed the foundation and will be asking others to build an endowment totaling \$200 million.

**Marquez** is a 1976 graduate of Lincoln High School and an alum of the Colorado School of Mines. He is the founder and CEO of Venoco Inc., an oil and gas company.

**Bernadette Marquez**, who grew up in Michigan, is a nurse at St. Luke's Medical Center in **Denver**. She said the two come from modest backgrounds and want to share their good fortune.

"We're fortunate to be in a position to have enough money to help out," **Tim Marquez** said. "There's a lot of kids I went to school with who should have gone on to **college** but were not able to. . . . These kids have a lot of potential."