

### Urban districts cue DPS about shared schools

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Separate programs or schools will probably share buildings in Denver by 2009, a change that has advantages but also could pose difficulties.

On Thursday, school board members and administrators met over lunch with officials from Chicago and New York public schools — urban districts where multiple school programs have been integrated in single facilities.

Denver Public Schools buildings are 70 percent to 80 percent full, and the district is actively seeking new educational programs that could fill that space. Those new programs could include charter schools, which now operate in facilities separate from traditional public schools.

The school board will create a policy this year that will help define how schools share buildings, said Theresa Peña, school board president.

"We'll have to work with principal leadership so they understand the objective that we are trying to strive for," Peña said.

Officials from Chicago and New York discussed how schools share buildings in their cities.

In New York, for example, 900 programs share facilities.

Principals learn to work together, said Lawrence Pendergast, principal of Urban Assembly School of Design and Construction in New York, which shares a building with five other schools.

Ultimately, he said, students are better off, and families get more choices of where to send their children.

In Chicago, the district works closely with the community to establish

new schools. The district closes poor-performing schools and creates new schools in targeted neighborhoods to give students a broader choice, "so they don't have to travel across the city to go to good schools," said Claudia Quezada of the Office of New Schools in Chicago.

The city has 41 schools sharing facilities, she said.

Peña said Denver attempted to create a shared school last year by placing the new Venture Charter high school at West High but decided against it because no policy had been created for how to do it.

Patrick Sanchez, West's principal, said his school was already implementing a model similar to what the Venture school will do — a project-based learning environment.

"It would have been like opening a Starbucks in a Starbucks," he said.

Officials from New York and Chicago said district leaders must be clear with principals and assure them the shared concept does not mean imminent closure.

"It's not easy on that building's principal," Pendergast said.

"The upside is quality choices for kids," said Joyce Caine, principal of Collins Academy High School in Chicago. "That makes the challenges worthwhile."

The policy is expected to be in place by next fall when the district selects its innovative and charter schools for 2009, Peña said.