



DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

2010 Denver Plan

Strategic Vision and Action Plan

2010 Denver Plan

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“We must be willing to do more than talk. We all must be willing to change. Education reform isn’t a table around which we talk. It’s a moving train, and we all need to get on board.”

Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education

LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT |

Dear DPS Community:

This is an absolutely critical time for our schools and our city. The 2005 Denver Plan started to change the conversation in our community about our schools, and it has been the blueprint for the progress we’ve seen over the past four years.

Despite our progress, however, we must face the sobering fact that we are failing the civil rights challenge of our generation: to ensure that all of our students, regardless of ethnicity or income status, graduate from our high schools prepared for college or career. Now is time to accelerate our reforms, to sharpen the focus on student achievement, and to get all of our children—in every neighborhood of Denver—on track to walk across the commencement stage armed with everything they need to forge a great future for themselves. The momentum is there, and we need to capitalize on it now.

This is a plan to do just that. It has an intense focus on the work in our classrooms. Teaching is our society’s noblest profession, requiring enormous skill, passion, creativity, and commitment. Nothing is more important to the future of our children than our teachers. Effective teaching is the one thing proven to truly move the achievement needle – to close our achievement gaps and give every one of our students a real chance to succeed. As President Obama has stressed:

From the moment students enter a school, the most important factor in their success is not the color of their skin or the income of their parents, it’s the person standing at the front of the classroom.

This plan also recognizes the three critical strategies we must pursue to enable our teachers’ work in the classroom: retaining, rewarding, and recruiting great people; strong family and community engagement; and strategic management of financial resources.

But those strategies—important as they are—will not fully succeed if we do not continue and deepen our conversations around fundamentally changing the culture and structure of public education. We need that dialogue to center on high expectations, excellent customer service, and systems of empowerment and responsibility.

We must acknowledge that our culture historically has not been one consistently defined by high expectations, service, empowerment, and responsibility. This is partly the result of the fact that our district, like school districts across the country, has operated for generations as a monopoly and has suffered from a monopoly’s resistance to fundamental change, a lack of urgency, and an inflexibility that often puts the interests of the system and its adults over and above the needs of our students. This must change. It is long past time to reorganize our system on new principles. We need to create a

system and a culture that places our students' interests unequivocally first, that presumes the best of our professionals, that empowers them, and that focuses above all else on our student performance.

We must move away from the conflicts of the past that pitted adults within our schools against one another and turn our attention to focus solely on the needs of our children. We must embrace our shared mission of dramatically improving student achievement and serving our families. For the sake of our children's and our city's future, together, we're UP to the challenge.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Tom Boasberg

Superintendent



The vision of the Denver Public Schools is clear:

We will lead the nation's cities in student achievement, high school graduation, college preparation, and college matriculation. Our students will be well-prepared for success in life, work, civic responsibility, and higher education.

We will lead the nation. It is the right thing to do for our children. It is the right thing to do for our city, which will achieve its highest potential only when our schools are a thriving, vibrant success story. This plan, the 2010 Denver Plan, explains what we will do to achieve it.

Since launching the 2005 Denver Plan five years ago, thousands more of our students have become proficient in reading, writing and mathematics, and DPS has shown more academic growth on state assessments than the rest of the state and more than any other major school district in Colorado. We have doubled the number of high school students who take Advanced Placement (AP) courses or concurrently enroll in college programs, reduced our drop-out rate by one-third, and graduated 200 more seniors than four years ago.

Despite this progress, however, we must face the sobering reality that less than 50% of DPS students are proficient on the state's reading measures; less than 40% are proficient in mathematics and writing; we are graduating only half of our students from high school; and we suffer, in a district where 80% of our students are of color, from a persistent 35-point achievement gap between our African-American and Latino students and their Anglo and Asian-American counterparts. The four-year growth confirms we are on the right track, but we must significantly accelerate our rate of improvement and put far more of our students on the path to graduation and success in college and careers.

This is the civil rights challenge of our generation: provide all students an excellent education, regardless of race or economic status, thereby giving them a strong and equal chance to succeed in this democracy. Our school board recognizes that without continuing to reform our system of educating children in Denver, we will not succeed. Thus, the Board of Education developed and adopted a set of core beliefs and commitments to drive our work. We believe:

- **All students can achieve and graduate, and we can close the achievement gap.**
- **Teaching and learning are the top priority.**
- **Accountability for performance by all adults matters.**
- **Choice, collaboration, and innovation are key to 21st century success.**
- **Parent, family, and community engagement are essential elements of quality education systems.**

The board also adopted a theory of action—our view about *how* we will make this progress. Called Performance Empowerment, the theory of action calls for clearly establishing our instructional program (including defined standards, baseline core curriculum, coordinated professional development, and interim formative assessments) and emphasizes the essential roles of autonomy, empowerment, and

innovation to reach much higher levels of success. The Board also adopted five-year, measurable goals against which we can be held accountable, by ourselves and by you. The goals require us to ensure that:

1. All students will graduate from the Denver Public Schools prepared for postsecondary success.
2. All students will demonstrate at least one year's growth in the core content areas and meet or exceed state standards.
3. The number of high-performing schools as measured by the School Performance Framework will increase.
4. All students will have access to full day kindergarten.
5. Enrollment will continue to increase in the Denver Public Schools.

(The specific goals are available in Appendix A.)

This document, the **2010 Denver Plan: Strategic Vision and Action Plan**, lays out our vision and the course we are embarking on to achieve its goals. In large part, this plan is an extension of the 2005 Denver Plan, carefully building on and leveraging the vastly improved capacity we have built in this district, including aligning our curriculum to state standards; introducing benchmark assessments to track every student's and school's progress; providing comprehensive professional development for principals; instituting a more transparent and equitable student-based budgeting formula to distribute resources to schools; and implementing ProComp, the nation's most differentiated teacher professional pay system.

To build upon the 2005 Denver Plan and accelerate our student gains, we must transform teaching and learning conditions district-wide, so thoughtful and empowered teachers will expertly deliver effective instruction using their content knowledge, as well as their knowledge of students' strengths and needs in every classroom in Denver Public Schools. DPS recognizes that the quality of our educators is the most significant factor in driving student outcomes. We are committed to having a highly effective teacher in every classroom and building strategies to support this commitment.

As depicted in the visual on page seven, everything in the 2010 Denver Plan centers on the classroom—interactions among students, teachers, and content—the instructional core. We cannot change student performance without changing the instructional core. Research is clear that effective teaching is the most important factor in student academic success. Great people working for DPS, family and community engagement, and strategically managing our financial resources all support our teachers' and principals' work with students every day. Surrounding all of this work is a culture of high expectations, service, empowerment, and responsibility. These are the major elements of our plan; the visual that follows illustrates how they support the instructional core and interact with one another.



Focus on the Instructional Core |

As affirmed by our core beliefs, learning and achievement are not determined or limited by race, family income, native language, disability, gender, or area of residence. Instead, learning and achievement are outcomes of a healthy and highly functioning instructional core defined by interactions among engaged students, effective teachers, and rigorous content. Focusing on and improving our instructional core means that teaching, schools, and systems are well-organized to provide consistent, high-quality instruction that engages and challenges all students in acquiring skills, strategies, understandings, and knowledge necessary for the 21st century. To improve student achievement and close the achievement gaps, we will:

- Create conditions to ensure our teachers' and principals' effectiveness.
- Ensure all students, including English language learners, gifted students, and students with disabilities, have access to rigorous standards-based curricula and assessments.
- Provide coordinated and comprehensive support systems for the whole child.
- Use data and best practices to evaluate and continuously improve our instructional programs.

Great People to Drive Better Outcomes for Students |

Talented and committed people are our most important resource in driving improved student outcomes. To ensure we have highly effective teams of teachers and leaders in every school and department who successfully support the instructional core, we will:

- Recruit the best teachers and principals for our schools.
- Empower and retain effective educators.
- Create meaningful recognition systems, advancement opportunities, and rewards for driving student achievement.
- Recruit, retain, and reward outstanding staff to support teachers' and principals' work.
- Replace low-performing employees who, despite support, fail to meet expectations.

Deepening Engagement with Families and the Community |

Families, as well as the larger Denver community, are essential partners in helping our students achieve at dramatically higher levels and graduate from high school ready for college or career. To ensure family and community engagement effectively supports the instructional core, we will:

- Deepen and strengthen parent and family engagement classroom by classroom, school by school.
- Engage and inform DPS students, families, and the community about DPS strategies and initiatives.
- Foster dialogue and input from stakeholders to promote civic engagement and ownership of public schools.
- Partner with nonprofits, faith communities, philanthropic groups, and others to support Denver's students with streamlined services that are focused on improving student achievement.
- Leverage partnerships with the City and County of Denver and other governmental agencies.
- Forge formal partnerships and secure additional resources promoting college entry and success.

Strategic Management of Financial Resources |

Our district's single goal is to dramatically improve student achievement. Thus, our financial resources must wisely support the instructional core of students, teachers, and content. It is also critical to manage resources to ensure long-term stability and to attract growing numbers of students and families to DPS. To achieve this goal, we will:

- Ensure fiscal stability by growing our enrollment and keeping costs in line with revenues.
- Effectively use funds to maximize available school and classroom resources.
- Align resources with effective programs that allow us to meet our student achievement goals and to establish financial incentives for achieving them.
- Increase transparency so the public more easily understands use of funds and alignment of resources with goals.
- Effectively use bond resources for facility upgrades and targeted expansion.

A Culture of High Expectations, Service, Empowerment, and Responsibility |

Building and maintaining a culture characterized by high expectations, excellent service, empowerment, and responsibility is critical to achieving our goals. Culture surrounds and permeates our work. A successful culture is in many ways intangible, but its presence is a powerful force for and a necessary element of change. Admittedly, it is a significant shift for a culture that remains too focused on compliance. To build and maintain a high-performance culture focused on student results, we will:

- Establish and maintain high expectations for all students and adults in Denver Public Schools.
- Ensure that our schools and departments provide excellent service to families and students and that the central service organization provides high-quality service to our schools.
- Strengthen our systems and norms of providing significant empowerment to DPS employees that is coupled with responsibility for student results.

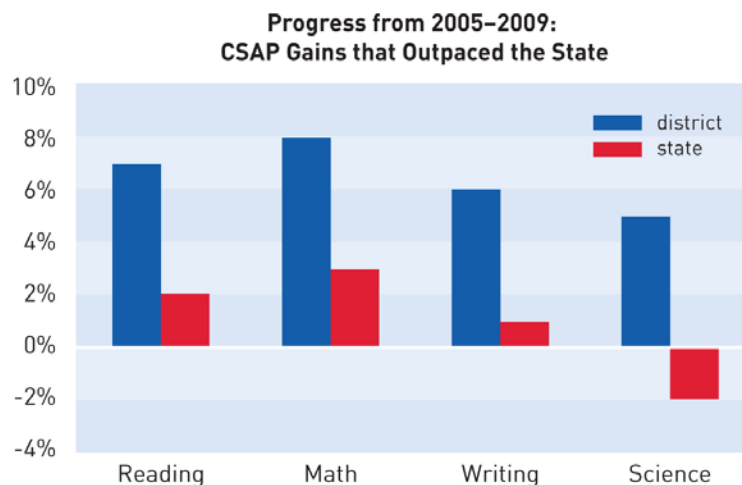
We fully believe that aggressive and thoughtful implementation of these strategies will yield significant and rapid improvements in student achievement. That said, this plan is a living document. We will continue to track our progress carefully and report that progress to the community. For the goal to rapidly increase achievement—and opportunities—for our students simply must be realized.

CALL TO ACTION |

“Operating an urban school district in the 21st century based on a century-old configuration will result in the failure for too many children. It is long past time to admit this. As a district and a community, we must gather strength and have the courage to make change, knowing that the changes we face are much, much less perilous than the status quo.”

Denver Public Schools Board of Education, April 2007

In the fall of 2005, Denver Public Schools began implementing the Denver Plan, an ambitious set of education reform initiatives anchored in three main areas: highly skilled and empowered teachers, great school leaders, and close community collaboration. The first four years of the Denver Plan have produced considerable progress. **In fact, in each of these four years, DPS has shown more academic growth on Colorado state assessments than the rest of the state and has demonstrated greater achievement progress than any other major school district in Colorado.** Significantly, we also doubled the number of high school students who take Advanced Placement (AP) courses or concurrently enroll in college programs, reduced our drop-out rate by one-third, and graduated 200 more seniors than four years ago. These student outcomes confirm we are on the right track.



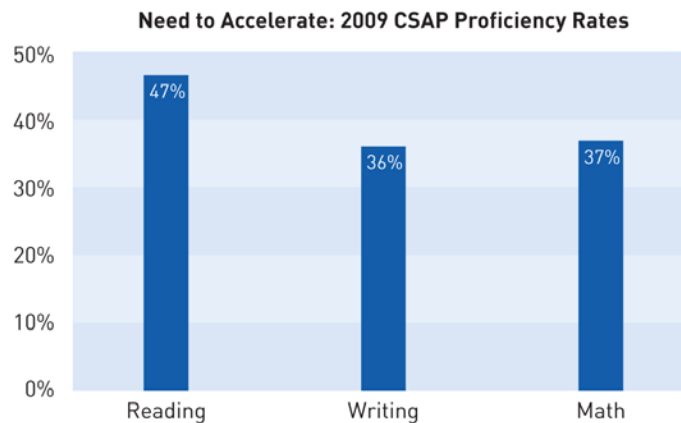
Denver’s families agree. DPS enrollment is the highest it has been in more than 30 years. Thanks to taxpayers’ approval of Denver Preschool Program funding, we increased enrollment in our pre-schools from 500 full-day students in 2007–2008 to 2,600 in 2009–2010—a five-fold increase. We also increased participation in full-day kindergarten from 72% to more than 90%. And, thanks to Tim and Bernie Marquez’s extraordinary generosity, we have established the Denver Scholarship Foundation to provide counseling and financial assistance to help our graduates apply to and pay for college.

The nation’s experts agree that DPS has embarked on a strategic and comprehensive overhaul. The Council of the Great City Schools, a national organization of 67 of the nation’s largest urban school

districts, stressed in its 2009 evaluation of Denver Public Schools that our district’s vision for reform is “one of the most promising and comprehensive in the nation.” The council further noted, “The architecture of these reforms—instructional, financial, and human capital—is among the most seamlessly conceived in all of urban education in the United States.”¹

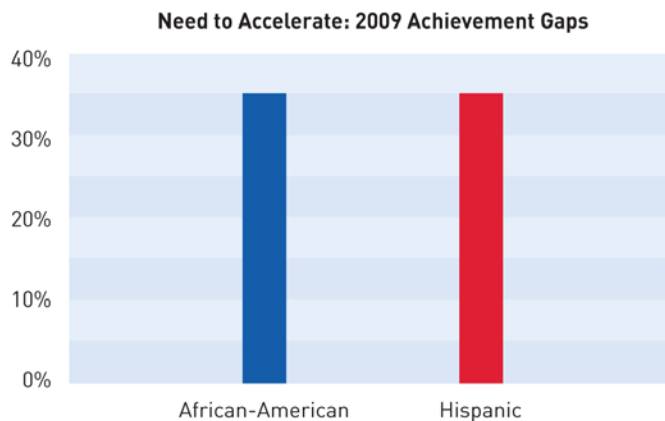
We are grateful for the tremendous dedication and hard work of our students, teachers, school leaders, staff, parents, and community members that has put our district on this path of improvement.

But we are still not close to meeting our goals. Less than 50% of DPS students are proficient on the state’s reading measures, and less than 40% are proficient in mathematics and writing.



In a society where failure to graduate from high school condemns young people to a life of second-class economic citizenship, our four-year graduation rate is only slightly more than 50%. Most sobering is that, in a district where 80% of our students are of color, a 35-point achievement gap persists between our African-American and Latino students and their Anglo and Asian-American counterparts.

¹ Council of the Great City Schools. *Accelerating Achievement in Denver Public Schools: Report of the Strategic Support Team*. Winter 2008–2009.



At the current rate of improvement, students who are not yet born will graduate from Denver Public Schools before our achievement levels equal the state’s and before we close the achievement gap between our students of color and their Anglo classmates. This rate of improvement is profoundly unacceptable to a school system with high expectations for our students and to a community with high expectations of its school system.

We must accelerate our rate of progress to meaningfully address our achievement gaps, to reach our achievement goals, and to meet the civil rights challenge of our generation: to give all our students, regardless of race or economic status, a strong and equal chance to succeed. It is essential that we as a district—and as a city—face the reality that we are nowhere near where we need to be.

Building a Framework for Success |

Recognizing this, the Board of Education developed and adopted a set of core beliefs and commitments to drive our work, based on our sole focus of driving better student outcomes.

We believe:

- **All students can achieve and graduate, and we can close the achievement gap.**
- **Teaching and learning is the top priority.**
- **Accountability for performance by all adults matters.**
- **Choice, collaboration, and innovation are key to 21st century success.**
- **Engagement of parents, families, and community are essential elements of a quality education system.²**

These core beliefs represent our fundamental values as an organization. Next, the Board developed and adopted a theory of action, which represents what we need to **do** to effect change and realize these core values. The theory of action is essentially an “if, then” statement: “If we do our work in this

² See Appendix B for a fully defined and annotated set of the district’s Core Beliefs and Commitments.

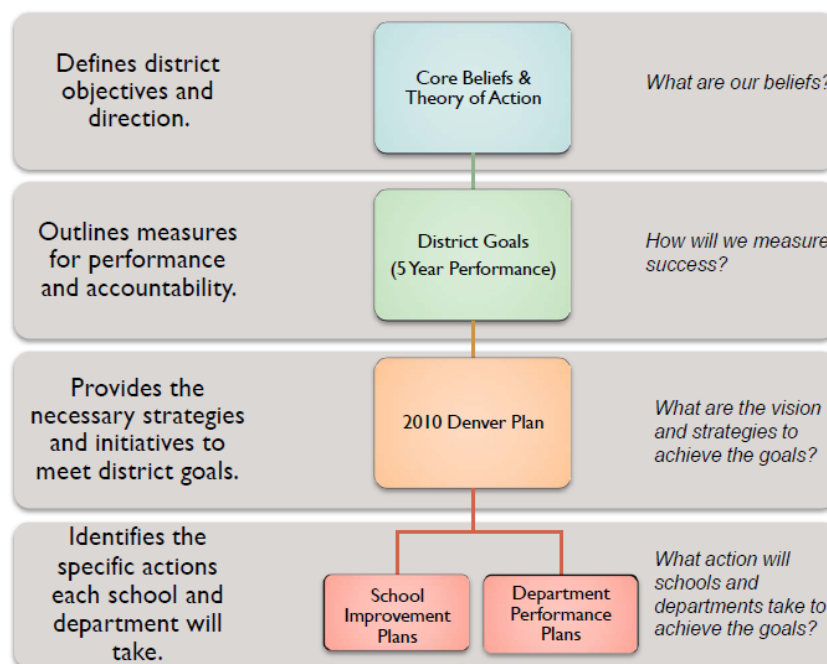
way, then we have the highest chances for success.” It guides us when setting priorities, making plans and budgets, and undertaking new initiatives.

Denver Public Schools’ theory of action calls for the district to establish and ensure quality control of core elements of the instructional model, including clear standards, a baseline core curriculum, coordinated professional development, and interim formative assessments. Central direction around these elements 1) builds upon research-based methods; 2) establishes clear, non-negotiable standards for student success; 3) helps provide continuity to students who move from school to school; 4) enables the delivery of high-quality and tightly focused professional development; 5) allows the district to administer common interim assessments that guide differentiated classroom instruction and give visibility to succeeding or struggling schools ; and 6) ensures equity for and mastery of rigorous standards by all students across all schools in the district.

While we believe it is essential to establish these non-negotiables, we are just as intentionally investing significant decision-making authority at the school and department levels. Success hinges on empowering our talented teaching and leadership staff to make decisions about *how to teach* and *how to lead*. While the district will ensure all schools and all students have access to rigorous courses rooted in world-class standards, we want a system in which all teachers, principals, and staff tap their talent and creativity to design the best ways to teach and lead.

By putting this theory of action into practice, the district will go beyond incremental change and accelerate gains in academic achievement for all students.

To measure our progress, the board adopted five-year, measurable goals that require us to dramatically improve student achievement, close existing achievement gaps, improve high school graduation rates, and continue to increase enrollment in Denver Public Schools. (The specific goals and timelines are available in Appendix A.) As depicted below, School Improvement Plans and department performance plans will directly support the five-year goals.



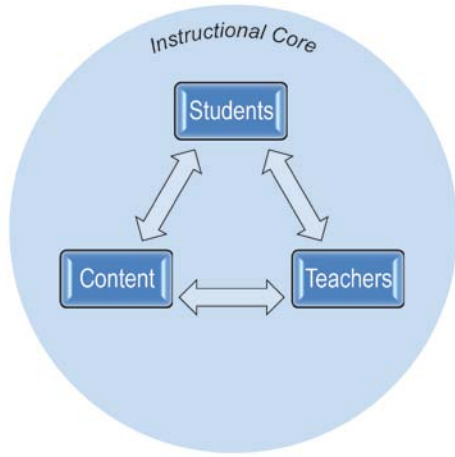
Fundamentally Changing Our Approach |

As the 2005 Denver Plan and the Board's 2007 response to the *Rocky Mountain News* series, "Leaving to Learn," makes clear, if we wish to achieve these goals and fundamentally change student outcomes, we need to fundamentally change our approach. For decades, public school systems in this country have provided education to nearly 90% of students in America, with options available only for families with means to afford them. School systems have not demonstrated an imperative to change. DPS has suffered from this lack of urgency to change, most clearly evidenced by the nearly 27,000 Denver families who choose to enroll their children in non-DPS schools. We have begun and we must continue embracing competition and the challenges of this century. To do this, we must transform ourselves from a top-down, inflexible system that focuses too much on adults' debates and priorities and too little on the achievement of our students.

Our sole focus must be improving student achievement. To do this, the center of our work and our strategy must be the instructional core. As defined by education policy expert Richard Elmore, the instructional core is the interactions and relationships among students, teachers, and rigorous content. Further, Elmore describes how the elements interact:

You can't alter the skill and knowledge of the teacher when you stay in a low-level curriculum. If you alter the content without changing the skill and knowledge of teachers, you are asking teachers to teach to a level that they don't have the skill and knowledge to teach to. If you do either one of those things without changing the role of the student in the instructional process, the likelihood that students will ever take control of their own learning is pretty remote.³

³ Elizabeth City, Richard Elmore, Sarah Fiarman, and Lee Teitel. *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning*. Harvard Education Press. 2009.



Students: Student learning is the goal, and actively engaged students are an essential part of the instructional core. Student learning is only possible when our students are challenged and actively engaged. We recognize that each student has unique strengths and learning needs and we must differentiate our instruction to meet his or her needs. We will engage students through rigorous content and meaningful coursework that makes clear we have high expectations for them. As many comments on our draft last fall emphasized, students must take responsibility for their own education by setting and meeting rigorous academic, personal, and school community goals.

Teachers: Study after study has made clear that the only thing proven to close the achievement gap is the quality of teaching.^{4,5} Effective teaching requires enormous skill, dedication, and hard work. DPS is fortunate to have an extremely talented teacher corps to whom we owe our thanks for our progress to date. This plan moves aggressively, with the support of a three-year, \$10 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, to develop our teachers' skills and to ensure that there are highly effective teachers in every classroom across the district. We will support teachers to be the most effective they can be in pursuit of our goals.

Content: Our aligned system of instruction will use state standards to ensure that content is rigorous, coherent, and engaging. Our standards at every grade in every subject must be at a level to build upon each other and prepare our students to graduate from high school ready for college. We will emphasize higher-order thinking and problem solving aligned to the revised state standards so our students can compete in the increasingly global workplace of their future.

We believe three critical supports are necessary to ensure success for our work in the instructional core.

- First, and most important, is fundamentally changing our policies and practices to do a much better job recognizing, retaining, developing, rewarding, and recruiting **great people** to teach in and lead our schools and run our support services. We also must recognize that we have the responsibility to replace low-performing employees who, despite support, fail to meet expectations.
- Second, we must **deepen our engagement** and communication with our families and community.
- Third, we must strategically and transparently manage our **financial resources** to support the instructional core.

We further recognize that all of this work occurs within and is impacted by our organization's culture. While perhaps more intangible, a high-performing culture is equally essential to our success in changing student outcomes. Thus, we must build and maintain a shared culture of high expectations, high-quality service, empowerment, and responsibility for results in all our schools and throughout all district departments.

⁴ Darling-Hammond, Linda. *Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence*. Education Policy Analysis Archives. January 1, 2000.

⁵ Brian Rowan, Richard Correnti, and R. J. Miller. "What large-scale, survey research tells us about teacher effects on student achievement: Insights from the prospects study of elementary schools." *Teachers College Record*. 2002.

Traditionally, public school systems have promoted neither empowerment of education professionals nor accountability for students' academic success. We must promote both, as they are two sides of the same coin. As Albert Shanker, the founder of the American Federation of Teachers, emphasized:

The key is that unless there is accountability, we will never get the right system. As long as there are no consequences if kids or adults don't perform, as long as the discussion is not about education and student outcomes, then we are playing a game as to who has the power. Who's going to feel bad, the teachers or the principal? Unless you start with a very heavy emphasis on accountability, not end with it, you'll never get a system with all the other pieces falling into place.⁶

We believe Shanker is correct in his emphasis on accountability. Our long-term success depends on empowering our professionals and ensuring a deep sense of individual and collective responsibility for student achievement. Presently, however, our system is not organized to create such a sense of empowerment or responsibility. Instead, we have created systems that value and enforce compliance over performance. Our incentives do not clearly align behind the goal of improving student achievement. Additionally, we have developed state laws, district policies, and collective bargaining agreements that presume that our faculties must be protected from arbitrary and ineffective principals by one-size-fits-all work rules.

It is long past time to reorganize our system on new principles: to discard the one-size-fits-all, top-down model that has failed our students and to collaborate with our teachers and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association to replace it with a model that empowers our faculty and principals to take up the challenge of fulfilling the high expectations they have of themselves and our community has for our students. Such a system must focus on results, especially improved student performance, and move away from controlling inputs, such as dictating how teachers must use their time or how schools must use their budgets.

We need to pursue a system and a culture that presumes the best of DPS employees. We must, in short, move away from the conflicts of the past that pitted individuals and groups of adults within the district against one another and embrace our common mission to improve student achievement.

⁶ "A Tribute to Al Shanker." Pew Forum on Education Reform, special insert in *Education Week*. May 14, 1997.

A Charge to DPS Students |

“We can have the most dedicated teachers, the most supportive parents, and the best schools in the world—and none of it will matter unless all of you fulfill your responsibilities, unless you show up to those schools; pay attention to those teachers; listen to your parents, grandparents, and other adults; and put in the hard work it takes to succeed.

“Every single one of you has something you’re good at. Every single one of you has something to offer. And you have a responsibility to yourself to discover what that is. That’s the opportunity an education can provide.

“But at the end of the day, the circumstances of your life—what you look like, where you come from, how much money you have, what you’ve got going on at home—that’s no excuse for neglecting your homework or having a bad attitude. That’s no excuse for talking back to your teacher, or cutting class, or dropping out of school. That’s no excuse for not trying.”

President Barack Obama, Back to School Speech, September 9, 2009

Working together as students, families, employees, and community members, we will ensure every DPS student graduates high school ready to excel in college or other postsecondary options. Students also have a very clear responsibility for their own learning and success. As one teacher commented on our draft, **“The district as a whole needs to have clear expectations for students. From the teacher’s experience, students will rise to meet any expectations set for them—but the expectations must be clear.”**

We challenge all DPS students to:

- Try their very best on a daily basis and excel in their courses.
- Discover their unique abilities by taking challenging courses.
- Attend school regularly, ready to learn, with homework completed.
- Serve as role models to peers by honoring community values and school discipline codes.

To support students in meeting this challenge, we will:

- Treat students as our partners, working with them to plan rigorous academic programs.
- Motivate and set highest expectations for our students.
- Monitor progress and ensure that students understand where they excel and areas where improvement is needed.
- Focus our individual goals to help achieve success in the classroom.
- Provide student support based on individual needs.
- Ensure that our schools are safe learning environments.
- Advise all students on potential college options and courses they need to access postsecondary opportunities of their choice.

A Charge to DPS Parents and Guardians |

Research proves that parent involvement has a positive effect on student success. When parents are involved in their children's education, they achieve more. Schools perform better. Teacher morale even improves. Ultimately, communities are stronger when parents get involved.

Parent Teacher Association. March 2010

Parent and guardian involvement in education is about building partnerships between homes and schools to support every child. We must encourage and nurture relationships with our families and commit to providing them with tools and support they need to participate in their children's education. Our parents and guardians' support is vital in shaping the future of all DPS children.

We challenge all parents and guardians to:

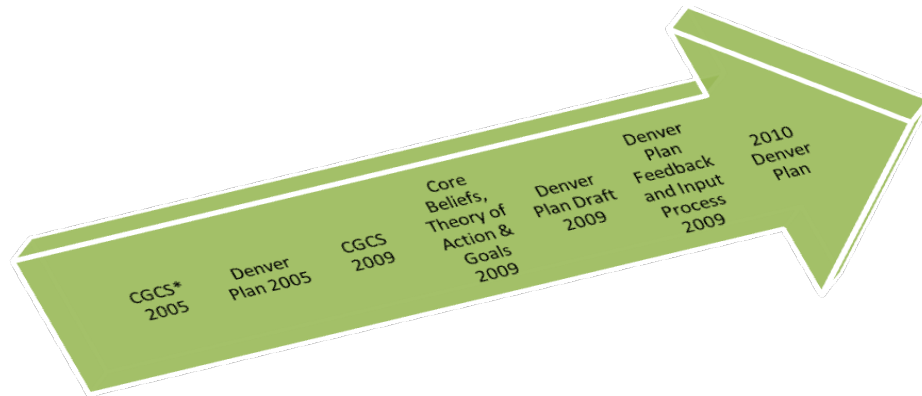
- Set high expectations for your children's achievement and emphasize the importance of college and career readiness.
- Ensure that your children attend school regularly, ready to learn, with homework completed.
- Read to or with your children, limit and guide television watching, and provide stimulating experiences outside of school that contribute to your children's education.
- Visit your children's school regularly, attend parent-teacher conferences, and access information about your children's performance.
- Serve as role models to your children by honoring community values and supporting school discipline codes.

To support parents in meeting this challenge, we will:

- Engage you on how to work directly with your children on learning activities at home.
- Provide access to real-time information on how your students are performing.
- Be your partner in resolving your children's issues and challenges, as well as your partner in celebrating your children's successes.
- Ensure that our schools invite and welcome your involvement.
- Advise you on potential college options and courses your children need to access postsecondary opportunities of their choice.

2010 Denver Plan: Strategic Vision and Action Plan |

In the **2010 Denver Plan: Strategic Vision and Action Plan**, we detail our vision and proposed course of action for the next three years. As depicted in the timeline below, the 2010 Denver Plan is an evolution of four years of continuous improvement. In 2005, the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) conducted a thorough review of our system. The Council's recommendations formed the basis of the 2005 Denver Plan. We invited the Council to examine our system again in 2009. Its report laid the foundation for the Board to establish our theory of action and five-year measurable goals. Building on the Council's 2009 recommendations and our progress to date, this plan explains how we will achieve the five-year goals.



*Council of Great City Schools

The 2010 Denver Plan will become the basis of individual school improvement plans and central office departmental performance plans which, in turn, drive budgets, timelines, and individual performance goals. These work plans will operationalize the strategies described in this plan. We will measure our progress by the five-year goals.

Launching the 2010 Denver Plan |

This plan is meant to provide a shared vision and commitment to the success of Denver’s children. While the 2010 Denver Plan has its roots in the 2005 Denver Plan goals, its vision has been informed by many: from the voices of our teachers, principals, parents, and community members heard in school faculty meetings, principal institutes, and public comment sessions at board meetings, to the joint DCTA-district Professional Practices Workgroup that worked successfully to make the district one of eight national recipients of major grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the largest competitive philanthropic grant in DPS history.

We look forward to ongoing, powerful dialogue with our talented employees, dedicated parents, and devoted community members on specific strategies. It is your hard work and commitment to Denver’s children that will shape our collective success.



FOCUS ON THE INSTRUCTIONAL CORE |

ALL STUDENTS CAN ACHIEVE AND GRADUATE. AND WE CAN CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP.

“We believe that all students can learn at grade level or higher (no excuses), make dramatic gains in student achievement, reach their full potential and graduate prepared for success in life, work, civic responsibility, higher education, and competition in a global community. We believe this is true for all students and is not determined or limited by race, family income, native language, disability, gender, or area of residence.”

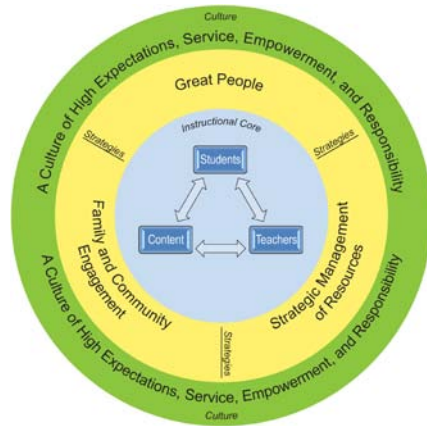
Denver Public Schools, Core Beliefs and Commitments

Vision |

Our vision is that all Denver Public Schools’ students will learn at grade level or higher and graduate from high school ready for college or career, which means that all 78,000 students, 55,000 of whom live in poverty, 36,000 of whom speak languages other than English in their homes, 9,131 of whom have identified education disabilities, and 8,200 who are identified as gifted and talented, will graduate from high school ready for college or career.

As affirmed by our core beliefs, we believe that learning and achievement are not determined or limited by race, family income, native language, disability, gender, or area of residence. Instead, learning and achievement are outcomes of effective teaching, schools, and systems organized to provide consistent, high-quality instruction that engages and challenges all students in acquiring skills, strategies, understandings, and knowledge necessary for the 21st century. It is clear that jobs of the future will require postsecondary training and education and that our students be thinkers and problem-solvers. Students of today will encounter careers and contexts that currently do not exist, and they will need to be able to solve complex problems and apply their learning to an ever-changing world.

To ensure success for all students, we must focus on the instructional core, comprised of interactions and relationships among its three major elements: students, teachers, and content.



Students, at the heart of our mission, must be approached as they are: each one unique, with individual strengths and needs. Teachers must be knowledgeable about how to make content both accessible and understandable to students. Finally, content must be rigorous and aligned to high standards. It is the interplay of students, teachers, and content that allows learning to occur.

Research consistently shows that effective teaching is the single largest factor in student academic success.⁷ Effective teaching results from increasing the level of knowledge and skills that teachers bring to the instructional process, increasing content level of complexity of the content that students are asked to learn, and changing students' role from passive information recipients to active, engaged learners.⁸ The district's teacher effectiveness initiatives are referenced in this section of the Denver Plan, as well as in the Great People section of the plan. The teacher effectiveness strategies in each section reinforce and support one another in their efforts to better support teachers and drive improved student outcomes.

In DPS, we are fortunate to have a talented and dedicated teaching staff that both embraces the district's core beliefs and works hard to ensure student success. To accelerate gains in academic achievement, we will build on the momentum established to transform teaching and learning conditions district-wide, so thoughtful and empowered teachers can expertly plan to implement effective instructional strategies using their data-driven knowledge of content as well as their knowledge of students' strengths and needs. These accomplished teachers will use their expertise to make informed decisions that ensure all students have the instruction, opportunities, and supports they need. Teachers and school leaders will also identify and meet individual academic and social-emotional learning needs of each and every student, so all DPS students reach their full potential and graduate prepared for success in life, work, civic responsibility, higher education, and as competitors in a global community.

To foster the best interactions between engaged students, effective teachers, and rigorous content, we will pursue the following strategies.

⁷ Rowan, Correnti, and Miller; Darling-Hammond.

⁸ Elizabeth City, Richard Elmore, Sarah Fiarman, and Lee Teitel. *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning*. Harvard Education Press. 2009.

Strategy 1 |

Create conditions to ensure educator effectiveness. This will require us to develop a shared definition of effective teaching, strengthen our support for teachers to develop their professional skills, and develop principals to be effective leaders. We will create a common definition and shared understanding of effective teaching. Our definition and understanding of effective teaching will include teachers' impact on student learning as measured by achievement data. Effective teaching will be anchored in a meaningful system of observation, feedback, and evaluation. Professional development will be aligned to the standards of effective teaching and will be accessed based on individual identified needs. We will focus on developing principals to lead their schools effectively and develop their teachers. *(Teacher effectiveness strategies in this section are reinforced in the Great People section.)*

Strategy 2 |

Ensure all students, including English language learners, gifted students, and students with disabilities, have access to rigorous standards-based curricula and assessments. We will provide rigorous standards-based curricula and assessments aligned with new Colorado state standards. We will differentiate materials to meet students' needs, and students will have access to appropriate interventions to ensure learning and achievement.

Strategy 3 |

Provide coordinated and comprehensive support systems for the whole child. Each student comes to school with unique circumstances, strengths, and needs. We will create support systems for all aspects of our learners, including their health and physical and emotional needs, as well as academic needs to give them the best opportunities for success.⁹

Strategy 4 |

Implement a continuous improvement process informed by data and best practices. We will build curriculum and program evaluation methods, using formative and summative assessments linked to standards to ensure that we maximize the most effective practices for our student population and improve or eliminate less-effective practices. We will focus on turnaround strategies in our low-performing schools and welcome high-quality new programs and schools.

We are confident—through experience, research, and good common sense—that these strategies will ensure rapid increases in student achievement and dramatically decrease our achievement gaps.

⁹ Abraham H. Maslow. *Toward a Psychology of Being*. Wiley, John and Sons, Inc. 1999, third edition. (originally published in 1957).

Progress to Date |

In the first four years of implementing the 2005 Denver Plan, we made great strides in instructional reforms, focusing our efforts on increasing coherence, raising expectations, and supporting educators.

To increase coherence, we:

- Developed planning and pacing guides with and for teachers and principals based on state standards.
- Developed classroom “look fors” and best practice documents to develop shared understandings and expectations.
- Selected and provided common core curricula for literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and affective education.
- Aligned textbooks and instructional materials to state standards.
- Provided professional development for all common curricula.
- Developed benchmark assessments in mathematics, science, and language arts and end-of-course assessments in courses required for graduation.
- Overhauled school improvement planning and accreditation processes so both are aligned with state and federal accountability initiatives and are more tightly focused on driving improvement in student achievement.
- Selected and supported common interventions in literacy, mathematics, and social-emotional development.
- Revised the Student Intervention Teams process to focus more on individualized data and placements.
- Developed and supported a district-wide approach to Response to Instruction and Intervention, including selecting and training site leaders at all schools.
- Selected, trained, and supported progress-monitoring tools for literacy.
- Created and supported principal professional development in literacy and mathematics instruction and leadership.

To raise expectations, we:

- Expanded and strengthened our early childhood and full-day kindergarten programs.
- Established Denver School-Based Health Clinics to improve the service system delivering primary health care services to school-age children and youth, increasing affordable, accessible and appropriate primary health services in targeted schools to promote physical, psychological, educational, social and personal health.
- Instituted rigorous high school graduation requirements.
- Increased enrollment in Advanced Placement classes 66% over 6 years.
- Created and supported school-based data teams focused on student performance on formative and summative standards-based assessments.
- Developed and implemented standards-based progress reports and grading standards.
- Enhanced intervention services and additional supports for struggling students, including the Ninth Grade, Sixth Grade, and ELA Academies.
- Provided parents access to real-time data about their children’s academic achievement, attendance, course schedules, and behavior incidents through the online tool Infinite Campus.
- Introduced Encore software to ensure timely and appropriate IEP development for students with disabilities.
- Improved special education programming quality as measured by State Performance Plan indicators.

- Hired a director to develop professional development plans for gifted and talented teachers, including support for Advanced Learning Plans.
- Passed new Board policy for discipline focused on restorative justice principles and keeping students in school.

To provide stronger support to DPS educators, we:

- Provided principals and teachers a single access point for student performance data and teacher tools through the Administrator Portal and Teacher Portal.
- Invested heavily in principal professional development and networking.
- Transitioned from a district-focused professional development calendar to a school-focused professional development calendar that offers more job-embedded professional development.
- Targeted recruiting and outreach to aspiring principals.
- Focused instructional leadership selection process.
- Reorganized area offices into instructional networks and developed teams of instructional leaders to oversee our schools.
- Hired instructional facilitators to support school-based instructional reforms.
- Transitioned English Language Acquisition coursework for teachers to the University of Colorado at Denver.
- Secured Counselor Corps grants through state legislation to expand student counseling services.

These accomplishments were achieved largely because of the high degree of professional and community engagement. A team of more than 50 DPS educators created the 2005 Denver Plan. Work required by the plan, such as developing benchmark assessments or standards-based report cards, was accomplished by groups that included educators and community members. Thus, a deeper professional and community understanding of these important tools now exists and is part of our stronger foundation going forward. This core principle of professional and community involvement will continue to guide our work in strengthening instructional reforms.

Moving Forward: 2010–2013 |

To fulfill the vision that all students achieve at grade level or higher and graduate from high school ready for college or career, we will pursue the following strategies.

Strategy 1: Create conditions to ensure educator effectiveness, which requires us to develop a shared definition of effective teaching, strengthen our support for teachers to develop their professional skills, and develop principals to be effective leaders.

- **Develop a shared definition of effective teaching.** Anchored in a meaningful system of observation, feedback, and evaluation, we will develop in collaboration with Denver Classroom Teacher Association (DCTA) a robust, measurable, and shared definition of effective teaching. Standards of effective teaching will include student achievement data and evaluated practice.

- **Select appropriate measures for assessing teacher effectiveness.** Working with DCTA, we will develop a Teacher Performance Assessment based on multiple measures, with student achievement at the center, to allow for meaningful differentiation of performance and to drive improvement and practice. Measurements will include principal observations and evaluations, as well as peer observations and student perception data that provides formative feedback.
- **Restructure and refocus our professional development to ensure alignment with the Teacher Performance Assessment and to meet individual teacher’s needs.** We will use the definition of effective teaching, as measured by the Teacher Performance Assessment, to ensure that all professional development is based on student and teacher performance data and supports teachers in meeting expectations. We will provide targeted assistance to our highest-needs schools and in our areas of most significant achievement gaps. This coaching will assist with specific indicators of effective teaching and will support teachers through co-planning, co-teaching, modeling, and providing observation feedback in regularly scheduled coaching cycles and through a coaching continuum designed to build capacity at schools.
- **Refocus professional development offerings on content knowledge and the best teaching approaches to support our diverse learning population, including a focus on English language learners, students identified as gifted, and students with disabilities.** The redesigned professional development will adhere to principles of adult learning, will support observable teacher behaviors and student outcomes, will prepare teachers to implement Colorado’s new postsecondary and workforce readiness standards, and will be regularly adjusted to ensure alignment to district achievement goals.
- **Transform the current teacher induction program to one based on moving all new educators to effectiveness.** The definition of effective teaching and corresponding Teacher Performance Assessment will inform a developmental continuum for novice teachers. To ensure novice teachers can meet the high expectations, new teachers will receive intensive, differentiated support starting in the summer and continued throughout the year with multiple opportunities for coaching and peer and administrator feedback.
- **Design Teacher Leadership Academies to leverage effectiveness.** Effective teachers will apply for this prestigious program of study, which will provide opportunities for collaboration and for sharing and learning teacher leadership skills, while informing district reform efforts. The Academies will enable teachers to take on important leadership work in their buildings without giving up all teaching responsibilities.
- **Focus principal professional development.** We must continue to develop our principals as instructional leaders and leaders of complex organizations. We will focus professional development in critical areas, such as evaluating teachers, conducting feedback loops, coaching on Student Growth Objectives (annual goals teachers set for student achievement in their classrooms), and recommending professional development to teachers. This will include revisions to our principal evaluation system.

Note: teacher effectiveness strategies in this section are reinforced in the Great People section.

Strategy 2: Ensure all students, including English language learners, gifted students, and students with disabilities, have access to rigorous standards-based curricula and assessments.

- **Review and revise our curricula, instructional practices, and assessments to align with the state's newly adopted content standards.**
 - We will use the new standards to backward-map the proficiencies a successful college-and-career-ready students must demonstrate, setting key performance targets at critical junctures based on district data.
 - We will review current and prospective standards-based materials to ensure that our resources align and culturally reflect our diverse population.
 - We will infuse 21st century learning into all content areas, including problem solving and technology, so schools may select materials appropriate for their students to increase engagement and learning.
 - We will align with standards that focus on college readiness, ensuring that our students gain the depth of knowledge necessary to demonstrate mastery of essential course content standards. Additionally, academic interventions and extension opportunities will support students to increase success in our most challenging college-level classes.
 - We will seek valid assessment instruments to inform English language development of our ELLs.
- **Strengthen district progress-monitoring assessments.** We will update our formative assessments and administer them with enough frequency to provide diagnostic information to guide instruction aligned to state standards. We will encourage the use of technology to allow schools to better adjust their instruction and interventions at the individual student level to ensure that students have supports they need to meet grade-level standards.
- **With the support of a third-party research organization experienced in diagnosing and identifying best practices to support our ELL population, we will restructure our educational program for a linguistically diverse population.** After reviewing the district approach to ELL instruction, including curriculum, resource allocation, and teacher effectiveness, we will adopt a district-wide strategic plan to improve service for students presently in ELL-identified programs, as well as students who have transitioned out of ELL programs. ELL support will focus on the needs of all language minority students and students with language development needs, not only those identified as “in-program ELLs.”
 - We will research effective practices with ELLs and create district-wide support systems to implement these practices, with particular focus on the development of academic English along with the strategic use of native language. Support for leadership actions and teaching strategies will be built into the Pedagogical Content Knowledge Intensives for teachers and principals. We will engage parents in this effort through school and district forums.
 - Professional development and assessment tools sensitive to the learning needs of ELLs as well as other diverse students will support and measure teacher effectiveness .
 - Teachers who work with exited ELLs and other non-identified students with language development needs will participate in professional development geared at developing academic language for college and career readiness.
- **Use instruments developed for diverse populations to identify gifted and talented (GT) students and develop Advanced Learning Plans (ALPs) for all students identified as gifted**

and talented. We will revise the GT identification process to ensure equity for our diverse population. ALPs will be developed for all GT students and will contain student goals and teaching plans to support rigorous individualized instruction for advanced learners. The identification process and ALPs will include measures of creativity.

- **Increase the availability of early childhood education to high school programming that accesses Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and concurrent enrollment programs.** We will offer more students advancement opportunities aligned to rigorous, internationally recognized standards. All high schools will create site plans to increase student involvement in these programs, with enrollment goals that mirror school populations. We will allocate funds to purchase textbooks for expanded enrollment in these courses, and we will pursue funding to offset these program costs, such as AP tests, Accuplacer exams, or concurrent enrollment fees.
- **Provide pathways to expose students to college coursework in academic or Career and Technology Education domains.** High schools will be encouraged to offer college classes through programs, such as CU Succeeds, the Community College of Aurora, and the Community College of Denver. Students will also have access to a fifth-year program through the state's ASCENT program.

Strategy 3: Provide coordinated and comprehensive support systems for the whole child.

- **Implement the Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI) approach to ensure that our programs and services meet individual students' learning needs.** RtI emphasizes the need for highly qualified teachers with deep content knowledge and skills to individualize their instruction to meet diverse learners' needs. We will use RtI as an aligning framework to ensure that all students have access to high-quality teaching, to monitor their progress and intervene when the rate of progress is too slow, to serve students in smaller and more intensive settings with additional support staff as their needs become more intensive and our responses more specialized, and to refer students to Student Intervention Teams. These teams will consider referred students' cultural, linguistic, academic, and behavioral needs. Next, teams will decide what instructional interventions will meet those needs, monitor student progress, and readjust instruction based on data. Finally, for the few students who are unable to succeed without specialized instruction because of educational disabilities, they may make referrals for special education eligibility determinations. The Teacher and Administrator portals will support educators as they monitor individual student progress.
- **Expand and strengthen our early childhood and full-day kindergarten programs.** We will pay special attention to giving students a head start, so we can provide an aligned educational program from pre-kindergarten to postsecondary success. Access to quality early childhood education (ECE) lays the foundation for future school success and helps level the playing field for the 9,000 children who now benefit from full-day ECE and kindergarten. We will increase opportunities for students with disabilities to be included in preschool programs with their non-disabled peers. Additionally, we will increase inclusive opportunities during the course of the school day for students with disabilities in center-based kindergarten programs to participate with their non-disabled peers.

- **Implement the recently adopted discipline policy throughout the district to maximize student time in class.** We will use developmentally appropriate disciplinary techniques that emphasize restorative rather than punitive approaches. We will also aim to keep students in class and learning, limiting the time spent outside of class for disciplinary reasons.
- **Monitor early warning signs to ensure all students are on track to graduate.** We will strengthen our early warning system that monitors attendance, grades, and behavior. The warning system will also give schools the information they need to intervene so students stay in school and have access to credit recovery so they are on track to graduate.^{10,11}
- **Support students identified as at risk of dropping out of school.** We will replicate effective strategies district-wide, emphasizing attendance and credit recovery. These strategies will include proactive support systems, such as the Attendance Tool Kit, to monitor and intervene when absences are a concern and a district-wide software system with credit recovery courses to streamline efforts and economize expenses. Furthermore, teachers and support personnel will provide credit recovery services to students who are not on track to graduate. We will also use Positive Behavior Support programs, which establish school-wide expectations for positive student behavior. We will provide uniform interventions to all schools to address our students' diverse social-emotional challenges, including functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans, as well as restorative justice and truancy mediation projects.¹²
- **Establish schools and programs focused on students who have not experienced success in traditional high school settings.** These programs will be modeled after local and national sites of excellence. Smaller alternative school settings, as well as schools using competency-based courses, which award credit from standards-based performance rather than through traditional semester and year-long courses, will support alternative education students, providing multiple pathways to graduation. We will use reengagement centers, career academies, competency-based diplomas, online course work, and credit recovery in this plan, including:
 - Creating four to six schools targeted at students aged 15–21 who are currently disengaged from traditional schools. Our first multiple pathways center—Summit Academy—opens for the 2010–2011 school year, offering a new approach to non-traditional education, combining high academic expectations with a strong support foundation. Its educational approach is customized to each student's needs and goals, with accelerated learning options, such as Diploma Plus, Career and Technical Education, credit recovery, and Advanced Placement courses. And at every step of the way, students will be supported with physical and mental wellness services, small learning communities and flexible scheduling options.
 - Partnering with providers, such as Aims Community College, to offer competency-based diplomas for students who are over-age and under-credit; and
 - Creating a GED Plus program to allow students focused on acquiring GEDs to go beyond to college and career programs.

¹⁰ Pamela Buckley and Lana Muraskin. "Graduates of Denver Public Schools: College Access and Success." The Piton Foundation and Denver Scholarship Foundation. April 2009.

¹¹ Martha Abele Mac Iver, Robert Balfanz, and Vaughan Byrnes. "Advancing the 'Colorado Graduates' Agenda: Understanding the Dropout Problem and Mobilizing to Meet the Graduation Challenge." The Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University. June 2009.

¹² Sandomierski, T., Kincaid, D., and Algozzine, B. "Is School-wide Positive Behavior Support An Evidenced-Based Practice?" OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. March 2009.

- **Coordinate comprehensive support to the whole child.** We will work with community partners to provide student and family supports.
- **Complete and adopt the DPS Health Agenda 2015.** We will implement a cohesive and prioritized set of health objectives to improve student health and readiness to learn. The health agenda will address eight components of coordinated school health: nutrition, physical activity, direct health services, mental health services, health promotion to staff, safe and healthy school environments, family and community involvement in healthy activities, and health education.^{13,14}

Strategy 4: Implement a continuous improvement process informed by data and best practices.

- **Use a continuous improvement approach to create conditions for large-scale improvement in student achievement across all schools.** The instructional rounds process is “an explicit practice that is designed to bring discussions of instruction directly into the process of school improvement.”¹⁵ Instructional rounds teams will:
 - **Describe** what they observe in classrooms.
 - **Analyze** emerging patterns.
 - **Predict** the learning they might expect from the teaching they observed.
 - **Recommend** the next level of work to help schools better achieve desired goals.
- **Evaluate district education programs’ effectiveness, including curricula, professional development, and school design structures.** The evaluation process will include an assessment of the planning, implementation and sustainability of the initiative and, most importantly, its effects on driving student achievement. Evaluation results will inform future decision making.
- **Use student achievement data aligned to grade-level, standards-based curriculum from the Teacher Portal and Administrator Portal to inform and adjust instructional practice.** Teachers will use the Teacher Portal and principals will use the Administrator Portal, one-stop software systems that provide access to all student data, including demographic and assessment data, as well as standards-aligned curriculum and resources for all core content classes. The Teacher Portal eliminates the need to consult disparate systems for data and teaching tools, reducing the time needed to access data and reporting, which, in turn, provides teachers information they need and time to plan for instruction based on these student progress reports.
- **Turnaround Schools.** Chronically low-performing schools require immediate and dramatic interventions to improve teaching and learning. We will identify low-performing schools and diagnose gaps in the delivery of quality educational services. Ensuring this quality requires targeted and differentiated interventions converging in sustainable transformation. We will use the School Performance Framework to identify our lowest-performing schools in need of turnaround strategies. For each school, we will apply a thorough qualitative diagnostic process

¹³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health. “Healthy Kids Learn Better: A Coordinated School Health Approach—Local Implementation Tool Kit.”

¹⁴ Association of State and Territorial Health Officials and the Society of State Directors of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation. “Making the Connection: Health and Student Achievement,” presentation. 2002.

¹⁵ City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel.

to include data analysis, staff capacity, resource alignment, and community needs. Working with the school's community, we will then target the necessary interventions for each school based on which approach will best meet the needs of that community's students. Turnaround strategies may include enhancing current programs, replacing school leaders, and/or a significant portion of the staff or replacing existing schools with new schools.

- **Create new schools to increase student options.** It is essential that we both improve our existing schools where the vast majority of our students are enrolled and welcome promising new schools. New schools, district-run or charter, must meet our criteria of having rigorous academic programs with successful track records, strong leaders, and demonstrated community support. We will intensify our district leadership training program for aspiring new school leaders and strengthen the Office of School Reform and Innovation's ability to facilitate opening new schools and maintaining high levels of academic quality and organizational stability at our charter schools.
 - We will ensure that all of our schools—whether district-run, charter, contract, or innovation—have a level playing field of opportunity, of access and responsibility, and of accountability.
 - **Opportunity:** All our schools should have access to district facilities (including co-locations in our larger buildings) and equitable per-student funding.
 - **Access and Responsibility:** All our schools must offer equitable access for all our students, regardless of socio-economic, disability, or language status; all our schools must contribute financially on the same basis to use district facilities and for district obligations, such as pension obligations and district-wide special education funding needs.
 - **Accountability:** All new schools are subject to the same accountability framework (the School Performance Framework), including the potential for school closure in the event of a failure to demonstrate student achievement growth.

Collectively, we believe these strategies will rapidly improve and strengthen DPS' instructional core which, in turn, will yield significant and rapid improvements in student achievement.



“We must retain and recruit the most effective teachers and principals, and we must develop and support them so they are able to implement research-based best practices in every classroom and school.”

Denver Public Schools, Core Beliefs and Commitments

Talented and committed people are our most important resource in driving improved student outcomes. As referenced in the Instructional Core section of this plan, we know the quality of our educators is by far the single most important factor in driving student achievement and closing the achievement gap.¹⁶ We also recognize that changing children’s learning and life outcomes is challenging work that demands both tremendous skills and personal commitments. To significantly improve student outcomes, we must attract teachers with the drive and potential to succeed; expand strategies to recruit high-quality teacher and principal candidates who more closely reflect DPS’ diverse student population; support teachers to develop and improve; and bolster them with effective teams of fellow teachers, school leaders, and staff who share a commitment to and accountability for student results.

Through the U.S. Department of Education’s Race to the Top and other stimulus funding, President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have challenged states and districts to better align laws, policies, and practices to support the essential role of effective teaching. During the past decade, we have worked collaboratively with the Denver Classroom Teachers’ Association (DCTA) to develop innovative approaches to transforming teaching in DPS, including implementing one of the first compensation systems in the nation to recognize and reward teachers for their impact on students; approving requests from school faculties for more flexibility over the use of staff, budgets, and time to drive improved student performance; and revising staffing rules to allow more open and competitive teacher staffing.

DPS is one of eight districts nationally that has been recognized for its human resources reform by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and subsequently received a \$10 million deep-dive or accelerator funding to support effective teaching. The Professional Practices Work Group with DPS and DCTA representatives has met at length to identify ways in which our systems, policies, and practices to retain, develop, recognize, advance, and reward talented educators must be fundamentally realigned to support effective teaching.

Specifically, the DPS-DCTA Professional Practices Work Group highlighted the importance of the following work, which is supported by strategies in the Instructional Core section of this plan.

- **A multiple-measure teacher evaluation and feedback system that meaningfully differentiates teacher performance and provides targeted and specific feedback aligned to**

¹⁶ Kati Haycock. *Good Teaching Matters—How Well Qualified Teachers Can Close the Gap*. Education Trust. 1998.

the shared definition of effective teaching. Currently, our teachers are evaluated under a binary satisfactory-unsatisfactory rating system. More than 98% of our teachers receive a satisfactory rating, with little to no recognition or reward for teachers demonstrating the most significant student outcomes.

- **A standard that makes attaining non-probationary status a meaningful indication of effectiveness tied to our student achievement goals.** The conferral of non-probationary status marks a significant change in teachers' careers. Under current state law, however, non-probationary status (i.e., tenure) is granted automatically if teachers are renewed after three years of service, with no link to actual effectiveness. As a consequence, the district is required to make a binary decision when teachers are often no more than 25 years old: to effectively give them a lifetime right of employment or forbid them from ever teaching in the district again. Few teachers perceive the conferral of tenure as a meaningful indication of effectiveness.
- **Frequent and meaningful feedback, coaching, and differentiated development opportunities for all teachers.** Under the current satisfactory-unsatisfactory evaluation system, more than 60% of our teachers report receiving no identified growth or improvement areas on their formal evaluations, and professional development is rarely linked to performance standards or individual needs. To improve their practice, teachers must receive regular feedback aligned to expectations in the definition of effective teaching and development that targets identified, individual needs, reflects research-based best practices, and is tied to professional standards to grow and develop.
- **Intensive support and development for our new teachers.** Although it is widely recognized that new teachers face particular challenges in their first years in the classroom, new teachers currently do not receive enough support or development. As noted in the Instructional Core section, new teacher induction must be transformed from an exercise in compliance with minimum state statutory requirements to a meaningful process that helps teachers continuously develop one of society's most difficult and challenging set of professional skills.
- **Mechanisms for retaining, rewarding, and leveraging experienced educators to increase their impact on students.** Our most effective experienced teachers are among our most valuable resources. However, our current compensation system lacks adequate differentiation to reward these teachers for their contributions and to provide them with incentives to remain in the classroom. Furthermore, we do not offer adequate incentives to attract these teachers to the most difficult assignments and our most demanding schools and to reward them for their positive impact on students. Our compensation systems must provide meaningful rewards for effective teachers throughout their careers and increase incentives for teachers who take on the most challenging assignments.
- **Systems of mutual consent hiring, particularly in our highest-needs schools.** At a time when we have more than 500 openings for new teachers annually, we continue to forcibly place more than 100 non-probationary teachers a year into schools without the consent of the schools' leadership teams or the affected teachers. This process disproportionately affects our highest-needs, highest-poverty schools, which receive the highest numbers of forced placements each year. We will work with the DCTA and state lawmakers to replace forced placement with mutual consent hiring that allows principals and their personnel committees to hire teachers they believe to be most likely to drive improved outcomes for students, particularly in our highest-poverty and lowest-performing schools.

We must be willing to work collaboratively with DCTA to resolve these fundamental issues to increase teacher effectiveness and student success. Some of these issues will require changes to our collective bargaining agreement and/or state statutes. To accomplish these changes, we must all (district, union, and political leaders) commit to re-align our recruitment, evaluation, development, advancement, and reward systems around a common set of effective teaching and leadership standards and build

collaborative school cultures in which teachers, principals, and staff share responsibility and accountability for student success.

Vision |

Our vision is to assemble highly effective teams of teachers, principals, and staff in every school and to build a culture in which every DPS employee feels responsible for and is accountable for improved student results. To achieve this vision, we will:

Strategy 1 |

Recruit the best teachers and principals for our schools. To build a highly effective teaching faculty and principal corps, DPS must recruit a diverse and talented group of individuals to become teachers and principals by ensuring that our aspiring teacher and principal sources produce individuals who more closely reflect DPS' diverse student population and who have the skills and mindset necessary to succeed at DPS and that DPS is a destination that the most promising teachers and principals seek as a place to perfect their craft.

Strategy 2 |

Retain and empower effective educators. To retain effective teachers, DPS will transform teaching and school leadership from an isolated experience to a collaborative profession with meaningful professional growth and advancement opportunities. We will better identify our most highly effective educators to target them for additional classroom responsibilities and to lead other teachers to expand their impact on students. Tenure and satisfactory evaluation will represent meaningful performance indications that are aligned with our goals for student college readiness.

Strategy 3 |

Create meaningful recognition and reward systems to drive student achievement. DPS will continue to work with the DCTA to create competitive compensation and incentive structures to retain and reward teachers for their outstanding performance in driving student achievement and to recruit new teachers with the confidence to succeed. DPS will also continue to advance performance-based pay systems for principals, department leaders, and others to reward outstanding contributions to district goals.

Strategy 4 |

Recruit, retain, and reward outstanding support staff committed to supporting teachers' and principals' work. A network of highly skilled school-based staff and support departments who share responsibility and accountability for achieving the district's student achievement goals will support teachers and principals. We will grow a culture of outstanding customer service and establish a clear line of sight between each employee's work and the district's student achievement goals.

Strategy 5 |

Replace low-performing employees who, despite support, fail to meet expectations.

Supervisors and management will use performance management systems, including the teacher assessment, the principal evaluation process, and the Employee Performance Management Program, to clearly communicate performance expectations and reinforce these expectations through regular evaluation and consistent coaching and feedback. Principals, teachers, and staff who fail to meet expectations for performance will be given opportunities and support to succeed. However, fair and efficient processes must also exist to replace employees, who despite this support, fail to meet expectations.

Progress to Date |

During the past four years, we have made significant progress in laying the foundation for this work.

To increase our ability to recruit the best teachers and principals, we:

- Worked with DCTA to implement changes to our budget and staffing cycles beginning in 2009 that allow DPS to begin hiring external teacher candidates more than two months earlier than previous years.
- Developed partnerships with alternative providers, such as Teach for America and The New Teacher Project, to provide additional new teachers sources , particularly in hard-to-staff subject areas.
- Created our own programs to prepare teachers and principals:
 - Established the Denver Teacher Residency (DTR), with the assistance of a \$3 million gift from the Janus Capital Foundation, to support up to 100 aspiring teachers a year through a medical residency model.
 - Established the Ritchie Program for Aspiring Principals in 2003 and a Training Program for Aspiring Principals of New Schools in 2009 to increase the number of high-quality principal candidates.
 - Secured a waiver from state statute to allow DPS to approve its own programs to prepare individuals to teach in DPS and license teachers from these alternative teacher preparation routes based on student outcomes.
- Raised average starting teacher salaries more than 30% from \$33,301 in 2004–2005 to \$43,200 in 2008–2009, the highest in the metropolitan Denver area.
- Successfully drafted and negotiated legislation merging the DPS Retirement System into the state Public Employees Retirement Association (Colorado PERA), providing for full portability of pension benefits between Denver and the rest of Colorado.
- Created a dedicated Department of Human Resources recruiting function to support the recruitment of high-quality teachers and principals.
- Hired a Director of Diversity Initiatives to develop and implement strategies to recruit and retain diverse teachers and administrators.
- Partnered with The New Teacher Project in a Model Staffing Initiative to build principals', school personnel committees', and Human Resources partners' knowledge and skills to lead effective site-based teacher recruitment, staffing, and induction (launched with the 2009–2010 hiring cycle).
- Implemented new recruitment and retention strategies to reduce substitute teacher vacancies by more than half in just two years.

To expand our ability to empower and retain the most highly effective educators, we:

- Created the Janus Educational Alliance to improve teacher induction, mentoring, and professional development.
- Initiated daily meetings throughout the school year between the superintendent, chief academic officer, and each school's faculty, fostering closer communication between district leaders and teachers.
- Developed a student growth model and based longitudinal performance measures on state assessments to identify teachers having the most significant impact on students.
- Approved collective requests by school principals and teachers for waivers from district policies, the DPS/DCTA collective bargaining agreement, and state statutes to provide more flexibility, including how to use their staff, allocate their budgets, and schedule the school day and year to better drive student achievement.
- Initiated teacher evaluations of principals to inform principal decision-making and evaluations and target principals' professional development and growth opportunities.
- Established a team of school partners in Human Resources to serve as principals' primary contacts for guidance and support to increase the management effectiveness of principals.

To recognize and reward educators most successful in driving improved student outcomes, we:

- In partnership with the DCTA, initiated ProComp, a pioneering and nationally recognized teacher performance compensation system that links compensation to improved student academic outcomes and provides incentives for serving in our highest-poverty schools.
- Worked with DCTA to make changes to ProComp in 2008 that increased ProComp performance-based pay by more than ten times and more than doubled incentives for teaching in high-poverty schools and difficult-to-staff positions, such as special education or high school mathematics.
- Worked with DCTA to provide an average 15% increase in ProComp teacher salaries in 2008–2009, the largest one-year raise in state history.
- During the course of four years, increased average teacher salaries by 35.8%, compared to an 8% increase in the Consumer Price Index during the same period.
- Secured a \$25 million federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant to fund principal performance-based pay, based on leading high-poverty schools and driving student growth.
- Aligned ProComp and the principal incentive pay program with the School Performance Framework to ensure that all teachers and administrators in a school building work toward common student growth goals.

To recruit, reward, and retain outstanding support staff, we:

- Worked with classified unions to provide hourly staff with retirement benefits through the PERA merger.
- Established monthly performance metrics to measure each central office department's effectiveness.
- Instituted yearly surveys for principals to assess the performance of central office support functions.
- Implemented systems to ensure principal accountability for effectively evaluating teacher performance. Working with DCTA, we limited the amount of annual, one-year, teacher assignments, eliminated principal-level administrative transfers, and more actively managed the Reduction in Building (RIB) process.
- Established a dedicated labor relations and operational support team in Human Resources to lead relationships with our classified unions and provide targeted support to operational managers.

- Begun implementing an Employee Performance Management goal-setting and performance appraisal process for all salaried central office staff.
- Initiated employee and manager professional development on customer service and employee performance management.

To expand our ability to replace low-performing employees, who, despite support, fail to meet expectations, we:

- Replaced principals who failed to drive sufficient improvement in student growth in their schools.
- Worked with DCTA to eliminate loopholes in the collective bargaining agreement that allowed teachers to avoid remediation's and potential dismissals by declaring "intents to vacate" their current assignments and requesting placements at other schools.
- Participated with DCTA in a national study by The New Teacher Project that analyzed obstacles to effective evaluation, remediation, and dismissal of low-performing teachers. The findings have and will inform our systems for evaluating teachers and for holding principals accountable for evaluating teachers. The report is available at <http://widgeteffect.org/>.
- Educated principals on the importance of granting teachers non-probationary status and began to create shared responsibility among principals for addressing performance issues by eliminating loopholes by which principals could pass poorly performing teachers to other schools.
- Provided training and expanded support to principals on remediation and dismissal processes.
- Implemented the Employee Performance Management Program (EPMP) to ensure consistent, performance-based evaluation practice for all employees and targeted support and performance improvement planning for underperforming employees.

Moving Forward: 2010–2013 |

To build on this foundation and transform the district's practices for recruiting, hiring, retaining, supporting, and rewarding DPS' great people, we will pursue the following strategies.

Strategy 1: Recruit the best new teachers and principals.

- **Improve communications and marketing materials to reposition DPS internally and externally as an employer of choice.** We will launch more proactive recruiting campaigns, targeting talented student teachers and professionals.
 - Launch "Teach in Denver," a rebranding of the DPS teaching career, to generate interest in teaching in DPS.
 - Create and communicate a compelling value proposition for new employees, including the competitive compensation potential for high-performing teachers through ProComp.
 - Implement a new recruiting application to support proactive recruitment and cultivation of high quality diverse teacher and principal candidates.
- **Evaluate impact of teacher recruitment channels on student achievement outcomes to ensure that DPS hires teachers from teacher preparation routes shown to produce the most effective teachers.** We will analyze where we find our most effective teachers and work to understand the programs elements that yield success. Knowing these key success factors will help us improve our in-house professional development, novice teacher training, and Denver

Teacher Residency training and allow us to communicate our expectations clearly to other recruitment channels.

- Complete student performance and teacher evaluation data analysis (in partnership with local universities, Teach For America, the New Teacher Project, and the Denver Teacher Residency) to assess the effectiveness of our sources of aspiring teachers and use that information to communicate with major teacher candidate providers how they can better prepare teachers to meet DPS students' needs .
 - Based on this data, work collaboratively with our university and alternate route teacher preparation programs to improve their programs.
 - Develop a strategy to identify and actively recruit high-potential student teacher candidates.
- **Improve principals' capacity to identify and select high-potential new teacher candidates.** During the last two years, we have made significant efforts to shift staffing decisions to schools, where those decisions are best made. During the next three years, we will ensure our principals and their personnel teams have the skills necessary to recruit and select teachers most likely to drive improved student outcomes.
 - Expand principal training and support on strategic teacher recruitment, selection, and induction.
 - Work with the DCTA, state policymakers, and others to increase teacher and principal satisfaction and improve student achievement outcomes by replacing forced teacher placement with mutual consent hiring.
 - The principle of mutual consent hiring is fundamental to schools because successful schools are so mission-driven. Having all school professionals fully committed to its shared culture, mission, and values is critical to the school's cohesion, growth, and success. To forcibly place teachers, who by definition do not want to be at a particular school or are not being asked to teach there, undermines the formation and development of these successful shared cultures.
- **Expand strategies to recruit and retain high-quality teacher and principal candidates who more closely reflect DPS' diverse student population.** We recognize the importance of diversity in our teacher population and principals in building dynamic and inclusive school cultures to serve our students. Accordingly, we will:
 - Aggressively recruit talented teachers and principals who reflect our student population;
 - Expand outreach to high-potential teacher and administrator candidates of color;
 - Increase the number of high-potential teachers of color prepared to teach in DPS through the Denver Teacher Residency (DTR) and other teacher preparation channels; and
 - Implement targeted strategies, including leadership development and mentoring, to retain high-performing teachers and principals of color.
- **Provide increased incentives for effective teachers to serve in the highest-needs schools.** To close the achievement gap, our most effective teachers must work with our highest-needs students. We will work with the DCTA to provide increased incentives under ProComp for the most effective teachers to serve in highest-poverty schools; create options for teams of effective teachers to serve in high-poverty schools without losing their right to return to their previous positions; and transform our highest-needs schools into models of effective teaching by providing expanded coaching, development, and growth opportunities.
- **Improve the principal selection process to incorporate research-based indicators of leadership potential to drive improved student outcomes.** To select the highest quality new principals for our schools, we will develop a new principal selection model, which will identify candidates who have leadership qualities shown to be most effective in leading schools to improved student outcomes.

Strategy 2: Retain and empower our most highly effective educators.

- **Collaborate with the DCTA to create a Teacher Performance Assessment system that supports the district’s definition of effective teaching with student achievement at the center.** This system will meaningfully differentiate teacher performance, including recognizing excellence and identifying areas for improvement and growth. This system will directly support instructional core strategies around teacher effectiveness.
 - Implement talent management software to track and retrieve individual teacher effectiveness data, including teacher performance assessment data, classroom level achievement data, and history of professional development.
 - Create meaningful peer review opportunities, where expert, experienced teachers inform teacher performance assessments and providing feedback.
 - Collaborate with DCTA to improve Student Growth Objectives and Professional Development Units to align with the Teacher Performance Assessment system.
 - Revise principal evaluation process to set expectations and create accountability for providing effective feedback through the teacher evaluation process.
 - Align principal evaluation system to principals’ ability to effectively drive student achievement and identify and target highly effective teachers for development and advancement.
- **Establish non-probationary status as a meaningful indication of effectiveness by setting a performance-based bar for non-probationary status, aligned with goals for student college readiness.**
 - Seek changes to state law that provide for the granting of tenure based on demonstrated effectiveness, not just time in position.
 - Seek changes to state statutes to eliminate the provision that non-probationary status must be made automatically after three years to allow teachers more flexibility to achieve this status.
 - Develop clearly defined benchmarks, standards, and methodology for granting tenure based on student achievement outcomes and research-based teacher effectiveness indicators.
 - Work with DCTA to increase compensation and advancement opportunities for who meet the bar for non-probationary status.
- **Provide expanded opportunities for highly effective teachers to capture and disseminate effective teaching practices, assume expanded leadership roles, and increase their impact on students.**
 - Create prestigious Teacher Leadership Academies where teachers can share and learn best instructional practices and teacher leadership skills and collaborate, while informing district reform efforts.
 - Map career opportunities and explore alternative school designs to allow highly effective educators to expand their roles leading other teachers or expand their classroom impact by increasing the number of students they serve, with additional support.
- **Improve principals’ and leadership teams’ capacity to establish school cultures of respect, shared responsibility, and accountability for student outcomes.**
 - Continue to develop principals’ capacity as their schools’ instructional leaders through differentiated training, development, and support.
 - Continue to expand principals’ and teachers’ autonomy to decide on how to staff their schools, use their budgets, and structure the school day and/or year to improve student achievement outcomes.

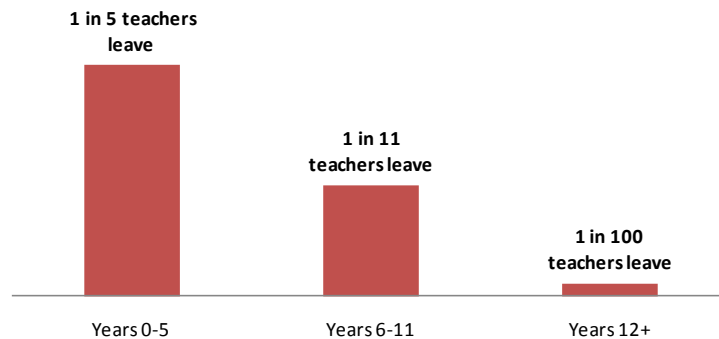
- Provide management, training and support for school leaders on effective staffing, strategic resource planning, team-building and performance management to increase their effectiveness in establishing high-performing teams of educators.
- Revise principal evaluation to incorporate measures of effectiveness in establishing school cultures of shared responsibility and accountability and ensure alignment with district and school goals for student achievement and research-based indicators for effective school leadership.
- Implement training and support strategies to promote the development of inclusive and culturally responsive school communities that embrace the diversity of our students and employees.

Strategy 3: Recognize and reward teachers and principals for driving student achievement.

- Work with DCTA to continue to build upon and improve ProComp to substantially increase earning potential for teachers who drive the most significant student achievement growth.
- Negotiate changes to ProComp to significantly increase incentives for highly effective teachers to serve in high-poverty schools.
- Increase the retention of highly effective early and mid-career teachers. Currently, early or mid-career teachers are more than ten times as likely to leave the district as late-career teachers.

Chart 1 |

Odds that a teacher will leave the district

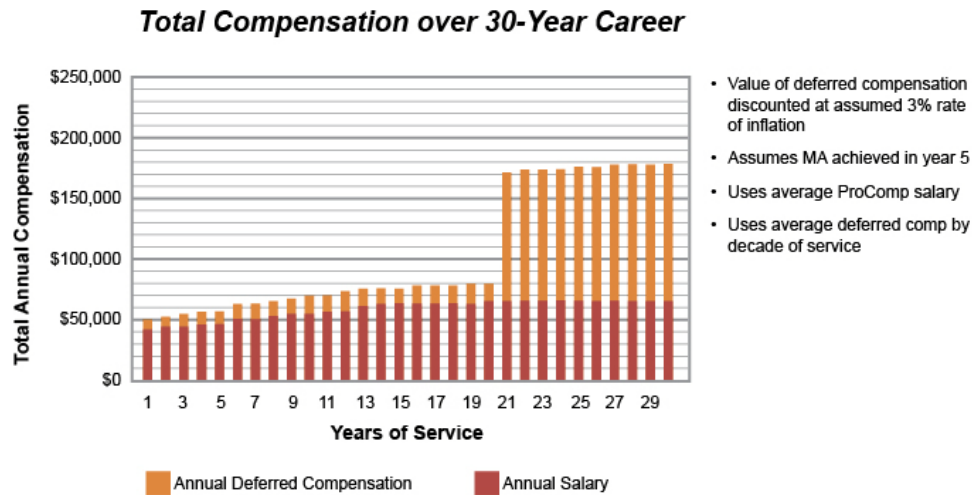


*Data is from the 2005–2007 contract years and excludes retirements and dismissals for performance.

Our current compensation structure is not well aligned to address this high turnover of early and mid-career teachers. Under our present compensation structure, teachers receive more than 55% of their total career compensation in real dollars in the last decade of their careers, and teachers in their 25th year will earn more than three times the total annual compensation (salary plus pension benefits) of teachers in their fifth year.

Chart 2 below captures a typical teacher's total annual compensation in real, inflation-adjusted dollars during a 30-year career.

Chart 2 |



Hence, while the pension system provides extraordinarily powerful retention incentives to teachers later in their careers, we must improve effective teachers' earning potential earlier in their careers and provide more equitable compensation distribution throughout teachers' careers to retain effective early and mid-career teachers.

- **Collaborate with DCTA to develop means of measuring and rewarding effective performance** of teams within schools in driving improved student outcomes.
- **Create annual total rewards statements** to clearly communicate the value of total compensation and benefits earned, including the significant value of retirement benefits, for all employees.
- **Revise communications to clearly convey the total value of incentive pay** to current and potential teacher and principal candidates, as well as outcomes for which employees will be rewarded.
- **Use advantages created by PERA merger** to negotiate more attractive and affordable health care and other benefit options for all employees.

Strategy 4: Recruit, retain, and reward outstanding central office and support staff.

- **Expand ability to recruit high-potential support staff in high-turnover areas**, including hourly custodians, bus drivers, and food service staff, by expanding outreach, eliminating delays in posting positions to external applicants, and allowing employees to increase their earning potential by serving in multiple roles in the organization.
- **Use the Employee Performance Management Program (EPMP) to align central office employees' work with district student achievement goals** and build a culture of service to

schools built around common core expectations, which are Putting Students First, Achieving Results, Collaborating, Delivering Excellent Service, and Making Change Happen.

- **Expand Employee Performance Management Program goal-setting and performance evaluation process to include all non-exempt central office staff.**
- **Work with unions to eliminate “bumping”** and other practices that base employee displacement and layoff decisions on factors other than demonstrated effectiveness.
- **Establish a competitive and differentiated pay system to reward central office staff who contribute most significantly to achieving district goals.**
- **Expand central office leadership development opportunities and training to increase managers’ effectiveness and to establish a strong customer service culture.**

Strategy 5: Replace low-performing employees who, despite support, fail to meet expectations.

- **Align evaluations, supports, and dismissals around research-based effective teaching standards** articulated in the Teacher Performance Assessment.
- **Collaborate with DCTA to implement changes that create fair and efficient processes to replace low-performing teachers who, despite support, fail to meet expectations.** We will use performance data to decide which administrators and central office staff should be retained or replaced.

The work in this section embraces our district’s core belief about the importance of teaching. It also acknowledges that we must significantly change in order to generate dramatically improved student results. Taken together, we believe these strategies will change our children’s learning and life outcomes.



DEEPENING ENGAGEMENT WITH FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY |

“We believe that parents and the community are essential partners in the effort to improve student achievement and that it is our responsibility to engage them in that process.

“We must develop new and more effective ways to engage our families, members of the broader Denver community, and partners in improving the conditions for learning so all students may achieve.”

Denver Public Schools, Core Beliefs and Commitments

Previous sections of this plan look within the district for areas of change and next steps. This section looks outside the district, to our families, community, and network of partners. Denver Public Schools’ leadership affirms the critical importance of family and community involvement in the district’s core beliefs and commitments. Families, as well as the larger Denver community, play a critical role in helping our students achieve at dramatically higher levels and graduate from high school ready for college or career.

Vision |

We envision a community in which every Denver parent, resident, taxpayer, and organization feels ownership of Denver Public Schools. “Ownership” means that families, nonprofits, faith communities, foundations, businesses, and governments are all motivated to support DPS’ student achievement goals. In turn, DPS will ensure all of these partners have clear and substantive ways to support our students.

We believe that strengthening parents’ skills in specific ways to help children and schools will directly contribute to student learning. We know how important a role parents play in their children’s success in our schools. We are also committed to strengthening our city-wide, collective understanding of DPS, thus contributing to a stronger sense of ownership. Helping parents help their children and deepening community-wide ownership will help all of us hold our students to higher standards. The complementary efforts of connecting families to schools and connecting the community at large with our reform strategy will provide essential support to DPS’ core mission: ensuring our students succeed in school and graduate from DPS ready for college or career.

With these beliefs in mind, our three-year strategy to deepen families’ connections to schools and to broaden community engagement is to:

Strategy 1 |

Strengthen parent and family engagement classroom by classroom, school by school.

Strategy 2 |

Engage and inform DPS students, families, and the community about DPS strategies and initiatives.

Strategy 3 |

Foster stakeholder dialogue and input to promote civic engagement and ownership of public schools.

Strategy 4 |

Partner with nonprofits, faith communities, philanthropic groups, and others to support Denver's students with streamlined services that improve student achievement and ensure that they graduate from high school ready for college or career.

Strategy 5 |

Leverage federal, state, and local resources to benefit student achievement.

Progress to Date |

When DPS launched the 2005 Denver Plan, we began redefining how we engage families and the broader Denver community.

To strengthen parent and family engagement in schools and classrooms, we:

- Established an Office of Parent Engagement and an Office of Community Engagement to ensure, for the first time, specific responsibility was assigned for outreach to families and the community.
- Developed more focused and strategic parent education and outreach, including workshops to recruit and train parents to participate on CSCs and to increase parent awareness and use of Infinite Campus, DPS' online resource for parents to track their children's grades, attendance, behavior, and course schedules. We also expanded outreach to parents about school choice and parent information sessions to interpret standards-based progress report cards.

In partnership with nonprofits, faith communities, philanthropic groups, businesses, and others, we:

- Called on civic leaders to assist with the district's efforts. Known as A+ Denver, this 100-member citizens' group helps DPS foster solutions on challenging issues, including financial stability, school closures, pension reform, and overall district accountability. A+ Denver also provided feedback on the implementation of the 2005 Denver Plan. Many of their recommendations are addressed throughout this plan.
- Developed the 2008 bond through a community process. At \$454 million, it was the largest school bond in Colorado history and was approved by Denver voters by a 2-to-1 margin.
- Worked closely with the DPS Foundation (DPSF), whose mission is to drive community investment in our schools. DPSF is instrumental in raising funds for teachers and classrooms, principal leadership, and after-school and summer programs.
- Maintained and fostered deep communication with parent-based, community advocacy groups.

- With the Denver Scholarship Foundation, established Future Centers in every high school to provide postsecondary counseling to high school students and assist all seniors in applying for college federal and state financial aid programs, and scholarships.
- Coordinated a network of community partners to provide before- and after-school programs, summer camps, and academic supports for at-risk youth.
- Established several dozen school-business partnerships through the School Partners program with Qwest Communication and DPSF funding.

To leverage partnerships with the City and County of Denver, thereby reducing duplication and improving the quality of services, we:

- Established the City-DPS Collaborative to provide resource advocates (RAs) in eight schools. RAs coordinate and link students and their families to services, such as after-school programs, health services, mental health services, career exploration, and basic needs.
- Helped establish the Youth Mentoring Collaborative, including more than 20 groups, which coordinates, matches, and delivers high-quality services and supports to students.
- Supported Family-to-Family Centers, funded by the Department of Human Services. DPS parent liaisons and City Collaborative resource advocates work closely with Family-to-Family Centers to provide services to families and students.
- Mobilized AmeriCorps members to identify and work with students with habitual attendance problems, to increase the number of parent volunteers for classroom and school activities, to launch a comprehensive outreach and school enrollment informational campaign; and to reconnect with young people who have dropped out.

To engage and inform students, families, and the community about DPS strategies and initiatives, we:

- Launched the district's first "State of the Schools" address to parents in September and hosted a series of fall regional meetings and winter school-based meetings to discuss the district's improvement strategies.
- Hosted a DPS middle and high school expo and two early education information sessions for parents to learn about our enrollment and School of Choice processes and understand their elementary, middle, and high school options, including traditional, magnet, and charter schools. Additionally, the district organized a Higher Education Expo for all ninth and tenth grade students and their parents/guardians to tour a college campus, to meet metropolitan Denver college representatives, and to learn what college is really like.
- Published and distributed 17,000 enrollment guides that feature every traditional, magnet, and charter school to help students and parents learn about enrollment, special programs, and support services.
- Created and sent a MyDPS email on key district initiatives from Superintendent Tom Boasberg to more than 6,000 parents and community members.
- Launched two new social networking sites, a DPS Face Book fan page and a Twitter account, to reach a broader network of individuals who we may not have reached via other means.
- Revamped the DPS homepage to provide a more user-friendly space for our community to visit and to share exciting and important district initiatives and school events. It now features videos and events, as well as a weekly Spotlight section to highlight teachers, students, and staff members.
- Executed linguistically and culturally effective outreach strategies to build stronger links with non-English speaking parents and families, including the 2009 launch of a Spanish talk show

(EDUCA) on commercial radio; a presence at community events such as Cinco de Mayo and Fiestas Patrias; and hosting of a Spanish education fair.

Moving Forward: 2010–2013 |

We have built a stronger network of families, nonprofits, philanthropists, and others who now actively root for Denver Public Schools. The sense of possibility among our city's leaders is palpable. But we must also commit to connect with families, neighborhoods, students, and people who are in and out of DPS schools daily. Working together, we will raise expectations for our students and change outcomes for our students. To fulfill our goals, we will pursue the following strategies.

Strategy 1: Strengthen parent and family engagement classroom by classroom, school by school.

- **Expand school and classroom training and volunteer opportunities.** DPS will hold Parent Tutor Training Institutes to train parents and other caregivers to be tutors. We will also leverage opportunities with AmeriCorps to engage parents, students, and community members as volunteers.
- **Design effective outreach to non-English speaking parents and families.** We will assist schools in creating welcoming and comfortable classroom and school environments for non-English speaking parents and families.
- **Increase parents' access, knowledge, and use of online resources to track their children's progress.** Staff and volunteers will provide opportunities for parents to learn about Infinite Campus, DPS' online resource that tracks their children's grades, attendance, behavior, and course schedules.
- **Strengthen parent and student participation on Collaborative School Committees (CSCs).** The Office of Parent Engagement will recruit and train parents to participate on CSCs. We will also support student involvement on high school CSCs.
- **Train and support teachers and school leaders on the importance of parent engagement.** We will review best practices for parent engagement and set school-specific expectations.
- **Create structures for consistent dialogue between parent representatives from all schools and the superintendent to improve communication between parents/ guardians and our district's leadership team.** The Offices of Community Engagement and Parent Engagement are launching the superintendent's Parent Forum, with school principals, to create new opportunities for parents/guardians in all areas of the district to regularly meet and dialogue directly with the superintendent.
- **Measure parent engagement levels.** We will track school committee functioning, parent conference participation rates, parent survey results, and numbers of school volunteers to determine where parent and family involvement is robust and where outreach, support, and training is needed. We will improve parent engagement measurements to include on the School Performance Framework.

Strategy 2: Engage and inform students, families, and the community about DPS strategies and initiatives.

- **Increase the quantity and quality of school choice information and outreach to parents to help them make more-informed educational choices.** As we pursue our strategy of offering diverse instructional programs to students, we will ensure parents and families have the best information possible to choose schools for their children. We will advise parents on how to use the School Performance Framework for school choice decisions; revise School Improvement Plan documents to use as a resource for selecting schools; and if funding permits, establish enrollment centers and/or employ choice liaisons to provide parents and families with information and expertise about kinds and types of schools to consider.
- **Strengthen media communications in print, broadcast, and online to ensure expanded community outreach and greater consistency, depth, and accuracy.** We will expand our external communications strategy, such as weekly radio broadcasts, to engage culturally and linguistically diverse community members.
- **Increase technology use to connect stakeholders and to improve access to information and resources.** In 2008, DPS fully redesigned our Internet presence, significantly growing and organizing available information. We will refine and expand our online presence, exploring interactive features and using technology to coordinate and connect staff, teachers, students, parents, and neighbors to the DPS mission.
- **Engage Spanish-dominant parents and families through awareness and educational campaigns using radio, television, and print publications.**
- **Encourage greater community ownership of schools and the district through school visits and facility tours for area businesses, media, realtors, and community members.** School and facility visits will give people firsthand opportunity to see what is happening in DPS schools and encourage and support the development of pipeline programs between businesses and the district.

Strategy 3: Foster stakeholder dialogue and input to promote civic engagement and ownership of public schools.

- **Foster dialogue and regularly seek key stakeholders' input and recommendations.** Through community forums, focus groups, advisory committees, surveys, and other methods, we will maintain a robust and open dialogue with Denver's many parent, community, and advocacy groups. We will support their role in monitoring our reform efforts and interpreting them for the community. We will continue to seek their advice, counsel, and criticism so we can improve.
- **Engage advocacy groups in shaping and supporting the district vision and developing strategies and policies that advance district goals.** DPS will work with Denver's advocacy organizations to pursue our shared goal of improving DPS student outcomes.
- **Continue to use volunteer resources to review and monitor progress of district-wide initiatives.** The citizen committee that reviewed DPS' alternative education programs produced enormously successful work, changing how DPS views alternative education. We will launch similar citizen groups around other district initiatives, such as narrowing the achievement gap, increasing attendance, and implementing the bond program.

- **Coordinate and manage community processes and engagement strategies on district initiatives.** We will strengthen our systems for and approaches to community relationship building. Providing the public with timely information and being responsive to inquiries requires a coordinated, multifaceted approach. To be timelier with information to the public on the public input process via the Web site and public postings is a key priority. Reaching out and engaging stakeholders for regular feedback on community needs and school processes is also key.

Strategy 4: Partner with nonprofits, faith communities, philanthropic groups, and others to support Denver’s students with streamlined services that improve student achievement and ensure that they graduate from high school ready for college or career.

- **Increase the number and effectiveness of school-business partnerships to support student achievement goals.** DPS will examine existing partnerships, determining key success factors and replicating and growing partnerships with high potential to significantly impact student achievement.
- **Align community-based programs’ and service providers’ work with district academic standards and goals.** Working with community partners, DPS will strengthen before- and after-school programs that support and align with schools’ improvement plans. We will also strategically increase and improve the quality of after-school programs and services, as well as summer offerings, particularly for the highest-need students and families.
- **Coordinate and expand programs that help parents and students with college and workforce readiness.** The Office of Postsecondary Readiness and the Office of Community Engagement will work with community partners, such as the Denver Scholarship Foundation, to survey students to determine postsecondary goals; facilitate postsecondary exploration; support and train parents and students on the college application process; survey graduating seniors to determine postsecondary plans; and track the performance of DPS graduates who enter college to determine efficacy of DPS college readiness efforts.
- **Forge formal partnerships with Colorado postsecondary institutions, college access organizations, relevant City of Denver offices (e.g., summer employment programs), and state entities (e.g., the Colorado Department of Higher Education) to support our postsecondary enrollment and completion goals.**
- **Streamline process for partners to contribute resources and expertise.** We will leverage the DPS Foundation to align school and district priorities with donor interest. The School Partners Program will build capacity to sustain existing partnerships and launch new ones.

Strategy 5: Leverage federal, state, and local resources to benefit student achievement.

- **Increase effective models.** As funding permits, we will expand the resource advocate model, in part through AmeriCorps, to more schools and neighborhoods to engage with parents and families at the school community level.

- **Secure additional resources that promote college entry and success.** Forge formal partnerships with pre-collegiate agencies and local colleges and universities to support our postsecondary enrollment and completion goals as outlined in Strategy 4.
- **Continue working with local, state, and federal partners.** We will maintain program coordination roles with local government partners that support key programs, including the Youth Mentoring Collaborative, the City-DPS Partnership, the Social Worker Partnership, and Creative Options; with state partners, including the Governor’s Commission on Community Service and the Department of Education; and with federal partners, including AmeriCorps, federal stimulus funding, and Race to the Top—all of which expand high-quality services to DPS students.
- **Actively engage in processes to support legislation that best serves the district’s student population.** We will monitor and contribute to the legislative process to inform and educate on district needs and advocate for financial equity, services, and programs to benefit every student in every school.

Together, we believe these five strategies will dramatically increase family engagement in our schools and strengthen civic ownership and responsibility for DPS students’ success.



STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES |

“We must ensure that all resources and the operational infrastructure of the district are strategically aligned and optimally managed to support the differentiated needs of all schools to build the capacity to accelerate and sustain achievement results.”

Denver Public Schools, Core Beliefs and Commitments

As emphasized throughout the plan, our district’s single goal is to dramatically improve student achievement. Thus, our financial resources must wisely support the instructional core of students, teachers, and content. It is also critical to manage our resources to ensure long-term stability and to attract a growing number of students and families to DPS.

We are in the middle of a significant financial crisis in this country with far-reaching impact on our funding from the state. The economic downturn threatens our financial stability and requires careful management of resources we have today, along with those we expect to have in the next several years. Our financial resources are, and likely will continue to be, constrained, so our goals are to maximize classroom and school resources and to push as much decision-making authority over school budgets as possible to individual schools. We also must further improve the transparency of our budgets, so the public can clearly understand where each dollar is spent.

Vision |

Our vision is to maximize our resources in our classrooms and to invest every dollar strategically to achieve the goals in this plan. DPS is committed to providing financial stability to invest in this plan for the long term. To achieve this vision, we will pursue the following strategies.

Strategy 1 |

Ensure fiscal stability. Long an established goal for the district, we have made significant strides in ensuring DPS’ fiscal stability. We adopted structurally balanced budgets in the last two fiscal years and will maintain this focus in the future by ensuring our cost structure does not grow beyond our available revenues. Within the balanced budget, we will prudently and carefully align spending and investments with goals set forth in this plan.

Strategy 2 |

Maximize financial resources. DPS already spends more than 94% of its operating budget directly in schools. We will continue to pursue administrative and operational efficiencies to maximize the funds available for schools and classrooms. We also will aggressively pursue competitive outside funding opportunities that can increase available funding. We will seek to push as much decision-making authority over school budgets as possible to individual schools and provide adequate support to school leadership teams who can best make budgetary decisions to serve their student and community needs.

Strategy 3 |

Align resources with goals. We will continue to align resources explicitly with our student achievement goals and to establish financial incentives for achieving them. For example, principals, teachers, and schools will earn financial rewards for improving student performance. DPS will fund effective programs as identified by evaluation processes referenced in Strategy 4 of the Instructional Core section.

Strategy 4 |

Increase transparency. The public will more easily understand DPS' use of funds, how our resources are aligned with our goals, and how they can impact budget decisions at school and district levels. We will streamline the budget process to provide better efficiency and better internal and external reporting.

Strategy 5 |

Effectively use bond resources. DPS will rigorously monitor, deploy, and manage the \$454 million in General Obligation Bonds that Denver citizens approved in November 2008 for facility renovations, repairs, upgrades, and targeted expansion.

Progress to Date |

As with previous sections of this plan, we will quickly highlight key accomplishments in strategically managing our financial resources during the last three years. This track record not only indicates our ability to achieve our goals, it lays a critical foundation for our next steps.

To ensure fiscal stability, we:

- Increased DPS enrollment by more than 4,400 students to more than 78,000 students in two years (2008–2009 and 2009–2010). In the 2009–2010 school year, DPS experienced the largest one-year enrollment increase in recorded history.
- Secured a successful legislative change that resulted in the merger of the DPS Retirement System with the state-supported Public Employees Retirement Association (PERA), which took effect January 1, 2010. A key merger outcome included portable retirement benefits for our employees, which will enhance our recruiting efforts for great people, another key element of the 2010 Denver Plan.
- Secured and re-affirmed a AA credit rating, allowing Denver taxpayers to pay lower interest costs on district debt.
- Refinanced the pension liability at a lower interest rate. More than 90% of the savings have been invested directly in or in direct support of schools.
- At the end of the 2007–2008 school year, DPS closed eight school buildings due to poor performance and declining enrollment, generating \$3.5 million in recurring annual savings that was invested in schools. On average, our elementary schools are now operating at 95% capacity.
- Established more equitable financial arrangements with charter schools, including cost-recovery formulas that more appropriately support special education and facility costs.

As a result of this work, DPS balanced the budget without significant cuts to school or departmental budgets for two consecutive years (after five straight years of budget cuts).

To aggressively maximize school resources, we:

- Increased budget amounts that go either directly to schools or in direct support of schools. Currently, more than 94% of the general fund budget is spent in schools.
- Secured more than \$75 million in competitive grants, including a \$25 million Federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant to fund performance-based pay for principals, a \$10 million Teacher Effectiveness Grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and \$7.5 million gift for the Performance Management initiative from the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation.
- Accessed more than \$7 million newly available Denver preschool program funds and additional state Colorado preschool program funds in 2008–2009 and 2009–2010 to increase preschool offerings by more than 50%. DPS full-day preschool grew from 500 students in 2007–2008 to more than 2,100 students in 2008–2009 and 2,600 in 2009–2010.
- Partnered with the developer, the City of Denver, and the Denver Urban Renewal Authority to secure funding to build a third Stapleton school to meet the need for more capacity in that area and increase enrollment.

To better align our resources to support improved student achievement, we:

- Established student-based budget formulas that increase dollars for middle and high school students, special education, English language learners, gifted and talented programs, and students living in poverty. Resource distribution is now more closely aligned with the costs of serving these students.
- Created financial incentives that reward schools for increasing enrollment and provided principals with greater authority to determine the best use of their budgets to meet their school communities' academic needs.
- Established school-based financial incentives and interventions based on School Performance Framework ratings limited to student achievement and academic growth.
- Prioritized state and federal funding to support a 30% expansion in full-day kindergarten over two years (2008–2009 and 2009–2010). More than 95% of DPS kindergarten students attend a full-day class, greatly increasing the number of DPS first graders ready to learn.

To increase the transparency of the DPS budget and understanding of the use of funds, we:

- Designed the student-based budget system to distribute dollars to schools based on enrollment and types of students. The system provides high transparency, creates incentives for school leaders to increase enrollment, and provides principals with additional funding to support higher-need students.
- Redesigned internal financial reporting processes to produce functional departmental and regulatory reports and aggregated financial statements that better communicate the district's financial health.
- Maintained rigorous financial reporting requirements and continued producing the highest-quality audited financial statements.

November 2008 K–12 School Bond |

In November 2008, DPS passed the largest K–12 school bond in Colorado history by a 2-to-1 voter margin, signifying high voter confidence in our district’s needs and progress. A committee of business and civic leaders determined the bond request amount and specific projects included in the bond ballot initiative.

To ensure effective use of bond funds, we:

- Sold \$424 million in bonds in 2009 at an attractive interest rate, providing construction project funds and saving taxpayers \$153 million in interest costs below the ballot measure ceiling.
- Established a citizens’ Bond Oversight Committee to oversee progress and represent the public interest throughout the program’s term. This committee will also oversee the use of the 2003 Mill Levy Override annual revenue fund.

Collectively, these actions create a stable financial foundation for Denver Public Schools, something our students, parents, and workforce can count on to sustain the progress and support reforms in the coming years. We also built better monitoring and tracking systems that give us the capacity for the work described below.

Moving Forward: 2010–2013 |

We will sustain our focus and ensure DPS can navigate the current financial crisis without losing momentum. Going forward, we maintain the same overarching goals, pushing further and farther with an expanded set of initiatives.

Strategy 1: Ensure fiscal stability.

- **Grow enrollment.** Enrollment is the district’s fundamental revenue driver. When enrollment increases, our budget increases. We estimate approximately 72% of school-age children in Denver attend DPS district-run and charter schools; thus a terrific opportunity exists to grow our enrollment. (Other Denver resident students attend private schools, home schools, or go out of district.) Additionally, we expect the school-age population in Denver to increase during the next five years and will strive to be *the* choice for these families. Objectives in other sections of this plan—high-quality schools, community outreach initiatives, preschool program expansion, drop-out prevention programs, and social service agency and nonprofit collaborations—are designed to support our goals of increasing enrollment by attracting new students and retaining a higher number of current students. Our student-based budget approach provides incentive for schools to grow enrollment.
- **Monitor and meet the district’s capacity challenges.** Areas of Denver exist where the capacity of our schools today or in the future will not meet growing demands. New Stapleton and Green Valley Ranch schools are being built to meet demand now, and the district will proactively target solutions to meet capacity needs throughout the city. The district is engaged in long-term planning and solutions that consider capacity needs today and in the future.
- **Pursue state financial support that protects our most underserved students.** DPS has a higher number of low-income, special education, and English language learners than any other district in Colorado. Existing state funding formulas do not adequately recognize the increased

costs of meeting the needs of this student population. Through increased information sharing and advocacy, DPS hopes to impact changes to funding formulas that will provide more resources to serve our higher-needs student population.

- **Ensure highest and best use of all real estate assets.** DPS will change its real estate asset use based on surveys and input from students, parents, community members, staff, and local experts where school facilities are considered for alternative uses or sale. Options include strategically co-locating instructional programs in existing campuses and disposition and/or use of vacant properties. In some areas of the district, we will use vacant facilities to serve new students and attract those not currently attending DPS.
- **Maintain strong credit ratings.** DPS will continue to maintain contingency reserves and appropriate fund balances to ensure DPS, and therefore Denver taxpayers, achieve the most competitive interest rates on its debt obligations.

By pursuing both the revenue-enhancing and cost-savings objectives listed here, we commit to maintaining a structurally balanced budget each year to build a highly stable foundation for our instructional core.

Strategy 2: Maximize available financial resources.

- **Optimize funds that flow through student-based budget formulas.** We will evaluate opportunities to reduce centrally managed funds to increase funds that directly follow students to schools through student-based budgeting formulas.
- **Apply rigorous process improvement methods and technology to increase efficiency in our operational organizations, improving services to schools and generating cost savings that can flow to instructional programs.** We will establish cost-reduction initiatives to offset growth in non-personnel-related operational costs. For example, we will seek to offset increases in costs, such as software maintenance, utilities, and fuels, with cost savings generated through actions, such as contract renegotiations and energy conservation.
- **Aggressively pursue competitive federal, state, and philanthropic funding that supports district goals.** We will continue to communicate the innovative work we are doing and deliver results with outside funding to maintain a high philanthropic interest in DPS. We will collaborate with local and national organizations to obtain financial support for key initiatives, including performance management, teacher development and support, human resource processes and technology improvement, and new schools and school innovation. We will specifically pursue American Recovery and Reinvestment Act stimulus funding, Race to the Top, and turnaround funds where appropriate.

Strategy 3: Align resources with goals and priorities.

- **Refine Student-Based Budgeting formulas to ensure they are best meeting the needs of all of the district's students.** Continue to evaluate and adjust student-based budgeting formulas to 1) meet student needs, 2) make progress on closing the achievement gap, and 3) grow the number of high school graduates and college-ready students.
- **Use and refine the ProComp merit pay system to improve performance and maintain long-term sustainability.** We will use teacher and principal compensation to provide appropriate

incentives to work in high-poverty schools and hard-to-staff positions and drive student growth and achievement. We will further align the compensation system to board-adopted student achievement goals.

- **Increase principals' control over school budgets and train and support them improve their capability to use funds to support their school priorities.** We will also provide greater budget control and accountability for central instructional and operational department heads.
- **Align financial resources to district priority initiatives, and to appropriately support financial needs.** In particular, we will seek federal stimulus dollars and other state and philanthropic funds that support district priority initiatives. Two-year stimulus funds and other non-recurring funds do not increase ongoing operational funding, so we must use them to develop increased capacity and sustainability. For example, we will develop systems and organizational capacity—through professional development, process and technology development, and educator support—to improve the use of data to guide instructional practices in our schools. We will develop rigorous processes to track, manage, and report on the use of these funds and use metrics to determine the effectiveness of these changes.
- **Introduce performance-based compensation elements to a greater number of district instructional and operational personnel.** We will use financial incentives aligned to the district's student achievement goals to reward exceptional performance, including improvements in service and efficiency. We will transition, over time, from compensation programs tied to longevity to those tied to performance.

Strategy 4: Increase transparency.

- **Effectively communicate with DPS internal and external stakeholders about the district's budget.** We will provide timely and accessible information on school and department budgets and the district's financial state through multiple means of communication. In addition, we will enhance online information, so stakeholders better understand the budget and resource allocations.
- **Present school and central department budgets that are clear and easy to understand.** We will ensure the general public can clearly see how tax dollars are spent in the district and understand how the DPS budget is allocated. We will create communications to share information more broadly and proactively with teachers and the community.
- **Give individual schools tools to discuss their budgets with parents and teachers.** We will empower principals to engage parents and staff in the decision-making process around spending their school budgets, which directly impacts class size, teacher-to-student ratio, and individual program funding.
- **Capture full costs in budgets.** We will ensure budgets fully capture costs, including employee pension and benefits and ensure individual employees understand their total compensation, including the value of pension retirement benefits.
- **Streamline the budgeting process.** We will redesign and automate the budgeting process to increase efficiency, visibility, and effectiveness. We will support and train school and departmental leaders to increase their understanding of creating budgets and tracking budget performance.

Strategy 5: Effectively use bond resources.

- **Deliver bond projects on time, within budget, and at excellent quality.** We will deploy bond funds to ensure DPS facilities are safe, inviting to students and families, and built with classroom design and technology that create high-quality learning environments. Key outcomes include:
 - Repairs and renovations that touch every school building in the district, ranging from replacing aging boilers, leaking roofs, and worn-out flooring, to upgrading security and safety systems, including fire alarms and closed-circuit cameras.
 - Significantly improved technology district-wide.
 - Newer and safer playground equipment.
 - Expanded early education classroom capacity.
 - A new campus, accommodating two schools, serving the growing ECE–12 population in northeast Denver.
- **Aggressively bid and manage bond projects to achieve cost savings that can be deployed to other priority areas.** We will work with the Citizens Oversight Committee to determine priorities for using unallocated funds on critical projects.
- **Effectively manage bond debt to limit taxpayer obligations.** We will maintain a good credit rating, use federal stimulus programs, and appropriately issue debt to limit interest costs.

We believe strategies detailed in this section will wisely support the instructional core and ensure long-term stability for Denver Public Schools.



A CULTURE OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS, SERVICE, EMPOWERMENT, AND RESPONSIBILITY |

ALL STUDENTS CAN ACHIEVE AND GRADUATE, AND WE CAN CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP.

“We believe that all students can learn at grade level or higher (no excuses), make dramatic gains in student achievement, reach their full potential and graduate prepared for success in life, work, civic responsibility, higher education, and competition in a global community.”

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PERFORMANCE BY ALL ADULTS MATTERS.

“We believe that creating a district-wide culture of ‘performance empowerment’ will best ensure the ability to build and maintain optimal conditions for student learning in every school.”

Denver Public Schools, Core Beliefs and Commitments

Building and maintaining a culture characterized by high expectations, excellent service, empowerment, and responsibility is critical to achieving our goals. Our culture surrounds and permeates the instructional core and our primary strategies supporting the instructional core. A successful culture is in many ways intangible, but its presence is a very powerful force for change, just as its absence is a large roadblock against change. Culture is both a cause and an effect—it is not just a result of our organization’s beliefs, behaviors, and systems, but it helps create them.

A shared culture of high expectations, service, empowerment, and responsibility is not the norm in large school systems, including our own. Thus, we must pursue significant shifts in our own historical culture.

A successful culture is one in which our students thrive, in which parents believe their children will excel, and where talented educators want to work. Hence, in this section, when we use the word “culture,” we mean not simply an abstract concept but a collection of practices, systems, beliefs, and behaviors that help shape DPS and our strategies to drive improved student outcomes.

Because culture surrounds and permeates all of our work, this section references all other parts of our plan. Equally, in each previous section, our chosen strategies embrace the high expectations, service, empowerment, and responsibility elements of our culture explicitly addressed here. In this section, we discuss the need for both specific changes to certain practices or rules, as well as more general cultural shifts we need to undertake.

Vision |

Our vision is that DPS embrace, build, and maintain a culture defined by high expectations, excellent service, empowerment, and responsibility. Such a culture retains and attracts the best talent, supports and serves students and families actively and respectfully, and helps all of us become more genuinely responsible for the primary goal of improving student achievement. To achieve this vision, there are four core elements to the culture we intend to build, including:

Element 1 | High Expectations

The foundation of our culture must be high expectations—high expectations of our students, high expectations of all adults who work in the district, and high expectations of our parents and community.

Our conviction that every child is capable of and will graduate from high school prepared for college or career and that there will be no difference in student outcomes in DPS based on race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status is at the center of our work. We know students will live up to, or down to, expectations adults hold of them, and it is critical to convey to students from their first day in DPS schools that we expect all of them to graduate from high school prepared for college or career. College success is essential to prepare DPS graduates to compete in the 21st century global economy. During the current recession, high school dropouts are more than three times as likely to be out of work compared to those with college degrees.¹⁷

We are extremely grateful to the generosity of Tim and Bernie Marquez for establishing the Denver Scholarship Foundation, to back up our expectations with millions of dollars in scholarships to help our graduates pay for college and to provide them with the tools and assistance they need to reach for and succeed in college.

We also must expect every member of the DPS team to perform at high professional levels, with clear focus on our student achievement goals. We are extraordinarily fortunate to have teachers and school leaders whose passion and commitment led them to work in DPS, and we must nurture and sustain that passion and commitment to making our students' lives better.

We hold high expectations for our students, parents, and community, as well. As referenced in the Call to Action section, we recognize that students have a very clear responsibility for their own learning and success. In addition, we need parents and community to value education, to help young people succeed, and to hold us accountable for delivering an excellent product to our children. We are grateful for Denver voters' consistent support, including support for establishing the Denver Preschool Program and passage of bond and mill levy measures.

¹⁷ President Barack Obama. Speech to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. March 1, 2010, Washington, DC.

Element 2 | Excellent Service

Denver Public Schools must become a service-minded organization that views its students and parents as customers as well as partners. The role of the central office and the central service departments is to support teachers, principals, students, and parents in our efforts to increase student achievement. The centrality of customer service in this role requires our service departments to take responsibility for understanding and effectively addressing student, parent, principal, and teacher needs.

Elements 3 and 4 | Empowerment and Responsibility

The final two elements of our culture—empowerment and responsibility—are inextricably linked. We must empower our professional educators and all our staff to lead and best meet their individual students' needs and to closely couple that empowerment with responsibility for student outcomes.

Further, we believe that the school is the central unit of change in improving student outcomes. As discussed in the Call to Action section, we have certain critical non-negotiables for all our schools, including state standards that must be taught, core elements of the instructional program, and district-wide benchmark assessments. Within this framework, all schools should have autonomy on the critical matters of people, time, and money. Such autonomy is vital to each school's success.

Progress to Date |

For the last several years, DPS has been raising expectations for both students and adults. Efforts to raise and establish higher student expectations are discussed throughout this document, but a brief summary of key accomplishments includes:

- Established and publicized measurable goals to dramatically increase student achievement and the percentage of students who graduate ready for college and to close the achievement gap.
- Instituted the most rigorous high school graduation requirements in the state.
- Worked with Tim and Bernie Marquez to establish the Denver Scholarship Foundation (DSF). With DSF, we established Future Centers in all high schools to provide additional college counseling and assistance in applying for college and accessing scholarships.
- Expanded access to Early Childhood Education and full-day kindergarten, ensuring that nearly 11,000 children have access to early education, a proven strategy for narrowing achievement gaps.
- Provided parents access to real-time data about their children's academic achievement, attendance, course schedule, and behavior incidents through an online resource called Infinite Campus.

To significantly improve customer service, we:

- Developed HRConnect to provide better employee customer service. HRConnect elevates customer service to employees by connecting them with customer representatives to assist with same-day resolutions on a variety of issues or referrals to subject matter experts in Human Resources.
- Surveyed principals about their central department service satisfaction. These bi-annual satisfaction surveys provide feedback to central office staff on the quality and timeliness of services to schools and form the basis of action planning.

- We improved principals' average customer satisfaction with operational departments from 71% in April 2008 to 85% a year later.
- Conducted student and family satisfaction surveys to gather feedback on service.
- Conducted regular school faculty meetings to elicit feedback on district initiatives (2005 and ongoing).
- Were awarded more than \$8.3 million from the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation and the Broad Foundation to enhance data-based decision making for teachers, principals, and operational staff through performance management systems that track financial, operational, and service measures.
- Provided professional training on customer service to salaried central office employees responsible for delivering service to schools, families, and the community. More than 450 people have participated to date. Training for hourly employees continues to rollout and will be delivered to nearly 1,500 employees.
- Established "delivering excellent service" as one of five key success factors that inform the Employee Performance Management Program, a new performance-based evaluation system for central office employees.

In building system-wide empowerment and accountability, we:

- Established the School Performance Framework (SPF), a sophisticated tool that collects and reports multiple achievement indicators for every school. SPF performance and academic growth levels trigger school-based rewards, ensuring that high-performing schools and schools that achieve significant academic *growth* are recognized. SPF ratings also trigger interventions and support to struggling schools. Colorado has adopted a similar growth model for all schools in the state.
- Increased principals' and teachers' autonomy and flexibility to structure their schools in ways best designed to improve student achievement. We:
 - Implemented student-based budgeting to provide schools with greater autonomy over how they use their money and staff to best drive student achievement.
 - Developed a process for new schools to request waivers of district policies, the DPS/DCTA collective bargaining agreement, and/or state statutes to eliminate obstacles to improved student achievement.
- Developed the Employee Performance Management Program,, a recurring, yearly goal-setting and performance appraisal process for central office employees to ensure that 1) district goals are effectively translated into achievable goals and performance expectations for the district, departments, teams, and individuals; 2) all employees are held accountable for their achievements, recognized for their contributions, and supported in their career development; 3) the district maintains a process for continuous improvement and a focus on service; and 4) DPS remains a compelling place for employees to work, learn, and grow.
- Developed and implemented the School Innovation Grant Initiative to provide selected promising schools start-up funds to begin new efforts to improve performance and enrollment.
- Developed and implemented a request for proposal (RFP) process to solicit high-performing schools, especially in areas of high academic need, such as alternative education; the process creates a single pathway for all school proposals, including district-run and charter proposals.
- Led the state in becoming the first school district to be granted Innovation status under the 2008 Innovation Schools Act. Leading to the creation of this act, in December 2007, Randolph Middle School sought and received waivers from both district policies and collective bargaining agreements to afford more autonomy in managing their people, time, and money. Following passage of the Innovation Act, Manual High School, Montclair School of Academics and Enrichment, and Cole Arts and Science Academy became the state's first schools granted

Innovation status and are operating with waivers from collective bargaining agreements, district policies, and state laws. The Math and Science Leadership Academy is also operating with waivers from collective bargaining agreements, state laws, and district policies under another statutory provision.

Moving Forward: 2010–2013 |

We will take specific actions to build, nurture, and maintain a culture that is internally and externally characterized as a high-performance culture. You have read about many of these actions throughout the plan, but, because culture is so essential, we are highlighting key next steps in building a culture that simply demands better results.

Element 1: High expectations

High expectations for our students is the lifeblood of success in our district. As you have read in other sections of this plan, and we have summarized below, we will:

- **Emphasize college to students every day in all our schools and promote a college-going culture.** We will vigorously promote honors courses, gifted and talented programs, and AP and postsecondary offerings to all our students, working to eliminate racial and ethnic gaps among students taking these offerings. We will ensure all ninth graders take the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test or other comparable test to identify more students who are ready for advanced courses, a proven strategy employed by other urban districts.
- **Identify students who need support.** As discussed in the Instructional Core section, we will aggressively seek to identify students who need additional support to stay on a college-ready path and ensure they have access to credit recovery, dual enrollment, and other alternative pathways to high school graduation.
- **Increase postsecondary educational opportunities for DPS students.** In particular, we will work with state elected leaders on legislation to allow all public school graduates regardless of immigration status to receive in-state college tuition. We will also continue to collaborate with DSF to increase the number of students applying to college and to take advantage of additional public and private financial aid opportunities for students going to college.

All this (and more) cannot take the place of students, parents and a community who holds high expectations for themselves and for us. As discussed in the Deeping Engagement with Families and the Community section, we will engage parents and other caregivers in maintaining high expectations for their children and engage students in the great importance of graduating from high school prepared for college or career.

Element 2: Excellent service

To accelerate and energize our commitment to high-quality service—central office to schools, schools to families, and central office to families—we will:

- Empower and, ultimately, reward, central office employees to identify and implement changes that improve services they offer to schools.
- Establish feedback loops to capture the voice of our customers. We will survey students, families, and staff at schools to inform our school improvement plans and department performance plans and provide feedback on current satisfaction levels.
- Survey principals and central office staff about the quality and timeliness of central office services. We will use this data in goal-setting and performance evaluations in the Employee Performance Management Program. Customer service will be the core element in department and individual evaluations.
- Provide more streamlined and online opportunities to register students.
- Work with charter schools on a single streamlined choice process.
- Proactively communicate with customers to manage service delivery expectations.
- Expand goal setting and metrics tracking to hourly staff.
- Deepen service-related metrics development work with chief operating officer's departments and expand metrics work to chief academic officer's departments.
- Develop and manage service-level agreements between and among schools, central office departments, vendors, and partners to ensure quality service delivery.

Element 3: Empowerment and responsibility

Given that empowerment and responsibility are at the heart of our theory of action, we will discuss this element more deeply. Empowerment allows individuals and schools to innovate and best meet their students' needs. Responsibility ensures that all of us are properly focused on and accountable for student outcomes.

In terms of empowering schools on personnel matters, school leadership teams should have full capability to hire or retain teachers and staff. As discussed in the Great People section, practices such as forcibly placing teachers into schools against school leadership teams' and teachers' wishes, hamper schools' abilities to develop cohesive cultures of shared ownership and disempower school professionals.

Likewise, schools should have full flexibility on using time during the school day and days during the school year. One-size-fits-all limitations on how schools must structure their school day and school year that apply equally to 200-student elementary schools and 2,000-student high schools severely hinder schools' abilities to best meet their students' needs.

Third, schools should have maximum flexibility on using their budgets. We have significantly progressed on this front by abolishing formula-driven budgets that allocated schools specific numbers of various positions. In their place, we have introduced student-based budgets in which dollars follow

students and per-student dollars are differentiated based on key factors, such as students' economic, special education, or language status. We have already given schools full flexibility on how to use those dollars on personnel and resources to best meet their students' needs, and we need to further increase the dollars that go to schools using student-based budgets rather than centrally-based budgeting.

It is important to emphasize that empowerment occurs not just at school or department levels. Most profoundly, empowerment must be at the level of the individual professional, who has taken on the enormously challenging job of teaching our students or leading our schools. Empowerment represents the core belief that we respect our professionals—whether teachers, principals, or leaders of central service departments—and their ability to operate effectively. They are closest to students and must have the opportunity to tailor their approach to best meet the needs of their students.

To be effective, empowerment must be coupled with responsibility and accountability for results. Earlier experiments in efforts such as site-based management did not pair autonomy with accountability and were therefore doomed to failure. As Albert Shanker emphasizes in the quote in the Call to Action section, “Unless you start with a very heavy emphasis on accountability, not end with it, you’ll never get a system with all the other pieces falling into place.”

We now have a tool to evaluate individual schools' performance—the School Performance Framework—that is among the most robust in the nation. The SPF elaborates on how much academic growth a school is driving in its students, regardless of whether those students start the year at high or low achievement levels. In our Incentive and Interventions Policy, we align our school, principal, and teacher incentives and interventions around School Performance Framework results. Schools that drive their students' academic growth benefit from incentives, including additional principal and teacher compensation. Schools that do not drive satisfactory growth receive interventions, including additional supports, professional development, and professional guidance. If those supports do not produce necessary changes, we will consider new instructional programs or new schools for those communities.

Finally, to have an effective empowerment and responsibility system, we need robust data systems to capture relevant performance data that inform teachers' instructional practices. Teachers will use the Teacher Portal and principals will use the Administrator Portal, one-stop software systems that provide access to all student data, including demographic and assessment data, as well as standards-aligned curriculum and resources for all core content classes. The Teacher Portal eliminates the need to consult disparate systems for data and teaching tools, reducing the time necessary to access data and reporting, which in turn provides teachers information they need and time to plan for instruction based on these reports of student progress. These portals will also support educators in implementing the Response to Intervention approach.

Through our Performance Management Initiative, we are establishing key performance indicators for departments, just as we have established the School Performance Framework for schools, capturing data on that performance (for example, percentage of school buses arriving on time, number of critical maintenance items fixed within the requisite time, percentage of substitute teacher vacancies filled) and evaluating employees on their performance against these standards.

To further move Denver Public Schools fully to a system that embraces and supports empowerment and responsibility, we will:

- Develop capacity in our school leaders and teachers to exercise additional responsibility through professional development and peer learning with successful schools.
- Work with school leaders and faculties to develop cultures of individual and shared accountability for student outcomes in all our schools.
- Seek revisions where necessary in state laws, collective bargaining agreements, and district policies to allow each school authority over personnel decisions, including replacing forced placement with mutual consent hiring, and decisions about how to use the school day and school year to best meet that school's students needs.
- As discussed in the Great People section, further align compensation with teacher and principal performance and launch the Employee Performance Management Program for central office staff. We will develop processes and training for departments and employees to establish performance goals and measure performance.
- Introduce pay for performance for central office and service department staff.
- Continue to push further dollars into school-based budgets for maximum budgetary flexibility at each school.
- Use school improvement funding to fund innovative and effective approaches to driving improved student achievement.
- Welcome schools seeking Innovation status under Colorado law so they can exercise autonomy in personnel and the use of the school day and school year.
- Welcome high-quality new schools and programs.
- Track and publicize key performance indicator data on at school, district, and department levels.
- Invest in improved tools, processes, and support infrastructures that support the district-wide performance management project.

We believe that building and maintaining a culture defined by high expectations, excellent service, empowerment, and responsibility will ensure that we attract the best talent, support and serve our families, and engage everyone in the critical work of improving student achievement.



CONCLUSION |

We began sharing this plan as a draft with our students, employees, parents, and community members in September 2009. During an intensive six-month engagement process, we gathered feedback from our many stakeholders. Hundreds of people gave us feedback through our online survey tool and email. We met with community groups, such as A+ Denver, Padres Unidos, MOP, Denver City Council, and more, as mentioned in the Acknowledgements on page 65 and 66. Also listed in the acknowledgements are names of many internal stakeholders who, through email, faculty meetings, and teacher, principal, and central office sounding boards, provided valuable input on the plan.

Our collective wisdom will shape our success. This plan provides a shared vision and commitment to the success of Denver's children. The vision and strategies in the 2010 Denver Plan were informed and will continue to be informed by many: from the voices of our students, teachers, principals, parents, and community members, to the joint DCTA-district Professional Practices Workgroup that worked successfully to make the district the recipient of the largest competitive philanthropic grant in DPS history from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

We look forward to an ongoing, powerful dialogue with our students, employees, parents, and community members on implementing this plan.

Now is time to accelerate our reforms, to sharpen the focus on student achievement, and to get all of our children—in every neighborhood of Denver—prepared for college or career. We're UP to the challenge. We aim to change the very essence of public education in America, for we will not stop until, as our vision proclaims:

We lead the nation's cities in student achievement, high school graduation, college preparation, and college matriculation; and our students are well prepared for success in life, work, civic responsibility, and higher education.



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APPENDIX A |

2010 Denver Plan Goals

1. **All students will graduate from the Denver Public Schools prepared for postsecondary success.**
 - The number of DPS students taking AP classes each year will grow by 3.5%, the number taking the AP test will grow each year by 3.5% and the number of students who take the test and who receive 3, 4 or 5 will increase by 3.5% per year.
 - The number of students scoring 20 or better on the ACT will grow by 3.5% students per year by 2013.
 - The graduation rate for DPS students will increase by 5% per year to reach 82% in 2012 (base of 52% for 06-07).
 - The dropout rate for DPS students will decrease by 1.0% per year to be 4.4% by 2012.
 - College enrollment rates will grow by 3.5% each year to 63% in 2013.

2. **All students will demonstrate at least one year's growth in the core content areas and meet or exceed state standards.**
 - An additional 3.5% of 3rd Grade students will become proficient on CSAP in reading or Lectura each year for the next five years. The five-year target is an overall district proficiency rate of 68.4% in 2013.
 - The percentage of students scoring above the state median percentile on CSAP, thereby demonstrating above-average performance, will grow by 2.0% each year.
 - The performance gap between Asian / Caucasian students and African-American and Hispanic students scoring Proficient & above on CSAP will decrease by 3.5% annually, closing the achievement gap.
 - On average, the proficiency rate for grade level cohorts will increase 3.5% in reading, writing, and math over each year
 - On average, the percentage of students scoring unsatisfactory will decrease by 3.5% in reading, writing, and math each year.
 - 3.5% of grade level English language learners will become proficient or better on the CELA Overall rating each year.

3. **The number of high-performing schools as measured by the School Performance Framework will increase.**
 - The number of schools scoring above 50% of possible points on SPF will grow by 3.5% annually.

4. **All students will have access to full day kindergarten.**
 - By 2013, full-day Kindergarten will be available to 100% of parents who choose to enroll their student in a full-day program.

5. **Enrollment will continue to increase in the Denver Public Schools.**
 - DPS total enrollment will grow 500 students a year to a total exceeding 77,000 in 2012, from ECE-12, including charter school students.
 - By 2013, 84% of children in DPS will re-enroll in district schools the following year, excluding students graduating out of the district.

APPENDIX B |

Reform Framework—Board of Education Core Beliefs

The Board of Education holds six fundamental beliefs about its students, staff, schools, and community. These beliefs animate the work of the school board as policy makers and inform the staff, schools, and community about aspirations for Denver Public Schools.

ALL STUDENTS CAN ACHIEVE AND GRADUATE. We believe that all students can learn at grade level or higher (no excuses), make dramatic gains in student achievement, reach their full potential, and graduate prepared for success in life, work, civic responsibility, and higher education. We believe this is true for all students and is not determined or limited by race, family income, native language, gender, or area of residence.

- **Learning.** We must build a strong standards-based culture of learning across the district by promoting, supporting, and expanding the most effective academic opportunities for each student every day, every year.

TEACHING AND LEARNING IS THE TOP PRIORITY. We believe that ensuring that the most effective teaching takes place in our schools is our number one responsibility and priority as a school district.

- **Teaching and Leading.** We must retain and recruit the most effective teachers and principals, and we must develop and support them so they are able to implement research-based best practice in every classroom and school.

LEARNING, LEADERSHIP, AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PERFORMANCE BY ALL ADULTS MATTERS. We believe that creating a district-wide culture of learning, leadership, and performance will best ensure the ability to build and maintain optimal conditions for student learning in every school, thereby bringing achievement to scale-greater achievement gains in more schools-for all students across the district.

- **Performing.** We must use data to inform decision-making at all levels and empower teachers, leaders, and others to perform at high levels, while holding all throughout the system responsible for improving the academic results for all students.

CHOICE, COLLABORATION, AND INNOVATION ARE KEY TO 21st CENTURY SUCCESS. We believe that developing new, innovative approaches to teaching and learning in current and future schools will lead to a rich and compelling array of educational options, promote the acceleration of student achievement gains, and give Denver children and families high-quality choices for learning and success in the 21st century global economy and community.