

SCHOOL BOARD NEWS

- ***The schools in our neighborhoods in East Denver are among the best in the city.*** The schools in our neighborhoods in East Denver include 17 high quality elementary schools, five high quality middle schools, five high quality high schools and a wide variety of specialized schools and programs, including two STEM-focused schools, an arts magnet school, a dual language school, two expeditionary learning schools, a middle school International Baccalaureate school, a competency based high school, a school that integrates special education students into main stream classrooms, one of the best high school International Baccalaureate (IB) programs in the United States and a variety of gifted and talented and career and technical education and workplace apprenticeships programs. (High quality schools are schools rated blue or green, the top two categories on the DPS school rating system, that are that are located in District 3 or that are nearby and serve at least 40 District 3 students.)
- ***The rate at which DPS students are growing in learning is the highest of all the state's large school districts, and continues to improve.***
 - DPS has the ***highest combined academic growth rate of the state's largest school districts*** for the seventh year in a row. DPS's low income students (qualify for free and reduced lunch) and DPS's non-low income students both are growing faster than the state average for their respective subgroup.
 - More than ***6,500 DPS high school students earned college credit while still in high school*** through AP and IB classes and courses at local colleges last year.
 - The ***number of DPS graduates who are college-ready has increased by more than 80% since 2013*** based on college-ready benchmarks such as earning a qualifying score on AP or IB tests, meeting or exceeding the Colorado Commission on Higher Education benchmark score on the ACT or earning college credit through dual enrollment courses.
 - DPS was named a ***College Board Advanced Placement District of the year*** for expanding access to AP courses and improving AP exam performance. DPS students took and passed nearly four times more AP tests than they did ten years ago; AP pass rates increased for all demographic groups; and DPS's 2016 graduates earned more than \$89 million in college scholarships.
 - ***Two of the top three and five of the top 15 high schools in Colorado are DPS schools*** in U.S. News and World Report's latest ranking of U.S. high schools, an impressive accomplishment for a district whose students constitute only approximately 10% of Colorado's total public school enrollment. The DPS schools in the top 15 Gold Medal category are #2 DSST: Stapleton High School, #3 KIPP Denver Collegiate High School, #12 Denver Center for International Studies, #13 DSST: Green Valley Ranch High School and #14 Denver School of the Arts. George Washington is #46 and is one of 32 Colorado schools that received a Silver Medal.

For details, see: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/schoolview/coloradogrowthmodel>; <https://www.dpsk12.org/collegereadiness/#1474608611707-74513254-b818>; <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/colorado/rankings>
- Graduation rates have increased and drop-out rates have decreased dramatically. The on-time ***graduation rate has increased by nearly 30 percentage points*** over the last nine years, from 39% in 2007 to 67% in 2016. The graduation rate is even higher for students who started with DPS in ninth grade: 74% over four years and 82% over five years. And the ***dropout rate has decreased by nearly two-thirds***, from 11.1% in 2005-2006 to 4% in 2015-2016.
- DPS continues to be the ***fastest growing urban school district*** in the United States, growing from fewer than 70,000 students in 1998, when my oldest started kindergarten, to over 92,000 today. The main factors contributing to the growth are the development of single family homes in Denver and an ***increasing number of Denver students who are coming back to DPS as the performance of DPS schools improves at all levels.*** For more information, see <http://board.dpsk12.org/2016/11/15/strategic-regional-analysis-identifies-gaps-to-address/>
- ***DPS has expanded career and technical offerings for students who may not be interested in a traditional four-year***

college, increasing the number of students served from just over 5,000 two years ago to more than 18,000 this school year. Students who participate in DPS' CareerConnect programs have a 30 percentage point higher probability of graduating than their demographic and academic peers from any zip code in the district. For more information, see: <http://www.dpscareerconnect.org/>

- In an overwhelming endorsement of the work DPS is doing, in November 2016 ***Denver voters by a 2-1 margin voted in favor of \$572 million in bonds*** (for buildings and other capital improvements) ***and \$56 million in an annual mill levy override*** (to fund increased spending in the classroom and other operating costs).

The mill levy override will fund:

- Expanding early childhood reading programs (\$7mil per year)
- More mental health professionals and school counselors (\$15mil per year)
- Expanding technology access to more students (\$6.6mil per year)
- Support, training and leadership opportunities for teachers (\$14.5 mil per year)
- Expanding college and career programs such as apprenticeships, work experience, high school classes that earn college credit and career focused curriculum (\$8mil per year)

The bond will fund:

- Updates for every school in the district, including cooling 97 schools where temperatures are over 80 degrees (\$360 mil)
- New schools and additions to schools to accommodate student growth (\$142 mil)
- School technology and safety upgrades (\$70 mil)

For more information, see: <http://bond.dpsk12.org/>

RECENT SCHOOL BOARD POLICY INITIATIVES

- ***Transparency; listening to our community*** – As the Treasurer of the district, I led the effort to prepare school-by-school budgets that track every dollar spent in our schools. I also led the effort to improve our community outreach by attending hundreds of meetings with parents, neighborhood organizations and community groups in East Denver to update them, listen to their concerns and answer their questions about DPS. For a copy of the information I hand out and more than **130 pages of answers to questions asked at these community meetings**, go to the DPS website and click: Board, Board in the Community, Board Member Mike Johnson in the Community. To institutionalize improve community outreach, I led the effort to assign staff members to serve as liaisons to parent, neighborhood and community organizations in each school board director. For more information or to reach a member of the Public Affairs Team, please email: publicaffairs@dpsk12.org.
- ***Shifting resources and decision-making to schools and reducing the size of the central office*** – In order to assure that more decisions about the education of our students and the use of district resources are made at the school level by principal and teachers who are closest to our students:
 - In this year's budget, 157 full time positions were cut from the central office and another 49 were shifted to schools.
 - Next year's budget increases the amount of money controlled by schools by more than 16%, from just over \$6,000 per student to just over \$7,000 per student, and reduces the amount spent on the district's central office from 5% to 4% of the general fund.
 - All schools have the option to opt in or to opt out of district-provided curriculum, interim assessments and professional development. Those that opt out receive funding to purchase or develop their own curriculum, interim assessments and professional development.
 - 47 DPS schools have applied for and been granted innovation status (requires vote of staff and approval by DPS board and State Board of Education), which exempts them from a variety of state and district rules such as (depending on their innovation plan) curriculum, interim assessments, professional development, calendar, length of day, length of year and hiring and dismissal procedures. The DPS board and staff is ready, willing and able to facilitate innovation applications by other schools.
 - The board has created district's first innovation zone through which zone schools work together to obtain more exemptions from district rules and more school-controlled funding, and is currently considering the creation of additional innovation zones.

- The board and staff are working together to develop new school by school budgets that more accurately describe all the funding and resources provided to every school in the district.

For more information, see: <http://portfolio.dpsk12.org/>; <http://flexibility.dpsk12.org/>. For the 2017-18 budget, see: [http://www.boarddocs.com/co/dpsk12/Board.nsf/files/ALHQEB68EB9D/\\$file/FY17-18%20Proposed%20Budget_Final.pdf](http://www.boarddocs.com/co/dpsk12/Board.nsf/files/ALHQEB68EB9D/$file/FY17-18%20Proposed%20Budget_Final.pdf)

- **Expanding the role of teachers in training, supervising and evaluating other teachers** – With the additional \$14.5 million per year investment from the 2016 mill levy, DPS will expand its Teacher Leadership and Collaboration (TLC) program to all DPS-managed schools over the next few years. The TLC program is a new organizational approach that allows our best teachers to coach and grow other teachers in their schools while staying true to their first love, teaching their own classroom of kids. Teachers leaders share school leadership responsibilities with the school’s principal, including:
 - mentoring, leading and increasing collaboration among teachers;
 - assisting in the evaluation of other teachers, replacing evaluators from outside with true peer evaluators;
 - designing and delivering school-based professional development that meets the specific needs of each school, replacing one size fits all PD provided by outside contractors; and
 - increasing the effectiveness of principals by freeing up more of their time to focus on the educational mission of the school.

For more information, see: <http://teacherleader.dpsk12.org/>

- **Investing Early** – Research shows that **students who are proficient in reading by third grade are four times more likely to graduate**. DPS is investing a significant amount of time and resources, including an additional \$7 million per year from the 2016 mill levy vote, to develop the instructional skills of ECE through 3rd grade teachers and to provide personalized interventions to students who are behind in reading. For more information, see: <http://earlyliteracy.dpsk12.org/early-literacy/>
- **Supporting the whole child** – DPS leads the nation in advancing supports for the whole child as a key strategy for accelerating student achievement. Next year’s budget spends more \$33.5 million for psychologists, social workers, counselors and other student supports, including the money from the \$15 million annual whole child money from the mill levy voters approved in 2016 that will go directly to schools to spend it best to support their students. For more information, see: <http://wholechild.dpsk12.org/> and the proposed 2017-18 budget.
- **Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative**. In order to deal with Denver’s rapid growth and changing neighborhoods, the School Board is creating a city-wide advisory committee to:
 - review changing demographics and housing patterns in our city and the effect on our schools
 - make recommendations on our policies around boundaries, choice, enrollment and academic programs to drive greater socio-economic integration in our schools
 - consider how to think about school choice and school consolidation to ensure that our schools offer high-quality, sustainable programs for our kids in the face of sharp declines in the number of school-aged children in gentrifying neighborhoods
 - complete the work by the end of 2017.

For more information, see: <https://www.dpsk12.org/neighborhoods/>

- **Clear, objective and consistent standards to determine whether a persistently low performing school should be replaced, restarted or closed** – The board historically has made decisions about replacing, restarting or closing low performing schools on a case-by-case basis. To ensure greater consistency and a more transparent decision-making process, in 2016 the board adopted a clear and objective policy to identify and designate for restart or closure the most persistently low-performing schools. The policy applies to all schools regardless of governance type (district-managed or charter) and will help DPS ensure that all students have access to high quality schools that prepare them to succeed. Based on our experience applying the policy in 2016, the policy was revised in April, 2017 to provide that a school will be restarted or closed only if both Criteria A and B are met and none of the Exceptions applies:
 - **Criterion A:** (1) the school is rated red on the most recent School Performance Framework (SPF); AND (2) the school either (a) is rated red on the immediately preceding SPF or (b) is rated red or orange on the two immediately preceding SPFs (note there was no SPF in 2015); and

- Criterion B: the school received fewer than 50% of the total available growth points on the most recent SPF.
- Exceptions: Schools that meet Criteria A and B will not be recommended for restart or closure if any of the following exceptions applies:
 - the school has not had three SPFs;
 - for purposes of applying the policy in 2017 only, the school was rated green or blue on the 2014 SPF; or
 - the board has approved a “clock reset” for the school.

Results of School Quality Reviews will be used for school improvement efforts but will no longer be part of the staff’s recommendation for restart or closure. For more information about the existing policy, see: <http://greatschools.dpsk12.org/en/>. For the staff changes to the existing policy, see: [http://www.boarddocs.com/co/dpsk12/Board.nsf/files/AKET5K75B3DA/\\$file/3_13_SPC_BOE_v10.pdf](http://www.boarddocs.com/co/dpsk12/Board.nsf/files/AKET5K75B3DA/$file/3_13_SPC_BOE_v10.pdf). For information about the SPF, see: <http://spf.dpsk12.org/en/>.

- ***Clear, objective standards for selecting the education programs for new or restart schools*** – The board historically has made decisions on a case-by-case basis regarding the placement of academic programs in new buildings or existing buildings in which space is available. The board adopted the Facility Allocation Policy in February 2015 to establish clear, objective and consistent standards for determining which academic programs to place in buildings. The new policy requires the board and staff to apply the following criteria, which are aligned with the district’s strategic plan and goals:
 - *Academics*: The program’s track record for maintaining high levels of student achievement and academic growth, demonstrated leadership capability and plans to meet the academic needs of underserved students.
 - *Regional Priorities*: Does the placement of the program align with the priorities identified in the district’s most recent strategic analysis for the region? Will the program provide seats in a region where there is more demand than supply? Will the program provide high quality seats in a region in which existing schools are struggling? Will the program serve regional priorities for socio-economic integration, service for special education students and English language learners and early childhood education?
 - *Demand*: Is there strong enrollment demand and community support for the program?
 For more information, see: <http://www.boarddocs.com/co/dpsk12/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=A5V5KC05296F>
- ***Additional \$20 million per year for use in our schools because of smart pension financings*** – In its 2015 session, the Colorado legislature adopted legislation that makes an additional \$20 million per year available for use in our schools because, as a result of some smart pension financing decisions made by prior boards, the pensions of DPS teachers are significantly more secure than the pensions of teachers in all other Colorado school districts. The DPS pension fund is funded at 133% of the funding level for the pension fund for other Colorado school districts (74% for DPS, compared to 43.1% for other Colorado school districts, based on PERA’s 2016 year-end financial report).
- ***Reductions in standardized testing*** – The school board does not control standardized testing. Standardized testing requirements are set by the Colorado legislature and the State Board of Education. DPS has lobbied the legislature and the State Board to limit the number and time required to complete tests, with a goal of no more than 3-4 hours per year per student, and to obtain results quickly as possible so they can be used to guide instruction. Although we do not think the reductions go far enough, the legislature recently reduced testing:
 - High school students will no longer take PARCC language arts or math tests. Freshmen and sophomores will take the pre-SAT, juniors will take the SAT and seniors will not be tested.
 - Language arts and math testing in grades 3-8 – The length of the tests was reduced by 60 minutes and, to eliminate one of the greatest burdens on our teachers and school administrators, the test will be administered only once a year, as we have advocated, rather than twice a year.
 - Science and social studies testing – Students will be tested in science one time in elementary, middle and high school. One third of our schools will test students in social studies once every three years.
 - Grades K-3 - READ Act testing requirements have been reduced by more than 50% in grades K-3. And for kids who already read at grade level, early literacy tests have been eliminated. For more information, see: <http://www.coloradokids.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/HB1323.FINALsummary.pdf> and House Bill 17-1181.
- ***\$12 minimum wage*** – In 2015, the board established a \$12 minimum wage for all hourly wage employees, including lunch room staff, janitors and maintenance workers, using the money freed up by the pension financings described above. For

more information, see: <http://www.denverpost.com/2015/09/01/denver-public-schools-set-new-12-minimum-hourly-wage/>

- ***Intensive supports for low performing schools*** – To disrupt the pattern of low achievement in some of our highest needs schools, DPS has provided additional resources to schools identified as needing the greatest support. Since this work began more than five years ago, schools that receiving intensive supports outperformed the district average on 2016 SPF with an 8.8% average gain of SPF points, against the district average gain of 1.1%, and 14 of the 25 schools receiving intensive supports increased their SPF rating by one or more levels. For more information, see: <http://tieredsupports.dpsk12.org/>
- ***Making sure that minority and women business enterprises receive their fair share of district contracts*** – After hundreds of hours of meeting with community members and conducting an in-depth disparity study regarding the utilization and availability of minority and women-owned businesses (MBWE) by the district, the board adopted a policy that sets goals and continuously monitors progress towards the goals for the inclusion of minority and women business enterprises in DPS construction contracts. The new policy is modeled on and similar to MWBE policies of the City of Denver and the Regional Transportation District and is one of the first ever adopted by a school district in the United States. In our first year, we exceeded our aspirational goal of the percentage of bond funded projects over \$50,000 awarded to MWBEs: 24% goal and 31.4% actual.
- ***DPS recently joined a law suit that seeks to invalidate TABOR and give the legislature the ability to increase school funding*** – In September 2016, the board voted unanimously to join the plaintiffs in a lawsuit seeking to declare the TABOR amendment does not comply with the United State constitution because it violates the rights of state legislators, the Denver school board and other elected local governments, to determine core governmental functions, including specifically their budgets. For more information, see: <http://board.dpsk12.org/2016/09/16/dps-joins-plaintiffs-in-tabor-lawsuit/>

HOT TOPICS

- ***Should the board continue, accelerate or roll back its initiatives to shift resources and decision-making to schools and reduce the size of the central office?***
- ***Should we spend more money on transportation to make it easier for students (for some students, possible) to attend the schools of their choice?*** If yes, do we pay for it by reducing spending on something else or do we ask our voters to increase their taxes?
- ***How do we increase pay for younger teachers?*** Most young teachers make less than the amount required to pay the average rent for a Denver apartment based on the generally accepted guideline that housing costs should be no more than 30% income. Young teachers also do not receive the benefit of the district's contribution to the teacher retirement fund which equals approximately 20% of each teacher's salary because benefits do not vest for five years and are dramatically back-loaded based on seniority.
- ***How do we increase racial and income diversity in our schools? Should we be trying to do so?*** Because neighborhoods are segregated, assigning students to schools based solely on their addresses results in segregated schools. Since DPS launched its unified city-wide choice process in 2012, segregation has decreased and integration has increased. The percentage of students who attend segregated schools has decreased by 12 percentage points, from 42% to 30%, and the percentage of students who attend integrated schools has increased by five percentage points, from 39% to 44% (using the US Department of Education definition that a school is segregated if less than 10% or more than 90% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch and is integrated if the percentage is between 25% and 75%). Some of our most recent efforts to promote integration include:
 - Shared school zones in which students in more than one neighborhood are given preferential access to schools within the larger zone through the choice process. Examples include the Park Hill/Stapleton middle school zone and the Sunnyside, Highlands/Berkeley middle school zone. These zones have had a positive, though not large, effect on

integration.

- For new schools, drawing the boundaries to include a diverse community and including preferences for certain neighborhoods in order to encourage diversity. The boundary for the new Northfield high school is an example and has resulted in a very diverse school.
- Free and reduced “floors” for some of our charter schools, including most DSST’s, Odyssey, Highline and Downtown Denver Expeditionary School, and at least one district-run school, McAuliffe-Manual. Schools with FRL floors, where FRL students receive preference in the choice system, have increased diversity.
- Pilot program in some of our least diverse schools providing a preference for FRL students in the choice process. The pilot includes Asbury, Bromwell, C3, Edison, Sandoval, Slavens, Steele and East. The pilot program has produced inconsistent results; we are continuing to analyze the data to determine why.
- ***How do we attract and keep more teachers of color?*** Research shows that students of color learn better if their teachers look like them (controlling for teacher quality). While DPS has consistently maintained a more diverse teacher workforce than our surrounding districts, we still have too few teachers of color. More than 70% of our students are students of color but fewer than 30% of our teachers are teachers of color. Our efforts to diversify our teacher workforce include: building partnerships with historically black colleges and universities and other higher education institutions that graduate a high percentage of students of color; launching a visitor teacher exchange program with Mexico for school year 2017-18; partnering with the Mayor’s Office on the “Make Your Mark” campaign to recruit both local and national educators of color to Denver (for more information, see www.MakeYourMarkDenver.com); contracting with recruiting firms outside of Colorado to reach more diverse candidates beyond our internal pipelines; focusing on growing our own diverse talent within DPS by launching our Paraprofessional-to-Teacher program (65% of our more than 2000 paraprofessionals are of color), with 14 initial participants this year and plans to expand the program to more participants annually; and developing EducationConnect, a CareerConnect pathway for current DPS students who are interested in careers in education.
- ***Do we need more academic program choices in East Denver?*** For example, specialized academic programs focused on science, technology or the arts? Because East Denver is not growing and adding new schools, it may not be possible to create a new program without closing an existing one.
- ***How do we increase participation in sports programs in order to increase physical activity/physical fitness?*** Given that we have limited resources, should we shift resources from traditional PE to more inclusive sports programs? Can we get more bang for our buck by partnering with nonprofits that provide sports?
- ***How do we increase/improve arts offerings in our schools?*** With the funding from the 2012 mill levy developed by the committee that I co-chaired, we expanded arts, music and PE by hiring additional teachers and we funded a significant expansion of the arts, music and enrichment instruction provided by our community partners. Do we need more art? Should we cut something else to pay for more art? Do we need more arts-focused schools?
- ***Should we delay the start time for high school?*** The National Academy of Pediatrics recommends that high school start at 8:30 a.m. based on the natural biological clocks of teenagers. Most of our high schools start between 7:30 and 8:00 a.m. Shifting to a later start time creates issues with bus transportation, after school activities and afternoon babysitting for younger siblings. Cherry Creek recently changed its high school start time to 8:20 a.m.