

## Denver Public Schools – Board of Education

### Second Read of policy proposal regarding school consolidation and unification

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#### Create a new Executive Limitation titled **EL-18 School Consolidation and Unification**.

The reduction in the student-aged population in Denver has declined since 2008. It is projected to continue over time and impact Denver's elementary, middle, and high schools due to gentrification, declining birth rates, increased housing prices, the construction of multi-family rather than single-family housing, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reflecting the national trend of declining birth rates, DPS has experienced declining enrollment in elementary schools since 2014. As a result, declining enrollment is starting to cross into reductions at the middle school level, eventually leading to drops in enrollment at the high school level in the next five years.

Based on the district's annual Strategic Regional Analysis document, enrollment growth may also be slowed by the continued shift in residential development. Aside from the development near Denver International Airport and the Gateway neighborhood, almost all of the additional residential units planned across Denver will be small multi-family units that have historically had lower student yields. Further, aging generations are staying in their homes longer, resulting in a lack of turnover of housing to new families.

Due to the declining enrollment expected for at least five more years, the Board of Education believes it is necessary to consolidate and unify schools to maintain the financial viability of the district and to maximize the resources, staff, and programs offered to students.

Accordingly, the Superintendent shall not fail to:

1. Propose schools for consolidation and unification that equitably distributes the burden of declining enrollment across all of Denver and maximizes student resources and opportunities. Take reasonable steps to the following:
  - 1.1. Most under-enrolled schools in DPS are located in historically marginalized neighborhoods. The schools tend to serve a disproportionate number of emerging bilinguals, students of color, students with disabilities, and students that qualify for free or reduced lunch. As kindergarten enrollment has declined since 2014, a stigma now exists for "small schools," which can accelerate the school's enrollment decline. Therefore, do not use enrollment minimums (e.g., 215 students) as bright line criteria for consolidation. Schools of any enrollment size are eligible for consolidation.
  - 1.2. Do not use standardized test scores or SPF ratings (school performance framework) as a condition for consolidation or unification.
  - 1.3. Avoid consolidating a boundary school with another boundary school that is greater than two miles away.
2. Declining birthrates and enrollment is impacting most regions of Denver, therefore, involve the community through regional meetings and conversations to help inform and co-create future recommendations for addressing declining enrollment. Ensure all schools within a region have an

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equitable voice in the conversations. At a minimum, discuss the following with the regional communities:

- 2.1. Demographic trends within the region.
- 2.2. Outline the positive implications of proceeding and the negative implications of not proceeding with school unifications and consolidations.
- 2.3. Demonstration of accelerated achievement of the Board's Ends policies and increased access to resources and opportunities resulting from consolidation and unification.
- 2.4. Building utilization rates, boundary enrollment rates, and choice enrollment rates.
- ~~2.5. Forecasts from the Strategic Regional Analysis document, Denver Housing Authority, including the region's enrollment and housing forecasts.~~
- 2.6. Concerns of inaccessible routes, missing or narrow sidewalks, gaps in bicycle infrastructure, and dangerous streets between schools within the region in coordination with the City's Safe Routes to School Action Plan.
- 2.7. Concerns about accessibility into school buildings and the condition of the facilities and major building equipment within the region.
- 2.8. Locations of center-based programs and TNLI (transitional native language instruction) programs within the region.
- 2.9. Status of district-provided transportation at each school within the region.
- 2.10. Unique programming and staffing available to students with IEPs (individualized education program) at each school within the region.
- 2.11. Unique educational programming available at each school within the region, including curriculum, culture, staff, and electives.
3. Ensure the students, parents, and guardians at schools recommended for consolidation are informed and understand the enrollment options available to them. Students impacted by school consolidation, including charter school closures, shall have priority enrollment into all district-managed and charter schools and a guaranteed seat at their boundary/zone school.
4. Ensure the faculty at schools recommended for consolidation and unification are informed and understand available employment opportunities. Include the following information in presentations:
  - 4.1. Demonstrate improved educational experiences to achieve the Board's Ends policies.
  - 4.2. Demonstrate financial efficiencies through the consolidation of administration and school support services when two or more schools are unified.
  - 4.3. Explain employment guarantees, if applicable, for employees at consolidated schools.
  - 4.4. Procedures for innovation plans, if applicable.
5. Ensure the Board of Education is informed and understands the financial and programmatic implications of declining enrollment before receiving the Superintendent's recommendations for school consolidation and unification. Include the following information in presentations:
  - 5.1. Demonstrate improved educational experiences per the Board's Ends policies and compliance with Executive Limitation policies.
  - 5.2. Demonstrate financial efficiencies through the consolidation of administration and school supports when two or more schools are unified.
  - 5.3. Plans to ensure students from a consolidating school have a safe and accessible route to the unified school in coordination with the City's Safe Routes to School Action Plan.
  - 5.4. Preliminary plans for the future use of consolidated buildings.
  - 5.5. Potential impacts to the bond fund when consolidating and unifying schools.

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6. Propose schools for unification and consolidation on this timeline:
  - 6.1. September Board Work Session — Superintendent shall announce any schools recommended for unification and consolidation.
  - 6.2. October Board Work Session — Board of Education shall report any concerns with the Superintendent's reasonable interpretation of Board policy for schools recommended for unification and consolidation.
  - 6.3. November Special Public Comment Session – Provide a special comment session exclusively for students, parents, and guardians that attend a school recommended for consolidation or unification. The district shall follow up with the speakers for any open items, questions, or misunderstandings by November 30th.
  - 6.4. January Voting Board Meeting — If the Superintendent has reasonably interpreted board policy, the Board of Education shall vote to approve the Superintendent's consolidation and unification recommendations.