



**United States Department of Education  
Office for Civil Rights**

**DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT FORM**

**You do not have to use this form to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR). You may send OCR a letter or email instead of this form, but the letter or email must include the information in items 1-15 of this form. If you decide to use this form, please type or print all information and use additional pages if more space is needed. An online, fillable version of this form, which can be submitted electronically, can be found at:**

**<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html>.**

Before completing this form, please read all information contained in the enclosed packet including: Information About OCR’s Complaint Resolution Procedures, Notice of Uses of Personal Information and the Consent Form.

If you have questions about civil rights or how to file a complaint, you may contact OCR at 800-421-3481, 800-877-8339 (TTY), [OCR@ed.gov](mailto:OCR@ed.gov), or by calling the enforcement office that serves your state or territory. Contact information for enforcement offices can be found at: <https://ocrcas.ed.gov/contact-ocr>.

If you have difficulty understanding English, you may, free of charge, request language assistance services for this Department information by calling 1-800- USA-LEARN (1- 800-872-5327) (TTY: 1-800-877-8339), or email us at: [Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov](mailto:Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov). If you are a person with a disability, you may request disability-related assistance by contacting OCR at 800-421-3481, 800-877-8339 (TTY), [OCR@ed.gov](mailto:OCR@ed.gov), or by calling the enforcement office that serves your state or territory. Contact information for enforcement offices can be found at:

<https://ocrcas.ed.gov/contact-ocr>. To request this document in an alternate format such as Braille or large print please contact the Department at 202-260-0852 or [om\\_eeos@ed.gov](mailto:om_eeos@ed.gov).

1. Name of person filing this complaint:

Last Name: Nation First Name: D. Sean Address:

2596 South Lewis Way

City: Lakewood State: CO Zip Code: 80227

Primary number: 720-640-8706 Alternate number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: dnation@mslegal.org

2. Name of person discriminated against (if **other** than person filing). If the person discriminated against is age 18 or older, we will need that person's signature on this complaint form and the consent/release form before we can proceed with this complaint. If the person is a minor, and you do not have the legal authority to file a complaint on the student's behalf, the signature of the child's parent, guardian, or other authorized legal representative is required.

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address:

Caucasian Students; heterosexual and

City: non-transgender students State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Alternative Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

3. OCR investigates discrimination complaints against schools, colleges and universities, institutions, and agencies which receive funds or other forms of financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education and against public educational entities and libraries that are subject to the provisions of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Please identify the institution or agency that engaged in the alleged discrimination. If we cannot accept your complaint, we will attempt to refer it to the appropriate agency and will notify you of that fact.

Name of Institution: Denver Public Schools

Address: 1860 Lincoln ST.

City: Denver State: CO Zip Code: 80203

Department/School: All Programs and Activities, Math Extension

4. The regulations OCR enforces prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age. The regulations also ban retaliation against persons who assert the right to be free from discrimination. Please note the following:

- Discrimination based on race, color, and national origin includes failure to provide meaningful access to English learners and limited English proficient parents and guardians, as well as discrimination based on shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics or based on citizenship in a country with a dominant religion.

- Discrimination based on sex includes discrimination based on sex stereotypes, pregnancy or related conditions, sexual orientation, and gender identity, as well as rules about parental, family, or marital status that treat people differently based on sex.
- Discrimination based on disability includes discrimination against individuals who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, as well as individuals who have a record of or are regarded as having a disability.
- Discrimination based on age does not limit protection against discrimination to a certain age group (e.g., people over 40); however, there are a variety of exceptions to the relevant Federal law that may permit age to be taken into account.
- Retaliation refers to actions taken for the purpose of interfering with any rights under the laws enforced by OCR, or because you made a complaint, testified, or participated in any manner in an OCR proceeding.

Please indicate the basis of your complaint:

**Discrimination based on race (specify)**

DPS offers opportunities to non-Caucasian students based on different criteria than Caucasian students. One example is attached.

**Discrimination based on color (specify)**

DPS has also conducted outreach based on race and color, and has included steps in its strategic plan based on race.

**Discrimination based on national origin (specify)**

**Discrimination based on sex (specify)**

Because DPS programs also target students based on sexual orientation and transgender status, they violate Title IX, under Bostock.

Discrimination **based on disability (specify)**

Discrimination **based on age (specify)**

**Retaliation because you filed a complaint or otherwise asserted rights under laws enforced by OCR (specify)**

**Violation of the Boy Scouts of America Equal Access Act (specify)**

5. Please describe each alleged discriminatory act. For each action, please include the date(s) the discriminatory act occurred, the name(s) of each person(s) involved and, why you believe the discrimination was because of race, disability, age, sex, etc. Also please provide the names of any person(s) who was present and witnessed the act(s) of discrimination.

See attachments. For math extension opportunities, a Caucasian student must be in the 95th percentile or higher. For non-Caucasians, only the 90th percentile is needed. DPS also affords numerous opportunities using discriminatory criteria. All of these are illegal under Title VI, as noted in OCR's Aug 24 DCL.

6. Do you have documents or written information that you think will help us to understand your complaint?
- No
  - Yes

If yes, please describe the documents or written information you have.

Exhibit 1 is a short memo; Exhibit 2 is an email from [REDACTED] to parents apprising them of a math extension opportunity; Exhibit 3 is DPS's Strategic Roadmap

If OCR investigates your complaint, we may ask you to provide us the items you describe above.

7. What is the most recent date you were discriminated against?

Date: September 2023

8. If this date is **more than 180 days ago**, you may request a waiver of the filing requirement.

I am requesting a waiver of the 180-day time frame for filing this complaint.

Please explain why did not file your complaint within 180 days.

9. Have you complained about the allegations that you raise in this complaint to your school, institution, or another organization or agency?

YES  NO

If yes, have you complained about the allegations that you raise in this complaint by:

filing an internal complaint or appeal with your school or institution?

participating in your school or institution's grievance procedures?

participating in a due process hearing either at your school or institution, or through another organization or government agency?

If you answered **yes to any of the above questions**, please describe the allegations that you raised in an internal complaint or appeal, through your school or institution’s grievance procedures, or in a due process hearing, identify the date you complained about the allegations and where you made the complaint, and tell us the status of the complaint, appeal, grievance procedures, or due process hearing. If possible, please provide us with a copy of your complaint or grievance or appeal or due process request and, if completed, the decision in the matter.

N/A

10. If the allegations contained in this complaint have been filed with any other Federal, state or local civil rights agency, or any Federal or state court, please give details and dates. We will determine whether it is appropriate to investigate your complaint based upon the specific allegations of your complaint and the actions taken by the other agency or court.

Agency or Court: N/A

Date Filed: \_\_\_\_\_

Case Number or Reference: \_\_\_\_\_

**Results of Investigation/Findings by Agency or Court:**

11. You do not need to have a lawyer to file a complaint with OCR; however, if you do have a lawyer, OCR staff are required to communicate directly with your lawyer. If you have a lawyer representing you in this matter, please provide the lawyer’s contact information.

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

12. If we cannot reach you at your home or work, we would like to have the name and telephone number of another person (relative or friend) who knows where and when we can reach you. This information **is not required**, but it will be helpful to us.

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

13. **Option to Participate in OCR's Early Mediation Process**

OCR provides an early mediation process as an opportunity for you and the recipient institution to voluntarily resolve your complaint soon after you file it with OCR.

Mediation is a form of complaint resolution that OCR offers as an alternative to its investigative process. Mediation is an informal process in which a staff member from OCR who is trained in mediation assists the parties to reach a negotiated resolution of the complaint. The mediator does not decide who is right or wrong and does not have the authority to impose a settlement on the parties. Instead, the mediator helps the parties to find a mutually acceptable resolution to your complaint. Mediation is a strictly voluntary process. If either party does not want to participate in mediation, OCR will address the complaint through its regular processes.

***If you are interested in participating in the early mediation process, you must check the box below.*** If you indicate your interest in early mediation by checking the box below **and** OCR determines that your complaint is appropriate for this process, OCR will contact you and the recipient institution and offer this resolution option. If the recipient agrees to participate in early mediation, OCR will work with you and the recipient to achieve a mutually agreeable resolution of your complaint. If the recipient does not wish to participate in early mediation, OCR will proceed with its regular processing of your complaint. ***If you do not indicate your interest in early mediation by checking the box below, early mediation will not be offered to you and OCR will proceed with its regular processing of your complaint.***

***I am interested in participating in early mediation (Please check box):***

**NOTE:** You **MUST** submit a signed Consent Form to OCR if you want to participate in early mediation.

14. What would you like the institution to do as a result of your complaint  
— what remedy are you seeking?

**Removal of all race-based and sex-based  
criteria for participation in DPS's programs or  
activities. Entry of monitoring agreement with  
regular reporting obligations.**

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Complaint Form, Consent Form, and Complaint Processing Procedures

15. We cannot accept your complaint if it has not been signed. Please sign and date your complaint below.

9/22/23  
(Date)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of person in Item 2)

Please mail or email the completed and signed Discrimination Complaint Form, your signed consent form and copies of any written material or other documents you believe will help OCR understand your complaint to the OCR Enforcement Office responsible for the state where the institution or entity about which you are complaining is located. You can locate the mailing information for the correct enforcement office on OCR's website at <https://ocrcas.ed.gov/contact-ocr>.

**CONSENT FORM - FOR DISCLOSING NAME AND OTHER PERSONAL INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THE DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT FORM TO OTHERS**

(Please print or type except for signature line)

Your Name: D. Sean Nation

Name of School or Other Institution That You Have Filed This Complaint Against: \_\_\_\_\_

Denver Public Schools

- The purpose of this consent form is for the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) to request your consent to disclose your name and other personal information when OCR decides that doing so will assist in investigating and resolving your complaint.
- For example, to decide whether a school discriminated against a person, OCR often needs to reveal that person's name and other personal information to employees at that school to verify facts or get additional information. When OCR does that, OCR informs the employees that all forms of retaliation against that person and other individuals associated with the person are prohibited. OCR may also reveal the person's name and personal information during interviews with witnesses and consultations with experts.
- If you do not consent to OCR disclosing your name or other personal information, OCR may decide to close your complaint if OCR determines it is necessary to disclose such information in order to determine whether the school discriminated against you.


**NOTE:** If you file a complaint with OCR, OCR can release certain information about your complaint to the press or general public, including the name of the school or institution; the date your complaint was filed; the type of discrimination included in your complaint; the date your complaint was resolved, dismissed or closed; the basic reasons for OCR's decision; or other related information. Any information OCR releases to the press or general public will not include your name or the name of the person on whose behalf you filed the complaint.

**NOTE:** OCR requires you to respond to its requests for information. Failure to cooperate with OCR's investigation and resolution activities could result in the closure of your complaint.

**Please sign section A or section B (but not both) and return to OCR:**

- If you filed the complaint on behalf of yourself, you should sign this form.
- If you filed the complaint on behalf of another specific person, that other person should sign this form.  
**EXCEPTION:** If the complaint was filed on behalf of a specific person who is younger than 18 years old or a legally incompetent adult, this form must be signed by the parent or legal guardian of that person.
- If you filed the complaint on behalf of a class of people, rather than any specific person, you should sign the form.

A. **I give OCR my consent to disclose my name (and that of my minor child/ward on whose behalf the complaint is filed) and other personal information contained in the Discrimination Complaint Form to others for OCR's investigation of, and enforcement activities related to, the Discrimination Complaint Form.**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

9/22/23  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**OR**

B. **I do not give OCR my consent to disclose my name (and that of my minor child/ward on whose behalf the complaint is filed) nor other personal information contained in the Discrimination Complaint Form to others for OCR's investigation of, and enforcement activities related to, the Discrimination Complaint Form. I understand that OCR may have to close my complaint.**

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**Signature**

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**Date**

I declare under penalty of perjury that it is true and correct that I am the person named above; and, if the complaint is filed by a parent or legal guardian on behalf of a minor child/individual who has been declared to be incompetent due to physical or mental incapacity or age by a court of competent jurisdiction, that I am that person's parent or legal guardian. This declaration only provides consent for the disclosure of identity of the persons (and other individually identifiable information about them contained in the Discrimination Complaint Form) and does not extend to any of the claims filed in the complaint.

*Updated June 30, 2023*

## **Excerpt from the Online [Interactive Complaint Form](#)**

### **Race / Color / National Origin / Ethnicity / Shared Ancestry**

Discrimination based on national origin includes discrimination based on the country, world region, or place where a person or their ancestors come from; a person's limited English proficiency or English learner status; and a person's actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, including membership in a religion that may be perceived to exhibit such characteristics (e.g., Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh students). For more information about race, color, and national origin discrimination, please visit [www.ed.gov/ocr/frontpage/pro-students/race-origin-pr.html](http://www.ed.gov/ocr/frontpage/pro-students/race-origin-pr.html).

### **Sex**

Discrimination based on sex includes discrimination based on sex stereotypes, pregnancy or related conditions, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Discrimination based on sex also encompasses rules about parental, family, or marital status that treat people differently based on sex. For more information about sex discrimination, please visit <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/rights/guid/ocr/sexoverview.html>.

### **Disability**

A person with a disability is defined as any person who (i) has a physical or mental impairment, which substantially limits one or more major life activities, or (ii) has a record of such impairment, or (iii) is regarded as having such an impairment. Whether a person has a disability is determined without considering mitigating measures. For more information about disability discrimination, please visit [www.ed.gov/policy/rights/guid/ocr/disability.html](http://www.ed.gov/policy/rights/guid/ocr/disability.html).

# **EXHIBIT 1**



**MOUNTAIN STATES LEGAL  
FOUNDATION**  
FREE COUNTRY. FREE PEOPLE.

2596 South Lewis Way | Lakewood, CO 80227 | Tel: 303.292.2021

September 22, 2023

**VIA MAIL AND E-MAIL**

**SHORT MEMORADNDUM (Exhibit 1)**

To: Catherine Lhamon, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education

CC: Denver Regional Office, U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights

From: D. Sean Nation, Deputy General Counsel, Mountain States Legal Foundation

Date: September 22, 2023

RE: Denver Public Schools' Use of Race and Sex as Criteria for Programming

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As noted in the OCR complaint, Denver Public Schools (DPS) engages in explicit race-conscious decision-making in affording programs and activities to students. As just one example, in Exhibit 2, you can see that students are eligible for participation in math extension based on different criteria, depending on race. This is a violation of Title VI, as confirmed by OCR's August 24, 2023 Dear Colleague Letter.

Additionally, DPS recently announced its District-wide Strategic Plan, which essentially confesses that it has violated civil rights laws in the past, and promises to engage in numerous discriminatory acts based on the race and sex of students in the school district. In Exhibit 3, you will find the following statements in the DPS Strategic Plan:

- (1) DPS acknowledges that it has used race as a factor in the past, by listening more closely to the concerns of individuals based on their sex or race. For instance, DPS's Superintendent "began his superintendency prioritizing listening to members of the DPS community,

particularly those who represent voices of our marginalized students and families.” (Page 28)

(2) And it admits that it has developed its new Strategic Plan specifically based on listening more closely, and paying more attention, to certain people based on their race and sex:

a. “The strategic roadmap was developed using the following equity framework questions that came out of the Transition Team’s Equity and Excellence Subcommittee:

i. For which historically marginalized groups does this issue matter? Why is it important based on past and current inequities for those groups within DPS?

...

ii. How will we know the proposed action has its intended outcome for historically marginalized groups? (Page 16)

(3) DPS also acknowledges that its new Strategic Plan is meant to cater more to individuals, based on their race and sex: “In this strategic roadmap, we are envisioning a new DPS experience. One that centers our students, particularly our marginalized students, while also elevating the experience of our adults.” (Page 3)

(4) And DPS has crafted the Strategic Plan in a particular way to increase its ability to listen to certain individuals based on their race and sex, in the future: “As critical partners in transforming the DPS experience, we also know we need to engage our families, particularly of marginalized identities, by expanding engagement opportunities and cultivating community relationships.” (Page 26)

- (5) DPS’s confessions do not stop there. Indeed, one of DPS’s goals is expressly to “Accelerate the growth trajectory **for marginalized students and prioritize them** and their communities in our culture and decision-making.” (Page 18)
- (6) This theme is repeatedly stated: “But because of the inequities in our system, we know we **must prioritize some students on an accelerated trajectory...**” (Page 19)
- (7) And DPS intends to focus its limited financial and personnel resources on this mission: “For every learner to truly thrive, **we must shift focus, resources and opportunities to accelerate the trajectory of our marginalized students** because we know opportunity without added support is a hollow promise.” (Page 20)
- (8) DPS does not shy away from the concept of prioritizing “marginalized students” above other students. Indeed, DPS criticizes the idea of “equal opportunity”: “We will prioritize our marginalized students on an accelerated trajectory, **providing students with added support** so they benefit from opportunities. **Equal opportunity is necessary, but is not sufficient to eliminate our persistent student gaps.**” (Page 22)
- (9) DPS grounds this mission in readiness for college, career, and life: “Goal: Learners are on track to graduate ready for career, college and life in a post-pandemic global society, with **an accelerated trajectory for marginalized students.**” (Page 22)
- (10) Stated similarly DPS plans to: “Accelerate the growth trajectory **of marginalized students** by developing, implementing and improving high-quality specialized plans for **students of color**, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and other marginalized groups.” (Page 23)
- (11) DPS also plans to: “Accelerate the growth trajectory **of marginalized students** by developing, implementing and improving high-quality **specialized plans for students of**

color, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and other marginalized groups.”

(Page 23)

(12) DPS intends to focus enrichment and extracurricular learning opportunities based on race and sex: “Pursuit of Passion: Increase access to enrichment and extracurricular learning opportunities for every learner, with a focus on marginalized students.” (Page 23)

(13) DPS plans to expand engagement opportunities specifically for “families of marginalized identities”: “As critical partners in transforming the DPS experience, we also know we need to engage our families, particularly of marginalized identities, by expanding engagement opportunities and cultivating community relationships.” (Page 26)

(14) DPS also plans to “Strengthen and expand initiatives to recruit, hire, retain and advance team members of marginalized identities at all levels of the organization...” (Page 28)

(15) DPS intends to “Deepen the way we engage, educate and communicate to encourage greater dialogue among our entire DPS community, with a focus on outreach to families and community members of marginalized identities.” (Page 28)

(16) DPS says that it will “Strengthen and establish advisory groups to increase the voice of marginalized groups.” (Page 28)

(17) One of DPS’s specific goals is to “Improve participation of families of marginalized identities in district decision-making by 10 percentage points.” (Page 29)

Separately, lest there be any doubt, DPS has clearly defined the term “marginalized identities” by reference to both race and sex<sup>1</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> After *Bostock*, a student’s heterosexuality and/or non-transgender status is based on their biological sex, and discrimination against students on either basis is prohibited under Title IX.

Definition of Equity Statement: “Equity statement: Racial and educational equity is our collective responsibility. We will achieve equity when we dismantle deeply rooted systems of oppression that have historically resulted in inequitable access and distribution of opportunities and resources for those who represent marginalized identities, including race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, language and ability.” (Page 36)

Definition of Marginalized Identities: “Marginalized identities: Groups and communities who experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political and economic) because of unequal power. This includes but is not limited to individuals who experience discrimination and exclusion because of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, language and ability (Page 36)

### **Conclusion**

DPS’s efforts to violate federal civil rights laws are brazen. OCR must intervene now to protect DPS students of all races and both sexes from discriminatory conduct. I am open to early mediation to ensure that DPS’s programming is completely colorblind, and that it commits to a robust monitoring agreement with OCR.

*/s/ D. Sean Nation*

---

D. Sean Nation  
MOUNTAIN STATES LEGAL FOUNDATION  
2596 South Lewis Way  
Lakewood, Colorado 80227  
(303) 292-2021  
(877) 349-7074 (facsimile)  
snation@mslegal.org

# **EXHIBIT 2**

Date: Mon, Sep 11, 2023 at 12:08 PM

Subject: GT/Extension ( ) Groups Start This Week!

To:

Greetings!

If you are receiving this email, your student will have the opportunity to participate in a 4th-grade math extension group.

Students in this group meet one of the following criteria:

1. Formally identified as GT/HGT with a strength area in mathematics,
2. Have 'magnet-eligibility' with a qualifying cognitive score of 95%ile or higher and demonstrated relative strength in mathematics,
3. Have two or more qualifying pieces of data for GT identification, or
4. Students of Color, Multilingual Learners, and Twice Exceptional students with 90%ile or higher achievement or cognitive data.

#### **Formally IDed, Family input surveys and ALPs- Week of 9/25**

If you are wondering which of these designations applies to your kiddo, please wait until the first week of October to inquire. I have updated the identification for over 120 students over the summer and will be sending out formal ID updates soon. If you don't receive a survey for ALP input for me by the end of September and are curious about your student's current identification status, please shoot me an email at that time (October) and I will happily provide individualized bodies of evidence, and next steps towards attempts for formal GT/HGT identification.

#### **Group Schedule**

I will be providing a once-a-week in-person extension class during your 4th-grade students' Monday 'Walk-to-Learn'

#### **Trimester-At-Glance**

We do a daily IGNITE! (a divergent thinking activity meant to get your brain ready to do hard things). I will post links to them as we do them in the Google Classroom/GC if you want to try some yourself (see below).

Through the end of October, students will prep for the Noetic Math Tournament. The competition is national and requires students to solve 20 problems with above-grade-level concepts and problems involving logic and reasoning. They will compete in our classroom during one of our regular sessions.

Practice sets will be posted on the GC (see below).

and will also host weekly Math Olympiad problem sets and debrief sessions.

## Google Classroom

This is where all of our work is posted. If you want to know more, check in with your student and they can show you what we are up to in here.

## Outside of School Commitment

Students can do as much or as little of their work outside of school. I am not a fan of homework. Our students work hard when they are here and need time to relax or frolic in the sunshine, get exercise, and enjoy unstructured downtime, and if they do extra work from the group it should be because it sparks joy!

I have the best job! On occasion I have had a parent or family member ask me if I know just how special and awesome this group, experience, and all of the relationships that are built because of our time together are. Yes! Yes, I do! I can't wait to be together again! ❤️

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

# **EXHIBIT 3**



# DPS Thrives:

A Strategic Roadmap to the  
Denver Public Schools Experience







# Waypoints

## Introduction

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The background is a solid blue color. Overlaid on this are several abstract, stylized lines. A prominent white line starts from the top right, curves down and left, then continues horizontally to the left, where it turns down and left again, ending in a large, rounded arrowhead pointing towards the bottom left. A thick green line follows a similar path, starting from the top right, curving down and left, then continuing horizontally to the left, where it turns down and left again, ending in a large, rounded arrowhead pointing towards the bottom left. The text is contained within a white-outlined rectangular box that is part of the white line's path.

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need in order to do this. Whether we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.

*Ron Edmonds, Harvard University  
"A Blueprint for Action II", National Conference on  
Educating Black Children (1987)*

# A Time for Change: Getting Better at Getting Better

For almost 20 years, the Denver Public Schools (DPS) has been a district on the rise. As directed by our last strategic plan, the Denver Plan 2020, we doubled down on great schools in every neighborhood, on a foundation for success in our youngest learners, on career and college readiness, on the whole child, and on closing opportunity gaps. With the vision of Every Child Succeeds as our beacon, we focused on increasing rigor in our classrooms, on early literacy, especially in grades K-3, and on graduating students who are college and career ready. We focused on attracting, developing, and retaining strong talent. We focused on empowering our educators to make decisions based on the needs of their communities. As a result, we've seen the overall achievement of our students trend upwards with the four-year graduation rate increasing 39% to 74% from 2006-07 to 2020-21 and over 18% in the last 10 years.

This upward progress has only been incremental. More troubling, we have only narrowed gaps modestly between racial and student groups. For example, the four-year graduation rates for Black and Latinx/Hispanic have lagged behind that of the district by 3 and 4 percentage points, respectively. Meanwhile, the four-year graduation rates for multilingual learners and students with disabilities have lagged behind that of the district by upwards of 10 percentage points. The percentage of students in third through eighth grade who meet proficiency in Language Arts (English and Spanish) and Mathematics has decreased 5 percent and 10 percent, respectively, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of our students are not yet meeting proficiency. Systemic inequities have prevented far too many Black, Latinx/Hispanic, low-income students, multilingual learners and students with disabilities from succeeding at high levels. Now, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these gaps have widened. The tragic truth is that, when we don't narrow gaps in access and opportunity, it perpetuates the advantage of some over others. When we don't eliminate these gaps, we are contributing to an oppressive system.

Since our last strategic plan expired, our society has faced immense change. Our students, families and educators within Denver Public Schools have not been spared from the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, social and political unrest, and individual levels of uncertainty. We know that many of our students are still struggling today academically, socially and emotionally. And we know this is also true for many of our educators. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified inequities in our educational system. We've seen marginalized communities — those most disenfranchised by our education system — be hit the hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic. A return to the old "normal" would be a missed opportunity. Our students must do more than succeed, they must thrive. As a school district, we have an obligation to not only help our students overcome the obstacles of COVID, but to disrupt and redesign inequitable systems and practices, so ***Every Learner Thrives***.

<sup>1</sup>Anthony S. Bryk, Louis M. Gomez, Louis M., Alicia Grunow, and Paul LeMahieu, *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2015 Linda Darling-Hammond, Cited during public remarks Professor Darling-Hammond offered aloud during her public presentation to members of the New York State Board of Regents on September 13, 2016 (presentation that was titled "New Accountability – 21st Century Learning with Equity" is found at <https://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/Research%20Work%20Group%20-%20accountability-ldh.pdf>)

Despite the challenges of the last few years, we've seen great resilience and persistence. We're discovering new ways of learning and new ways of working together and, with that, comes great opportunity. We are getting better at getting better. For DPS, getting better means we have continuous improvement as our focus and priority. Getting better means we're maximizing potential, not reinforcing advantage and privilege. Getting better means we provide a pathway and the support needed so every student can thrive in school and accomplish their dreams after graduation.

Our opportunity for a great reset of the Denver Public Schools starts now. This is the strategic roadmap that will lead us into a more equitable education system — into more equitable and joyful experiences for our students and adults. Our intent is to bridge the gap between what we say we want to achieve and our actions and their impact. The good news is that we have the power to achieve the results we desire, as long as we identify and break down the systemic barriers that are in our way. As we look ahead, we know the path forward may not always be easy, but we know it is the right journey for Denver's students. In this strategic roadmap, we are envisioning a new DPS experience. One that centers our students, particularly our marginalized students, while also elevating the experience of our adults. One that recognizes the role of systems in creating equity in education and justice in society. One that will turn our vision that *Every Learner Thrives* into a reality.



## Where We Are Now: DPS Data Narrative

The DPS Thrives: Strategic Roadmap is the foundation that will support our mission of ensuring educational equity is our collective responsibility, we prepare students for career, college, and life, and we create conditions and partnerships where students, families, and team members belong and thrive. Due to the unforeseen circumstance of the COVID-19 pandemic, social and political unrest, and individual levels of uncertainty, Denver Public Schools has seen a decline in student academic success. DPS is committed to not only reversing the course of the last few years but improving upon the Student Experience, Adult Experience, and System Experience as we have seen before. Below is a snapshot of critical district data over the last five years as we strive toward being the nation's leading public school district.

### Student Overview & Demographics

#### Student Ethnicity (All Students in District)

Hispanic/Latinx  
**51.7%**

White  
**26.0%**

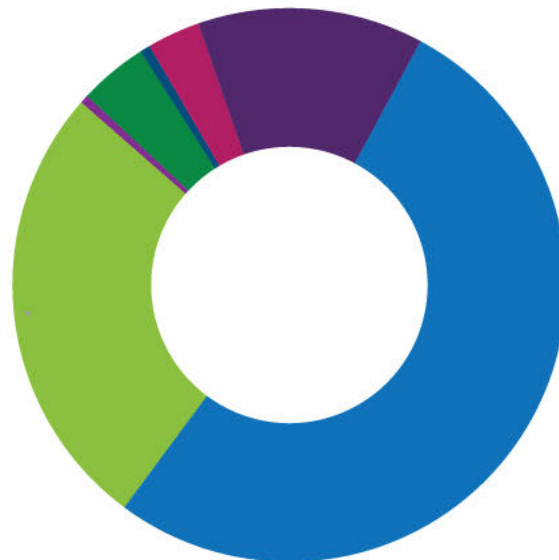
Black/African American  
**13.1%**

Multiethnic  
**4.0%**

Asian  
**3.1%**

Pacific Islander  
**0.5%**

American Indian  
**0.6%**



Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch

**59.4%**

Students with Disabilities

**12.1%**

Student Receiving Gifted and Talented Services

**7.2%**

Students Experiencing Homelessness

**1.3%**

## Over 200 Languages are Spoken by DPS Students and Families!

### The 11 Most Widely Spoken Languages in 2022 are:

English, Spanish, Arabic, Amharic, Vietnamese, Somali, French, Nepali, Tigrigna, Russian, and Mandarin Chinese



**39.1%**

of Students Speak  
Another Language at Home  
(Multilingual Learners)



**25.4%**

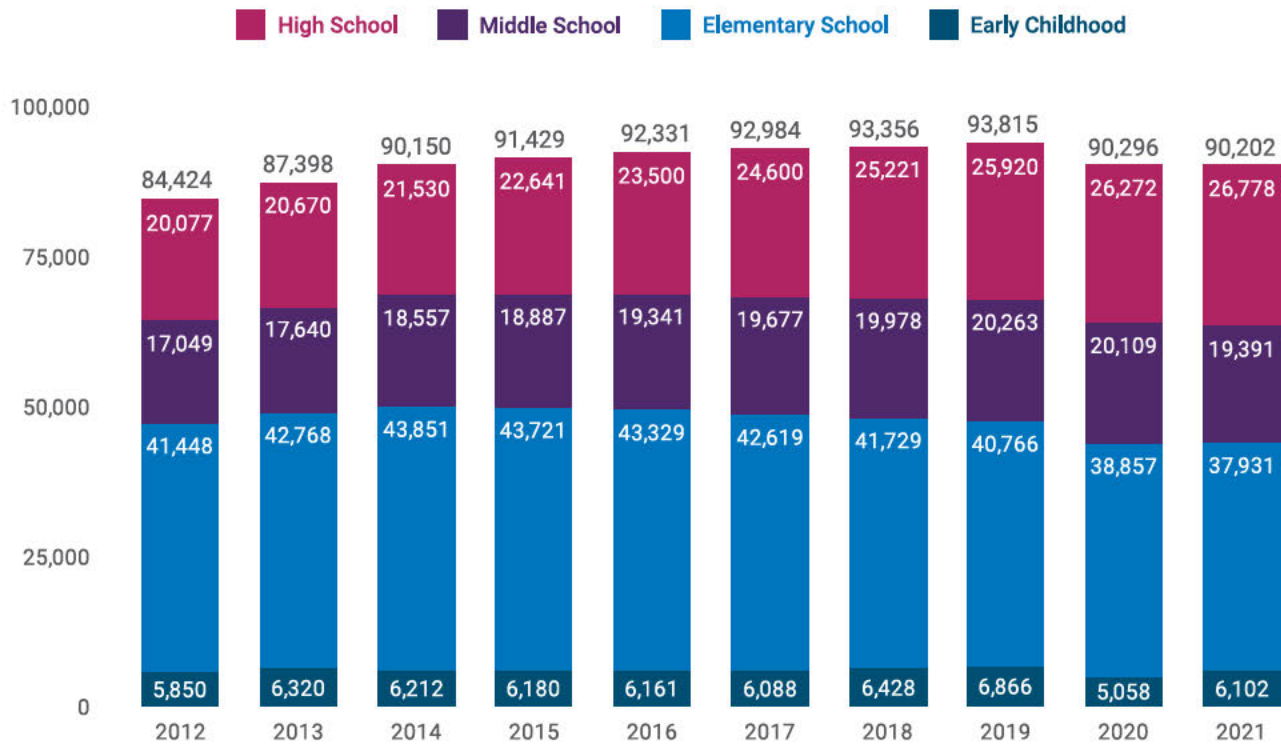
of Multilingual Learners  
Currently Receive Services



**1000+**

Seals of Billiteracy Earned

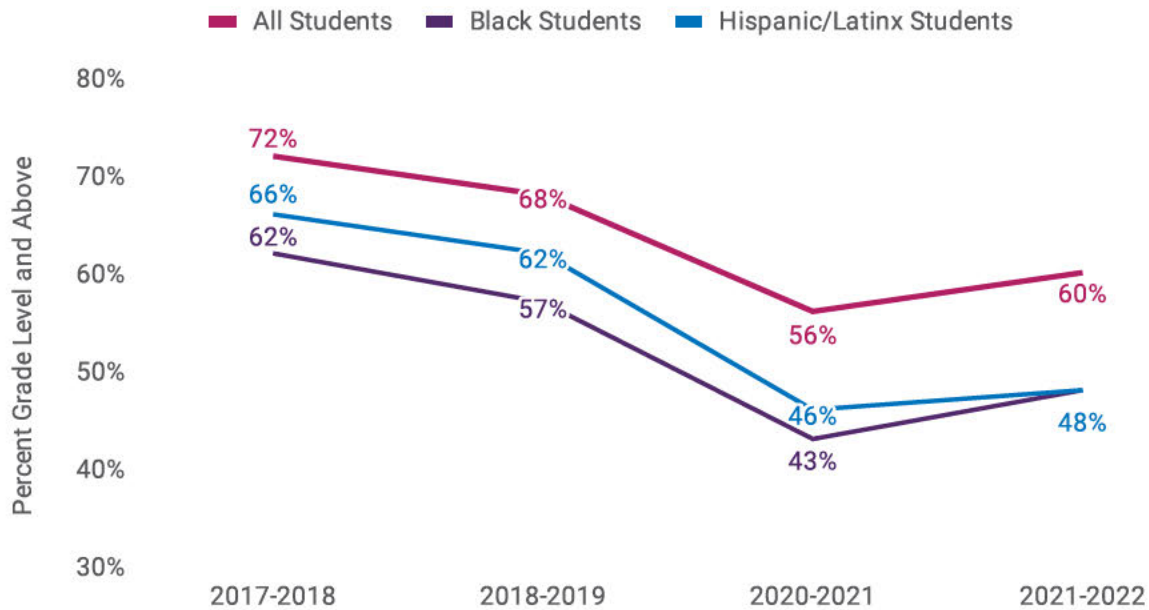
## Enrollment



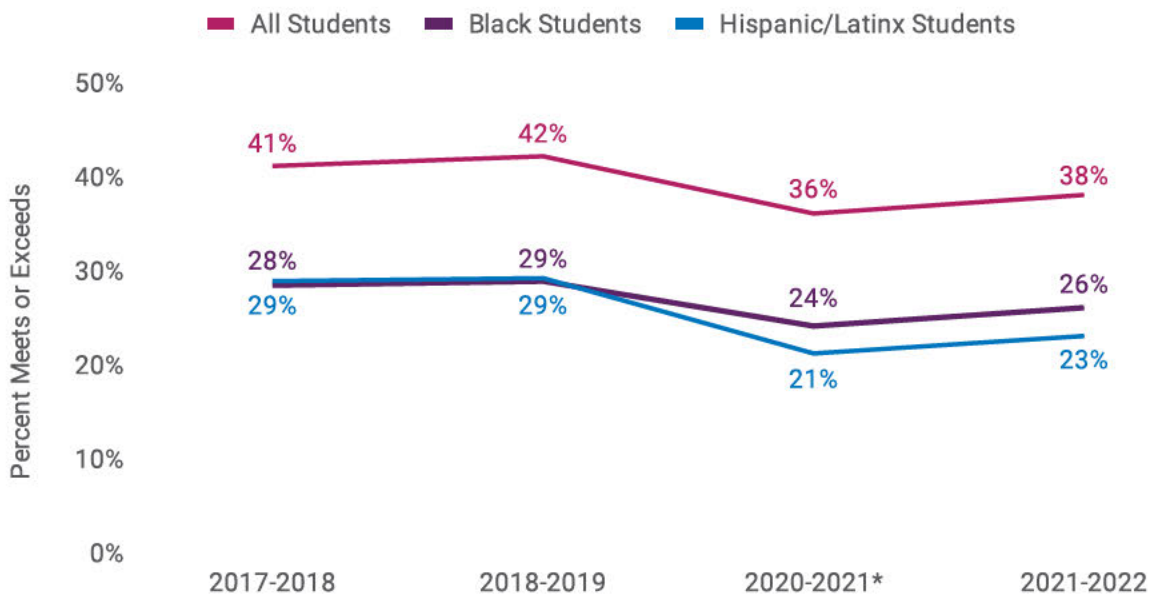
# Our Students

## Student Achievement

### Early Literacy Kindergarten - 3rd Grade (READ Act)

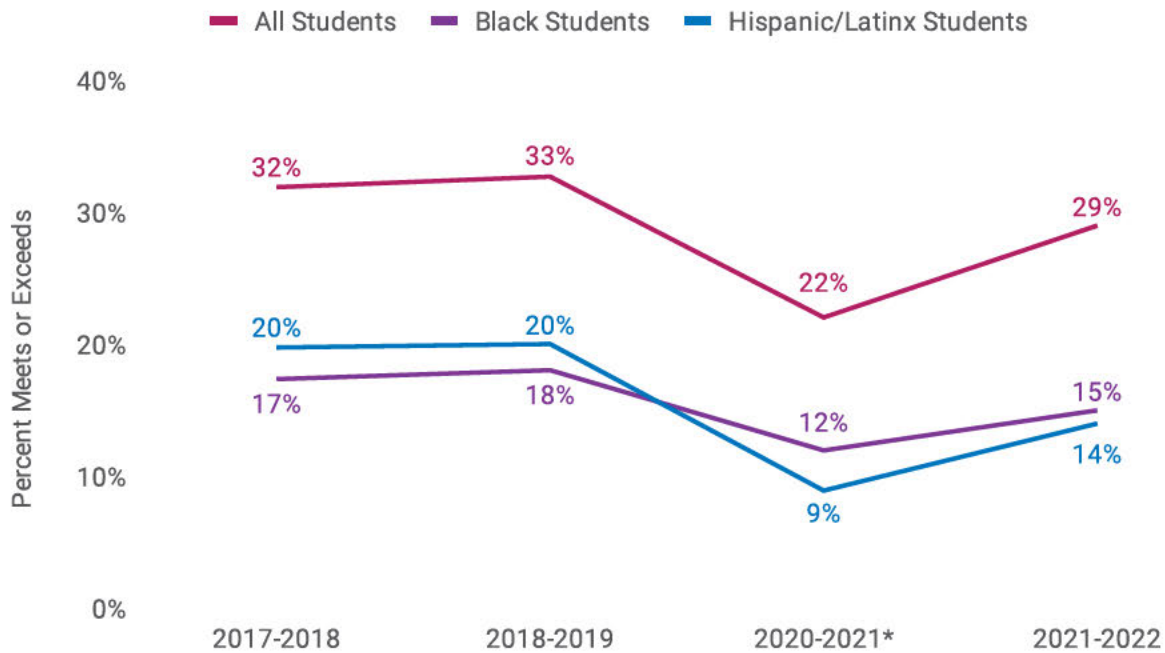


### English and Spanish Language Arts 3rd-8th Grade Proficiency (CMAS)



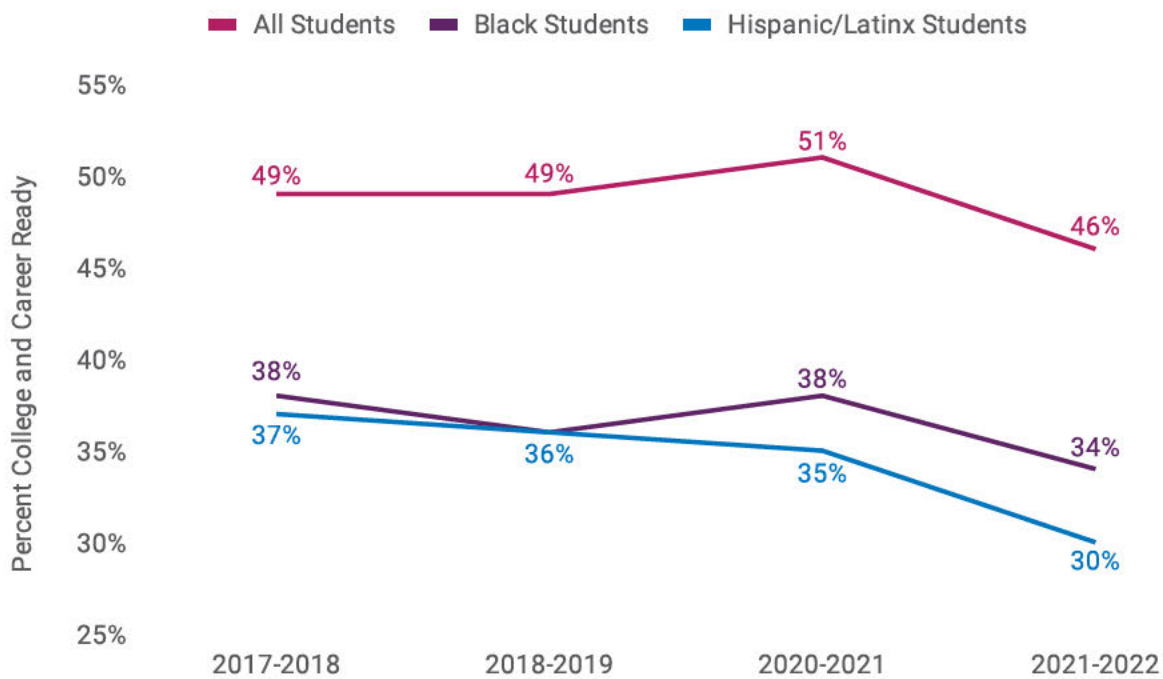
\*Due to COVID in 2020-2021, CDE only required that alternating grades test in alternating content areas for CMAS, coupled with low testing rates resulted in less than 1/2 of DPS students testing in less than 1/2 of the content areas.

## Mathematics 3rd-8th Grade Proficiency (CMAS)



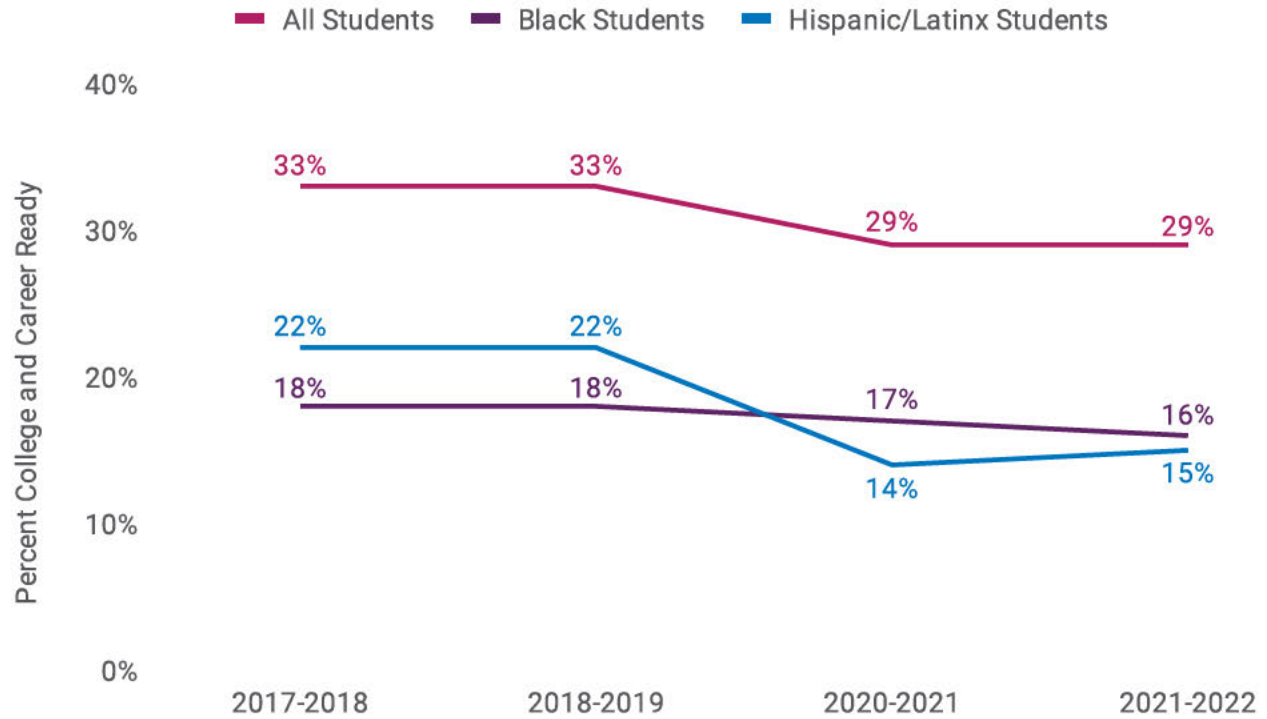
\*Due to COVID in 2020-2021, CDE only required that alternating grades test in alternating content areas for CMAS, coupled with low testing rates resulted in less than 1/2 of DPS students testing in less than 1/2 of the content areas.

## Evidence Based Reading and Writing 11th Grade Proficiency (SAT)

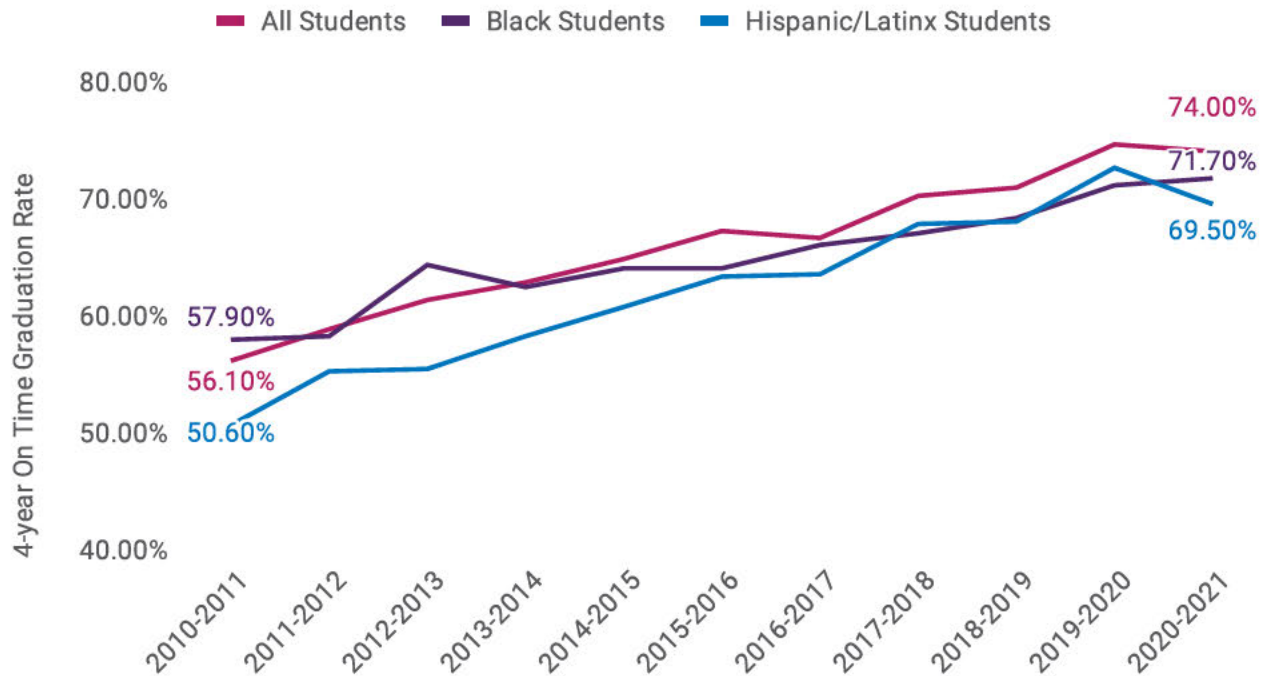


# Our Students

## Mathematics 11th Grade Proficiency (SAT)



## Four Year Graduation Rates



# Our Students

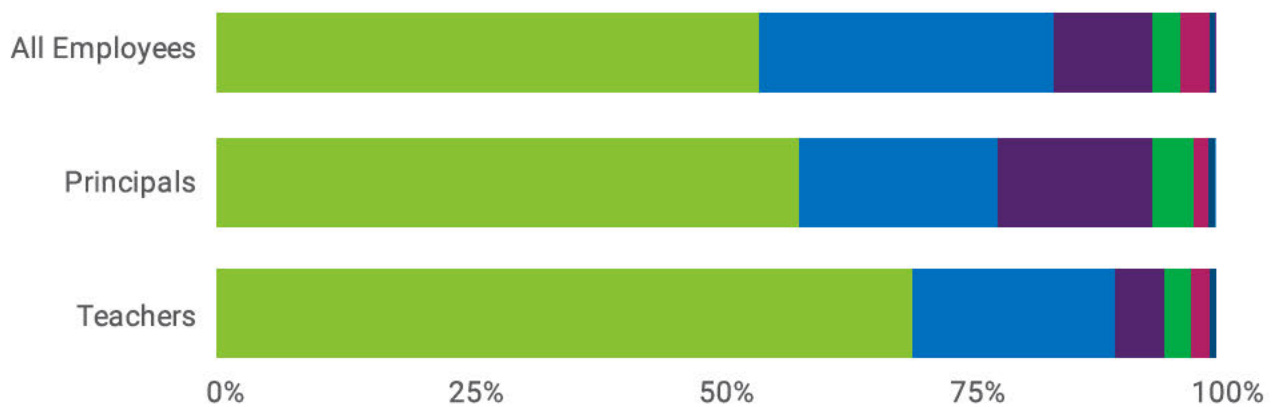


## Over 16,000 Adults Support DPS Students and Community\*

\*As of 7/5/22 all employees. Includes charter employees and seasonal coaches, guest teachers, etc.

### Employee Ethnicity\*

	All Employees	Principals	Teachers
White	55.0%	58.4%	69.8%
Hispanic/Latinx	30.0%	20.1%	20.1%
Black	10.0%	15.5%	4.8%
Multiethnic	3.0%	4.2%	2.7%
Asian	3.0%	1.4%	2.2%
Native American	0.4%	0.9%	0.4%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%



\*Rounding may cause % to not equal 100%. Unknown and withheld race and ethnicity is not included.

## Parent Teacher Home Visits



Total Visits:  
**6,041**



Students Visited:  
**4,509**



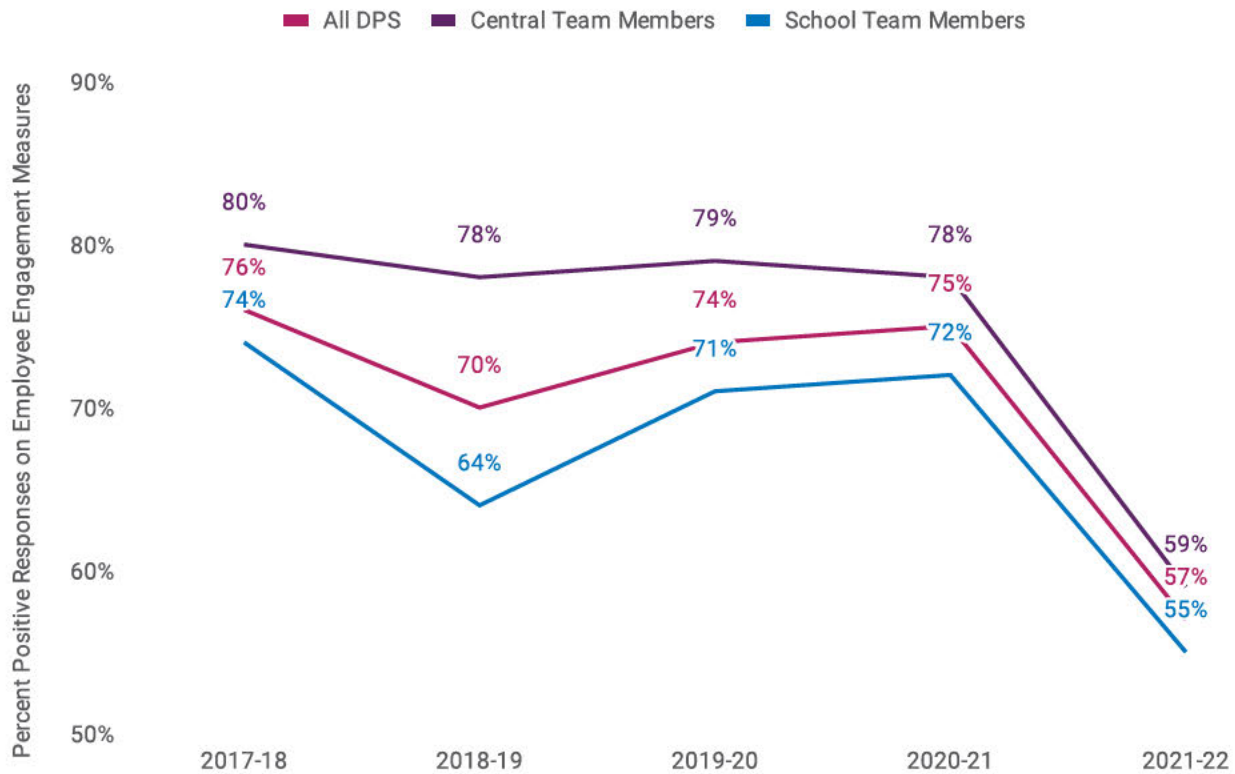
Online Visits:  
**4,242**



In-person Visits:  
**1,786**

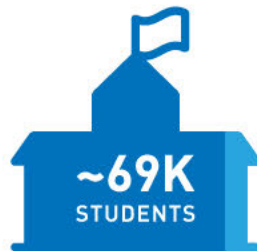
Over 50% of visits were conducted in a language other than English!

## Staff Engagement Over Time *(based on internal employee engagement measures)*



## Our Schools

**202**  
SCHOOLS



132 Traditional & Innovation Schools  
(12 in Innovation Zones)



60 Charter Schools

### Elementary Schools & Early Childhood Education Centers



### Middle Schools & K-8th Grade Schools



### High Schools & 6th-12th Grade Schools



**Number of Students Eligible for Transportation Services**  
**32,212**



**Avg. Daily Meals Served**  
Breakfast: 25,835  
Lunch: 39,502



**Number of 1:1 Devices**  
85,275+ Lenovo Chromebooks

## Our Budget

School Budgets (\$903M)



Field Supports\* (\$216.7M)



Central School Supports\*\* (\$122M)



Investment Funds from Central Office Reorganization\*\*\* (\$9M)

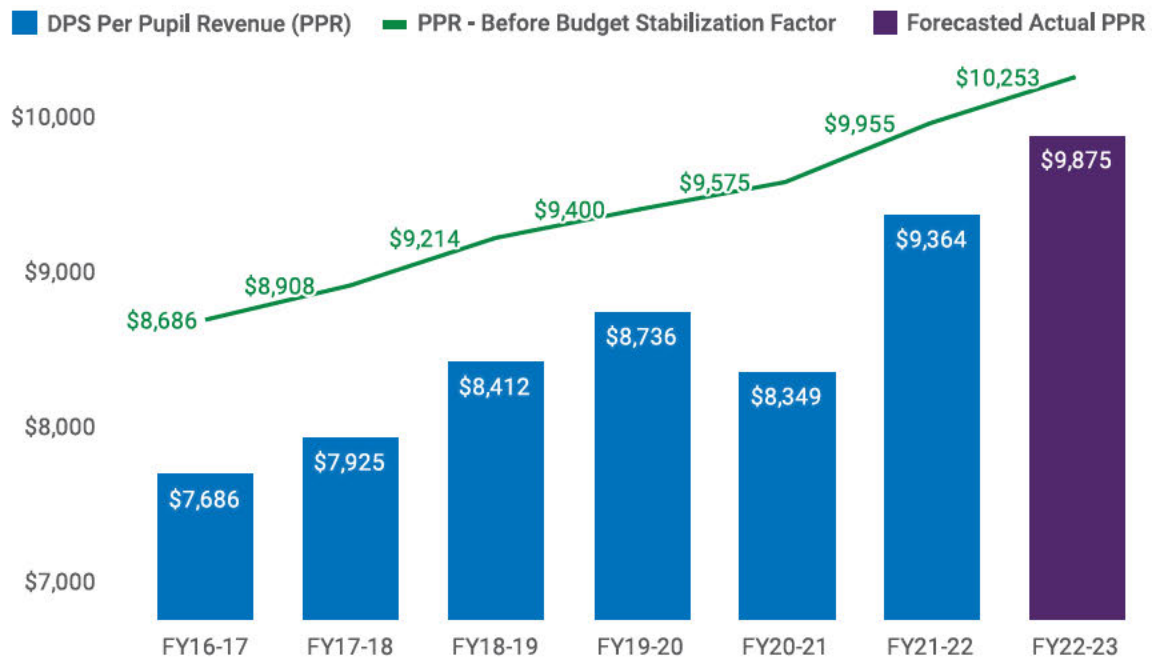


\* Examples include Facilities, Transportation, Safety, Textbooks, etc.

\*\* Examples include Family & Community Engagement, Career & College Success, Payroll

\*\*\* District Leadership has already reprioritized these funds to support employee health and wellness, increased hourly compensation for hard to fill positions, support for schools experiencing declining enrollment, and the Community Hubs initiative.

## State Per Pupil Funding\*



\*Per Pupil funding is set in the "School Finance Act" in the spring. 2022-23 funding is finalized in the January Supplemental budget. Funding can vary based on local and state changes to free and reduced price lunch eligibility, enrollment; state revenue, local property taxes, and other factors

# Developing the Roadmap

Our strategic roadmap was built in collaboration and partnership with the DPS community.

## 2021



July

In these first 100 days, Dr. Marrero heard from a diverse group of more than 13,000 students, family, community members and staff.



October

In the fall of 2021, Superintendent Dr. Alex Marrero set out to listen and learn from the DPS community about what is going well and what needs improvement in the Denver Public Schools.

### Findings:



#### Appreciations:

- The work of DPS teachers
- Available non-academic supports
- The district's focus on equity and COVID precautions



#### Areas for Improvement:

- Academic success
- Course offerings
- Communication with families



#### Frustrations:

- Operational practices—
- Constrained resources
  - School schedules
  - Inadequate facilities
  - Staffing shortages

## Listening & Learning Tour

# 2022

## November



### Transition Advisory Team Created

A diverse group of community members and DPS team members, this group was charged with creating [recommendations](#) around student experience and achievement, equity and excellence, and operational effectiveness to guide the development of our strategic roadmap.

## January



In the spring of 2022, the [Transition Advisory Team](#) passed the baton to DPS team members to develop “DPS Thrives: A Strategic Roadmap to the Denver Public Schools Experience.”

Our strategic roadmap was built in collaboration and partnership with the DPS community. In the fall of 2021, Superintendent Dr. Alex Marrero set out to listen and learn from the DPS community about what is going well and what needs improvement in the Denver Public Schools. In these first 100 days, Dr. Marrero heard from a diverse group of more than 13,000 students, family, community members and staff. Through meetings and surveys, participants shared appreciation for the work of DPS teachers, the non-academic supports that are available to them, and the district's focus on equity and COVID-19 precautions. Participants shared frustrations with some of our operational practices, such as constrained resources, school schedules, inadequate facilities and staffing shortages. Participants saw academic success and course offerings as an area for improvement, along with how the district communicates with its families. We heard a great need for the district to double down on its equity focus in a way that yields meaningful changes in our systems, culture and workforce.

Following the [listening and learning tour](#), DPS commissioned the Transition Advisory Team, a diverse group of community members and DPS team members. This group was charged with creating [recommendations](#) around student experience and achievement, equity and excellence, and operational effectiveness to guide the development of our strategic roadmap. These recommendations, coupled with the Board of Education [Ends Statements](#)<sup>2</sup> that serve as the long term goals for the district, and are together the foundation of our strategic roadmap.

The strategic roadmap was developed using the following equity framework questions that came out of the Transition Team's Equity and Excellence Subcommittee:

- For which historically marginalized groups does this issue matter? Why is it important based on past and current inequities for those groups within DPS?
- What related programs, policies, or practices exist at DPS or have been tried previously? How might the proposed approach yield more equitable outcomes? What are best practices?
- What data exists and will be needed as a baseline to attaining equitable outcomes? Was data collected from historically marginalized groups? Is data disaggregated to clarify distinctions between and among groups?
- What relevant resources are needed to prepare and support all staff to achieve equity-related goals, while also holding them accountable?
- How will we hold schools and school leaders accountable for addressing equity to achieve strategic roadmap goals?
- How will we know the proposed action has its intended outcome for historically marginalized groups?
- What needs to be applied universally across DPS in order to advance equity?
- What's the history of budget allocation in regards to historically marginalized groups? How can we ensure that budgeting for this issue is equitable across DPS?

## INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2022, the Transition Advisory Team passed the baton to DPS team members to develop “DPS Thrives: A Strategic Roadmap to the Denver Public Schools Experience.” Along the way, we continued to seek counsel from members of the Transition Advisory Team to ensure that the strategic roadmap reflected what matters most to our students, families and team members. We built this roadmap as one community, and we are committed to acting together.

<sup>2</sup>The DPS Board of Education adopted Policy Governance as its governance structure in 2021 as Superintendent Dr. Alex Marrero joined DPS. Policy Governance is a framework that allows the board to focus on engaging with the voters to establish long term goals (Ends) while empowering the Superintendent to be the operational leader of the district. This allows the Superintendent to determine the methods and tools needed to achieve the goals outlined by the Ends statements.



# Our Vision

## Vision and Mission

### Vision:

*Every Learner Thrives*

### Mission:

Educational equity is our collective responsibility. We prepare students for career, college and life. We create conditions and partnerships where students, families and team members belong and thrive.

## Shared Core Values

**Students First**

**Integrity**

**Equity**

**Collaboration**

**Accountability**

**Fun**

## Theory of Action:

### If we:

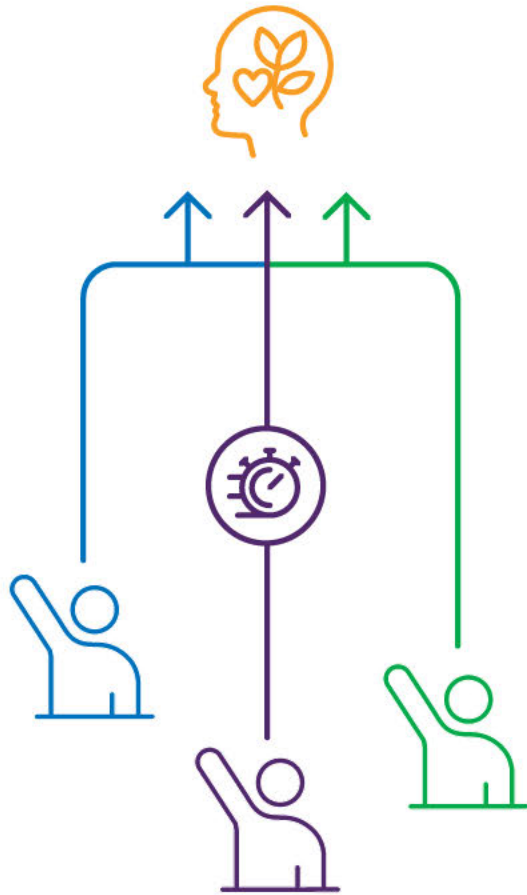
- Accelerate the growth trajectory for marginalized students and prioritize them and their communities in our culture and decision-making;
- Elevate the student experience through expanded academic learning, whole child support and the pursuit of passion;
- Build an adult experience that invigorates and unites the entire DPS community – team DPS, families and community members – as One DPS;
- Disrupt, dismantle and redesign systems and practices to ensure equity, transparency and excellence in the lived experiences of our students, families and team members;

**Then we** create a coherent DPS experience with equity as our collective responsibility...

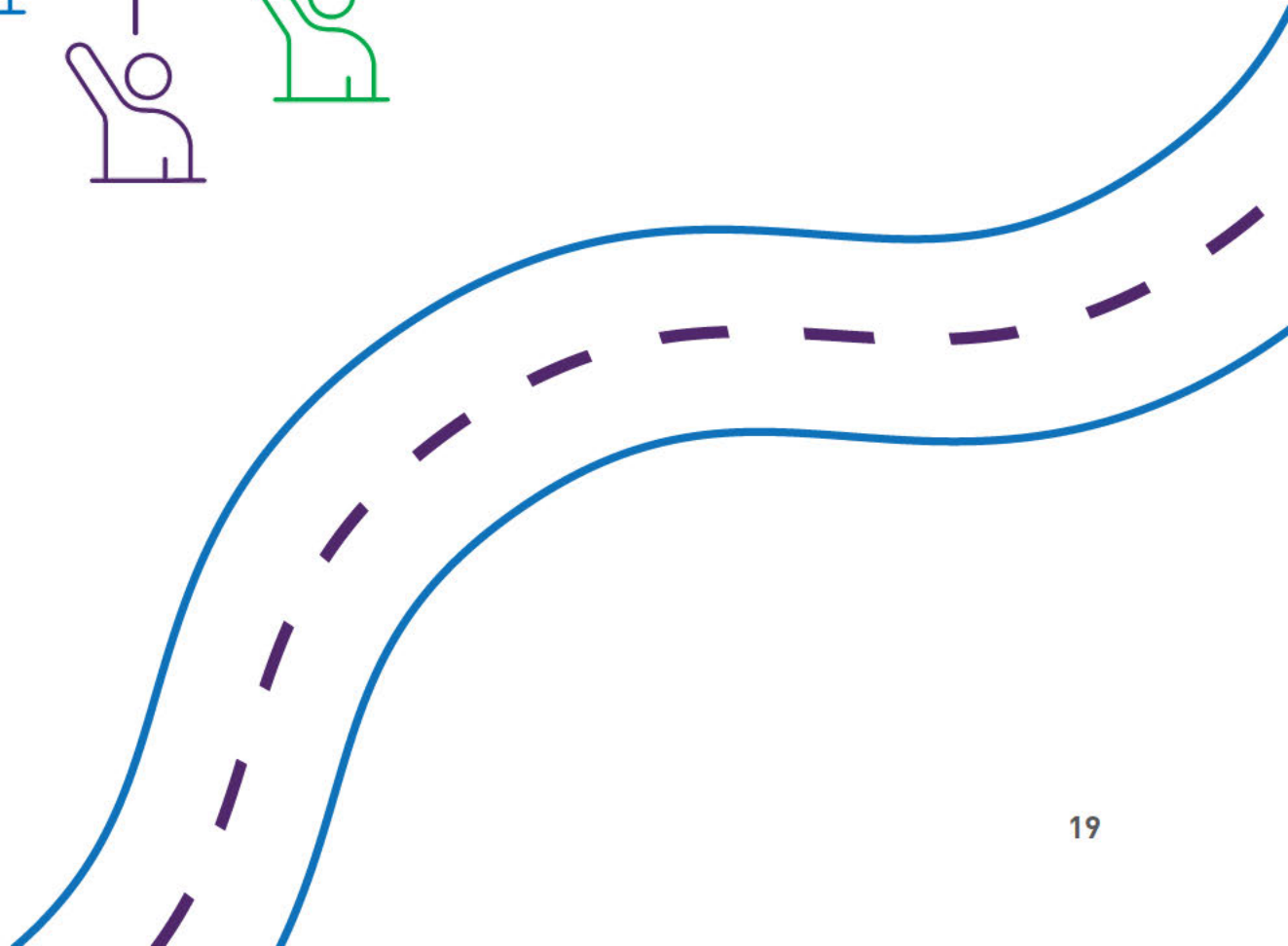
**So that** *Every Learner Thrives*.

# Accelerated Trajectory for Marginalized Students

Our vision is that *Every Learner Thrives*



But because of the inequities in our system, we know we must **prioritize some students on an accelerated trajectory**, while simultaneously **dismantling those very systems that hold them back**.



# The DPS Experience: Getting Better at Getting Better

## Why the DPS Experience

Historically, education was built on the transfer of knowledge from one individual (the teacher) to another (the student). Further, the notion of success, defined as the “accomplishment of an aim or purpose<sup>3</sup>,” is traditionally prescribed as success in K-12 education leading to success in higher education, which leads to success in life. As we look to the future and the global society we strive for, the notion of one individual empowering another and a prescriptive pathway works against the concept of justice.

If we are to accomplish our vision that *Every Learner Thrives*, we must reframe education as a series of experiences that promote an exchange of ideas, the pursuit of passion, and a quest for justice. This is the DPS experience.

## Why the Student Experience

At the center of the DPS experience is the experience of our learners in and beyond the classroom. We know that a prescriptive pathway to success limits opportunities for our learners to truly thrive based on who has access and the nature of the learners’ experience along the way. For every learner to truly thrive, we must shift focus, resources and opportunities to accelerate the trajectory of our marginalized students because we know opportunity without added support is a hollow promise. We will, therefore, create learning environments, pathways and opportunities that expand students’ experience of learning, facilitate the pursuits of their passions, and give space for them to flourish as young people ready for a global, post-pandemic society.

## Why the Adult Experience

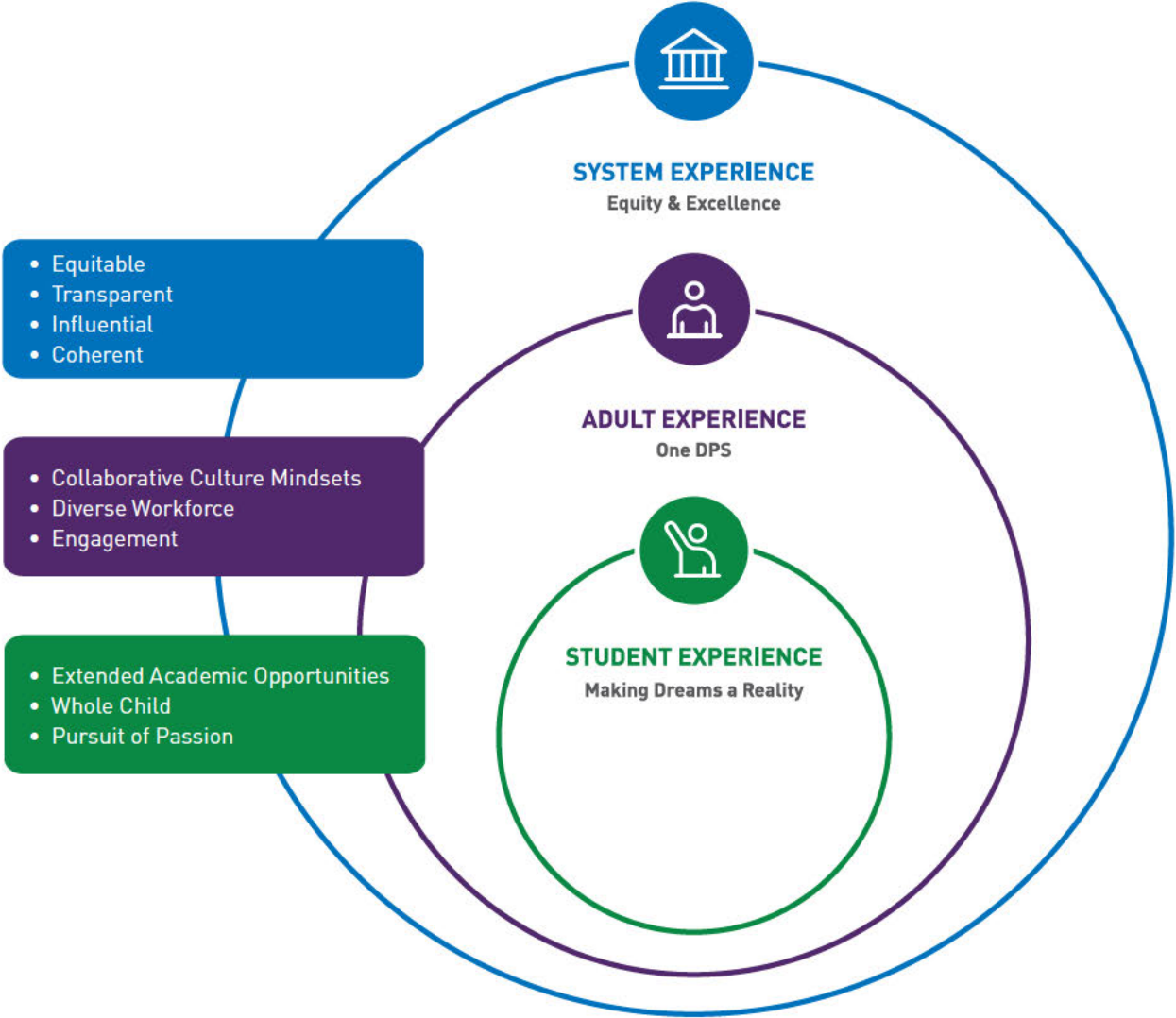
Surrounding the student experience is the adult experience. There is no question that the adults in our community – our team members, families and members of the Denver community – who guide and facilitate learning for our students, care deeply about our youth and their education. Yet, we haven’t always agreed about how to achieve what is best for our students, leading to a disjointed, inequitable experience. Furthermore, we have perpetuated systems that maintain power imbalances in our workforce and community, further compromising the experience of our students.

As adults, we must come together and unite both for one another and for our students. By partnering together, we cultivate opportunities to be more impactful, we build a more supportive environment for one another, and we create the student experience we know they deserve. We do this by: fostering opportunities for intentional collaboration across our schools and team members; by developing and cherishing asset-based mindsets that recognize the criticality of equity not only in intent, but also in impact; by recruiting and retaining a high-quality workforce and prioritizing diversity in that workforce; and by listening and building from those who know our students best – our families.

## Why the System Experience

Finally, in service of the student and adult experience is the system experience. Society, and the individuals within that society – students and adults – operate within the confines of intersecting systems. Put a different way, the education system – and others that impact education – is perfectly designed to get us the results we have. It’s no surprise, then, that the gaps between socioeconomic, racial and other groups in society have not closed. It is time for us to look inward and focus in a relentless way on dismantling systems of oppression and supremacy. Through an integrated and intentional approach to equitable systems building and partnership, we will transform our systems to ensure Every Learner Thrives. We have the power to achieve the results we desire – as long as we identify and break down the systemic barriers that are in our way.

<sup>3</sup>Oxford Languages via Google



## The Student Experience: Making Dreams a Reality

At the center of the DPS experience is a transformed student experience. Through a collaborative approach to teaching and learning, with a focus on continuous improvement, we will build an experience that supports students to make their place in the world as well-rounded, culturally and critically competent individuals, to pursue their passions and dreams, whatever they are, and to access careers — some of which don't yet exist. We will prioritize our marginalized students on an accelerated trajectory, providing students with added support so they benefit from opportunities. Equal opportunity is necessary, but is not sufficient to eliminate our persistent student gaps. By elevating the student experience, we're maximizing the potential for all, not reinforcing advantage and privilege.

Students will be immersed in rigorous, engaging coursework in a variety of subjects beginning in ECE through graduation and beyond in all of our DPS schools. They will engage in culturally and linguistically affirming approaches to instruction, wellness, and year-round enrichment opportunities. Their learning experiences will cultivate curiosity and facilitate exploration through intentional exchanges of ideas and opportunities to expand learning within and outside the classroom. They will cultivate an open mindset, seek out and consider multiple perspectives, and operate with a critically conscious lens. They will be heard, respected, and cared for in and beyond the classroom. They will experience intentional school cultures that are safe, inviting, and meet their needs socially, emotionally, and academically. They will have the skills to know who they are, recognize lived experiences as a source of strength, and question systems to collaboratively solve problems. They will have the agency to explore their ideas and interests. They will have high-quality facilities in which to pursue their passions. And, when they graduate, students will know what their next step is and how to unlock and be successful in opportunities for the future.



- 1. DPS learners of all identities, ages and abilities feel a strong sense of belonging, are emotionally supported in school, and have the capacity to advocate for themselves and for justice.**
- 2. Learners are on track to graduate ready for career, college and life in a post-pandemic global society, with an accelerated trajectory for marginalized students.**
- 3. DPS learners grow in and pursue their areas of passion (as athletes, artists, scholars, etc.).**



## Strategies

### 1. Extended Academic Opportunities:

- Create equitable access to rigorous courses and high-interest curriculum, and plan and deliver culturally and linguistically responsive instruction (CLRE) for all grade levels, from our youngest learners through graduation.
- Enhance academic programming in numeracy and literacy, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM), humanities (including cultural competency and ethnic studies), languages, comprehensive health and financial literacy through partnerships with various community organizations and local colleges and universities to allow for high-quality programming year-round.
- Expand Career and Technical Education by increasing course and pathway diversity, access, and success to ensure students are prepared to compete in the current labor market and high-demand industries.
- Accelerate the growth trajectory of marginalized students by developing, implementing and improving high-quality specialized plans for students of color, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and other marginalized groups.

### 2. Whole Child: Strengthen the implementation of a comprehensive system for supporting the whole child, including:

- Robust Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS).
- Transformative Social-Emotional and Academic Learning (TSEAL).
- Culturally affirming mental health resources and support.
- Student-led spaces to build a sense of belonging and social identity (e.g. affinity groups).

### 3. Pursuit of Passion:

- Increase access to enrichment and extracurricular learning opportunities for every learner, with a focus on marginalized students.
- Streamline and simplify enrollment processes for the enrichment and extracurricular activities and ensure families have the resources and tools they need to enroll their students in these experiences.
- Provide student leaders, performers and athletes with updated facilities, developmental programming, and highly trained coaches, teachers and guides.
- Develop partnerships and programs to offer year-round opportunities for learner-directed development, growth and competition across the city and state.



## Supporting our Student-Athletes in Their Pursuit of Passion

We envision a student experience in which our DPS student-athletes have access to state-of-the-art facilities and participate in an expanded range of sports at a variety of levels. We will expand opportunities by partnering with community organizations, including the Park Hill Golf Course Association, the Denver Park Hill Golf Course Association, the Denver Parks and Recreation system, and our local professional sports teams and hometown colleges and universities. We see DPS consistently ranking in the top 10 statewide in the near future.



### Progress Measures 2022-26

**1. Improve Student Experience Index average by 10 percentage points. We are accountable for closing gaps between student groups and accelerating the growth of some student groups by more than 10 percentage points.**

- a. Student experience index will be developed from surveys for grades 3-12 and supplemented with focus groups and interviews to measure
  - i. Student health and sense of safety.
  - ii. Students feeling welcome and a sense of belonging.
  - iii. Students feeling a sense of cultural and linguistic pride.
  - iv. Student engagement.
  - v. Student agency.
  - vi. Student attendance.

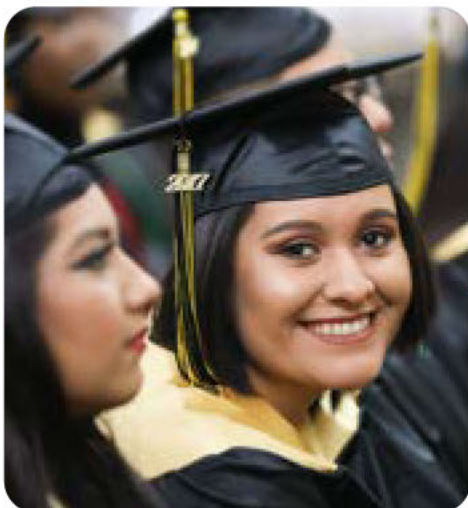
**2. Improve Grade-Level Achievement average by 10 percentage points. We are accountable for closing gaps between student groups and accelerating the growth of some student groups by more than 10 percentage points.**

**3. Improve Post-Pandemic Workforce Readiness average on each of these measures by 10 percentage points.** We are accountable for closing gaps between student groups and accelerating the growth of some student groups by more than 10 percentage points.

- i. Four-year graduation rate.
- ii. Five-year graduation rate.
- iii. Students graduating with college and apprenticeship and internship credit hours.
- iv. Students eligible for the Seal of Biliteracy at graduation.
- v. Students graduating with industry certificates.

**4. Improve participation average in passion-sustaining programming in and beyond the classroom by 10 percentage points.** To increase the average across all students, we are accountable for closing gaps between student groups and accelerating the growth of some student groups by more than 10 percentage points.

- a. Participation will be measured by:
  - i. Students receiving robust diverse programming during the school day.
  - ii. Students participating in enrichments and/or extracurriculars outside of the school day.



## Graduation Requirements

In pursuit of graduation, DPS students will experience rigorous and diverse coursework, plan for their next steps through Individual Career and Academic Planning, and demonstrate their readiness through various competency demonstrations. With the support of adults, students will explore careers, college, and their passions and dreams for the future, enabled by a robust sixth- through 12th-grade quarterly ICAP reflection process. At the end of their DPS experience, students will be prepared to be successful in any path they choose.



## The Adult Experience: One DPS

We must build an adult experience that invigorates and unites us as individuals in our work as guides and champions of our students. All team members — our teachers, our administrators, our facilities staff, and everyone else who is part of Team DPS – must step into our roles as educators. We all have a critical role to play in ensuring Every Learner Thrives. Our success will only be possible through collaboration. As a team, we will operate as One DPS —recognizing our shared triumphs and relentlessly continuing to improve ourselves and the DPS experience. We will hold each other accountable to know and do better by building our mindsets and disrupting and redesigning equitable systems. We will ensure everyone has meaningful opportunities to grow from feedback, coaching, and development, and leave their mark on the DPS experience.

We will counter a narrative that views difference as a deficit and instead recognize our differences allow us to eliminate inequities in our system. The DPS experience will nurture individuals with diverse identities in our students, adults and community through intentional development, engagement, and relationships. We will recruit and retain team members who are working to make this a reality in our schools. As critical partners in transforming the DPS experience, we also know we need to engage our families, particularly of marginalized identities, by expanding engagement opportunities and cultivating community relationships. It is incumbent upon us to foster an adult experience that is safe and welcoming, that reflects our values and commitment to equity, and that invites, rather than resists, calls to action toward a just society.



- 1. Every member of Team DPS is an educator: each member of Team DPS sees themselves and each other as valued contributors and works together to achieve our vision that *Every Learner Thrives*.**
- 2. Our workforce reflects the diverse identities of our learners so our students and families see themselves reflected in our schools and among our leadership.**
- 3. Families of all identities participate in making decisions that affect their child's educational experience.**



**1. Culture of Collaboration:**

- Build a mission-driven culture with reaffirmed values that recognize, honor and humanize our team members and unify and invigorate us around our collective actions.
- Develop structures and routines that foster a systemic shift to increase collaboration and continuous improvement within our organization, including sharing of best practices across schools of all governance types.
- Celebrate school and student successes to elevate impactful and transformative practices across district and school support.



**Organizing our teams and schools to foster intentional collaboration**

In Spring 2022, DPS reorganized the central office and restructured school supervision and support in order to promote greater collaboration across the district. Schools now have intentional structures - aptly named Collaboratives - that provide spaces for schools across the district to consistently and intentionally gather to share ideas, solve problems and bridge gaps together.



**2. Developing and Reinforcing Mindsets:**

- Build, reinforce and hold each other accountable to asset-based mindsets and practices that embrace diversity and advance equity and inclusion through professional learning, leadership development opportunities, and other culture-building experiences.
- Establish a mindset of continuous improvement by fostering a culture of feedback, reflection through coaching, and growth through intentional development.
- Recruit and retain a high quality workforce that is driven by a deep desire for equity in our schools and broader system.

### 3. Diverse Workforce:

- Strengthen and expand initiatives to recruit, hire, retain and advance team members of marginalized identities at all levels of the organization so that students see themselves reflected in our schools and among our leadership.
- Ensure our team members receive total compensation packages (benefits, market adjustments, etc.) at or above market rate, as compared to other Denver metro districts.

### 4. Engagement and Communication:

- Deepen the way we engage, educate and communicate to encourage greater dialogue among our entire DPS community, with a focus on outreach to families and community members of marginalized identities.
- Strengthen and establish advisory groups to increase the voice of marginalized groups.
- Collaborate with community organizations to elevate community needs, aspirations and solutions.



### Seeking council from advisory groups

Dr. Alex Marrero began his superintendency prioritizing listening to members of the DPS community, particularly those who represent voices of our marginalized students and families. In order to provide ongoing opportunities for community members to share perspectives that inform decision making, Dr. Marrero created or re-established advisory councils, including: Asian Education Advisory Council (AEAC), the Black Education Advisory Council (BEAC), Latinx Education Advisory Council (LEAC), Multilingual Education District Accountability Committee, and the Special Education Advisory Council. Dr. Marrero is also continuing engagement with Native American and Vietnamese-speaking communities, the LGBTQIA+ community, and families experiencing transient housing.





## Progress Measures 2022-26

### **1. Improve Culture Vitality Index by 10 percentage points:**

- a. Culture Vitality Index will be developed from surveys that measure:
  - i. Equity mindsets in employees.
  - ii. How valued employees feel.
  - iii. Employee perception of collaboration.
  - iv. Employee perception of trust.
  - v. Employee perception of support.

### **2. Continuous, positive movement toward a more reflective workforce:**

**Over the next 12 months, the Office of Talent will work collaboratively across the district to more deeply understand what student and staff needs are for a reflective workforce and develop a clear definition. After we have a clear definition, we will identify measures and targets over the following three years (2023 - 2026), to include:**

- a. Annual retention rates of staff of all identities.
- b. Measures of recruitment and hiring efforts for staff with diverse identities.
- c. 10 percentage point increase in students report in surveys that they see themselves reflected by the adults in their schools.

### **3. Improve participation of families of marginalized identities in district decision-making by 10 percentage points.**

- a. Participation will be measured by:
  - i. Event attendance.
  - ii. Survey responses.
  - iii. Parent-teacher conferences attendance.
  - iv. Other measures to be determined.

### **4. Improve Family Experience Index for families of all identities by 10 percentage points:**

- a. Family Experience Index will be derived from surveys and supplemented with focus groups and interviews to measure:
  - i. How welcomed families feel.
  - ii. Families being informed about their student(s)' progress.
  - iii. Families' ability to participate in decision-making at the district and school levels.



## The System Experience: Equity and Excellence

Our current system is not designed for equity or for marginalized students to thrive. It is our duty to redesign our system for an equitable student and adult experience that provides for accelerated trajectory for our marginalized students, so ***Every Learner Thrives***. Oppressive systems will no longer get in the way of our students and adults thriving; we will uproot and eliminate them as we know and do better<sup>4</sup>.

For us, “better” means all students thrive in school and accomplish their dreams after graduation, and our system aims to get better at getting better. We will eliminate ineffective, destructive systems and replace them with equitable, transparent systems that promote engagement and create the conditions for our students and adults to thrive. We want to be a district that students, adults, and community flock to and are proud of — for the work we do to ensure our students have the experience they deserve. We will be a national leader in incorporating sustainability into our practices and systems. We are committed to fostering meaningful partnerships that elevate the role of our community in reshaping DPS for the future. Students and adults will know what to expect from us as a system and we will collaborate to ensure the student and adult experience is realized.

<sup>4</sup>Inspired by Maya Angelou’s words: “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”



- 1. DPS disrupts, dismantles and redesigns systems and practices for equity and excellence.**
- 2. DPS provides resources and services equitably and transparently, as directed by the strategic roadmap and consistent with the Ends Statements set by the Board of Education.**
- 3. DPS is recognized locally, regionally and nationally as a leader in practices for equity and sustainability.**



### 1. Systems for Equity:

- Establish regular routines for auditing equity in operational and academic systems, including sustainability practices. This includes but is not limited to our transportation, enrollment, educator evaluation and resource allocation systems and practices. Share results publicly and take action based on findings.
- Develop and implement a holistic data culture and infrastructure in the pursuit of equity.
- Foster and incorporate student, family, and community voice and leadership in the development of equitable systems.
- Increase student and family interest in DPS through programming, choice, and communication.



### Building Equitable and Sustainable Systems

During the last decade, we have taken substantial steps to make our organization more sustainable and to minimize our carbon footprint. In addition to retrofitting our entire district with LED, we have 46 sites with solar arrays, we are utilizing geothermal energy technologies on three sites, and we are starting to procure electric buses. We have brought in \$9.1 million in revenue since 2009 through rebates and renewable energy credits. We are also proud to share that we have 128 gardens across the district through school and community gardens and we are continuing to expand our sustainability efforts through partnerships with the City of Denver.

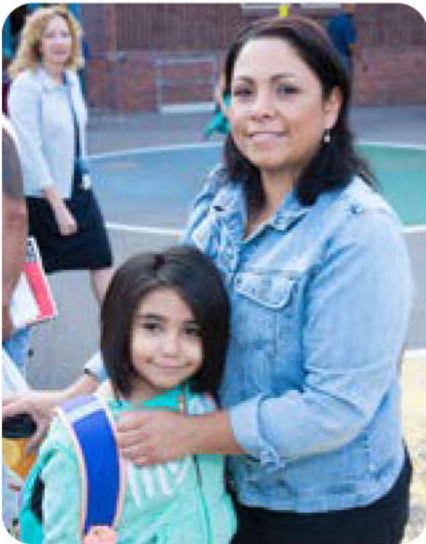


### 2. Conditions for Transparent Decision-Making:

- Increase access to clear and transparent information about the characteristics and effectiveness of different schools, in addition to the state School Performance Framework.
- Develop and implement a unified measurement strategy, including assessments and surveys, to support data-informed decision-making and progress monitoring at the district, school and classroom levels.

### 3. Partnership and Influence:

- Partner with external organizations in a collective effort to meet community needs and complement community assets, including but not limited to the launch of community hubs.
- Publicly advocate for the dismantling of systems of oppression at the local, state and national levels.



### Opening Our Doors to Community through Community Hubs

In Fall 2022, DPS is opening “community hubs” that provide a holistic approach to student learning through programs and services that support social, emotional, physical and academic needs of students. Building on the services provided by our existing FACE Centers, we are working with each identified community to build out the services that are most aligned to their needs. These services include enrollment support, language supports, basic needs (like food and supplies), child care, case management, workforce development, social-emotional supports and mental health services, financial literacy, GED classes, citizenship classes and more.



### 4. Coherence:

- Ensure coherence in annual planning and goal-setting processes and timeline at the district, team and school levels.
- Align district resources and central team functions to the priorities of the strategic roadmap.
- Define school-based flexibility by school governance type.



## Progress Measures 2022-26

1. Ten systems audited for equity
2. Six community hubs operating to meet community needs
3. Implementation measures
  - a. Budgets are aligned to the priorities named in the strategic roadmap.
  - b. Creation of annual targets that align with the strategic roadmap.
  - c. School-based strategic plans have connections to the strategic roadmap, District Annual Targets and Board Ends Statements.



# A Call to Action

The DPS experience is one for all of us to build together so that *Every Learner Thrives*.



## **Students,**

We call on you to fully engage in your experience and to make it your own. The future is yours, and our society needs you to make it more just. We are here to support you, and we ask you to hold us accountable to the promises we make. Speak up and speak out and let us know when we are fulfilling the promise of a new DPS experience, and, more importantly, when we're falling short.



## **Team DPS,**

We call on you to work together for our students and to design a more equitable DPS experience. Our organization has seen a lot of change, and the journey has not always been easy. Tomorrow is a new day, and we must build trust and culture together. Yes, this requires heavy lifting from us as leaders, but it also requires commitment and investment from all of the members of the organization.



## **Families and community members,**

We call on you to partner with us through the good and the bad. Help us see our biases and hidden spots and help us celebrate progress towards a just society.

# Glossary

- **Accelerated trajectory:** Ensuring students consistently receive grade-level materials, tasks and assignments along with appropriate supports that make the work accessible. More specifically, instead of sending students backward to fill in all the potential gaps in their learning, leaders and teachers should focus on filling in only the most critical gaps — and not in isolation, but at the moment they are needed.
- **Educational equity:** Re-envisioning and redesigning the systems and structures in which we operate to be more fair and just. This is done by removing the predictability of success or failure, and by ensuring each student has what they need to achieve.
- **Equity statement:** Racial and educational equity is our collective responsibility. We will achieve equity when we dismantle deeply rooted systems of oppression that have historically resulted in inequitable access and distribution of opportunities and resources for those who represent marginalized identities, including race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, language and ability. We will create conditions where we all belong, are included, have a clear purpose (why) and have the autonomy to lead in our respective areas. By creating these conditions, we will eliminate the predictability of success or failure for our students and team members.
- **Community:** DPS students, families, team members and individuals who live and/or work in Denver County.
- **Culturally and linguistically affirming:** Aligning mental health support to the culture of the student, starting with who the student or the family is, what their belief systems are, and how to support them accordingly.
- **Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Education:** We believe that a student’s academic and transformative social and emotional success is dependent on:
  - Educators who provide conditions that enable a deep understanding of content and responsive teaching practices.
  - Daily access to meaningful grade-level content.
  - Students who take an active role in their learning.
- **Data culture:** Provide the DPS community with trusted data to take action on building equitable outcomes for our students.
- **Dismantle:** To halt a process or practice and to identify and record its impact on the organization so that it can never be repeated by agents of the organization.
- **Learner:** Primarily refers to DPS students; also references any learner within the DPS community (families, team members, community members, etc.).
- **Marginalized identities:** Groups and communities who experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political and economic) because of unequal power. This includes but is not limited to individuals who experience discrimination and exclusion because of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, language and ability.

- **Mental health:** Includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make healthy choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.
- **Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS):** Framework that schools use to give targeted support to struggling students.
- **Post-pandemic global society:** Industry, workforce, values, culture and traditions emerging as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Rigorous instruction:** Instruction that is at grade level and is culturally and linguistically responsive.
- **Safe environment:** An environment that is healthy, physically safe, and free of the stressors that prevent students from learning.
- **Specialized plans:** Black excellence plans, English Language Acquisition plans, Individualized Education Programs, advanced learning plans, Individual Career and Academic Plans, etc.
- **Systems:** The processes and practices associated with the day-to-day operations of the district. It refers to all practices and processes within the organization and the interplay between these processes and practices.
- **Team Member:** Any DPS staff member (teachers, principals, other school-based staff, operational staff, central office staff, etc.).
- **Thrives:** I can, I will, I believe and I know how.
- **Transformational Social-Emotional and Academic Learning (TSEAL):** Lever for equity supporting the development of identity belonging, curiosity and collaborative problem-solving.
- **Well-Rounded:** The minimum student experience, which creates learning for the whole child, including emphasis on both academic and social-emotional opportunities for growth. It also requires that a student:
  - Be challenged academically.
  - Express themselves in a healthy way.
  - Has access to a safe, social space.
  - Has access to resources to support a healthy learning environment.
  - Has access to extracurricular activities.
  - Has agency to push back and challenge authority respectfully.
  - Has agency to solve problems and adapt to new challenges.
  - Has experiences that involves and engages critical thinking.
  - Has experiences which include the arts.

# Aligning to our Board of Education Ends Statements

DPS Thrives was developed to support the Board of Education Ends Statements set by the Board of Education. The table below represents a cross-walk of the focus and priorities outlined in the Strategic Roadmap to the Board Ends Statements.

	Vision & Mission	Theory of Action	Student Experience	Adult Experience	System Experience
Global End Statement	X	X			
Ends 1.1 Equity	X	X		X	X
Ends 1.2 Teaching and Learning	X	X	X		
Ends 1.3 Student and Staff Well-Being	X	X	X	X	X
Ends 1.4 Health and Safety	X	X	X	X	
Ends 1.5 Post Graduation and Global Citizenship	X	X	X		
Ends 1.6 Climate Action	X	X			X

## Footnotes

1. Anthony S. Bryk, Louis M. Gomez, Louis M., Alicia Grunow, and Paul LeMahieu, Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2015. Linda Darling-Hammond, cited during public remarks Professor Darling-Hammond offered aloud during her public presentation to members of the New York State Board of Regents on September 13, 2016 (presentation that was titled "New Accountability – 21st Century Learning with Equity" is found at <https://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/Research%20Work%20Group%20-%20accountability-ldh.pdf>).
2. The DPS Board of Education adopted Policy Governance as its governance structure in 2021 as Superintendent Dr. Alex Marrero joined DPS. Policy Governance is a framework that allows the board to focus on engaging with the voters to establish long term goals (Ends) while empowering the Superintendent to be the operational leader of the district. This allows the Superintendent to determine the methods and tools needed to achieve the goals outlined by the Ends statements.
3. Oxford Languages via Google.
4. Inspired by Maya Angelou's words: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

# With Gratitude

The Denver Public Schools would like to thank the many individuals who contributed to the development of DPS Thrives, namely:

- The DPS Community, including our students, families and team members, who shared their feedback in the [Listening & Learning Tour](#) and through other engagement opportunities and who continue to hold us accountable to doing what is right for Denver's students.
- The [Board of Education](#), who set the direction for the Denver Public Schools.
- The Superintendent's [Transition Advisory Team](#), who developed recommendations that became the foundation of this roadmap.
- The [Steering Team](#), including the co-chairs of the Superintendent's Transition Advisory Team and other strategic experts, who advised the Superintendent and his staff on the priorities of the strategic roadmap.
- The [Core Design Team](#), including internal district leaders, who drafted the strategic roadmap based on the recommendations of the Superintendent's Transition Advisory Team and in consultation with the Steering Team.
- External Reviewers, who provided feedback on the plan and helped us make connections outside of education and the DPS context.



## WITH GRATITUDE

### A Special Thank You to our DPS Board Members:

**Xóchitl Gaytán**

*President and Board Director, District 2*

**Auon'tai Anderson**

*Vice President and Board Director, At Large*

**Scott Esserman**

*Treasurer and Board Director, At Large*

**Michelle Quattlebaum**

*Secretary and Board Director, District 4*

**Scott Baldermann**

*Board Director, District 1*

**Dr. Carrie Olson**

*Board Director, District 3*

**Charmaine Lindsay**

*Board Director, District 5*

### And an Extra Special Thank You to our Superintendent, Dr. Alex Marrero





# Denver Public Schools Foundation is working to Improve Student and School Outcomes

## Community Leads and Students Succeed (CLASS): A Strategy to Improve Student and School Outcomes Across Denver Public Schools

### The Challenge

Like thousands of school districts across the country, Denver Public Schools (DPS) has been deeply impacted by the COVID pandemic. Students of color and those living in under-served and low-income communities across our metropolitan area have also been disproportionately impacted by school closures and uneven access to a myriad of learning opportunities.



Families moving out of our metropolitan area to seek more affordable housing.



Lack of access to more affordable out-of-school time learning opportunities.



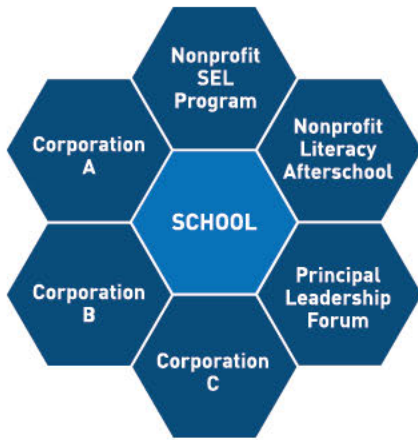
Teacher and principal attrition in many of our educational institutions.

**Our school district cannot solve these challenges alone.** Therefore, it is important that our schools, community-based programs, private sector and public agencies all come together and develop a collaborative approach that address the challenges that beset our schools at all levels.

### The Solution

Much research has been done on how students succeed, not just in school but also in life. We have proven practices that enhance family engagement in children's education, scale innovative teaching practices in the classroom, and develop principal leadership that enable school leaders to become more effective advocates for their students and staff and bring much needed supports into their schools. In short, we know what works.

Denver Public Schools Foundation established a framework to bring school-based partnerships to a whole new level: customizing supports based on individual school needs, and partnering schools with corporations and community-based programs and supports that have been proven to deliver quality outcomes and sustainable results. By having the community lead in



the process of supporting our students, educators will be able to focus on their core mission of teaching, which will lead towards positive student development outcomes and a higher level of school performance overall. Hence, CLASS: Community Leads and Students Succeed, a framework for school-community partnerships, developed by the DPS Foundation.

## The Structure

A public school will partner with at least 3 private companies that will provide financial and in-kind resources - along with employee engagement and other leveraging roles - to avail of already existing community-based

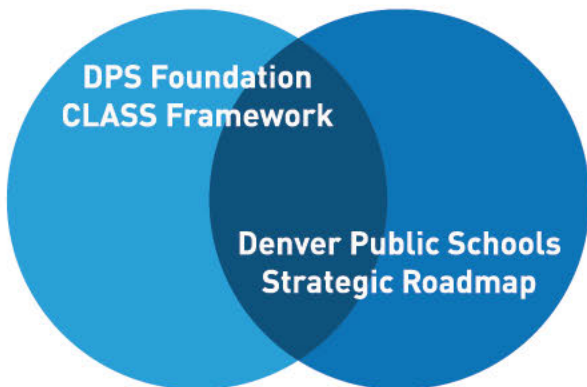
programs (e.g., summer and afterschool programs, mentoring programs, family engagement supports, professional development opportunities, and education leadership development). This partnership will span over seven years to support a generation of students that go through the pipeline. Data around four key areas will be gathered and evaluated on an annual basis. **These areas are: student academic growth, life skills and social emotional learning skills, family engagement and navigation, and educator leadership development.**

The CLASS vision is to ensure that public schools in Denver have the partnerships that would provide the supports needed by students, families, and educators to ensure that our schools thrive, perform well, and are fully connected to our community.



## Capacity and Feasibility of Success

CLASS aligns well with the DPS Strategic Roadmap with a focus on students, educators, and community. Both share a focus on whole child development, effective teaching and learning in the classroom, and expanding learning opportunities beyond the school hours. Partnerships, data, and a focus on high quality approach are common elements in both CLASS and DPS's Strategic Roadmap.



CLASS is scalable and sustainable. This framework incorporates proven research, best practice, sustainable resources, solid data, and a culture of collaboration and shared strategy to ensure that everyone in our school district and community are working together to not just lift student outcomes, but an entire cohort of schools that would result in population level change in our school system.



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