

DENVER PLAN COMMITTEE SUMMARY

FEBRUARY 2, 2006

Goal I: Our children will learn from a highly skilled faculty in every school that is empowered by robust professional development and real-time assessment data.

Component A: A coherent Instructional Reform Plan will set high academic expectations for all students and align curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development to Colorado's defined state standards.

Objective 1: All students (including English language learners, special education, and gifted and talented) who complete a rigorous 13-year course of study in Denver Public Schools will exceed state performance standards in four core subject areas—literacy, math, science, and social studies—and be prepared to succeed in college.

Topic: College Success Goal, Reorganization of Area Offices (page 6)

- The district shouldn't retreat from the rigorous goal of preparing all students to succeed in college, but should add other post-secondary opportunities and allow students to choose from a variety of paths.
 - The district should align its standards with college entrance requirements, as well as state standards, and specifically address the achievement gap for minority students.
 - It is a good idea to organize the support structure around instructional issues, but the number of administrators shouldn't be increased at the expense of staff who have direct student contact.
 - The portfolio for instructional teams should be a mix of low- and high-achieving schools and school configurations.
 - Central administration should be reorganized to assist principals as instructional leaders by providing support with management issues and student services and reducing their administrative workload.
 - Content-area groupings would provide a common foundation for instructional practices, shared learning opportunities, and consistency across the district.
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Topic: Literacy and Math Blocks, Intervention Specialists, Professional Development (pages 7–8)

- Double blocks will work only if what is done is different. The double-block schedule should ensure sufficient time for systematic instruction and skills development and conducting continuous assessments to make sure instruction is designed to meet students' needs.
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- We should look at successful models for scheduling with double blocks, especially in middle schools, and also work to minimize the loss of electives for both middle and high schools or students most in need of help will become discouraged.
 - We should work to minimize student “tracking.” Scheduling needs to be flexible for intervention purposes. We should examine successful scheduling models that allow students to move in and out of classes and/or blocks as they progress, so they don’t get stuck.
 - The quality of the intervention specialists, including coaches, specialists, and facilitators, is very important. We need to work to ensure these specialists are helpful partners and not taking too much time from classroom instruction and teacher planning time.
 - Intervention services need to be provided for students who are not performing to their ability levels, including gifted and talented and special education students. Intervention specialists should be experts in their field and spend time in the classroom demonstrating how teachers can work differently with their students.
 - When making instructional and programmatic changes, teachers can be better supported by receiving planning guide enhancements, professional development on differentiated instruction, and access to instructional resources (aligned with the standards) through the Internet.
 - We need to examine “lessons learned” about past professional development efforts in DPS and how professional development can be improved as new curriculum or programs are rolled out (refer to Council of Great City Schools analysis of DPS professional development).
 - Extended day and summer school offerings need to balance academic programs with enrichment activities.

Topic: Best-in-Class District for English Language Learners
(pages 7, 9–10)

- The goals should be for all students to learn English and for the district to promote mastery of a second language for all students.
 - Reorganize structure, administration, and support to provide consistency and best practices across the district and address the allocation of time ELLs spend with other native language students versus
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<p>Topic: Science and Social Studies Curriculum, Field Tests, and Implementation (pages 10–16)</p>	<p>English-speaking students to minimize ELLs isolation, not only in the classroom, but from school to school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All teachers, not just ELA-E and ELA-S teachers, need professional support around English language development to address the needs of ELLs transitioning to English-only classes.
<p>Topic: Retention Policies, Class Size, and Full-Day Kindergarten (pages 16–17)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The district needs to be clear about what science and social studies instruction it expects next year—especially for schools not involved in field tests.• An inventory of existing curriculum and materials should be conducted, and policies for discarding old materials should be communicated, especially in science and mathematics.• All new programs and curriculum should be available in Spanish. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Retention issues are significant and sensitive and should be approached carefully. DPS should look at the body of research that supports best practices around retention. Current district retention policies should be reviewed to examine the most appropriate grade-retention strategies, examine other appropriate academic interventions, and clearly communicate with parents and the community (see Council of Great City Schools' letter for early intervention guidance).• Class size is a key factor in student success, and therefore, district class size staffing policies and formulas should be closely examined—both for classroom teachers and support staff.• Substitute policies warrant attention around access into substitute pool, substitute compensation, incentives for substitutes to teach in hard-to-staff schools, and building community partnerships to enrich and expand the substitute pool.• Access to full-day kindergarten for all DPS students is a worthy goal, but financial, physical space, and staffing issues should be considered when pursuing legislative strategies. Also, early learning legislative strategies may take time, and the district should identify other ways to provide kindergarten for low-income students in Denver.

Objective 2: Students will select from compelling curricular choices that complement

the core curricular areas.

Topic: Curricular Choice
(pages 17–20)

- Focus on strengthening the district's delivery of core content subject areas of mathematics, literacy, science, and social studies, but ensure the district provides rich and varied learning environments for all students. It is a worthy goal for schools to enhance core content offerings by providing meaningful and intentional opportunities in the visual arts, vocal music, physical education, world language, and technology, to name a few.
- Schools should decide what additional curricular options best serve their communities. Strong support exists for the district to provide assistance to schools with curriculum in the visual and performing arts, physical education, world languages, and technology. We should ensure the “menu of options” is not meant to be all-inclusive, so a school may choose to create their own plan and focus areas.
- With increased choice around curricular options, it is important to give principals additional flexibility to allocate and use resources to support these programs—specifically around supplemental funds.
- Attention should be given to the new schedule and how to balance core curriculum requirements (that is, mathematics, science, literacy, social studies) with wrap-around curricular choices.

Objective 3: All students will complete a rigorous course of secondary school instruction in grades six through 12.

Topic: Rigorous Requirements, Uniform Grading Policy and Eighth Grade Algebra, Ninth Grade Academies, Student Advisories
(pages 21–23)

- We should ensure any new high school requirements are aligned with CCHE college entrance requirements and consider using the PSAT and ACT as additional measures of college preparedness.
 - The district needs to more broadly publicize graduation requirements and college entrance requirements to include parents, students, and the greater community and ensure information is provided about two-year community colleges and alternative post-secondary options.
 - Uniform grading is a great idea, but more work needs to be done to address whether there will be only one grading scale for all classes, including regular track, X track, and AP, and whether “weighted” grading
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should continue. DPS should consider whether grading should be based on content mastery only or also include behavioral issues, such as attendance. Plus, great support exists for a districtwide definition of RIGOROUS—and it should be one that includes specific examples.

- Algebra, or courses that teach algebraic concepts, should be widely available to all district eighth graders and prepare students to pass districtwide exams—it is important for building CSAP skills and for continuing to college.
- It is a great idea to formalize opportunities for communication and interaction between middle school and high school teachers, parents, and staff. Good programs and initiatives are already happening in the district and should be assessed for what's working.
- Ninth grade academies are a great idea. The focus should be on students most in need of services. Academies should include school counselors and special education teachers and tie into the intervention strategies workgroup.
- The concept of advisement is good, but it shouldn't be another "prep" for teachers. Advisement is also viewed by many as free time and may need a new name, so it's not viewed as useless. Some concern exists about teacher buy-in for this program, as many of them don't see the "relationship piece" as their responsibility. Focus on hiring more counselors and creating more personalized communities. If implemented properly, this model can work (see notes for models).

Objective 4: All students and teachers will have access to appropriate classroom materials and supplies

Topic: Centralized Purchasing
(page 24)

- We need to create a centralized purchasing process timeline for school materials, supplies, and resources. We should also consider timing and alignment around budgets and ordering; Special education, highly gifted and talented, and ELA teachers must have access to all appropriate course materials. We must include school libraries as part of the strategy and ensure that policy doesn't inhibit school choice specializations, such as Montessori materials.

Objective 5: All DPS families will have equal

access to and make informed choices among a portfolio of schools—including neighborhood schools—that are aligned in their core instructional program, but unique in their ability to meet community needs and interests.

Topic: School Choice
(pages 24–27)

- Providing “choice” options within the district is a difficult issue. Demographics play a role when a student body needs double blocks of literacy and math to compete; therefore, the same opportunities might not exist for all students to take advantage of a rich wrap-around curriculum. Resources need to be part of this conversation.
 - Concern has arisen that increased choice will allow some schools to be abandoned. The district needs to reiterate its intention to create enough healthy tension, so every school improves. The goal is to make EVERY school a good choice. There is also great concern that marketing or “storytelling” may be taken too far, and schools that don’t market well will wither. We should reiterate that a quality academic program will sell the school and that it’s everyone’s responsibility to improve the experience and ensure success for all kids.
 - The district needs to provide marketing support and training for principals and staff to help them more effectively market their schools—right now, principals don’t have enough time.
 - DPS should ensure that all kids have access to available choices in the district. An extra effort is needed to reach underrepresented communities or populations.
 - DPS should conduct master planning around choices. The goal should be to draw more families into the district, not reshuffle existing students.
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Component B: Differentiated professional development opportunities for faculty members will support the Instructional Reform Plan and enhance teaching practices in all DPS classrooms.

Objective 1: All DPS faculty members will participate in coherent, relevant, and excellent professional development opportunities.

Topic: Differentiated Professional Development
(pages 29–30)

- The district should be more explicit about the need to support teachers with large numbers of high-need students and help them focus on helping kids succeed. DPS needs to assess what's not going well or working, choose appropriate interventions (including, but not limited to, professional development), and ensure collaboration in schools around assistance and interventions.
 - The district must ensure that professional development is high-quality and that teachers actually are learning and using it in their classrooms (there must be follow-up).
 - Tracking teacher professional development is a good idea, but it needs to be easy and technology-based.
 - Just because teachers have timely data doesn't mean it can be translated into better instructional practices. They need ongoing professional development around interpreting data AND training on how to improve instruction (look at UCDs C2D3 project).
 - The cost of implementing the stated professional development opportunities needs examination, and consideration must be given to teacher workload, schedules, and capacity.
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Component C: A comprehensive assessment strategy will provide teachers with real-time information regarding the growth of each student and allow teachers to differentiate instruction.

Objective 1: Student performance will be assessed regularly in all courses during the school year, using a consistent and coherent set of classroom assessments.

Topic: Assessments
(pages 33–34)

- In addition to using proficiency outcomes as a guide for targeting professional development, the district should also use individual student growth data to assess where kids are and how much growth they've made during the year to better
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target and focus professional development resources.

- Standards, curriculum, and assessments must all be aligned. Assessments should not become the curriculum. We need to incorporate best practices around assessment and focus on both summative and formative learning and assessments.
- If we consider time that assessments take to administer and diagnose, instructional time will be lost.
- DPS must examine better ways to track and use assessment data. Some schools in southeast Denver use Palm Pilots and need to know how to use them. Concerns have been expressed about Infinite Campus' effectiveness, but support exists for making data reporting easier and decreasing teacher workload.
- End-of-course tests may be a good idea, but if students fail, more students may dropout. Build in time for both teachers and students to adjust to new assessments and higher standards. The district should ensure additional supports for students who need extra help.

Objective 2: Student performance data will be communicated to parents and students on a regular basis and in a consistent manner.

Topic: Standards-based Report Cards (page 35)

- A report card committee that includes parents and community members is already working on this section. A court order is also in effect that requires all ELL kids be assessed every nine weeks and provided with a report card. The district is currently not doing this testing in many cases, and it needs to be addressed.

Component D: A best-in-class organization will demonstrate the capacity to recruit, hire, develop, and retain highly qualified teachers, principals, and support staff.

Topic: Human Resources (pages 37–38)

- It is not a good idea to try to monitor every single Human Resources transaction. Instead, the district should use surveys or focus groups to get a sense of effectiveness without examining every transaction.
 - Exit surveys should be administered uniformly to departing staff and employees to inquire about reasons for leaving. The district can compile this data and use it to inform policies to retain staff. We must focus on retention, as well as recruitment.
 - Professional development for the Human
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	<p>Resources department is a worthy goal, but it is expensive. Consider broadening the concept, so HR folks shadow principals and staff for a day. Help HR learn about schools and their needs and help schools learn about HR.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• HR staff should have knowledge and expertise regarding various labor contracts.• HR is minimally funded now. It may not be able to withstand further cuts.
<p>Topic: Recruitment and Hiring of Teachers and Principals (pages 38–39)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DPS already has a comprehensive marketing and recruitment strategy. Don't recreate the wheel. HR does have some new PR materials (especially around ProComp)—build into existing successful model.• The hiring sequence needs to be examined. People are also concerned about teaching positions, facilitators, and coaching timelines.• Enrollment projections should be part of recruitment and retention conversations and policies, since it has a major impact on staffing, hiring, firing, etc.• "High-quality teacher" should be defined someplace, different from the NCLB definition of highly qualified.
<p>Goal II: Highly trained principals and assistant principals will serve as instructional leaders of the faculty in DPS schools.</p>	
<p>Component A: Denver Public Schools will articulate a well-defined role for both the principal and assistant principal position.</p>	
<p>Objective 1: Redefine the principal and assistant principal roles.</p>	
<p>Topic: Instructional Leaders (page 44)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The district should clarify how to measure that 75 % of a principal's time will be spent on instruction and explore whether a better measure exists. The Wisconsin model may be helpful.• "Management" shouldn't be a bad word. Teachers appreciate principals running interference for them, so teachers can do their jobs better. We understand principals need to be in the classroom, especially when achievement is lagging. The district needs to be clear about how support staff can help with management issues, especially in schools with no assistant principals, and how to free up principals' time around extracurricular activities (good examples in Jefferson County and Cherry Creek).

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- Some concerns have been expressed about whether the shift in the principal role to become more of an instructional leader (along with active roles for coaches) is “too much” for teachers—creating too many opinions and people in-and-out of the classroom. This model elicits concern about the professional judgment of teachers being respected. DPS should clarify that the administration intends to empower teachers—not take on a “big brother” approach. Responsibility and accountability should remain in schools. The commitment should be to improve the quality of life for teachers and focus on building open and collaborative culture in classrooms and schools—a culture of pride and enthusiasm.
 - Principal training should focus on best practices and improving learning, not on compliance. Principals should be instrumental in creating an atmosphere conducive to a mutual learning process with teachers and coaches.
 - Questions remain over whether differentiated instruction is uniformly good or whether teachers should just do it when necessary. It is a large issue that deserves conversation in the district. Curriculum and Assessment need to work together to help teachers appropriately understand and use assessment data. The district needs to provide clear direction about when and how to address individualized needs in planning and pacing guides.
 - Principals will need support around the new job description.
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Component B: A best-in-class organization will launch a strategic effort to attract and retain the best principals and assistant principals.

Objective 1: Execute proven recruitment practices for principals and assistant principals.

Topic: Recruitment and Hiring
(page 46)

- The priority should be on promoting and hiring school leaders from within DPS, including assistant principal ranks.
 - If the Ritchie Leaders Program becomes the aspiring principals program, DPS needs to ensure that regular classroom teachers can participate (work on structural issues).
 - The language in the principals’ performance contract should be similar to
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that of teachers, and teacher retention rates should be incorporated into the contract.

Component C: Differentiated professional development opportunities for principals and assistant principals will support the Instructional Reform Plan and enhance their ability to serve as instructional leaders.

Objective 1: All DPS principals and assistant principals will participate in coherent, relevant, and excellent professional development opportunities.

Topic: Professional Development for Principals
(pages 48–50)

- Principals and staff need diversity training, including professional development around culture, language, race, and poverty. This concept should be highlighted and made much more explicit in this section and throughout the plan.
 - Professional development should be better differentiated: there's a world of difference in many schools around mobility, attendance, etc. DPS should examine why office staffing allocations are the same districtwide. The district needs to examine each school's need and deploy resources based on those needs.
 - Professional development for principals and assistant principals should create an awareness of various labor contracts.
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Goal III: Collaboration among the Denver community and all DPS stakeholders will support our children in a safe, orderly, and enriching environment in every school and classroom.

Component A: Parents will help DPS students realize success in their academic careers.

Topic: Parent Communication and Empowerment
(pages 53–54)

- Throughout this section, the word “parent” should be broadened to include parent/guardian and adult mentors. We should ensure all parent/guardian information is available via the Internet, but also use additional mechanisms for communication, because of the technology gap. The district might identify creative partnerships with Spanish language media outlets, for example.
 - The district should make it easier for parent and community volunteers to be involved in schools by streamlining and reducing obstacles involved in the background check process. DPS needs to streamline these processes through the central office and the Internet.
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- We should understand that parent/guardian engagement will look different at every school and that is ok.
 - Don't just engage parents at the school. Identify where parents can be engaged in other community settings where they are comfortable. Outreach should mean "get out into the community."
 - The district could revive DPS parent training sessions.
 - The Community Outreach office should provide a "Public Schools 101" course and materials for parents to introduce them to the basics of schools: how schools work, parents' role, what grades mean, homework expectations, how to handle parent-teacher conferences, etc.
 - We should examine other parent surveys across Colorado districts for better models. In its current form, the DPS survey is not very helpful. DPS needs to be clear about what the surveys are used for and thoughtful about what to ask parents and find a better way to capture information on open-ended questions and let parents and community know they are being heard and that the district uses the data.
 - The parent compact is a good idea, but it needs work. The goal of communicating with parents is excellent, but how to communicate should be a site-based decision. The district should closely examine communication measurements, so communication is effective and meaningful, not just a compliance exercise. Tailor the compact to individual schools' needs.
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Component B: The community will support DPS in their quest toward academic achievement and personal excellence.

Topic: Mentoring, Enrichment Activities, Community Partnerships (pages 56–58)

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- The district should survey what's already being done around mentoring and compacts, but don't undo good things currently going on in schools and communities. It is important to build on existing partnerships.
 - Mentor programs could provide training to be an educational surrogate parent.
 - DPS should ensure there are "ethnic minority mentors," not just diverse mentors.
 - An important mentor role is to help motivate, celebrate, and reward student success.
 - The timing for starting districtwide
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mentoring program warrants further discussion. There are both pros and cons of waiting until grades 6–8. Starting in middle school helps kids successfully move on to high school. However, Whittier had a successful mentoring program that started in second grade, where adults stayed with those kids as they grew and moved through the system. Where to start is a difficult decision.

- Infrastructure must exist to support and train mentors. Mentors should have a school and district point person. However, don't centralize so much that you inhibit local school community partnerships from developing and thriving.
 - Parents should have access to supplemental education programs, including Title I, at the beginning of the school year. This year, these services didn't start until November.
 - Students have many enrichment opportunities now, but many don't participate. Marketing and PR must be done to let students and families know about available opportunities.
 - Transportation and access are problematic for students who want to be involved in after-school activities, especially for special education and low-income students.
 - Community partnerships should be connected with classroom teachers, around items such as speakers, providing supplies (via the Web), etc. Sue Edwards runs a speakers bureau teachers may take advantage of—it needs to be publicized more broadly.
 - The inventory of partnerships that currently exist needs to be very broad and widespread. The district should provide an open invitation to submit information and make it available on the Web.
 - DPS needs to ensure that community partners' values are aligned with the district's and that community partnerships' effectiveness is coordinated with other, ongoing district feedback processes.
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Component C: Each school will work with its community to establish an intentional school culture and positive school climate.

Topic: School Culture, Classroom Management, Nutrition
(pages 60–63)

- It is a good idea to provide schools with a template to develop a school culture plan.
 - The committee working to develop intentional school cultures should be combined with the school improvement planning process. We don't need separate processes. Many schools have already worked on establishing a climate—don't reinvent the wheel.
 - Schools should make sure the code of conduct is separate from the discipline process—the code of conduct is intended to be more about expectations and positive attributes, not negative behaviors and consequences. It should be a living document and used throughout the year. Student buy-in around code of conduct is key. It should include social integration as an essential element for ELL students.
 - Part of good customer service is regular and accurate districtwide communication.
 - How do we eliminate tracking? It would help the school climate to integrate kids and provide them assistance and interventions on the side. Interventions work if schools are flexible and assess frequently to see what students are learning.
 - Mentoring and professional development for NEW teachers is important in classroom management.
 - It is important for staff to honor shared agreements around classroom management and other aspects of school plans.
 - Metric for health and nutrition should be examined. Are the measurements and responsibilities correct? Also, is it in the right place in the plan?
 - It is a good goal to make “customers” of the schools happy and well served. Customer service must be a priority at every school level and throughout the district from the front office staff, to facilities managers, to the superintendent, and all school board members.
 - Reactions are mixed about the classroom management focus of the plan, specifically regarding curriculum and programs. DPS should shift focus to philosophies and successful models, not programs. If a
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teacher is already successful in classroom management practices, then why spend time on further training? Others advocated for this model as an important idea and strongly believe faculty should come to some shared agreements around what should happen in managing classrooms. Once agreement exists, practices should be implemented across the whole school staff. Consistency is important.

- It is important to have conversations and establish shared philosophies regarding cultural differences around classroom and student management. Race and cultural issues are very tough, and professional development can be useful in helping staff value children for who they are, while also teaching them to be successful in life.
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Component D: All students not subject to serious medical concerns will demonstrate excellent attendance—97% of eligible school days.

Objective 1: The Denver community will hold a high expectation for all Denver Public School students.

Topic: Attendance, Closed Campus
(pages 65–67)

- It is very good to have high attendance goals and expectations. Staff should be held to a high standard as well.
 - We need a comprehensive strategy to outreach to students and their families who miss several months of school. If enough school time is missed, students should not move to the next grade level (link to retention and promotion policies). To move to the next grade, students need to be in class for a certain number of days (think about seat time versus proficiency and refer back to state laws).
 - Even if resources and enforcement issues are addressed, the closed campus idea punishes all students for truancy problems of a few. DPS should consider alternatives, such as differentiating lunch privileges by grade level and staggering lunches. Another approach might be to consider off-campus lunch a privilege to lose. A closed campus is tough to monitor, but is doable.
 - Does the closed campus lunch need to be a districtwide policy? The district could give schools some flexibility to design appropriate policy to meet specific needs. Each school needs to consider community and business impacts and look to them for support. Many schools are having success
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- with truancy programs (for example, East has one lunch period and a 97% return rate after lunch—it is working well.)
 - Better food at schools would help kids buy into the idea. We could elicit student feedback on food and consider private vendors.
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Component E: District administrators will operate under a coherent, systemwide safety and security structure.

Objective 1: The district will abide by a clear and uniform policy for the discipline, suspension, and expulsion of students.

Topic: Discipline and Safety
(pages 69–71)

- It is a good idea to have uniform policies around discipline, suspension, and expulsion. The district must communicate with parents, students, and communities about discipline policies and the rationale behind them.
 - District-level support around student advisors doesn't exist. They don't currently have a home, and we should better define the role of school resource officers.
 - Schools should not use police to handle discipline issues. Police presence causes concern, which is sometimes counter-productive. The district should distinguish between the roles of school discipline officials and law enforcement.
 - Professional development for teachers around discipline policies would be helpful as well (that is, due process law classes) to provide a better understanding of what discipline means—it shouldn't only be used as punishment, but around a broader teaching tool. Staff and others need to know that discipline is about choices, consequences, and student learning.
 - Schools could address students' and staff's emotional effects and needs around crises and focus on prevention.
 - Regarding emergency response strategies, the district should focus on young ECE and elementary school children who need adults assigned to them in crisis situations. Young kids generally aren't equipped to handle crisis well.
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Component F: District administrators will operate DPS with maximum efficiency and accountability.

Objective 2: All budgeted district resources will be aligned with the strategic plan and objectives.

Topic: Budget, Incentives
(pages 73–75)

- It is a good idea to align the district's budget with the strategic plan, consistent with legal requirements and prior funding obligations.
 - Mixed feelings have been expressed about enrollment incentives for schools. Overall, most feel they will be unfair and divisive. It is too hard to calculate based on projections, and schools already at capacity will suffer. The district needs to focus on marketing our schools and telling the story and clarify that the intent is to bring students outside the district in—not to shift around existing students.
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