Level-Setting

As we begin to engage in this conversation, it is important to recognize that small schools in our district have great teachers, staff, students, families, and programs.

We recognize that our great people are working hard every day to serve students. This is not about the school programs, models, or performance. This is about having fewer students in our district.

This is also about working together with our community to give our students the best opportunities and supports possible.
Why are we talking about under-enrolled schools in DPS?

Declining enrollment is impacting schools throughout DPS, limiting the academic programming and support we can provide our students.

- Between 2014-20, DPS enrollment decreased by ~5,000 at the elementary level. That is the equivalent of approximately 16 elementary schools.
- Due to the decline in student-aged population in Denver, student enrollment has significantly declined, and is projected to decline even more over the next 5 years.
- Declining enrollment significantly limits our ability to provide comprehensive academic programs.
What are the benefits of a school with strong enrollment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regularly scheduled Art, Physical Ed., Music, and/or other electives.</td>
<td>Collaboration opportunities to review student work and plan units and lessons with grade-level or subject-specific colleagues</td>
<td>Access to instructional leadership and coaching, as well as additional Teacher Leadership staffing to coach and grow teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriate grade and language-level programs for Multilingual Learners</td>
<td>Ability to focus on one set of course or grade-level standards and assessments</td>
<td>Increased ability to promote school based on services available</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intervention/ Extension supports appropriate for all levels in Gifted &amp; Talented, Special Ed., Math and Literacy</td>
<td>Regular coaching and professional development opportunities</td>
<td>Additional staff available for school-wide coverage (e.g., lunch duty, recess, substitute teaching, etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to mental health supports such as school counselors, psychologists and/or social workers, and staff for Restorative Practices</td>
<td>Designated time for teacher planning and data-driven instruction practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


How does low enrollment impact classrooms?

Impact of low enrollment

Low enrollment or under-enrollment impacts the intended school programing in many ways.

Examples:

- Some schools must combine or split classrooms due to the number of students and staff
  - TNLI and language learning programs combine grades, language levels, or language programs (ELA-E/ELA-S)
  - Grade level classrooms or support courses combine.

- There are fewer opportunities for students to engage in electives and intervention/extension courses

- There are limited opportunities to fund full time staff for mental health and social emotional programs for students
School Groupings

Rather than identify individual schools that are under-enrolled, we are looking to engage with groups of schools serving similar grade levels, or “school groupings”, that have collectively experienced a decline in enrollment over time. This will allow our schools, and their communities, to collectively generate solutions, which may result in school consolidations.
Community-led, DPS-supported process

What will the consolidation options development process look like?

- Consolidating will mean that we will have fewer schools, but they will be fully enrolled and therefore able to offer the range of enriching opportunities our students and families deserve.

- Geographically-close schools that serve similar grade levels will work with their communities and district staff to consolidate schools and design more sustainable options for the future -- rather than simply closing some schools and keeping others open.

- The Denver Public Schools and the Board of Education strongly value community partnerships, and community engagement will be the key process for determining how we should move forward.

- There will be a community engagement process that includes district and school leaders, teachers, families, and community members to evaluate the challenges and determine the best options.
Charter Schools

How are charter schools impacted by the Small Schools conversation?

Different from district-run and iZone schools, charter schools are fully responsible for their financial solvency and do not receive additional district funding when they are under-enrolled (e.g., below 215 at the elem level).

Financial solvency is a key requirement of the contract between each charter school and the district, and a charter school may be non-renewed or required to surrender its contract if a healthy financial status is not maintained.

Since the 2017-18 school year, six charter schools (including multiple schools from large charter networks) surrendered their contracts naming declining enrollment as a major factor for their decision.

In the charter renewal process, district staff consider how enrollment impacts a school’s ability to sustain its approved educational program.
Two-Year Timeline

Changes will not happen overnight - and we will work together at every step.

- How do we engage the community?
- What are the guidelines and guardrails for this process and the outcomes?
- What is the status of our small schools?
- How should we solve for this?
- Board reviews proposed options & votes on path forward
- Planning Year (2022-23)
  - Name leader & staff
  - Program design
- School Choice in Winter 2023
- Open doors in August 2023
Q & A