

Comprehensive Findings of the Community Engagement Project for Denver Public Schools

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Background

In recent years, enrollment in DPS has been declining, which has led to instability in school funding and the quality of programming in some schools. Many factors have contributed to the declining enrollment across DPS, including a declining birth rate, gentrification, and new commercial and residential developments.

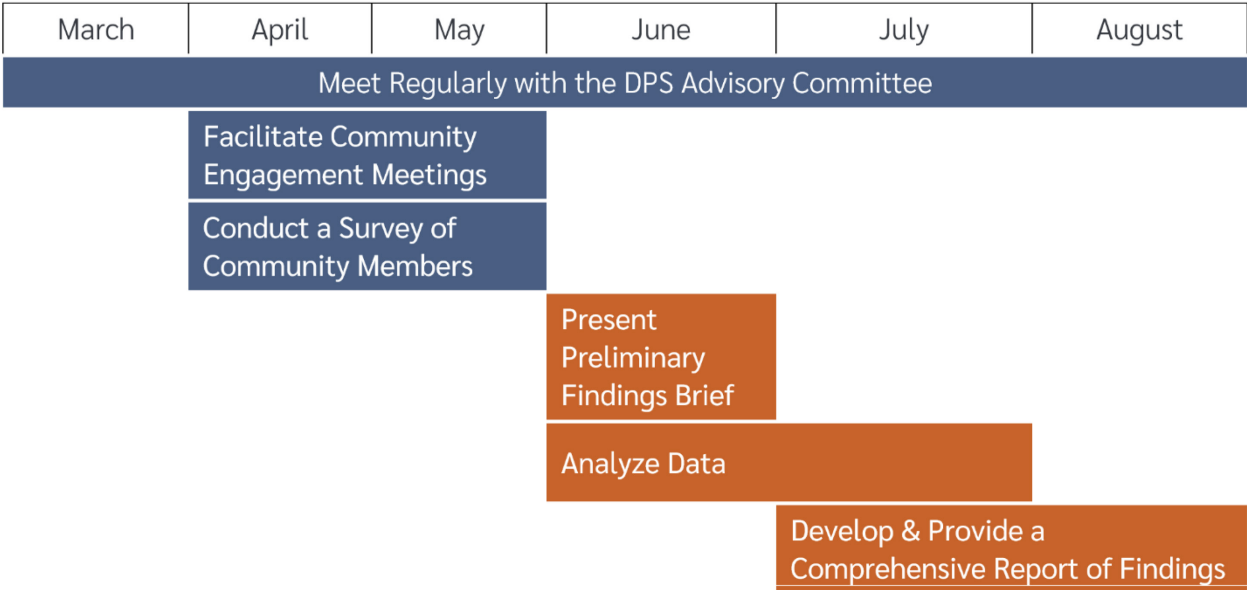
DPS contracted with Marzano Research to facilitate a process for engaging community members to provide input on potential solutions for declining enrollment. The purpose of the community engagement process was to collect feedback about potential solutions for DPS leadership to consider as they decide how to address the challenge of declining enrollment. It was important for the Marzano Research team to engage with school communities, school principals and staff, and school collaborative decision-making teams at schools impacted by enrollment across DPS.

This report presents the methods used by Marzano Research for community engagement and feedback analysis, the comprehensive findings from the analysis, and limitations throughout the process.

Methods

Marzano Research worked with DPS to create a phased community engagement and feedback analysis plan (Figure 1). As part of targeted community engagement (Phase 1), Marzano Research met regularly with the DPS Advisory Committee, facilitated community engagement meetings, and conducted a survey of community members. For the community feedback synthesis and analysis (Phase 2), Marzano Research analyzed data, presented a preliminary findings brief, and developed this comprehensive report.

Figure 1. Phased Community Engagement and Feedback Analysis Plan



Note: Items in blue are part of Phase 1. Items in orange are part of Phase 2.

Phase 1: Targeted Community Engagement

Community engagement is a crucial element of any effort to address issues that affect the well-being of a school, neighborhood, and city. Engaging the voice of community members in designing potential solutions helps to increase trust, create more effective strategies, and increase the likelihood that the solutions will be widely accepted. To support meaningful engagement, Marzano Research conducted the following tasks.

Task 1: Meet regularly with the DPS Advisory Committee

Marzano Research met weekly with the DPS Advisory Committee throughout the project. Meeting agenda items included coordinating resources in preparation for upcoming community meetings, reflecting on completed community meetings, and reviewing preliminary data. Between the weekly meetings, Marzano Research communicated regularly with the committee to provide updates, coordinate planning for community meetings, and respond to district leadership communication and direction.

Task 2: Facilitate community engagement meetings

Marzano Research met individually with the principals of each participating school to initiate the process of community engagement meetings. These introductory meetings were important to build trust, solicit feedback to understand community needs in preparation for the school-based community engagement meetings, and share the next steps and timeline of the process.

Marzano Research facilitated a series of 15 community meetings at schools, using a Community Meeting Protocol and guidance for facilitators to ensure consistency in data collection. The community meetings at each school aimed to engage community members by facilitating local, school-based communities to provide input on proposed potential solutions designed to address declining enrollment. The school communities that provided feedback on declining enrollment potential solutions were Ashley Elementary, Beach Court Elementary, Colfax Elementary, Columbian Elementary, Eagleton Elementary, Hallett Academy, International Academy of Denver at Harrington, Kaiser Elementary, Palmer Elementary, Schmitt Elementary, and Whittier ECE-8. Marzano Research held one-to-two meetings at each school, with a total of 478 participants across meetings.

Community meetings at each school site started with a brief overview of declining enrollment, a description of the community engagement process, and directions for the meeting process. Marzano Research then conducted a data walk, during which community members viewed a set of posters displaying data about the district and its declining enrollment, as well as school-specific data and enrollment factors. Marzano Research and the district provided language interpreters and translated materials that reflected each school site and community needs. DPS also provided childcare and food.

Marzano Research then facilitated conversation among the community members in small groups. After informing the group participants and providing options for participants who did not wish to be recorded, each facilitator recorded the conversations for later analysis. For consistency in data collection of themes and feedback, the facilitators used a common protocol to guide the conversation.

Task 3: Conduct a survey of community members

Marzano Research developed and administered a community survey to gather anonymous input from community members, especially those who could not attend the in-person scheduled community engagement meetings. The survey received a total of 799 responses.

The survey was translated into the DPS consent decree languages of English, Spanish, Arabic, Amharic, French, Mandarin, Nepali, Somali, and Vietnamese. DPS school leaders and individual teachers distributed the survey link through DPS dissemination channels and at community meetings. Marzano Research also worked with the DPS communications team to identify opportunities to reach community members through postcards, newsletters, web-based announcements, and social media.

DPS also conducted meetings with school staff using the Community Meeting Protocol. These staff meetings aimed for DPS district leadership to hear directly from staff about their perspectives and ideas about potential solutions. DPS shared these results with Marzano Research for inclusion in the analysis.

Phase 2: Community Feedback Synthesis and Analysis

Following targeted community engagement, Marzano Research conducted a thorough analysis of the collected data. Marzano Research has presented comprehensive findings in this report to allow for sensemaking and to support school-based and regional decision-making within DPS.

Task 1: Analyze data

Marzano Research conducted a qualitative content analysis to synthesize the community meeting small group conversations, survey responses, and DPS-provided staff meeting notes. Marzano Research developed a codebook based on a review of the data. A qualitative research codebook contains a list of codes, or terms, to be used in data analysis, along with definitions of the codes and examples of how to use them in practice. Appropriately using the codebook contributes to alignment, standardization, and consistency for analysis across a research team.

A team of four Marzano Research researchers participated in training on the codebook by coding a sample transcript and reaching consensus through discussion. Researchers coded all transcripts, survey responses, and meeting notes.

Marzano Research conducted inter-rater reliability checks as part of a quality assurance process to ensure alignment with the codebook. After all the coding was completed, Marzano Research conducted a content analysis of the codes to identify patterns and themes. For example, a theme that emerged from the analysis was the issue of student safety, which included discussions of safe walking routes, the impact on transportation routes, and policy revisions. Marzano Research completed the quality assurance process by ensuring all identified patterns and themes accurately reflected the data.

Task 2: Present the preliminary findings in a brief

Marzano Research compiled weekly reports that informed the preliminary findings, which were authored in a brief at the end of June. The weekly reports reflected the weekly data collection and monitoring used for initial insights into the overall community engagement process. The result of the brief allowed DPS leaders to begin reviewing the data and insights provided by community members.

Task 3: Provide a comprehensive report of findings

Marzano Research authored this comprehensive report to facilitate an understanding of the community engagement and feedback analysis processes. The report builds on the preliminary findings reported in the June brief to provide deeper insights from the data analysis.

Results

From analyzing transcripts of community engagement meetings, survey responses, and notes from school staff meetings, Marzano Research identified findings for each potential solution. Findings present community opinions that Marzano Research found most predominantly referenced for each potential solution during the data analysis process. Marzano Research also provides additional general themes that are not specific to a single school solution but are related to regional and district-level considerations.

Potential Solution 1: Boundary Revisions

Marzano Research's analysis of references to boundary revisions indicated that community members think a boundary revision might be difficult but that the district should explore this potential solution further. Community members acknowledged the opportunities and challenges in mitigating the boundary difficulties and increasing low school enrollment, which Marzano Research has compiled below.

Support for Boundary Revisions

Community members expressed support for boundary revisions to balance enrollment across schools and across regions (Table 1).

Table 1. Themes for Support for Boundary Revisions

Theme	Description
DPS is overdue for boundary revisions	Consider boundary revisions since the district has changed so much since the last boundary review.
Boundary revisions are a possible long-term solution	Boundary revisions are not an immediate solution but could have a positive effect over time.

Sample Quotes for Support for Boundary Revisions

There has not been a bigger look taken at enrollment zone boundaries in 30 years. ... We have to have a realistic conversation of what Denver is now. Not what Denver was in 1995, what Denver is in the year of 2023. You can't solve anything long-term without having a more realistic conversation about who is moving into Denver, who is having to move out of Denver, where they are living, what kind of housing they can afford, and what does that mean for the kids that are in this city and what do those kids need? And all of that has to be part of the conversation, and it starts with boundaries.

When you first redraw the boundaries, what you'll see is a lot of parents choice into the school that their child was at to keep them in that school. But as the next generation of students comes in, you'll see an influx in that boundary having an effect again. So I don't think it would be an overnight fix for enrollment, but over a long period of time, it would be. And I think that's really important to highlight—that changing boundaries is not gonna solve a problem overnight.

Why does [school name] not have an established and equitable enrollment boundary? The enrollment boundary, or lack thereof, has many impacts. The obvious impact is on student enrollment. We argue that with an equitable boundary, [school name] will see increasing enrollment. Furthermore, we have the capacity and desire to enroll more students.

When we think that out toward the airport, Montbello, they're building brand new schools out there, how might those boundaries be shifted so that we don't have to build a new school? That we're shifting boundaries maybe all over so that when it gets to this corridor, we don't have so many schools that are being closed and taking on the impact of lower enrollment. Like how can we justify building brand new [schools] when we've got some [schools] that are not being used or won't be used?

Concerns about Boundary Revisions

Community members also raised concerns about making boundary revisions (Table 2).

Table 2. Themes for Concerns about Boundary Revisions

Theme	Description
Potential conflict from community disagreements	There could be potential conflict in boundary revision conversations that may prohibit actual change.
Revisit the school choice policy	A boundary revision might not have the desired effect since families can “choice” students into a school.

Sample Quotes for Concerns about Boundary Revisions

How realistic is it to even have a boundary revision without impacting the other schools and having massive—not massive, but, I would say, concerns, outrage from the other schools, preventing it from actually happening? ... I don’t see this community, our neighborhood schools, willing to give up their boundary without a fight. And so, you know, for me, I feel like putting our resources and our time and efforts into other areas would be more sufficient for a better outcome.

Will [boundary revisions] make a difference since the district has school choice?

So even if you move their boundaries a little bit, they still have that overall choice and option to go to a different school. So I think that’s added another layer of complexity to it in a way. Ultimately, if the parent wants them to go someplace, they can apply there.

Specific Considerations for Boundary Revisions

Community members had suggestions for DPS to consider for boundary revisions (Table 3).

Table 3. Themes for Specific Considerations for Boundary Revisions

Theme	Description
Consider walking routes	New boundaries must consider prioritizing safe walking routes and avoid requiring students to cross busy streets.
Consider boundary changes based on landmarks	Consider boundary revisions around specific landmarks, such as the I-70 corridor and new housing developments.
Consider taking portions of boundaries from specific schools	Take portions of boundaries from specific schools with large enrollment areas.
Consider a return to traditional feeder systems versus a school choice system	Consider a return to traditional feeder systems, where patterns designate the schools students follow as they move from one level to the next, instead of allowing families to “choice” students into specific schools. For example, students from six elementary schools move into two middle schools and then into one high school.

Sample Quotes for Specific Considerations for Boundary Revisions

I would love to serve more children, but I don't want to serve more children if they're crossing streets that are really difficult for them to cross, like Colorado [Blvd.]. ... That we're making sure that our children all have safe routes to school.

I believe this [boundary revision] would be an effective way to address [school name] issues since the current enrollment area is so small, and the nearby Central Park zone still has a growing population.

Extending our boundaries to include a low-income housing unit that is going up a block outside of our current boundary would increase enrollment to [school name]. [School name] already had to extend their boundary and will be more than full with getting [school name] students. We would be helping by taking those students from that housing unit into our boundary. [School name] does not have [the] capacity to serve the expanded boundary considering the affordable housing projects taking place in the region.

The map makes it clear that our neighborhood schools are not preferable. [School name 1] 's boundary map is crazy—it's so close to [school name 2] and massive. [School name 1] is experiencing over-enrollment by design. My group talked about how the Five Points enrollment zone needs ended. [School name 2] needs their own zone. But in addition, we need investment and equity in our entire neighborhood. Make [school name 2] have a reasonable zone, but then also redo [school name 1] 's.

Create a strong system between [school names], which then feeds into [school name]. We absolutely have the population in [school names] for thriving schools. Our schools are being under-valued and under-supported, and then families are deciding to go elsewhere.

Potential Solutions 2 & 3: Co-Location and Consolidation

Marzano Research's analysis of references to the potential consolidation and co-location solutions indicated that community members think these two are basically the same. Community members reflected similar concerns and comments for each potential solution. One community member stated:

I think the co-location is just a temporary measure to consolidation.

Support for Co-Location and Consolidation

Community members expressed support for co-location and consolidation (Table 4).

Table 4. Themes for Support for Co-Location and Consolidation

Theme	Description
Consolidated schools may have better supports	Having greater overall numbers would provide support for students and teachers.

Sample Quotes for Support for Co-Location and Consolidation

For it! While strongly opposed by many of the other parents, this solution is good for both the students and the teachers. The students will have better peer-to-peer support with greater overall numbers, while class numbers may be smaller, and the teachers will have better peer-to-peer support by having other teachers at the same grade level.

Concerns about Co-Location and Consolidation

Community members expressed many concerns about the feasibility of co-location and consolidation (Table 5).

Table 5. Themes for Concerns about Co-Location and Consolidation

Theme	Description
Prioritize student safety in schools	Concerns about a feeling of safety in schools, including those with more students.
Prioritize student safety in getting to school	Concerns about safety, including safe walking routes and avoiding dangerous streets.
Distance of schools	Concerns about the distance of a new school and taking students out of neighborhood schools.
Factors in the decision to consolidate	Consider that all data, not just school size, should be considered when making decisions.
Additional staff may be required	Consolidated schools may need additional staff to support students and teachers better.
Logistical concerns for co-location	Logistics of two schools in the same building may be difficult, such as one gym, library, etc.
Potential conflict could arise	Concerns about the potential feeling of “separation” between schools and the possibility of segregated schools.

Sample Quotes for Concerns about Co-Location and Consolidation

When you think about consolidation and co-location, both schools are just not going to be the same. You also have to think about how you build this new community. ... How do you bring these groups of kids, these groups of families and parents and staff, together for that? And then what happens, you know, to the school leader as well, who leads that? You know, how do you choose which person is best to lead them? How do you give to each group that’s coming in equally so they all feel a part of it, you know?

Why house separate schools in the same building and share resources? Whoever/whatever those “shared resources” are requires learning and acting within two separate cultures. That’s taxing on the individuals and costly for the schools to develop materials and systems separately when in reality, they’ll end up being similar in the end anyway. Plus, staffing multiple principals/APs/office admin is unnecessarily costly.

The other thing is the accountability for where students are. How [are we] keeping students safe? How [are we] keeping students making good decisions if they have recess together? Who is responsible for those students’ safety?

Neighboring schools all have major crossroads—dangerous for kids to go to/from school.

No, none of us are going to allow our kids to cross Monaco [St. Pkwy.]. So a lot of us are able to walk [now]—we’re not gonna be able to do that anymore. Whether we send our kid on a bus or whether we drive them to school, they’re gonna have to go by car. And that’s not, that’s not something I think any of us want. That’s not the way the world is moving in. We are becoming, I mean, the sidewalk resolution that, or whatever it was that has less, we wanna be a city that walks more, right? And drives less. I mean, and, you know, talk about a street that you never want your child to cross, which is Colorado [Blvd.].

I love the fact that my son can walk to school without me necessarily having to hold his hand or anything. And that would not be the case if my son had to go across [a busy street] to get to school. It would be a much further walk, and it’s not always pleasant weather, and I see a lot of students walking by themselves to [school name], and I don’t want to see them having to cross a busy street in the snow, and it’s not always light outside in order to get to school.

No. What would even be the point of this? Also, a lot of families choose schools based on location. We chose our school because it was the best location for us, so now you’re going to inconvenience families and make them drive farther or take them to a location they don’t feel comfortable taking their kids [to]?

Our students should not be bussed out of their neighborhood where generations have historically lived.

Maybe more support staff would be good. Not necessarily teachers, but support staff, para/office staff, people who will help with logistical things. Because I know admin and teachers wear multiple hats because there aren’t enough support staff members. And so when you’re putting two schools together, or you’re asking another school to [do] whatever it is, you still need people to support that transition.

Like the gym, if there’s one gym and two schools are trying to get through the classes specials ... that’s double the number of classes that we normally have, and they already have a full day.

It was tricky because it was high school, and ours was an elementary school, and we started as a K-2, and then it rolled up, 3, 4, 5. So the age difference was [there], but then we all shared the same lunchroom. So like coordinating two different schools to use a lunchroom during lunchtime when kids need to eat. It just is very complex, and I don't think the neighborhood schools are big enough to facilitate schools to take two schools in one. So where would those two schools go? But I've lived it, like it can work, and it does save [the] district money, and it does save resources [by] using buildings that are already there. But it's a complex change.

I think it's gonna cause rivalry as you bring two schools together. Our school is what, 65% African American? I think there's a historical context of that and what that means to students of color entering a school that might not be as diverse as we are and having them feel like they're, you know, maybe not seen, heard, as much as they [are here] and also not represented. Our school has not only mirrors of students that look like each other here and they feel comfortable, but they also have people in positions that also mirror them as well. And so there's something [to] be said for that and a trust factor.

I know location is the most important piece, but there's also a big school culture piece. Our school culture here is very different than other schools. Pieces around social-emotional wellness, like approaches to de-escalating upset parents versus calling safety and security on upset parents, to pick a very real example. So I just think if consolidation's on the table, I really hope DPS finds a way to work with communities. I mean, it's gonna be cultural differences in any two schools. I just, I particularly worry about how communities are being combined and what that looks like. Because for us, [for] example, in a small school, like it's easy for us to sit down in a meeting and talk about a common language to use with the students and consistency with the students. We're starting all over.

You lose the community when you don't know anyone.

I think that is just weird and creates an odd culture of separation. Didn't [school name] do that with their middle school? It seemed like "The Have's of [school name]" and the "Have Not's" of some throwaway school. No. Unless we, as a district, are trying to move back to segregation.

Having a co-located elementary school doesn't feel like it would work. We are trying to help our youngest students find a place of belonging, but it would cause confusion to have students from a different school in the same building. This also could look a lot like segregation. [School name] is mostly black students, and if the school is co-located with a school that has different demographics, it would look terrible. It would look/feel a lot like segregation in a school.

Specific Considerations about Co-Location and Consolidation

Community members shared specific suggestions for DPS to consider for co-location and consolidation (Table 6).

Table 6. Themes for Specific Considerations of Co-Location and Consolidation

Theme	Description
Establish a new school identity	Consider consolidating schools into one school with a new name, identity, and programming.
Maintain existing staff	A desire for current school staff to be at the new school.
Keep class sizes small	A desire to ensure DPS maintains small class sizes within a consolidated school.
Consider building condition	The condition of the building should drive consolidation decisions, not the school's population. Also, schools designed to meet certain students' needs, such as those eligible for special education services, should not be closed in favor of schools that are not.
Expand transportation options	A desire and need for expanded transportation options if students have to go to a school farther away than their current school.
Maintain programming and offerings	If schools are consolidated, the new school needs to be able to offer all programming and options that both schools previously offered.
Involve all affected communities in conversations	A belief that all impacted communities need to be involved in conversations that affect them.

Sample Quotes for Specific Considerations about Co-Location and Consolidation

I think that a consolidation should combine the two schools into a new re-branded school. Our district has many schools named after individuals and are very dated. ... With moving to one building, I think the ONLY way to make it happen smoothly for community members and students is to create a new school, either with BOTH fully intact leadership teams for the first year, or a completely new leader taking over the "new" school. I know this likely would add some costs for the 1st year, but both schools are incredibly outdated anyway, and rebranding would likely also help with the low neighborhood enrollment by giving a new, fresher face to the building and school, which may encourage neighborhood families to stop choicing out and instead, enroll at their nearby neighborhood school.

Any school that we are gonna be co-locating into [needs to] have the opportunity to create a sense of community and thrive together in a meaningful way where it's not, you stay on your side of the school, and we stay on our side of the school.

I think this could potentially be a good option if it is done with care as a TRUE consolidation. In the previous iteration, it was clear that we were just being absorbed by the other school. We would lose our name, our leader, and all of the things that make our school community ours. We were told we would spend the next full year determining what we wanted the new consolidated school to be, but if that is the case, what is the point? By the second year there, we would already have absorbed ourselves into that community—the one that was not ours. Our traditions will have been lost, our leader would have been gone, we would have had a full year following the absorbing school’s curriculum and programming. To make this work, it would need to be a true consolidation with BOTH schools coming together, making decisions together about programming—what curriculum will we use? How do we set up a model to support all teachers, etc.?

What values and traditions from each school do we incorporate into the new school? We would need to change the school’s name to prove it isn’t an absorption but instead a reinvention of both schools.

What has just happened with [school name] being consolidated into [school name]? Taking one small school and placing it in another, you’ve got a really much larger-capacity school. Whereas giving [school name] families a choice to come to either [school name] or [school name] would’ve seemed a more appropriate decision because it’s, for one thing, closer to [school name]. There is a major road that they have to cross to get to [school name], but to get to [school name], there are two major roads. So I’m not sure how thoughtful that decision was. And how can we make decisions that take into account more than just the capacity of the building? [Because] there’s so much more at play in a school when these types of decisions are made.

As long as my son can have the same teacher and the school isn’t really far from home, then I would be ok with it.

And I think it goes back to the needs that we have in this particular school, within this particular community. To move to a new building with a lot of students may not get the attention and the education, the academic growth, that they have with so much support that we can give here because we are a small school. DPS advertised small-sized classrooms—then why are we putting students in a building with 400 students? I don’t want my son in a classroom packed like sardines.

Why ruin a great thing? If you must consolidate, keep the classes small.

Our students need the small community. This is best for them to stay in our small community school instead of overcrowding another school where they will have less attention.

While it would afford my school and students more resources (or at least that is my hope), I worry that cramming more students into the school would take away from learning. If a class has too many students, learning goes by the wayside as teachers must manage behavioral issues.

If there are MANY students mixed in with behavioral issues, it becomes more about managing chaos. We want our students to succeed and read and [be] able with their math skills. This cannot be done with large classes, and it hurts the students.

Please keep class sizes under 22 students. Our students need small class sizes in order to adjust to all the changes. Small class sizes will ensure more individualized attention per student. What additional mental health and behavioral supports and staff will be provided? How many Specials teachers will be in the building? Will there be any additional Specials/Enrichment classes created? Will the school's budget increase with the influx of students in a traditional way, or will the budgets be combined? What do those numbers look like?

[School name] can receive the [school name] staff and students. The building is newe[r] than the other school, and has all the requirements for MIA [Multi-Intensive Autism]. It's well maintained and has the capacity for all students.

I would like more consideration around the physical buildings of welcoming and closing schools. Why would we move students into an older building [that has] no AC and [is] not as nice simply because the welcoming school has a higher capacity?

[School name] is a newer, nicer building with AC. More specifically, [school name] currently has MIA programs, and [school name] 's building is set up to meet the many needs of these programs.

If you look back at the school that we were supposed to consolidate with last time around, the school wasn't really even accessible. We have a lot of students with disabilities at this school. So this should be a consideration at each school individually. Like the building, like physical structures and things like that for accessibility. ... Why retrofit if the place is already there? Why spend the money on a building that needs to be retrofitted if there's already building capacity [at another school]?

So we would ask that as they're making decisions, they keep in mind special classrooms like that and the students and the teachers and the staff that support them because if we go up the road, that building is different and does not, is not built the same and has been retrofitted to allow movement. But it's different than living in a building, or working in a building, or going to school in a building that is already made the same for every student.

So if your student has to go to a different school, for sure, you need to have transportation from where they live to where they're gonna be going.

And what it's doing is you're putting more hardship on families to already find transportation to where they're gonna have to go. ... They're gonna have to go somewhere that's gonna be, you know, inconvenient [for] their family, and eventually what's gonna happen, so they're just like, screw this, I'm gonna disenroll and just find another option.

I'll get my kids to school, but there are families who don't have that ability. They don't have the transportation security that I have to get my kids to school. How can DPS guarantee that every single family in these neighborhoods has an ability to get their children to school?

And I'm really worried that if families have to rely on bussing, they're not gonna be able to get here [on time]. They're just not gonna be able to make it to school if they miss the bus, and we know we have been working so hard, we know the many families. That's gonna be a major barrier. Another big one, and I've said this and said this, and it feels like no one's listening: ECE can't be bussed. Right. We have 50 ECE students here. We're expanding. We have a wait list.

[Make] transportation available for the first year of consolidation—pick up at [their] neighborhood school, then go to [their] new school to have that security [of] going to school at a new place.

I mean, if you're going to close our school, all of our services and whatever have to go and be still available and whatever to all of our people regardless of where they go. So if you're going to split us between two schools, then those two schools better have community hubs, those two schools that have transportation for us, those two schools need to take one-half of the staff members, you take that other half because guess who knows those students? We do.

The conversation is about us. And last time, [school name] wasn't even aware of it.

Please talk to communities TOGETHER—don't talk to [school name] and then to [school name] separately at different times. Bring those communities in nearby locations together to problem-solve and come to communal understandings. Pitting buildings against each other and keeping groups apart is just eroding trust and causing more stress!

It felt bad to be, like, you have to abandon your school without that being a choice of the community as a whole. If schools are consolidating, it should be, like, school staff, families, [and] kids get a say. Maybe take a tour of both buildings. Really compare the facilities and the capacity and [what meets] the needs of students and what already exists in each building to better help the communities come together.

Potential Solution 4: No Guaranteed Subsidy

Marzano Research’s analysis of references to keeping schools open without a guaranteed subsidy indicated that community members show varied support for this potential solution. Currently, schools that are not receiving enough funding to maintain operations based on their enrollment numbers receive a subsidy from DPS to cover the gap in funding. If a school continues to operate without a guaranteed subsidy, there is the possibility of a decrease in programming, staffing, and resources.

Community members who held positive views of this potential solution thought that their principal and community had a great capacity to fundraise. Community members who did not hold positive views of this potential solution recognized the shortcomings of relying on fundraising. Many community members interpreted this option as a threat. Community members shared the following considerations regarding this potential solution.

Concerns about No Guaranteed Subsidy

Community members expressed many concerns about the feasibility of maintaining a school with no guaranteed subsidy (Table 7).

Table 7. Themes for Concerns about No Guaranteed Subsidy

Theme	Description
Address budget concerns	Concerns about long-term impacts.

Sample Quotes for Concerns about No Guaranteed Subsidy

This is an option, but [I] worry about funding for MLL/SpEd, Specials, and if that has to be cut, then it is not a good option for kids.

Due to the large number of students requiring food assistance (~90%), I don’t believe this would work, given many studies which suggest that it costs more to educate children of lower income.

Without the subsidy, you don’t really have a school—no specials, no school psychologists/social workers, no resources for the SEL needs of kids.

The lack of a subsidy puts more pressure on the school and families to raise money.

Potential Solution 5: Transitional Closure

Marzano Research’s analysis of references to transitional closure indicated that community members discussed concerns about how long the school closure process has taken. One member summarized their opinion this way:

I think that will feel awful for staff and students. I think this process has already been drawn out enough. Either give us a path forward or close us.

Specific Considerations about Transitional Closure

Community members shared specific suggestions for DPS to consider for transitional closure (Table 8).

Table 8. Themes for Specific Considerations of Transitional Closure

Theme	Description
Mitigate the negative impact on students	Worries about the impact on students and the culture of a school, using words like “ <i>depressing</i> ,” “ <i>eerie</i> ,” “ <i>spooky</i> ,” and “ <i>lonely</i> ” and stating that a transitional closure is “ <i>very hard on school culture</i> .”
Address budget and staff concerns	Concerns about the impacts on staff members and the difficulty of keeping a high-quality staff at a school as it slowly closes.
Address family concerns	Concerns about families wanting to have all their students attend the same school, and transitional closure prevents families from being able to keep their students together.

Sample Quotes for Specific Considerations about Transitional Closure

Fine for a year or two, but too lonely for children as they move up each year with no other grades to interact with, teach, [or] learn from. Not a healthy environment for kids to work and learn in a silo without community.

I can only imagine how hurtful it is going to be to the entire school community (students, staff, and families) watching their school dwindle down year after year to practically nothing. Each year as the student body gets smaller, the school will receive less resources and support from the district. Equity will definitely be a thing of the past.

This would definitely drive families away and create a very depressing atmosphere for the remaining students.

This option would present many challenges for the many families who have multiple children in a plethora of grade levels. This could lead to a damaging mass exodus, which is very detrimental to staff jobs.

As a kindergarten teacher, what would happen to my job in this instance? What about older students who then have kindergarten-aged siblings? Those families would leave if their children would have to attend multiple schools.

I fear the teachers and staff might be too transitory as the school prepares for closure, and the consistent educational values could be compromised.

I guess as a staff member, I don't have to worry about next year, and then I have to fight again. There's another year and then another year, and it's like, in the end, I don't want to stay here. I'd rather leave and go to a school that is not going to close, but if you're thinking about in five years, it's like, "Okay, in five years, then what?" Why wait five years when I can just wait a year and leave? And I feel like [it would be] the same with our families. Why am I going to wait another year when I know your brother, that is an ECE, is not going to be here in fourth grade because we're going to close in four years?

Potential Solution 6: Community-Generated Potential Solutions and Comments

Marzano Research's analysis of community-generated comments found various potential solutions to keep schools open. Overall, community members asked DPS to prioritize long-term, sustainable solutions.

As we continue to grow low-income housing in our neighborhood, it is imperative to think long-term.

Shutting down schools now would lead to having to spend even more money reopening schools in later years due to the influx of families/students that WILL be coming.

In addition, although community members appreciated being asked, they also recognized that they can't solve the problem of declining enrollment.

DPS should be telling us what they can do to provide support to [school name] ... to continue growing. I don't think they should be hearing from us. I think we should be hearing from them [about] what they can do for us and for [school name].

Overall Considerations

Community members shared suggestions for DPS to consider throughout this process (Table 9).

Table 9. Themes for Overall Considerations

Theme	Description
Value small schools	Support of small schools and the ability to provide better educational opportunities for students.
Consider enrollment caps	School enrollment and class size caps would promote a more equitable distribution of students across schools.
Provide time and support for schools to increase enrollment	A desire for a <i>grace period</i> to allow the school to increase enrollment. In some cases, schools were in the beginning stages of whole-school reforms designed to make the school more attractive and desired additional time to work on these changes. In other cases, the community thought that the declining enrollment process and announcements of school

Theme	Description
	closures had hurt enrollment, and schools needed time to rebuild and secure increased enrollment.
Reconsider the school’s daily schedule—start and end times—and the impact on enrollment decisions	Concerns about the new start and stop times and how these changes will “further hurt enrollment,” especially when parents “choice in” students and travel across the district.
Revisit overall school funding structures, formulas, processes, and policies	Consider that the funding model should be revised, taking into consideration what the district is allowed to do. In most cases, community members think that a per-pupil funding model exacerbated equity issues and that a model based on student needs should be adopted.
Integrate new educational programming	Consider several options for increasing the attractiveness of school offerings, such as adding ECE programs, adopting specialty focuses, creating community hubs, adding language resources and programming, and other suggestions. Also consider time and funding to fully implement these changes, including in schools where these programming changes have already occurred.
Promote family engagement and community involvement	Consider the inequity in PTA funding and the belief that inequities in funding result in students “choicing” into “have” schools and “choicing” out of “have-not” schools. Consider district intervention to solve these inequities through district funding, sharing programs, support for developing funding partnerships, or other strategies.

Sample Quotes for Overall Considerations

I feel like this has been a crusade against small schools. There is nothing wrong with small schools. Rather than looking at small schools as a liability, let’s look at them as an alternative asset in what is otherwise a large district. DPS should champion and promote its small schools for students who thrive in smaller learning environments. For example, I bet some of our administrators chose to go to a small college versus a big one. Let’s offer those same options within DPS to our students. With strong leadership, these can become strong small schools, and DPS will be better off with them.

Limit enrollment in schools that are overenrolled and push more students into their neighborhood schools. This is the way to drive a sense of community and to keep the neighborhood school.

DPS needs to look into capping enrollment at some of these other schools and reducing the number of schools we open each year. The district is consistently talking about declining enrollment but opening schools in areas that already have a sufficient amount of schools. I understand some of these newer “innovation” schools have ideas and [a] curriculum that differs from our standard schools, but instead of opening new schools, why not incorporate that curriculum into existing schools?

These schools are neighboring schools, [and] some of them are overenrolled. So capping elementary schools could open up the opportunity to grow neighboring schools.

I think we should be looking at enrollment caps for our white flight schools. Let's be clear, we have people gentrifying the neighborhood, and as a white woman, I can, you know, like, I know we're doing it. And yet there's this unwillingness to send your kid to a regular school. So they're opportunity hoarding. They're taking all the spots at international schools. They're trying to get as many little opportunities for their kids who already have an advantage, and I think that either we need to make sure we're giving more priority to free and reduced lunch kids, kids of color, or just putting caps.

Provide extended time to increase enrollment, such as a 5-year opportunity to strategically implement practices and procedures to increase enrollment.

But we need a promise of investment.

I think that [DPS] also needs to look at issuing something like an official statement saying that we will not be closed for at least five years or something like that.

Do not change our start times. Starting at 7:30 will hurt our center programs and our students, who rely on transportation [and] will be outside waiting for the bus in the dark!

The 7:10 start time is a MAJOR issue for enrollment. That is way too early.

I think the start and end times are hurting the school even more for next year. I live across the street, and I don't know how I'm gonna get [my student] at 2: 40.

Maybe the district needs to rethink their funding model. Some schools probably need less funding from the district, while other schools need more funding. I think that [schools] should be subsidized in a similar way that the federal government offers subsidies for schools who have more students who qualify for free and reduced lunch because those schools clearly need more support. The idea that each school should be funded per student creates inequities in different ways, so maybe shift the funding model rather than thinking about shutting down schools as the first option or even find ways to use schools to make money during summer and holiday breaks.

Why does money have to follow the student? I don't think all schools in the district need the same financial support or have students facing the same inequalities and issues. Maybe the money should be distributed by need rather than headcount.

Take a more honest look at the budgeting decisions made by DPS, especially when considering other surrounding districts. DPS spends an extraordinary amount of money at the district level. Additionally, DPS does not have to send the per-pupil funding to each individual student at their individual school. DPS could redistribute their funds to focus on lower-income schools.

ECE doesn't contribute to K-5 funding. So how can we maybe shift some of that?

ECE is part of our building, right? And it's also part of these resources. And ECE enrollment doesn't get counted at any school. It shouldn't be separate funding. Even if it is, that's a state issue. We can't change that. But can we change it at the DPS level, where the ECE department maybe pays towards specials teachers and admin because we support their kids?

School Choice and Charter School Policy Considerations

Community members shared suggestions for DPS to consider for school choice and charter school policies (Table 10).

Table 10. Themes for School Choice and Charter School Policy Considerations

Theme	Description
Prioritize school choice applications from students in different populations (FRL, closed schools, etc.)	Consider prioritizing school choice applications for students impacted most by school closures.
Prioritize school diversity in the school choice program	Consider that school choice has seemingly led to more segregated schools.
Reconsider charter school policies	Frustration with charter schools and the belief they are part of the declining enrollment issues.
Develop marketing plans for schools	Consider that schools and the district should be doing more to market the special features of their school to attract students through the choice process. Many parents contrasted district and school efforts with local charter schools' often "overwhelming" marketing efforts. There was also the request to consider disincentivizing families from using the school choice process.

Sample Quotes for School Choice and Charter School Policy Considerations

I think [students from closed schools] should be given [the] first choice at any school.

DPS could take a long and hard look at the role that their [school] choice system has had in segregating the students of Denver Public Schools.

[School choice] is not equitable until all families feel [the] impacts. Make parents pay a fee that goes to small schools when they choice out.

[Declining enrollment] would simply not be happening if charters were not given lower standards and allowed to give too many options that weaken other schools. The problem is too many charters.

Consider closing down underperforming charter schools. The creation of many of these schools was in response to the influx of people moving to Colorado as a part of the green rush. Now that that population surge has died down, maybe consider closing charters.

I think one thing we could do is start looking at the way charter schools are renewed year over year, and the length at which charter schools are granted a privilege to operate. I think it does a disservice in so far as demographics can change [from] year to year, decade to decade. And ... the length [at] which charter schools are being granted permission to operate really misses the economic condition of a city and [the] ups and downs, the ebbing and the flowing of people moving in and out of the city.

DPS needs to not shut down the charter schools that are already up and running, but they need a hard stop. Hard stop. Stop making charter schools. Stop funding charter schools. Like, okay, like all the ones that are up and running, great. Like, let them do their things.

Maybe the piece that I struggle more with is the inequity that exists in marketing. So we had a charter school that had a billboard across the street from our school this year, and definitely, that was placed intentionally. ... Charter schools that have big money budgets for marketing, they have TV ads, they have music ads or radio, they have Facebook ads, billboards, mailers that they send. When was the last time you saw [a] DPS neighborhood school have a billboard?

As a parent who lives three blocks from the school, it is extremely frustrating that DPS does not do anything to encourage neighborhood school enrollment. Instead, they allow dozens of charters to send out mailers and make phone calls to draw students to their schools while neighborhood schools are being penalized for low enrollment while the district just sits and watches. Furthermore, [school name] is one of the last standing neighborhood schools in the downtown area. Shutting it down will only leave charter schools in the neighborhood, which is not fair to our students and community.

Declining Enrollment Process Considerations

Community members shared suggestions for DPS to consider for the DPS-defined declining enrollment process (Table 11).

Table 11. Themes for Declining Enrollment Process Considerations

Theme	Description
Rethink the timing of this process	A belief that news around declining enrollment and school closures came at a critical time for new enrollment.
Need for transparency	A desire for more information about the declining enrollment process and the data used for the decision to close a school.
Adjust the criteria for school closures	A belief that school population is the only criteria used to decide on school closures. They want the district to consider other factors when making closure decisions.
Reconsider process for school openings	Frustration with a perception that the district is “celebrating” the opening of schools while closing schools.

Sample Quotes for Declining Enrollment Process Considerations

[DPS needs to] think long and hard about what they are gonna do to remediate the kiss of death they gave us last fall when it was in the news about how we were gonna close.

DPS is advertising closures at critical enrollment times. You will see lower enrollment because [DPS] timing pushes families to consider other options. [DPS] will use this data to show that these schools need to be closed, but they facilitated and advertised closures during enrollment windows, so they helped to hurt their own schools and did not help to increase enrollment like they should have. DPS has not been true to their values of integrity, accountability, or students first through this process.

I've been in the neighborhood for six years. It's had a black mark on it since then. So families are going to be possibly choosing a different school for the school of choice because they think that the school's going to be closing. ... Is it a self-fulfilling prophecy?

Budget and numbers are a guaranteed part of life (like death and taxes). We must elevate the human side of this predicament. There are many people affected and many who may have wonderful ideas. Releasing truly transparent financial information would be respectful and helpful to many stakeholders.

I really hope that the decision-makers do their "diligence" this time as they make difficult decisions and go much deeper than selecting schools with the largest space, which was a surface-level cop-out and so humiliating for the staff and families in these schools. Which schools are on a trajectory for success? Which leaders are trusted by their staff and could be successful [in] merging two schools? DPS has Collaborate Survey data which could help with this. Dig into the Colorado Department of Education surveys that were sent out last year. Which of these schools, in spite of declining enrollment issues, have positive data results again from the staff who might transition with a leader who is merging two schools? Which schools are implementing huge grants from the Colorado Department of Education and are on a trajectory for change? This decision is deeper than building capacity and building combinations. Do the work, and PLEASE make an informed decision, one that honors the profession of Education.

I would like to see some hard fiscal numbers with respect to these individual schools that are being proposed. What is the energy footprint? What is the cost of the land? Has it been paid off? Has the district borrowed against it? Like, have they put themselves in a fiscal position where they can't now back out?

So it seems like the consensus is that DPS is overlooking the quality of education here.

You're just looking at the numbers, overlooking the facilities, overlooking the program and curriculum, and looking only at the enrollment numbers, right?

[Academic] performance should be factored into criteria for closing schools

DPS should consider the limited number of other proximate schools for this neighborhood.

Decisions about school closure, consolidat[ion], whatever we're gonna do to solve this challenge need to be made not solely on the numbers but in an examination of what the school is offering and bringing to the community. And if there's a value-add there, we need to prioritize that value-add over the raw numbers.

Maybe more research can be done to sort out why enrollment is declining, [and] address it with the school board to increase enrollment in the district.

Count ECE in enrollment numbers. These students become kindergartners quickly.

I think a big argument that we had as a community was that every school should be considered on a case-by-case basis. At the time, they were lumping ten schools in together. And that wasn't fair to anybody in any of those schools. And you know, I think the hard reality is there are times when schools need to close. That's just the nature of the ebbs and flows of schools and funding and everything else that goes along with it.

I think another really big thing that's on everybody's mind [is] when the district put out a [request to] celebrate the groundbreaking of a brand new ECE-8 school. Right in the middle [of this process]. That was in March. And so it is very, very hard to stomach the groundbreaking of a brand new building while yours is looked at [to be] closed.

We realize that Denver is geographically very large, but there have to be some solutions where we're not spending millions of dollars to open a building and leaving others empty and closed.

We understand the challenges, we really do. But PLEASE be sensitive when "celebrating" the opening of three new schools while telling others they're going to close. ... This was so very difficult to stomach!

Limitations

There are several limitations to consider when interpreting these results. Overall, it is critical to acknowledge that these data only represent the 11 participating schools across the district that are impacted by low enrollment. These findings should not be generalized across the district, and it is recommended that DPS conduct additional regional community engagement activities.

Community Engagement Meetings

Participants self-selected to participate in community meetings, so the pool of members who provided input may not completely represent the school community and surrounding neighborhood. In addition, DPS canceled the second meeting at three schools after the first meeting. It is possible community members were planning to attend the publicized second meeting and missed their opportunity to provide input.

DPS also engaged the community in school safety meetings after a major school safety issue occurred. These meetings were high in importance. However, the school safety meetings conflicted with the timing of one of the school community engagement meetings, which could have contributed to decreased attendance numbers.

Community Survey

To increase participation from a wide range of community members, district and school staff administered the community survey broadly. Marzano Research encouraged survey respondents to complete the survey more than once if respondents needed more opportunities to share their feedback. Therefore, the survey could not be quantified, and responses were only tracked by the school of interest.

Within the survey, respondents were not required to answer each question, which led to several questions with missing data. Marzano Research was unable to include these questions within the analysis. The survey was also administered digitally, so those with limited access to, or understanding of, technology might not be represented in these responses.

DPS-Conducted Staff Meetings

While school staff were encouraged to participate openly during these staff meetings, it is possible they did not feel comfortable speaking in a meeting led by district leadership. As a result, data analysis from these conversations may be skewed.

DPS School Board's Executive Limitations Policy Development

During the community engagement process, the DPS School Board began revising its Executive Limitations policy. The initial revisions and public discussions prompted some school principals to seek clarification about the policy's impact on the community engagement process. Principals voiced concern that the policy discussions interfered with and prompted the cancellation of community engagement opportunities.

Conclusion

Marzano Research offers an independent and objective perspective on the community engagement process about the potential solutions for DPS leadership to consider as they decide how to address the challenge of declining enrollment. This report was written to ensure that DPS community members' voices are accurately reflected in this final set of considerations, as well as to provide insights into the strengths and challenges, for each potential solution.

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