



# Declining Enrollment

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the Small Schools Resolution?**

The Denver Board of Education approved the Small Schools Resolution in June 2021, which directs the district to work with school communities throughout the district to address declining enrollment in elementary schools.

The resolution calls for DPS staff to begin a community-led, district-supported process to create possible solutions for declining enrollment, with guidelines to ensure sustainable programming for students, including strong bilingual education using the Transitional Native Language Instruction (TNLI) model.

What is declining enrollment?

Between 2014-2020, DPS enrolled approximately 5,000 fewer elementary students, and the trend is expected to continue over the next five years. This decline is attributed to Denver's changed demographics. For example, there has been a decline in children being born in Denver since 2008. This fact, combined with changing housing stock in many areas of the city have led to fewer school aged children living within Denver Public Schools' enrollment area.

### **What impact does declining enrollment have on our schools?**

As the student-aged population declines, enrollment also has been declining at many schools throughout the district. When schools enroll fewer students, DPS and the school receive less money from the state, which makes it very difficult to fund all of the programs and services we believe students deserve. This trend is projected to continue over the next five years.

DPS offers additional funding to district-run schools for a variety of needs. This includes both a "small school subsidy" for schools with enrollment less than 215 students and additional "budget assistance" that includes schools that have declining enrollment or are projected to have fewer students than they would need to fund and staff all of their desired programs, among other reasons.

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## **Why is a fully enrolled school important?**

A fully enrolled school has sufficient funding to provide students with robust and equitable student opportunities, including:

- Regularly scheduled Art, Physical Ed., Music, and/or other electives.
- Appropriate grade and language-level programs for Multilingual Learners
- Gifted & Talented, Special Ed., Math and Literacy Interventions at all levels
- Mental health supports such as school counselors, psychologists and/or social workers, and staff for Restorative Practices
- Designated time for teacher planning and data-driven instruction practices
- Ability for teachers to focus on one set of course or grade-level standards and assessments

## **What happens when a school is under-enrolled?**

Elementary schools with low enrollment often experience inconsistent elective courses, impacts to quality TNLI programming, and limited opportunities for intervention (like extra help in Literacy and Math) or extension (like Gifted and Talented programs). Schools with low enrollment and TNLI programming often have to make further compromises by combining grade-levels.

## **When will changes to schools be implemented?**

This process will not happen overnight. The vision is for no changes to occur at schools until the 2023-24 school year, with the unique exceptions for some schools that are in extenuating circumstances and need to close earlier due to extreme declines in enrollment. Prior to any changes, DPS will work with school staff, families, and neighbors to develop options for the impacted communities.

## **Which schools have been identified to be closed?**

No schools have been identified to be closed, and there is no list of schools being considered for closure or consolidation. The Declining Enrollment Advisory Committee will create the criteria the district will use to determine which schools should be closed or consolidated.

What does this mean for school staff and families?

Once schools have been identified for consolidation or closure, DPS is committed to supporting families and staff through the transition. DPS and the board have clearly stated their commitment to supporting staff, who will be prioritized through any changes. DPS will also support families with any plans for transitioning schools, school choice, transportation, specialized programming, and other needs that are important to our families and students.

## **What will the changes mean for TNLI and language learning programs?**

DPS will remain committed to our legal obligations outlined in the [Consent Decree](#). This decree outlines the requirements we have to ensure language support and language learning programs for our multilingual students. We deeply value our multilingual students and families and will always remain committed to ensuring strong language learning programs. If any schools are closed or consolidated, close attention will be given to ensuring there are strong language programs for our students. A core rationale for this conversation about closure and consolidation is to ensure our language programs are supported and able to successfully serve and support our students.

## **What will happen to special education center-based programs if a school is closed?**

Similar to our legal obligations to the consent decree, we are also legally and morally obligated to ensure our students in center-based programs have quality programs and support services. Regardless of any closures, DPS will ensure that all students in a center-based program have the opportunity to transition to a quality program.

## **Is early childhood education (ECE) enrollment declining at the same rate?**

ECE enrollment is separate from K-12 enrollment and funded separately from the K-12 public education system. ECE enrollment is not guaranteed in the state of Colorado. ECE is not mandatory for students and many families do not enroll in ECE. This means that the enrollment is very different from K-12 enrollment, and ECE is not a clear indicator for K-12 enrollment. Typically, DPS ECE 4 represents about 50% of its kindergarten students. In the past several years, DPS has made great strides in

increasing the number of ECE seats available to students, particularly ECE 3 students. So while ECE enrollment has remained relatively flat or increased some, this is not reflective of changes in student populations, it is a function of the fact that additional seats have been added.

### **Will charter schools participate in the process of consolidating schools?**

Declining enrollment impacts all school types (district-run, innovation, and charters) within the district. DPS charter schools are participating in the Declining Enrollment Advisory Committee, to create criteria that is equitably applied to all DPS schools. In addition, all DPS charter schools are nonprofit organizations and are fully responsible for their financial solvency. This means that they do not receive additional district funding when they are under-enrolled. 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 it does not maintain healthy financial status.

### **What is the cause of declining enrollment? Are Denver families choosing private schools or just leaving the district?**

There are several reasons for a decline in the number of students enrolled in DPS schools. We know that the increase in housing costs have caused many families to leave the city. We also know that the birth rate has declined steadily over the past decade. Our enrollment data also show that most Denver families choose DPS schools. Only about 8% of Denver students enroll in other Colorado districts, and about 6.6% attend private schools.

### **Why is the district focused on elementary and middle schools for this criteria?**

Our enrollment data show that our elementary schools have seen the greatest decline over the last decade, and this information is a leading indicator to understand the decline at the secondary level. As the smaller cohort of elementary students progress through middle school, we will see fewer middle school-aged students. We also have far more elementary schools across the district than secondary, and these schools have been more impacted by the challenges of declining enrollment.

### **Are the committee meetings open to the public?**

The committee meetings are considered “working sessions” and intended for the committee members who represent families and parents, teachers, school leaders, and community members across the district. There will be meeting recaps posted on the [Declining Enrollment Advisory Committee webpage](#).

### **Are there opportunities for public feedback?**

Yes, the committee will receive public feedback as they generate guiding principles and draft the criteria. There will also be public feedback after the set of criteria is created. These feedback opportunities will be posted on the [Declining Enrollment Advisory Committee webpage](#).