



# Success by Design

Entry Plan Summary Report

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AUGUST 2019



## Dear DPS Community:

The past year of talking with you about our schools has been among the most energizing, inspiring and challenging times of my 30-year career in DPS. Traveling around the city and listening to over 2,100 students, teachers, staff and community members has shown me once again how invested Denver is in our public schools and what an honor it is lead DPS into a new era of academic progress and connection with our community.

In the past few years, there have been many opportunities for people in the DPS community to voice their ideas and hopes, as well as their frustrations, but understandably, some have felt that their feedback has gone unheard. My sincere goal with this summary report is not only to reflect back what I have heard during my entry-plan tour, but also to show how it has influenced the actions I've taken during my first months as superintendent, and how it will continue to shape our plans and actions in the coming year.

As we look ahead to the 2019-20 school year and the development of the next Denver Plan, I'm thankful for the engaged community we serve and tremendously excited to work with the Denver Board of Education and our DPS families and community members to turn what we've learned into action. Together, let's create an equitable system of high-quality schools that is focused on ensuring that every student thrives — by design.

Warm regards,



Susana Cordova  
Superintendent

# What's Been Accomplished

## STATUS OF ENTRY PLAN ACTION ITEMS

### EQUITY

Negotiated to increase the ProComp incentives for teachers in the highest-poverty schools to \$3,000 and Title I schools or hard-to-fill positions to \$2,000



#### ALIGNING EQUITY EFFORTS

Synthesized 5 board resolutions, the work of 6 community task forces and 2 district plans to *create 1 recommendation* that will inform the district's next multi-year strategy



#### RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

*18* professional learning opportunities conducted for more than 250 attendees



#### ON-TRACK TO GRADUATE TOOL

Developing individualized reports for each high school student — more than *26,000* in total — to show progress toward successfully completing competency-based graduation requirements



#### LEARNING FROM OUR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY

Hosted *2 Latinx film screenings* and a *DPS alum panel discussion* to hear from former students

Spoke at the *Asian Advisory Council* Awards ceremony and attended the *Native American Student Support Services* graduation

#### TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES

*102* schools and *40* departments trained on Trauma-Informed Practices

#### BLACK AND BROWN EXCELLENCE COLLABORATION WITH DPS FOUNDATION

Engaged the DPS Foundation Board of Directors around future opportunities to support our black and brown students, in alignment with district priorities



#### ETHNIC STUDIES COURSES

Met with every HS to promote Ethnic Studies course enrollment

# What's Been Accomplished

## STATUS OF ENTRY PLAN ACTION ITEMS

### INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE

#### PSAT/SAT PREP RESOURCES

In partnership with Kaplan, provided free SAT tutoring to 200 high school students across 4 sites

#### CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Visited 36 schools to observe classroom instruction and academic rigor



#### SPECIAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS IMPLEMENTATION

Set into motion the "Inclusion Board Resolution" that commits DPS to demonstrating inclusive practices in serving students with disabilities

#### SCHOOL AUTONOMY EVALUATION

Conducted financial analysis of Gifted and Talented, Whole Child, Special Education services and more to inform future staffing decisions



#### FORMED QUALITY SCHOOLS TASK FORCE

Reviewed 160 applications and selected 30 participants to help DPS reimagine the School Performance Framework (SPF)



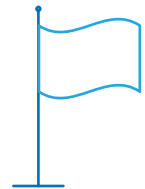
#### TEACHER ADVISORY COUNCIL

Creating Teacher Advisory Council that will launch in September



#### DISTRICTWIDE TEXT STUDY ON THE OPPORTUNITY MYTH

Worked with principals on the critical importance of rigor for low-income students, African American students and Latinx students



# What's Been Accomplished

## STATUS OF ENTRY PLAN ACTION ITEMS

### COLLABORATIVE TEAMWORK

Met with **17 civic leaders** and **33 community and advocacy groups**



Gathered feedback from more than **200 community members** and **650 educators, school leaders and school-support staff**



#### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Designing a plan and process for community engagement with the board to build trust and empathy



#### BOARD RETREATS

Hosted **two** board retreats to set expectations and agendas for first year

#### UNION LEADER MEETINGS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Met with **7 union leaders** to ask key questions and listen to feedback

#### CHARTER LEADER MEETINGS

Partnered with **charter leaders** to establish opportunities for collaboration

#### FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (FACE) LEADER HIRE

Recruited a **new team member** to build connections across our community

#### TEAM DPS TOWN HALLS

Hosted **six** town halls with central office teams to increase two-way communication and inspire a shared vision of success

#### TWITTER CHAT

Engaged community and **#teamDPS** to share ideas and comments on Twitter and with the broader education community



Analyzed more than **1,000** individual responses to key questions



#### DEVELOP BOARD RELATIONSHIPS

Successfully implemented **weekly** meetings with board members to strengthen the effectiveness of team





## What We've Heard

From the superintendent search process last fall to the entry plan outreach this spring and Denver Board of Education public comment sessions throughout the year, we have had many opportunities to listen to the ideas, concerns, celebrations and frustrations of our community, including DPS students, families, educators, leaders and staff. A few important themes emerged across all groups of people in our district:

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### I A QUALITY SCHOOL IS GROUNDED IN EQUITY, BELONGING AND ACHIEVEMENT

- Schools must have a culture and climate that is safe, joyful, caring, empathetic, cohesive, warm, welcoming, supportive and trusting.
  - Schools should focus on nurturing relationships and a sense of community.
  - The school's staff and community must believe in the academic promise and potential of all students and must affirm them for who they are. Both adults and students must have high expectations for one another and for themselves.
  - Teachers should provide classroom instruction that is challenging, standards-based and rooted in strategies that have proven to be successful.
  - Resources and services should be equitably distributed across our family of schools.
  - School-performance measurements (the DPS School Performance Framework) should be reflective of what our community and staff believe to be a quality school, instead of being a point of contention and division between district leadership and the community.
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### I AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT REQUIRES TRANSPARENCY, COMMUNICATION AND RESPONSIVENESS

- Authentic engagement and partnership must be grounded in mutual trust, which can only come with greater communication, transparency and a response that reflects on the feedback we have been given and shares with the community what actions we are taking and why.
  - Our community wants us to do a better job asking for and elevating the stories of our students, focusing on those voices that are not always heard.
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### I A COMMITMENT TO EQUITY IS PROMISING...

- We heard excitement about current initiatives to improve equity in the district, including [culturally responsive education](#), the [opportunity gap cohorts](#), [equity-based math](#), the [Culturally Responsive Fellowship](#), the [Bailey Report](#), the [African-American Equity Task Force](#) and the [Black Excellence initiative](#).
- We also heard appreciation for increasing the recruitment and retention of teachers of color.

## **...BUT IT HASN'T BEEN ENOUGH TO ADDRESS INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND IMPLICIT BIAS**

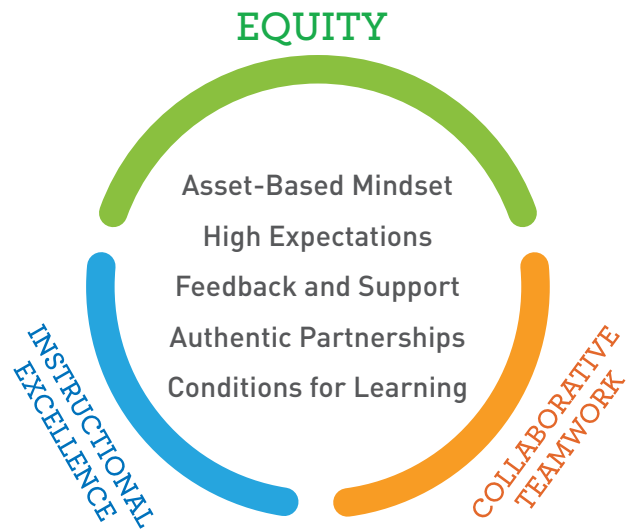
- We heard that DPS hasn't been willing to have difficult conversations related to race and privilege. Many people are frustrated with how that avoidance makes it harder for DPS to truly address school segregation, low expectations and a lack of resources and opportunities for our students most in need — and undermines efforts to hire a diverse teacher workforce.
  - We also heard that there is too much inconsistency in the level of access students have to opportunities and resources that support their preparation for college, career and life, such as targeted supports for language learners and students with disabilities, as well as inequities in the opportunities students have to enroll and succeed in advanced coursework and to engage in learning outside of the classroom.
  - Respondents also noted how important it is for DPS to understand and be enriched by the diversity of our students, families and staff, and to develop strategies and programs in support of racial/ethnic minorities, students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) and students with disabilities.
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## **REPAIRING RELATIONSHIPS AND BUILDING TRUST IS ESSENTIAL TO MOVING FORWARD**

- The teachers' strike and the reorganization of the central office created a feeling of division — a sense of “us versus them” — within our district.
- We heard a desire for DPS to invest in our people and culture in order to heal some of the divisions of the past, restore trust and repair relationships.

## The Cornerstones of Our Work

For our efforts to be successful, we must narrow our focus to a smaller set of priorities that will make a big difference for students. We must use our resources effectively and efficiently. And, we must hold ourselves accountable, by listening, reflecting and learning from missteps and new information. We've established three cornerstones as the foundation for all that we do in the unwavering pursuit of our vision — as well as high-impact strategies that will help us make that vision a reality:



### Equity

*We affirm our students for who they are and support them to excel as we know they can.*

#### High-impact strategy for 2019-20:

- Develop asset-based, culturally responsive mindsets so that all of Team DPS can better serve and support our students and families.

### Instructional Excellence

*We provide the highest quality instruction to each child, every day.*

#### High-impact strategy for 2019-20:

- Mobilize our resources around early literacy and K-12 math.
- Ensure that educators put rigorous, grade-level tasks in front of all students.
- Provide a clear pathway for students to demonstrate high school competency, including access to advanced coursework and CareerConnect professional opportunities, so that they are prepared to achieve their career and college goals.

### Collaborative Teamwork

*We work hand-in-hand to ensure Every Child Succeeds.*

#### High-impact strategy for 2019-20:

- Build collaborative, K-12 relationships with families, schools and community partners in each region, so we can work within our communities to support our students every step of the way.
- Reimagine the School Performance Framework (SPF) so that it better reflects what our families, communities and educators value most, with the leadership and recommendations of the [Quality Schools Task Force](#).



## Where We Go from Here

This will not be a one-year journey, but the first steps are clear to me: We must fundamentally re-orient every aspect of our work to be centered in equity. DPS must be a learning institution that breaks historical patterns of inequity for our kids. Together, each of us must:

- Foster and grow an unwavering belief in the academic promise of all students and make it the foundation of our culture and decision-making;
- Set high expectations for ourselves and our students, and ensure every student and educator receives feedback and support to achieve success at the highest levels;
- Build and sustain authentic partnerships, grounded in mutual trust and shared accountability, that help us identify and achieve the best results and biggest impacts, including with our students in the classroom and in the diverse communities we serve across all of our schools;
- Create the conditions for our students and educators to engage in rigorous learning opportunities that equip them to be successful in college, career and life.

We're beginning the last year of the [Denver Plan 2020](#), and as we partner with the Denver Board of Education to develop our next multi-year strategy, the input we've received from over 2,100 members of our community will guide us. As I look to the tremendously important work ahead of us in the coming year and beyond, I feel inspired and energized by what I have learned, and eager to turn heartfelt words into meaningful action. Together, we can create a next-generation strategic plan that is deeply rooted in equity — so that Every Child Succeeds, by design.

