Small Schools Resolution

Frequently Asked Questions - as of Sept. 24, 2021

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?

Many parts of Denver are undergoing major shifts in demographics, which has had a big impact on DPS’ student-age population. Between 2014-2020, DPS enrolled approximately 5,000 fewer elementary students, and the trend is expected to continue over the next five years.

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.

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. No changes will occur at schools until the 2023-24 school year. Prior to any changes, DPS will work with school staff, families and neighbors to develop creative options for consolidating schools in the impacted communities. In the spring of 2022, DPS and community members will present those options for the board to vote on in the spring of 2022. The newly consolidated schools will participate in SchoolChoice in the spring of 2023, and will open their doors for the 2023-24 school year.

What is the benefit of consolidating schools?

Rather than simply closing one school and keeping another open, the board directs us to work toward consolidating, or combining, schools. Consolidated schools would be fully enrolled and therefore able to offer the range of enriching opportunities our students and families deserve.

Consolidation takes advantage of the strengths of our community, including those of schools that may close or significantly change, and ensures those assets are not lost in the process of realigning our student capacity to meet the needs of today and tomorrow.

What does this mean for school staff?

DPS and the board have clearly stated their commitment to supporting staff, who will be prioritized through any changes. Though any change is two years away, school staff will be critical in providing continuity for students as well as in working alongside community members to design options for the board to consider.

Which schools will be part of this process?

The following schools will be part of the community-led, district-supported small schools process. Rather than identify individual schools that are under-enrolled, the district plans to engage with groups of schools serving similar grade levels, or “school groupings”, that have collectively experienced a decline in enrollment over time.
How did DPS identify schools for this process?

The DPS planning team does a deep analysis of enrollment trends throughout the district when it releases the Strategic Regional Analysis (SRA) each year. There are many schools in our district that are experiencing declining enrollment and are under-enrolled, so we looked at groups of schools that are highly impacted based on the SRA. We anticipate that this process will likely need to occur in other regions as we strive to address the challenges of declining enrollment throughout our district.

Will charter schools participate in the process of consolidating schools?

Declining enrollment impacts all school types (district-run, innovation, and charters) within the district. Although the process to consolidate schools includes district-run and innovation schools, charter schools will need to address declining enrollment in other ways and are encouraged to participate in the conversation, as stated in the Small Schools resolution passed by the board. 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.

How can the community participate in the process?

There are many details to work through, but we are committed to a robust and thorough community engagement process beginning in the fall of 2021. If your school will be participating in this process, your school leader will have more information about how to get involved. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our Family and Community Helpline at 720-423-3054 or email at FACEHelpline@dpsk12.org.