The Denver Public Schools Commitment to Empowering Excellent Educators
Background

The Denver Public Schools vision is clear: It will be the best big city school district in the nation. We will lead the nation’s cities in student achievement, high school graduation, college preparation, and college matriculation. Our students will be well prepared for success in life, work, civic responsibility and higher education.

In 2005, the Denver Plan started to change the conversation in our community about our schools, and it has been the blueprint for the progress we’ve seen over the past five years. The district has made steady strides in growing enrollment, providing more children with access to preschool and kindergarten, improving graduation rates and increasing college attendance.

Additional advancements include:

- Aligning curriculum to state standards
- Introducing benchmark assessments to track every student’s and school’s progress
- Providing comprehensive professional development for principals
- Instituting a more transparent and equitable student-based budgeting formula to distribute resources to schools
- Developing teacher and principal portals which provide the tools that educators need to make data-driven decisions, strategically plan instruction and interventions, and spend more time teaching.
Our Responsibility to the Children of Denver

We will lead the nation. It is the right thing to do for our children. It is the right thing to do for our city, which will achieve its highest potential only when our schools are a thriving, vibrant success story.

Despite the progress that we have made, we must face the sobering reality that still, too few DPS students are proficient on the state’s reading, mathematics and writing measures; not enough of our students are graduating from high school; and, in a district where a majority of our students are of color, an unacceptable achievement gap persists between our African-American and Latino students and their Anglo and Asian-American counterparts. While our growth confirms that we are on the right track, we acknowledge that we must significantly accelerate our rate of improvement and put far more of our students on the path to graduation and success in college and careers.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>% Proficient or Above</th>
<th>Change from 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DPS</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lectura</td>
<td>51%</td>
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<td>Escritura</td>
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Study after study has made clear that the most important factor in closing the achievement gap is the quality of teaching. Effective teaching requires enormous skill, dedication, and hard work. DPS is fortunate to have an extremely talented teacher corps which has helped fuel our progress to date. The 2010 Denver Plan moves aggressively, with the support of a three-year, $10 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, to ensure that there are highly effective teachers in every classroom and highly effective principals in every school across the district. These efforts will support teachers and principals to be the most effective they can be; our students’ success depends on it.

Gap analysis – Ethnicity
Reading – All Grades


“Our vision is to assemble highly effective teams of teachers, principals, and staff in every school... [to make this happen we will] ...

Collaborate with the DCTA to create a Teacher Performance Assessment system that supports the district’s definition of effective teaching with student achievement at the center. This system will meaningfully differentiate teacher performance, including recognizing excellence and identifying areas for improvement and growth...”

— The Denver Plan

“Denver’s Commitment

Now it is time to accelerate our reforms, to sharpen the focus on student achievement, and to get all of our children—in every neighborhood of Denver—on track to walk across the commencement stage armed with everything they need to forge a great future. Our momentum is strong and we need to capitalize on it now.

The nation’s experts agree that DPS has embarked on a strategic and comprehensive overhaul.

The Council of the Great City Schools, a national organization of 67 of the nation’s largest urban school districts, stressed in its 2009 evaluation of DPS that our district’s vision for reform is “one of the most promising and comprehensive in the nation.” The council further noted, “The architecture of these reforms—instructional, financial, and human capital—is among the most seamlessly conceived in all of urban education in the United States.”

A report released in August 2010 by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute recognized Denver as the 4th best city in the country for cultivating a healthy environment for school reform to flourish.

“We must continue to develop our principals as instructional leaders and leaders of complex organizations. We will focus professional development in critical areas, such as evaluating teachers, conducting feedback loops, coaching on Student Growth Objectives, and recommending professional development to teachers. This will include revisions to our principal evaluation system.”

— The Denver Plan
What is Empowering Excellent Educators?

In the summer of 2009, DPS embarked on the development of a strategic plan to empower our single largest asset—our teachers—to deliver the highest quality instruction in every school, in every classroom, and to every student. DPS is currently engaged in efforts to dramatically alter the landscape of teacher educator effectiveness – from recruitment to retention to how principals and teachers are developed and supported. This work is collectively known as Empowering Excellent Educators.

In 1999, DPS received national attention when we piloted ProComp, a teacher compensation model developed jointly by the district and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association. As of July 2010, over $27 million has been paid out to teachers by ProComp recognizing their contribution towards student achievement. Other districts have now followed suit, recognizing a need to compensate teachers for their performance.

DPS is at the forefront of education reform and has made significant strides in our educator effectiveness initiatives. We continue to prioritize educator effectiveness and build on innovative, effective strategies to increase student achievement district-wide.

Empowering Excellent Educators is striving to:

- Ensure that every student is taught by an excellent teacher and every school is led by an excellent principal.
- Provide teachers and principals with a clear understanding of characteristics of effective teaching and provide regular feedback about how they are performing against those standards.
- Provide teachers and principals with the tools, resources and support they need to perfect their craft.
- Reward our excellent educators and provide them with leadership opportunities to expand their impact on students and share their expertise across the district.
The Empowering Excellent Educators initiative is based on the four pillars of retention, recruitment, evaluation and personalized professional development.

**Retention**
- Support all DPS teachers
- Recognize and reward our best teachers as an invaluable resource
- Provide opportunities for leadership and advancement for highly effective teachers: Teacher Leadership Academy (TLA) builds a strong and sustainable network of teacher leaders to accelerate school improvement and increase student achievement
- Build sustainable training structures and teacher leadership opportunities as well as provide coaching to new teachers through the Teacher Effectiveness Coaches (TEC) program

**Recruitment**
- Attract excellent new and experienced teachers
- Recruit diverse teachers who reflect our diverse student population
- Complete early hiring cycles to secure the best available talent
- Provide multiple pathways into teaching including Denver Teacher Residency
- Train our principals on how to successfully identify and onboard new teachers that fit their school culture

**Evaluation**
- Provide evaluations that are transparent, objective and complete
- Use multiple measures, including peer observation and student achievement data
- Link to differentiated professional development

**Professional Development and Support**
- Provide meaningful professional development
- Link professional development to identified needs
- Create a structure of feedback and support
- Provide teachers with the online tools and resources they need for success, including online assessment tools and easily accessible curricular resources

Every component of Empowering Excellent Educators is built on the respect for the central role of teachers in the district. Our hope is that Empowering Excellent Educators will elevate the teaching profession within DPS, in our community and shine a national spotlight on the far-reaching and profound impact we know teachers have on their students.
The DPS Framework for Effective Teaching: The Foundation of Empowering Excellent Educators

In 2010 we have been focused on developing a framework to define teacher effectiveness and also designing the evaluation and feedback systems to support teachers and principals as they work towards perfecting their crafts. DPS and the Denver Classroom Teachers’ Association, DCTA, recognize that a successful framework and the supporting systems must be informed by the ideas and experiences of actual practitioners. Therefore, in addition to national research and recognized best practices, our process has relied heavily on feedback from the teachers and principals who will ultimately be using these systems to inform their own practice and the practice of teachers in their buildings.

Our collaboration process began in the spring of 2010 when over 250 DPS teachers and principals participated in focus groups that produced guiding principles and outlined what our educators value in an evaluation system. Teachers and principals were then chosen to participate in Design Teams through a rigorous application and selection process. The five Design Teams are grouped by topic: Teacher Effectiveness, Principal Effectiveness, Peer Observers, Professional Development, and Student Outcomes and Assessment.

All Design Teams worked throughout the summer of 2010 to understand the pertinent national research and incorporate DPS values as they worked towards defining effective teaching and building a supporting multiple measure assessment system. The Teacher Effectiveness Design Team initially considered choosing one of the nationally available observation tools and adapting to our specific definition of teacher effectiveness. Instead, they decided DPS should design its own framework for effective teaching based on what they perceived were the best components of each tool aligned to their specific understanding of teacher effectiveness in DPS. The result was a homegrown, practitioner-designed tool that pulls from research-based tools used locally and nationally. Our DPS Framework for Effective Teaching provides a shared understanding of effective teaching and is the foundation of our Empowering Excellent Educators work.

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3 These tools include Charlotte Danielson’s Framework of Effective Teaching, Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), Quality Urban Classrooms (QUC) and Denver Teacher Residency’s tool (DTR), the last two being locally-created tools aimed at Denver’s specific student population and needs.
Building upon the DPS Framework for Effective Teaching is our development of a comprehensive performance assessment and feedback system named LEAP (Leading Effective Academic Practice). LEAP will accurately reflect a teacher’s effectiveness through multiple measures including student performance data; principal and peer observations and feedback (using the new Framework for Effective Teaching); a teacher’s school-wide contribution; and student perception survey feedback. A key priority when developing LEAP is ensuring that professional development opportunities are aligned with the Framework for Effective Teaching so that teachers can access support to improve in any areas identified.

The Peer Observer role is a new position to DPS but one that has been used, in various ways, in school districts across the country for a number of years. Peer Observers are teachers who are recognized for their expertise in classroom instruction, content expertise, results in student achievement, and overall best practices. These centrally managed Peer Observers will be matched as closely as possible to the content or grade level of the teacher they are observing. Peer Observers will provide a third-party, outside perspective as well as firsthand experience with the realities of teaching. Both the principal and Peer Observations will provide targeted feedback intended to promote teacher growth and development. The ultimate goal, again, is to increase student achievement.

The new Framework for Effective Teaching, as well as LEAP, will continue to evolve as we learn from MET project data about the most impactful teaching levers and incorporate feedback from teachers, administrator and Peer Observers.
The Continued Commitment to Empowering Excellent Educators

The Empowering Excellent Educators initiatives will continue to be developed and refined over the next few years. For example, we are continuing to align our professional development supports to the DPS Framework for Effective Teaching. Additionally, several components of the LEAP system will pilot in 16 DPS schools from January through May 2011. The LEAP pilot is the next stage of collecting teacher and principal feedback. This feedback will be used to refine LEAP before district-wide rollout in August of 2011. Once LEAP is in place, we will be working to align rewards and recognition to the new system, including revising ProComp, our teacher compensation system, and the process by which we select our Teacher Leaders in DPS.

DPS recognizes that we can’t improve teacher quality without improving the quality of principals. As we redefine the work of our principals to support the Empowering Excellent Educators work and LEAP, it is important that we re-look at what makes an effective principal and ensure that principals are evaluated and supported in new ways, too. We are working with our principals to provide them with tools and training to be better evaluators and give more meaningful feedback to teachers. A new principal evaluation system is also being developed to align with LEAP. The Principal Effectiveness Design Team will work during the 2010-2011 school year to define principal effectiveness and develop recommendations for the new principal performance assessment system. The new principal system will be piloted during the 2011-2012 school year and rolled out the following year.

From educator recruitment and retention to evaluation and professional development, Denver Public Schools commitment to supporting educators will not waiver. It is a priority of the Denver Plan, and fundamental to ensuring that we are able to close the achievement gap and put Denver’s students on a path toward college and career success.