

**The vision of the Denver Public Schools is clear:**

**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.**

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. This plan, the 2010 Denver Plan, explains what we will do to achieve it.

Since launching the 2005 Denver Plan five years ago, thousands more of our students have become proficient in reading, writing and mathematics, and DPS has shown more academic growth on state assessments than the rest of the state and more than any other major school district in Colorado. We have doubled the number of high school students who take Advanced Placement (AP) courses or concurrently enroll in college programs, reduced our drop-out rate by one-third, and graduated 200 more seniors than four years ago.

Despite this progress, however, we must face the sobering reality that less than 50% of DPS students are proficient on the state's reading measures; less than 40% are proficient in mathematics and writing; we are graduating only half of our students from high school; and we suffer, in a district where 80% of our students are of color, from a persistent 35-point achievement gap between our African-American and Latino students and their Anglo and Asian-American counterparts. The four-year growth confirms we are on the right track, but 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.

This is the civil rights challenge of our generation: provide all students an excellent education, regardless of race or economic status, thereby giving them a strong and equal chance to succeed in this democracy. Our school board recognizes that without continuing to reform our system of educating children in Denver, we will not succeed. Thus, the Board of Education developed and adopted a set of core beliefs and commitments to drive our work. We believe:

- **All students can achieve and graduate, and we can close the achievement gap.**
- **Teaching and learning are the top priority.**
- **Accountability for performance by all adults matters.**
- **Choice, collaboration, and innovation are key to 21<sup>st</sup> century success.**
- **Parent, family, and community engagement are essential elements of quality education systems.**

The board also adopted a theory of action—our view about *how* we will make this progress. Called Performance Empowerment, the theory of action calls for clearly establishing our instructional program (including defined standards, baseline core curriculum, coordinated professional development, and interim formative assessments) and emphasizes the essential roles of autonomy, empowerment, and

innovation to reach much higher levels of success. The Board also adopted five-year, measurable goals against which we can be held accountable, by ourselves and by you. The goals require us to ensure that:

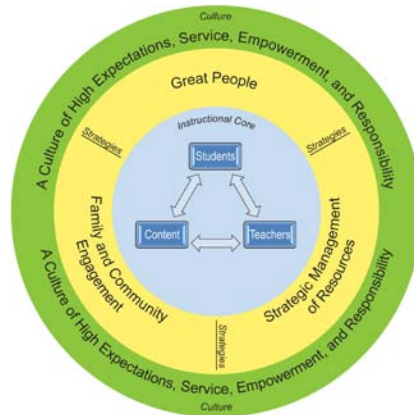
1. All students will graduate from the Denver Public Schools prepared for postsecondary success.
2. All students will demonstrate at least one year's growth in the core content areas and meet or exceed state standards.
3. The number of high-performing schools as measured by the School Performance Framework will increase.
4. All students will have access to full day kindergarten.
5. Enrollment will continue to increase in the Denver Public Schools.

*(The specific goals are available in Appendix A.)*

This document, the **2010 Denver Plan: Strategic Vision and Action Plan**, lays out our vision and the course we are embarking on to achieve its goals. In large part, this plan is an extension of the 2005 Denver Plan, carefully building on and leveraging the vastly improved capacity we have built in this district, including aligning our 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; and implementing ProComp, the nation's most differentiated teacher professional pay system.

To build upon the 2005 Denver Plan and accelerate our student gains, we must transform teaching and learning conditions district-wide, so thoughtful and empowered teachers will expertly deliver effective instruction using their content knowledge, as well as their knowledge of students' strengths and needs in every classroom in Denver Public Schools. DPS recognizes that the quality of our educators is the most significant factor in driving student outcomes. We are committed to having a highly effective teacher in every classroom and building strategies to support this commitment.

As depicted in the visual on page seven, everything in the 2010 Denver Plan centers on the classroom—interactions among students, teachers, and content—the instructional core. We cannot change student performance without changing the instructional core. Research is clear that effective teaching is the most important factor in student academic success. Great people working for DPS, family and community engagement, and strategically managing our financial resources all support our teachers' and principals' work with students every day. Surrounding all of this work is a culture of high expectations, service, empowerment, and responsibility. These are the major elements of our plan; the visual that follows illustrates how they support the instructional core and interact with one another.



## Focus on the Instructional Core |

As affirmed by our core beliefs, learning and achievement are not determined or limited by race, family income, native language, disability, gender, or area of residence. Instead, learning and achievement are outcomes of a healthy and highly functioning instructional core defined by interactions among engaged students, effective teachers, and rigorous content. Focusing on and improving our instructional core means that teaching, schools, and systems are well-organized to provide consistent, high-quality instruction that engages and challenges all students in acquiring skills, strategies, understandings, and knowledge necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To improve student achievement and close the achievement gaps, we will:

- Create conditions to ensure our teachers' and principals' effectiveness.
- Ensure all students, including English language learners, gifted students, and students with disabilities, have access to rigorous standards-based curricula and assessments.
- Provide coordinated and comprehensive support systems for the whole child.
- Use data and best practices to evaluate and continuously improve our instructional programs.

## Great People to Drive Better Outcomes for Students |

Talented and committed people are our most important resource in driving improved student outcomes. To ensure we have highly effective teams of teachers and leaders in every school and department who successfully support the instructional core, we will:

- Recruit the best teachers and principals for our schools.
- Empower and retain effective educators.
- Create meaningful recognition systems, advancement opportunities, and rewards for driving student achievement.
- Recruit, retain, and reward outstanding staff to support teachers' and principals' work.
- Replace low-performing employees who, despite support, fail to meet expectations.

## Deepening Engagement with Families and the Community |

Families, as well as the larger Denver community, are essential partners in helping our students achieve at dramatically higher levels and graduate from high school ready for college or career. To ensure family and community engagement effectively supports the instructional core, we will:

- Deepen and strengthen parent and family engagement classroom by classroom, school by school.
- Engage and inform DPS students, families, and the community about DPS strategies and initiatives.
- Foster dialogue and input from stakeholders to promote civic engagement and ownership of public schools.
- Partner with nonprofits, faith communities, philanthropic groups, and others to support Denver's students with streamlined services that are focused on improving student achievement.
- Leverage partnerships with the City and County of Denver and other governmental agencies.
- Forge formal partnerships and secure additional resources promoting college entry and success.

## Strategic Management of Financial Resources |

Our district's single goal is to dramatically improve student achievement. Thus, our financial resources must wisely support the instructional core of students, teachers, and content. It is also critical to manage resources to ensure long-term stability and to attract growing numbers of students and families to DPS. To achieve this goal, we will:

- Ensure fiscal stability by growing our enrollment and keeping costs in line with revenues.
- Effectively use funds to maximize available school and classroom resources.
- Align resources with effective programs that allow us to meet our student achievement goals and to establish financial incentives for achieving them.
- Increase transparency so the public more easily understands use of funds and alignment of resources with goals.
- Effectively use bond resources for facility upgrades and targeted expansion.

## A Culture of High Expectations, Service, Empowerment, and Responsibility |

Building and maintaining a culture characterized by high expectations, excellent service, empowerment, and responsibility is critical to achieving our goals. Culture surrounds and permeates our work. A successful culture is in many ways intangible, but its presence is a powerful force for and a necessary element of change. Admittedly, it is a significant shift for a culture that remains too focused on compliance. To build and maintain a high-performance culture focused on student results, we will:

- Establish and maintain high expectations for all students and adults in Denver Public Schools.
- Ensure that our schools and departments provide excellent service to families and students and that the central service organization provides high-quality service to our schools.
- Strengthen our systems and norms of providing significant empowerment to DPS employees that is coupled with responsibility for student results.

We fully believe that aggressive and thoughtful implementation of these strategies will yield significant and rapid improvements in student achievement. That said, this plan is a living document. We will continue to track our progress carefully and report that progress to the community. For the goal to rapidly increase achievement—and opportunities—for our students simply must be realized.