

DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Denver Schools Thrive Initiative (DSTI)

Denver Public Schools Executive Limitation 18 Annual Report






WHS

OVERVIEW

Executive Limitation 18 (EL-18)

On Nov. 21, 2024, the Denver Public Schools Board of Education voted to approve the Superintendent's recommendation to close seven schools and restructure grade levels at three more ahead of the 2025–26 school year. The recommendation was developed in alignment with Executive Limitation 18 (EL-18): School Consolidation and Closure, which set guardrails for how the Superintendent would use data to inform recommendations, engage with the community, and implement closures in Denver Public Schools (DPS). EL-18 was adopted after earlier efforts to address declining enrollment were paused so DPS could rebuild the process around transparency, equity, and meaningful community input.

In the spirit of transparency, this report outlines the District's approach to the closures and restructures, the major milestones from EL-18 adoption through implementation, and the initial data we have on the impacts of the closures on students, educators, schools, and district operations.

Declining Enrollment

Why Closing Schools Was Necessary

Like many major cities across the country, Denver is experiencing demographic shifts caused by declining birth rates, reduced housing developments, and increased cost of living. These shifts have prompted enrollment declines in DPS. From 2019 to 2024, student enrollment dropped by 4%, with another 9% drop projected by 2028. These losses are concentrated in the Southwest, Northwest, and Central regions.

Colorado utilizes a per-pupil funding model, meaning funding follows individual students. Schools with higher student enrollment receive more funding to pay for resources integral to the student experience, such as mental health resources and funding for programs like art, physical education, technology and music. Inversely, schools with lower enrollment receive less funding and are often unable to offer the same opportunities.

During the last few years, DPS used federal pandemic relief funds (ESSER) to supplement the budgets of the underenrolled schools so they didn't feel the full impact of declining resources. With ESSER funding ending at the end of the 2024-2025 school year, the District was faced with the need to come up with a longer-term solution to declining enrollment that **maximizes resources and increases the percentage of students who attend a school offering a robust student experience**.

APPROACH

Value Statements

DPS Commitments to Denver Students and Families

Academics and Programs

Every student attends a school that provides safe and welcoming learning environments, with high-quality instruction and programs to meet the needs of every learner.

Neighborhood Schools

Families across all Denver communities have access to a well-resourced neighborhood school close to home.

Facilities

All students will learn in top-quality school buildings.

Enrollment Stability

Schools will be adjusted to maintain steady enrollment aligned with Denver's future population changes.

Long-Term Support

The district will ensure that key systems like transportation and essential services are in place to keep schools running smoothly for the long term.

APPROACH

Equity Guardrails

DPS commitments to eliminating the predictability of outcomes based on demographic factors.

1. Ensuring well-rounded educational experiences of all students with a focus on meeting the needs of our diverse learners.
2. Expanding access to quality programs and schools regardless of zip code.
3. Financial investment to ensure high-quality programming across our schools.

Essential Data

- Schools with facility utilization under 65%.
- Facility condition and planned upgrades.
- Family choice patterns.
- Proximity to other schools.
- School demographics.
- School enrollment trends (historic, current, future projections).
- School performance.
- Special programming (Bilingual programming, Center programs, Gifted & Talented).
- Sub-regional enrollment trends.



METHODOLOGY

Applying Criteria

DPS started with all schools and narrowed them down to schools that have been affected by declining enrollment.

A list of 70 schools were generated that met the following criteria:

- Building utilization rate is 65% or lower.
- Located in a sub-region experiencing declining enrollment.

Elementary School Cluster Analysis

All DPS elementary schools were divided into 31 clusters that met the following criteria:

- Travel between locations of schools avoids hazardous roads, defined by DPS transportation.
- Schools are a maximum of three miles from each other.

Of those 31, there are 11 clusters with a seat utilization rate of less than 75% AND which contain more than one school. These are the clusters we advanced for further consideration.

Secondary School Cluster Analysis

- All secondary (middle and high) schools were grouped into clusters based on existing boundaries. This created 14 middle school clusters and 11 high school clusters.
- Because there are fewer middle and high schools than elementary schools, these clusters weren't subdivided further.
- One single, distinct cluster of schools that crosses four zones/boundaries was advanced for further consideration.

DPS then examined each cluster of schools and the holistic, collective state of the schools therein, and crafted reconfiguration recommendations in alignment with our **Values Statements** and **Equity Guardrails**.




Abuela's hoja



TIMELINE

Phase 1

Policy Establishment and Interpretation

- **June 13, 2024**: Board approved version 1 of Executive Limitation 18 - School Consolidation and Closure.
- **Aug. 15, 2024**: Board discussed and revised Executive Limitation 18 in service of clarity.
- **Aug. 29, 2024**: Superintendent provided update on timeline associated with EL-18.

Phase 2

Regional Engagement

- **Sept. 23 through Oct. 22, 2024**: Hosted six regional meetings to discuss enrollment trends, implications of consolidations closures, and gather input.

Phase 3

Recommendation, School-Based Engagement and Vote

- **Nov. 7, 2024**: Superintendent shared recommendation at Board of Education Meeting.
- **Nov. 11-15, 2024**: Board of Education Engagement.
- **Nov. 18-21, 2024**: Superintendent Engagement.
- **Nov. 21, 2024**: Board voted to approve recommendation.





TIMELINE

Schools Identified for Closure

- **Elementary Closures**
  - Columbian Elementary
  - Castro Elementary
  - Schmitt Elementary
  - International Academy of Denver at Harrington
  - Palmer Elementary
- **Grade Level Restructures**
  - Kunsmiller becomes 6-12 only (remove 1-5)
  - Dora Moore becomes ECE-5 only (remove 6-8)
  - DCIS Baker 6-12 becomes DCIS Baker MS (remove 9-12)
- **Secondary Closures**
  - West Middle School
  - Denver School of Innovation and Sustainable Design

Phase 4

Supporting School Communities Through Change

- **Choice and Enrollment:**
  - 100% of families of impacted students were contacted by a representative from Choice and Enrollment to support transitions to new schools. Application help was also provided through liaisons, helplines, and exploration events.
  - Priority in SchoolChoice and guaranteed seats within new enrollment zones were provided.
  - A 98% top-choice match rate was reported overall for the 92% of students who participated in SchoolChoice Round 1 in Spring 2025 or live in a boundary school.
  - Based on Round 1 results, 54% of students are expected to attend a higher-rated SPF school, 34% attend a school with the same rating, and only 4% a school receiving a lower rating. The movement of 8% is undetermined.
- **Building Utilization:**
  - A districtwide survey on future uses of closing buildings was conducted, and 250 responses were collected. ECE centers and libraries emerged as top preferences.
  - Community meetings were held for Castro, Palmer, and Columbian. Planning for Harrington and Schmitt was deferred to Fall 2025.
  - Community-supported reuse plans were shared, including Summit Academy at Castro and ECE and library uses at Palmer. Steps to preserve school history were initiated.
- **Principal Support:**
  - One-on-one support for principals leading transitions was provided. Regular roundtables, toolkits, and targeted operational guidance were made available. Stipends were provided to recognize added workload.

TIMELINE

- **Transportation Programming:**
  - All existing transportation policies will apply to families impacted by the recommendation. Route plans for 2025-26 were developed to align with new enrollment zones and a net increase of 17 bus routes was projected.
- **Programming Shifts:**
  - A two-way dual language program was added at DCIS Baker.
  - Montclair and Denver Green School SE offering transitional native language acquisition (TNLI) services.
  - Continuation and expansion of ECE programming at Palmer.
  - Reallocation of closing school ECE programs to nearby schools including Centennial, Beach Court, Goldrick and Swansea.
  - Location Determination Process and movement of center programs to ensure continuum of services by grade levels.
  - West High School will offer additional world languages of Chinese, Japanese and Lakota.
- **Staffing:**
  - As of June 2025, 123 of 223 active impacted team members had secured new roles in the district.
  - All collective bargaining agreements were upheld.
  - Support for affected staff was provided by Human Resources including access to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), resume writing assistance, and interview training.





TIMELINE

- **Bond Impacts:**
  - Closing schools were expected to receive approximately $20 million in 2024 through bond funding.
  - Maintenance and critical facility and safety needs are still planned for the impacted school buildings for a total of $11.4 million. An additional funding allocation of $8.7 million for arts, athletics, technology and focused learning environment program FLEP) will be evaluated over the next several school years as determination is made on future facility use of the buildings.
  - Remaining or unallocated funds will be assessed by the 2024 Bond Oversight Committee to determine funding use.
  - Additional bond funding for schools impacted by grade level changes are expected to maintain the same planned 2024 bond funding.
- **Expected Cost Savings:**

School Description	Amount
Total Budget Savings • School Budgets • Transportation • Facilities • Food Services	**$29.9M**
Total Reinvested • School Budgets • Transportation • Facility Management, Utilities	**$23.3M**
Net Savings	**$6.6M**

What's Next?

In June 2025, the Board amended its policy to add a four-year pause on closing or consolidating schools for low enrollment. The pause is not an absolute ban: the Board or the Superintendent may still bring forward a proposal if there is a substantial shift in enrollment or funding, or an unexpected emergency. Absent those conditions, the board could take up another round of closures in 2029, with any approved closures taking effect at the end of the 2029–30 school year.



DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

dpsk12.org
720-423-3200
info@dpsk12.org