

DPS Blueprint: Towards a High-Performing District – New School Development and Beyond

Kim Knous Dolan & Amy Berk Anderson,
Donnell-Kay Foundation

A report prepared by the Donnell-Kay Foundation
December 19, 2007



Introduction

The Denver Public Schools (DPS) district has an opportunity to become the premier urban school district in the nation. Success will be realized when the achievement gap is closed and every student in the district — regardless of ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic status — graduates from one of Denver’s outstanding high schools and is prepared for countless opportunities in college, career, and community life. Achieving this powerful vision is no small undertaking. Success will require the district, teachers, the teachers union and the greater Denver community to radically change the current way of doing business.

Numerous districts across the nation have embarked on similar efforts to advance student achievement and, while pockets of excellence are developing, no district has yet achieved the desired success on a scale that impacts the majority of its students. One of the primary strategies used by other districts to improve student achievement has been to create new schools which are generally smaller. Turning around large, failing schools is extremely challenging and rarely successful. Emerging research suggests that the creation of new and personalized learning communities is a promising strategy to increase — among other key goals — student achievement, the rates of grade promotion, high school graduation and teacher satisfaction.¹

For several reasons, Denver has a unique opportunity – now – to embark on a new schools development strategy:

1. The district, in collaboration with the A+ Denver citizens committee, courageously opted to close several chronically low-performing schools. While extremely difficult, closing schools that fail year after year paves the way for newer, high-performing schools that better serve children.
2. Unlike cities such as Chicago and New York where school buildings are at or over capacity, Denver has excess school building space that can be used to house new schools.
3. Because many urban districts across the nation have blazed the trail in creating new schools, Denver can “leapfrog” ahead and build on their successes as well as learn from their mistakes. Additionally, compared to Chicago or New York, Denver’s enrollment is substantially smaller. Therefore, even a handful of new schools can make a significant impact on overall student achievement in the district.
4. Influential community, foundation, education and businesses in Colorado are eager to support the development of new, high-performing schools in Denver. Furthermore, these organizations have the capacity to attract both local and national funding resources to help launch a robust new schools initiative.

5-Year School Development Plan for DPS

Building a reform strategy that brings high-quality new schools to Denver's students and families over the next five years can have a dramatic impact on the city's educational landscape. Over the past several years, the district has suffered from declining enrollment, largely because of two factors: 1) A consistently high dropout rate – largely among the city's low-income and minority students; and 2) families choosing to send children to schools outside of DPS. A recent study conducted by the Rocky Mountain News found that nearly one-fourth of school-age children in Denver (about 20,000) do not attend a Denver Public School.ⁱⁱ Instead, they attend private schools or public schools located in neighboring districts. Additionally, enrollment in DPS charter schools grew by 300 percent from 2000-2006 and an increasing number of African American and Latino parents choose a charter school instead of sending their children to their assigned neighborhood school, especially in the secondary years.

A new schools strategy in DPS should be designed to retain students and families in DPS, attract students back to the district, and better serve high-need students who are academically unsuccessful and are dropping out. Since a significant number of families choose to leave DPS during the middle and high school years and since academic decline and dropout rates for remaining students

skyrocket during this time, DPS should initially focus on schools serving students in grades 6-12. Additionally, focusing efforts where the student drain is most significant will have much more of an immediate impact.

Secondary enrollment for DPS hovers around 33,000 students. Over the next five years, it seems reasonable for DPS to open 15-20 new small secondary schools, each serving approximately 500 students (some will be less, some will be more). This scenario would mean approximately 7,500 students (more than 20% of the secondary population) would be served by these higher performing new schools by the year 2013. Having numerous thriving small secondary schools would help retain and attract families, while also directly addressing the dropout rate in the district. Eventually, this would allow the district to demonstrate that most of its students are being served in successful, high-performing public schools.

Denver is well-positioned for success, and the following blueprint provides a path for school, district and teachers union transformation that would enable Denver to realize this vision of becoming the nation's premier urban school district. A successful school development strategy in Denver will need to incorporate the following goals and strategies:



Goals Toward a High-Performing District

Goal 1: Create an array of high-performing schools in DPS customized to serve student and family needs.

Strategies:

- Close chronically low-performing schools to pave the way for new and smaller high-performing schools.
- Ensure that the following policy decisions for new schools are clearly articulated:
 - Common school design elements
 - Clear operational flexibility with increased accountability
 - Meaningful role for community
 - Equitable enrollment policies
 - Attracting high-quality new school providers
 - Equitable use of DPS facilities
- Create a top-notch Request for Proposal (RFP) process and open an Office of Performance Schools to support the development and ongoing operation of new and existing DPS schools showing promise of enhanced student success.

Goal 2: Reinvent Denver Public Schools operations and structure to ensure it is a modern enterprise that supports the development of new schools and the turnaround of promising existing schools.

Strategies:

- DPS evolves towards “portfolio” management of schools, where it runs an array of schools – some managed by the district, some managed by independent organizations, and all designed to meet the needs of Denver’s students.
- DPS begins to decentralize its functions to more effectively support the operations of all its schools. All current district services – including finances, personnel, professional development, transportation, English language services, special education, food services and others – are put on the table for review in an effort to create greater efficiencies and support.
- DPS considers a hybrid approach to district operations. Services and support are aligned and more centralized at the elementary level, while there is greater choice, flexibility and decentralization at the secondary level (see p. 16 for more information on this strategy).

Goal 3: Modernize the schools staffing system from a process and compliance oriented approach to one that is flexible, customized, and focused on student academic results.

Strategies:

- Recruit, train and retain excellent teachers and principals to staff new and existing DPS schools.
- Amend the teachers union and district collective bargaining agreement and request state waivers to allow school leaders to have more time in schools with students and more authority for principals over staffing and salary decisions.

Goal 1:

Create an array of high-performing schools in DPS customized to serve the needs of every student and family.

An important step when moving toward a more customized system of high-quality schools that serve all students well is to establish clear and transparent strategies that pave the way for development of new schools. One key strategy (defined in greater detail on p. 13) is to create a portfolio of high-performing, autonomous (or semi-autonomous) schools that are customized to each student's educational needs. This strategy has been employed in several of the districts examined for this blueprint including Chicago, New York City and Oakland.

Dr. Paul Hill coined the term "portfolio management" to describe "flexible, competitive, 'school marketplaces' in which districts learn to manage a varied portfolio of schools, providers have wide rein to innovate, and both are held accountable for student outcomes by strong contracts and meaningful choice for students and parents."ⁱⁱⁱ

A portfolio approach to new school development demands a different calculus on the decision to open a school. Traditionally, a district's decision to open a new school is primarily one of dollars and demand. That is, the school district considers, first and foremost, whether there is adequate need to warrant opening a new school and whether there are adequate dollars to do so.

On the other hand, the portfolio approach is powerful because it puts the focus on quality. The premise is that what districts need most is more good schools. Therefore, the central question in reviewing a proposal is whether the school is likely to be successful.

Close Chronically Low-Performing Schools

A necessary but challenging part of developing a portfolio of customized high-performing schools involves closing chronically low-performing schools (defined by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers as "schools where year after year, improvement has far lagged expectation").^{iv} By closing schools that continually fail to improve, students will no longer be trapped in academically unsuccessful schools and financial and facility resources will be freed up to invest in new schools. Research and experience suggest that it is extremely difficult to turn around chronically low-performing schools, so a fresh start is generally preferable.^v

The conditions and process for closing schools need to be clearly articulated to the public upfront. DPS and the A+ Denver citizens committee created a framework for this during the recent closure decisions, but there should be an opportunity to build on and refine this process for subsequent closures that will need to occur in the future. Additionally, a more comprehensive community process to help determine the future of new schools should be used in conjunction with the closure process. This area received less attention during the 2007 closure process. Closing schools is difficult, but the community process must become part of the educational landscape in order to create the space and demand for better performing schools.

Although closing schools is extremely challenging, it paves the way for new schools. The process creates fertile ground for innovation and success by radically changing the contexts and the cultures under which they can operate. Research from four years of work by Bill and Melinda Gates grantees across the country reveals: “New schools...are characterized by dramatically greater personalization, higher expectations of students, and a more cohesive teacher community than found in large, comprehensive high schools. Students...also have higher attendance and although they enter high school with lower achievement levels than other students in their districts, generally make progress relative to district averages in English/language arts.”^{vi}

Launch New Schools and Improve Existing Schools

Creating an array of high-performing schools in DPS must be anchored by a strong new schools development initiative. To attract these new, high-quality schools to Denver, the following are needed:

- Policy decisions to guide the new school development process,
- A well-designed Request for Proposals (RFP) process that attracts high-quality new school providers, and
- Creation of an Office of Performance Schools (OPS) that provides support for cultivating new schools and the development of promising district schools.

Key Policy Decisions to Guide the New School Development Process

Several RFP and new school application processes exist in a host of other urban districts across the nation, so Denver has the opportunity to learn from these early efforts. Prior to embarking on an RFP process, Denver should engage in thoughtful consideration about numerous policy decisions that will affect the quality of these new schools and the process used to select them. Several key points for district leaders to consider include:

- **Determine the common design elements to which all new schools must adhere.** Successful new schools articulate clear design principles that provide students with the greatest opportunity for success. Many of the successful and experienced high-quality school operators/providers in other cities have identified key elements or attributes of “high-performing schools.” For example, in New York City, all new schools have to demonstrate a commitment to a core set of principles in their application that speak to *academic rigor, personalization, and community partnerships*. These would be good design elements from which to start.
- **Provide clear operational flexibility upfront, in exchange for increased academic performance expectations.** School operators need to have clarity about the operational flexibility they will have to run their new schools. New school development movements in Chicago, New York City, and Oakland reveal successful new schools are best supported by obtaining clearly defined operational flexibility in exchange for stringent accountability standards. As one former leader in the Chicago Public Schools new schools reform effort advised, “Failure to do so will result in challenges down the road.”

Operating flexibilities usually focus on the following aspects:

Educational program - school leaders have control over curriculum, assessments and the use of data,

Leadership - schools have the ability to appoint their own principal,

Budget - principals have discretion over significant resources to use as needed in their buildings,

Staffing - principals have the autonomy to hire, place, fire, and compensate teachers and staff, and

Time -schools have the ability to manage their school day and calendar in ways that best support their mission and goals.^{vii}



In Oakland, the first small schools effort aimed to create “a movement towards greater flexibility, autonomy, and responsibility for schools and the transformation of the school district central office into a school support provider.”^{viii} However, a 2003 analysis of this initiative^{ix} highlighted difficulties in implementing this reform due to lack of planning time prior to implementation, the absence of basic starting agreements delineating what new authority the schools really had, and lack of communication between the schools and central administration. This highlighted the need to clarify roles and relationships from the beginning of the reform.

- **Create a meaningful role for the community in development of new schools.** District interviewees cited the importance of developing meaningful community partnerships to catalyze reform and sustain success over time. New school partnerships with community and intermediary organizations have been instrumental in the development of new small schools in New York City and Oakland. The intermediary organizations generally are non-profit groups that assist schools, school districts

and community groups in the work of creating or redesigning schools to elevate overall achievement. It is important for districts to determine to what extent they expect applicants to reflect community engagement in and support for the plan. At a minimum, most school districts require applications to address community support and partnerships and weigh the strength of those as part of evaluating the merits of a proposal.

New York City requires new school applicants to partner with intermediary organizations or community-based organizations and articulate the role they plan to play in the new school. Such partnerships can include: community-based organizations, hospital outreach groups, universities, cultural/arts organizations, non-profits, corporations, financial institutions or others. These types of partnerships help build capacity within the new schools to increase educational quality and to establish strong connections with the communities served.^x

Community resources to support the development of new school initiatives have also been instrumental in launching these efforts. Chicago, New York City and Oakland have been extremely successful in attracting large sums of private and philanthropic dollars to fuel their new school initiatives. The business community in Chicago was instrumental in creating the Renaissance School Fund that provides millions in critical start-up and early support dollars to new schools in Chicago. To date, New York City has attracted more than \$130 million from local and national foundations to support new school, charter school and leadership development as part of the Chancellor's Children First initiative. The Oakland School District also benefited from ample philanthropic and private sector dollars, with more than \$26 million^{xi} in grant funding to create new schools and to elevate overall academic achievement.

- **Design enrollment policies that provide equal opportunities for all students to attend new schools and are reflective of Denver's student population.** The demand for seats in high-performing, small schools will likely exceed the number of available slots. As such, it is important both to create a large enough supply of good schools and to ensure equitable access to these new schools. Regardless of the demographic makeup in DPS, it is important to provide equitable opportunities for all students to attend high-performing schools. Weighted admission lotteries are an effective way of ensuring a diverse student body in places where economic diversity is a priority and in order to ensure equitable access. That said, the district may choose to provide preferences to students who live near given schools in the lottery so they can attend a school near their home.

- **Attract high-quality applicants with proven track records.** Determine ways to attract high-quality school operators to Denver and provide incentives for local operators of successful schools to replicate their schools in other parts of the city. Districts involved in new school development strategies have varying providers opening new schools including: community groups, teachers, parents, labor unions, independent charter schools, charter (non-profit) management organizations, education (for-profit) management organizations, and networks such as the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) and Expeditionary Learning (EL). Incentives to attract high-quality providers to Denver should include: start-up funding, use of district school facilities, and clear and flexible operating conditions, to name a few (**See Appendix A**).

- **Decide how DPS schools facilities will be made available for new school applicants and determine an equitable process for choosing which applicants receive these facilities.** The availability of school facilities can act as a significant incentive to attract quality school operators to expand their programs in Denver. Because of serious facility constraints in many of the larger cities we examined, new schools often share buildings. It is critical that the district develop an equitable process for deciding which new schools get which DPS buildings. For example, in Chicago Public Schools, all applicants (charter and non-charter) are given equal consideration for the use of district facilities. In Denver, given the excess of school buildings and the capacity in existing buildings, the district has an opportunity to create a workable business plan for new schools to use empty or partially-full buildings to operate schools.

The Request for Proposal (RFP) Process

A well-developed new schools application process begins with an application packet or RFP that presents the public with relevant information about the contents of a completed application, the criteria for evaluation and the timeline for making decisions. As with any traditional RFP, the district also needs to let the public know who is eligible to apply. That is, it should define the type of person or entity that may operate a new school. Typically, any individual or group may submit an application but the RFP should make clear that it usually takes a team of people to put together a high-quality proposal. That said, the process should then be open to any applicants regardless of previous experience or qualifications.

In order to determine whether a school is likely to be successful, evaluation of a new school proposal should focus on three broad areas: the education plan, the organizational plan and the financial plan.

- **Education Plan.** The education plan should begin with a focused, compelling mission and should clearly describe what students will achieve; how they will achieve it; how the school will define success; and how it will evaluate performance in relation to the goals. It should present a clear picture of what a child who attends the school will experience in terms of educational climate, structure, materials, schedule, assessment and outcomes. Most importantly, it should have a basis in research, experience and/or sound reasoning to indicate that it is likely to serve the expected population effectively.

- **Organizational Plan.** The organizational plan should provide an understanding of how the school operators intend to govern and manage the school. It should present a clear picture of the school's governance and management priorities; what responsibilities various groups and people will have; how those groups will relate to one another; and how the school will approach student management issues such as enrollment, transportation and discipline. Virtually every entity that has engaged in new schools development – whether as charter, contract, performance schools or some variation – recognizes that full assessment of the organizational plan requires the district to know and evaluate the people who propose to implement the plan. This usually means requiring submission of resumes from the founding group and conducting an interview of the founding team and proposed governing board as part of the proposal evaluation process.

- **Financial Plan.** The financial plan should provide an understanding of how the school operators intend to manage the school's finances. It should present a clear picture of the school's financial viability including revenue and expenditure projections that are sound, realistic and well aligned with the school's educational program.



Invited Applications

As school operators have gained experience and demonstrated success, places like Chicago^{xii} and New Orleans^{xiii} have established a second application track for school operators that are already operating successful schools. Organizations on this track are sometimes called “invited applicants” because the district affirmatively identifies and informs specific operators that they are invited to apply and, on this track, the district will only accept applications from those groups that it specifically solicits.

If an invited applicant is applying to start a second or third or fourth school that is serving the same grades as the existing school(s), there are many aspects of running a successful school that the organization has probably ‘figured out’ such as the curriculum, on site resource and operating needs, budgeting, staffing needs and the like. The operators should know what makes the school successful and have probably learned a great deal from previous mistakes.

At the same time, operating multiple schools presents new challenges and requires evolving organizational systems and structures. The basic requirements of sound educational, organizational and financial plans remain the same, but the type of information needed from these applicants should be different than from those starting their first school. For example, in what ways will the new school’s educational program be the same as the original school? Assuming the results have been good, what goals do they anticipate for their new school(s) and what impact will operating multiple schools have on their original school?

A host of new questions apply to organizational matters: Will the new school have the same governing body? If the same, what is the board’s plan for managing the added responsibility? If different, what is the plan for

ensuring the governing body for the new school is just as strong as the one for the original school? In terms of management, what services, responsibilities, and functions will be centralized? Which will be left to the schools to handle individually? How will the relationship between the school and a centralized management be defined?

The most important challenge for replicating success is that education has long been a labor-intensive endeavor and people are not replicable. Great school leaders and teachers are hard to come by, even for organizations with a track record of success. The invited applicant must have a persuasive plan for recruiting and/or developing leadership and staffing for its new schools. In fact, the invited application standard should probably be higher in many of these areas with the expectation that an invited applicant can anticipate from experience what the challenges will be and should already have plans in place to address them.

Evaluation of Applications

Existing district frameworks for evaluating charter school applications can provide a shortcut for the development of new school application review processes. Denver Public Schools has recently revised its charter application evaluation framework and those rigorous requirements could serve as an excellent model for development of evaluation criteria for new schools.

The most important considerations for identifying application evaluators are experience, knowledge and expertise. As such, the district should assemble a team or teams of reviewers that have the ability to assess both the soundness of the plan on paper and the capacity of the founding group to successfully implement the plan. For many districts this means using a combination of district staff and external reviewers.

The district can often look in-house for expertise in areas like curriculum, special education, school finance and compliance. However, where new schools have the opportunity to operate with greater flexibility and independence, they may be more akin to operating a non-profit business than to operating a traditional public school. The school's leadership has responsibilities for managing finances, staffing, facilities and other aspects of the organization that differ from traditional public school operation. Therefore, most districts use at least some external reviewers to ensure that they have the expertise needed to review applications in a way that appreciates those differences.

From the early days of charter school development in Chicago, the Chicago Public Schools Charter Office recognized that the acquisition and use of private facilities was not an area of district expertise. As a result, the Charter Schools Office partnered with the Illinois Facilities Fund (IFF), a non-profit facilities lender, to evaluate the facilities component of every charter school application it received. Relying on the experience and expertise of the IFF enabled the Charter Office to develop criteria that were both rigorous and realistic for evaluating charter school facilities plans.

It is important to remember that evaluation, recommendation and decisionmaking are distinct, though overlapping, activities. Some districts and other charter school authorizers use outside reviewers in a purely advisory capacity. Others, like the Louisiana RSD, rely on them heavily for recommendations. Ultimately, the district must take responsibility for making decisions and for ensuring that those decisions are aimed at increasing the number of quality public schools. The composition of review teams and the structure of the process should be determined with the ends in mind.

See Appendix B for specific guidelines on the timing and rollout of the application process.

Create an Office of Performance Schools (OPS)

New school development initiatives in other cities have almost always been supported by the creation of a new district office and a redesign of central district office services. As Denver moves down this path, it too must support new schools by opening an Office of Performance Schools (OPS). This office should also oversee and support any existing "schools of choice" in the district (e.g. charters, magnets, alternative, contract and Beacons). Additionally, any existing traditional DPS schools showing signs of academic progress but perhaps needing additional flexibility to operate should also have the ability to apply to become a performance school through this office. Cultivating the talent and expertise within current schools and staff will provide a pathway for existing DPS schools to take part in this transformation, which will dramatically increase the educational options for Denver's students. Because this office will support the cultivation and development of a wide array of quality school choices, it should be called the Office of Performance Schools, rather than the Office of New Schools.

The OPS should be deliberate about the types of new schools it seeks to create. Looking at the data and desires of Denver's students and families will ensure that new options provide customized quality school choices. For example, if one of the primary goals is to decrease the high school dropout rate, then the district will want to examine successful secondary models for at-risk populations. Then the district can address the goal by (a) recruiting operators of those successful models to come to Denver and open new schools, and/or (b) designing an application process that asks applicants to demonstrate how they will incorporate successful intervention models and to prove their successes at reducing dropout numbers in schools they run. To determine its

effectiveness in authorizing and supporting new schools, this office should set measurable benchmarks and goals driven by student outcomes.

In New York City, the Office of Portfolio Management oversees and supports the development of new and existing schools in New York City. It has several objectives to measure success:

- Provide new, high-quality educational options for all students, particularly the traditionally underserved.
- Serve the student population most in need.
- Promote healthy competition by creating a portfolio of “existence proofs” – new schools succeeding where others have not.
- Attract new resources to public schools – intellectual, human, social and financial capital.
- Fuel innovation and drive catalytic impact.
- Provide opportunities that attract and develop new leadership talent.^{xiv}

Denver’s OPS should use the New York City objectives as a basis for primary responsibilities and further develop them to include the following:

- Establish and manage the process for creating new schools in DPS and support the transformation of existing schools showing promising signs of academic improvement.
- Provide resources and support to new school developers throughout the planning and application process.
- Monitor the performance of all schools created under this office, as well as those grandfathered in (such as existing charters, magnets, and alternative schools in DPS). Make recommendations to close schools that chronically fail to meet performance expectations within this office’s jurisdiction.

- Use student and school-level data to inform new school priority areas and grades served, as well as the desired outcomes.
- Actively seek out school operators with successful track records and craft the application process to reflect these priorities.
- Broker the charter agreement or other contract language that clearly delineates how schools will be funded, district services they will receive (and those that they will be responsible for on their own), and flexibilities they will have at the school site over areas such as staffing and length of the school day/year.
- Serve as the primary contact and convener for schools that fall within this jurisdiction. Bring school leaders together regularly to network, problem-solve and learn together.

In the New York City public school system, the Office of New Schools was recently renamed and reconfigured to become the Office of Portfolio Management. This was done because as one district leader put it, “You can’t new school your way to successfully create whole district reform.” Hence, the new Office of Portfolio Management also oversees and supports Transfer Schools (small, academically rigorous, diploma granting high schools designed to re-engage students who are over age and under credit or have dropped out of high schools); Career and Technical Education; ELL-Focused Schools; Single Gender Schools; Selective Schools; and Charter Schools.^{xv}

Goal 2:

Reinvent DPS

The Denver Public Schools district operations and structure must be reformed to ensure it is a modern enterprise that supports the development of new schools and the turnaround of promising district schools. Embarking on a new schools development strategy is an important aspect of Denver's transformation, but critical lessons learned from other districts that have previously implemented such reforms suggest a major lesson: In order to increase academic achievement, any new schools development strategy must be coupled with a much larger systems reform strategy. As one interviewee in New York City stated, "Unless a district just wants to create a few new boutique schools, the new schools development effort must be part of a larger district strategy that is well resourced and considered a priority." In other words, creating new schools must also be about creating a new and dynamic education system that can support the initiation and development of high achieving schools district-wide that serve all kids well.

Districts like Chicago, New York City and Oakland have not only engaged in ambitious new school development and school redesign efforts, but have also instigated whole systems redesign efforts. In New York City, the district leadership has been reinventing the central office and administrative operations to dramatically change how the district focuses on and supports its schools. A New York interviewee said, "It is futile to embark on a school redesign effort without a systems redesign effort. You cannot ask principals and teachers to reform schools within the same district administrative structure."

There are several challenges that may prevent districts from focusing on their core mission of improving teaching and learning and successfully educating kids. As recognized, "There is a dizzying array of district functions and responsibilities that are more about managing the systems around schooling (i.e. managing contracts, transportation systems, facilities, administering federal programs, etc.) than attending to the improvement of teaching and learning... education leaders are caught in a crucible of managerial, political, and instructional demands and instructional demands inevitably loses out."^{xvi}

Toward A Portfolio Management Strategy

As earlier mentioned, creating a portfolio of customized high-performing schools, requires a significant change in district operations to support these new and transformed schools. It is about creating a new management structure that will support these schools' success. This new district management system will oversee a diverse array of schools, some run by the school district and others by independent organizations, each designed to meet the needs of students. As such, boards of education would evolve from "overseeing a central bureaucracy which owns and operates all the schools in a given district... and replace it with a new model of portfolio management." In other words, boards would begin to focus much less on managing and controlling all the school "inputs" and operations, and instead, would focus on student achievement outcomes. As described by Hill, a portfolio management system would have the following key features:

- Districts build portfolios of schools, which may include charters, district-run schools and schools managed by external providers with whom the district contracts;
- Districts select and assign providers;
- Districts write and monitor provider contracts, which include clear performance indicators and performance measures;
- Providers receive fixed per-pupil amounts and have increased budgetary discretion;
- Providers, not districts, employ their teachers and principals, and
- Quality options and meaningful choice exist for students and families.^{xvii}

Hill goes on to describe this type of system as having the following key features:

Public oversight; public funding; concentration of resources near the student; rewards for high performance; openness to promising ideas, people and organizations; free movement of dollars, students and educators; and an environment of support for both new and existing schools.^{xviii}

As mentioned earlier, transforming district operations to support and foster a portfolio of high-performing schools means providing them with additional operational flexibility (program, budget, leadership, faculty/staff, and use of time) in exchange for increased accountability. All schools should be subject to baseline, or minimum, school design standards and assessments, but beyond that, curriculum and other flexibilities should be granted. The district also needs to reorient its existing structures and operations toward a philosophy of “support.”

In New York City, all schools are now provided with greater flexibility in allocating resources and choosing the type of support most needed for their school and students. This includes custom tailored support through a menu of 14 organizations that offer a variety of services including (but not limited to): professional development for principals and teachers, curriculum development, staff mentoring, and interventions for struggling students. Dollars leftover may be used by the schools to spend on additional teachers, materials, and services of their choosing. This initiative is district wide and early indicators point to success.^{xix}

To provide ideal operating conditions and ensure new schools have the support needed to successfully educate students, it is also critical to identify and remove the barriers to success. The district, teachers union, and community must come together in support of students and enact serious policy and cultural shifts. New school development and systems redesign efforts require key stakeholders to take a hard look at their practices and policies that may be (even inadvertently) creating obstacles and barriers to having high-quality schools in Denver.

A collection of elements, or common attributes, of high-performing schools currently utilized by schools and school organizations successfully serving largely low-income and minority students point to a common framework with which all schools must start.^{xx} The following elements of existing high-performing schools should serve as a model for all new and existing DPS schools:

- Firm belief in high expectations for all students
- Personalized learning environment for all students
- Mission driven and outcome focused
- Clear school design and clear classroom practices
- Rich, standards-based curriculum delivered through rigorous instruction
- Strong instructional leadership
- School-based control of school with extensive professional development for staff
- Meaningful assessments and strategic use of data
- More dollars are directed into the classroom
- More time on task
- Strong parent, caregiver, and community participation and partnerships
- Student voice and participation

Examples of these elements in practice, barriers to achieving these elements and some policy modifications to consider for attaining these school operating conditions can be made available by the Donnell-Kay Foundation.

Decentralized Services combined with Strong Oversight and Support

Part of evolving toward a portfolio approach often involves decentralizing district services and freeing up schools to make important site-based decisions around curriculum, budget and other support services. Districts such as New York City have been moving steadily in this direction over the past few years. The district is now in the process of establishing performance agreements with every school, while at the same time providing those schools additional financial resources to support their work. The impetus for this change stems in part from a philosophy that recognizes the school as being the most important unit of change, therefore middle

management is dramatically reduced, and the focus shifts to supporting schools and school teams. This theory supposes that when responsibility and ownership exist at the school, this creates the best climate for excellence. According to another interviewee, "Site-based ownership fosters greater responsibility and accountability."

DPS has articulated a desire to move in the direction of decentralizing and creating a portfolio of high-quality options for students but has communicated few concrete strategies to realize this vision. An April 25, 2007 Rocky Mountain News editorial by Superintendent Michael Bennet and the DPS School Board stated, "In order to create this array of high-quality choices, we must insist that DPS no longer function as a one-size fits all, centralized, industrial-age enterprise making choices that schools, principals, teachers, and most important, parents are in a much better position to make for themselves." It goes on to say, "We must now summon the will as a city to reorganize the school district in a way that will accelerate reform and lay the foundation for success in every school."^{xxi}

DPS should begin this process by conducting a thorough evaluation of the 55-plus district departments^{xxii} and how they either support or hinder school operations. This evaluation should look at the costs, functionality, and relevance of the services provided to determine if they are of value to the schools. Ultimately, district support should largely be based on the areas where it can add true value to schools. Otherwise, such services and operations should be left to the schools to handle how they deem fit. For example, while it may make sense to have a centralized technology and data services center to ensure that schools' technology needs are met and that data collection and sharing of information is uniform, it may make more sense for individual schools to select and purchase their own food services, and hire their own teachers and staff.

In particular, the district should provide new and transforming schools the ability to select the education programs, including curriculum and to some degree assessments, that best serve their student population. Similarly, districts must provide these principals with budgetary discretion to properly resource their buildings. Without these operating conditions, it will be difficult to customize schools to meet students' educational needs.



For several years, the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) has been working to significantly improve both its schools and its organizational structure. Facing a combination of structural deficits (including enormous financial problems), low academic performance (especially for low-income and minority children), and declining enrollment, the first state administrator outlined an ambitious plan to improve the fiscal health of the district, while also embarking on an ambitious school improvement strategy. This movement – now named Expect Success – intended to create a set of new smaller, more autonomous schools and to develop a new district operating model that complements this strategy. Expect Success aims to develop a much leaner central office that devolves responsibility and greater budget authority to schools and uses a fee-for-service model to provide services to schools. According to the Broad Foundation – one of the initiative's investors – the project is intended to “result in dramatic changes in district and school leadership, school creation and closure, technology systems, organizational redesign and outreach and communications - all to drive improvements in student achievement.”^{xxiii} “Oakland deserves a close look from people in other localities who want to control costs, spark school level initiative and innovation, and create continuous improvement” writes Dr. Paul Hill about Oakland's Expect Success initiative.^{xxiv} This initiative is still evolving. Thus far it has survived many leadership changes, and efforts are still underway to refine and improve these reforms.



Hybrid Strategy

Moving toward a decentralized district system also has its challenges – because economies of scale and reform alignment can be compromised. DPS, like many other urban districts has struggled over the years with whether to operate as a centralized system that supports aligned instruction and a common core curriculum or to be a more decentralized system that provides customized school options and increased school choice for families. Research and evidence from several urban districts around the nation over the last decade reveals potentially conflicting choices: a managed system of schools or a system of public school choice?

New thinking on this topic, however, suggests that a “hybrid” approach can exist, where districts can harmonize these ideas in a “portfolio of schools that builds on the benefits of an aligned instructional system while taking advantage of the benefits of school choice, particularly at the secondary level.”^{xxv} Further outlined in the Bill and Melinda Gates report on creating high-performing school districts, a hybrid “portfolio strategy combines an aligned instructional system in district-operated schools with quality options, particularly at the secondary level, that are aligned with the mission and internally coherent but operate with greater autonomy or are independently operated (i.e. contract, charter, or performance school).”^{xxvi}

Chicago Public Schools’ (CPS) new school reform effort provides an example of how it took a tailored approach to the portfolio management concept. Instead of entirely replacing the school district, CPS moved to modernize district operations in support of a more customized student learning opportunities. While a more thorough approach to portfolio management would have required deeper changes in the district central office, teacher policies, and budget allocations for schools, as a partial measure, Chicago’s approach has harnessed the existing capacity and expertise within the school district while also helping to improve its agility.^{xxvii}

Because the majority of Denver’s secondary schools continue to struggle even under reforms of the past several years, the District should move to provide more choice and new school options for secondary schools first. Plus, this would provide DPS an opportunity to experiment with decentralizing services at the secondary level while allowing it to maintain economies of scale and curriculum alignment with the elementary schools.

Creating new secondary schools first while initiating transformation of district operations to better support these new schools will provide time and space for these reforms to take hold and be refined before the whole system change occurs. To be sure, moving in this direction would require a thorough systems evaluation, time, and financial resources to thoughtfully roll out based on what makes sense for Denver.

Despite years of aligning instructional practices, the San Diego school district showed little evidence of success at the high school level. Experience suggested that improving high schools “required more than just changing instruction... [it also required changing] school culture, teacher-student relationships, structure, and community involvement.” San Diego’s early experience also suggested that when it came to high schools, there might be no single blueprint for success – different schools needed different tools to improve.^{xxviii}



Goal 3:

Modernize the schools staffing system from a process and compliance oriented approach to one that is flexible, customized, and focused on student academic results.

Outstanding school leadership and teaching staff are key ingredients for successful new and reformed schools.^{xxix} Therefore, it is critical that any new schools development effort focus on attracting high-quality staff to schools. Experiences from districts around the nation illustrate there are some existing barriers to ensuring high-quality teaching and learning in the classroom, and thus eliminating effectiveness of schools. Namely, the key barriers identified center around a principal's hiring and firing authority as well as the limitations of work rules as to how time is used.

There must be ongoing efforts to think creatively about how to address these issues so that teachers are treated professionally and are valued. As recently articulated by education reformers Jason Kamras and Andres Rotherham, "Like other trends in education, human-capital strategies must move from being process- and compliance-oriented, with little attention to performance, to being flexible, customized, and directly tied to results. Such changes would benefit teachers, as they would provide educators with the training, development, compensation, and respect they deserve. But, even more importantly, such a fundamental redesign of our education system would benefit our children."^{xxx}

Many (including teachers) would agree that district and union collective bargaining agreements represent an outdated system. While teachers "deserve protections against unfair and capricious treatment... their positions should not be immune from a review process that is rooted in a teacher's impact on student achievement."^{xxxi} Teachers deserve fair pay and quality benefits to support

themselves and their families, but contracts do not need to entail hundreds of pages that outline every detail and right. Instead, a new way of doing business is emerging in a few districts across the country. "Thin" teacher contracts are being developed by unions themselves in partnership with reformers to illustrate the constructive and modern role unions are playing in school transformation. As articulated by a New York City interviewee, these thin contracts are grounded by three core principles: "Fair treatment, fair pay, and voice in the workplace."

A former member of the Massachusetts Board of Education said, "All city school districts – Boston included – suffer from the same disease that afflicted New Orleans before Katrina. Because of their position as a monopoly provider of public education, urban districts invariably become overgrown bureaucracies that manage schools through elaborate, highly politicized systems of command and control that reward compliance with district rules, rather than student achievement. Even for independent-minded school leaders, change can be nearly impossible because of powerful teachers' unions, which hamstring principals in hiring, firing, managing, and rewarding their teachers."^{xxxii}

Recruit, train, and retain excellent teachers and principals to staff new and existing DPS schools.

District leaders around the nation cite outstanding school leadership and teaching staff as key ingredients for successful new and transformed schools. Incentives Denver may offer – such as the pro comp compensation system for teachers, the development of an attractive performance pay system for principals, union reform efforts, and the eventual development of unique career ladder opportunities in DPS – will hopefully attract and retain the best and most capable education staff to DPS.

Similarly, attracting non-profit educator development organizations such as Teach for America, New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) and other human capital development organizations to grow the educator pipeline will be an important factor in the success of Denver's new and transformed schools. Cities such as Chicago and Oakland have partnered with organizations such as NLNS to infuse their new schools with entrepreneurial and talented staff. Oakland has also emphasized the importance of strong leadership for new schools by developing a leadership selection process where all new school leaders must be approved. This process helps identify individuals who have both the capacity and the desire to open and run new schools. Aspiring principals of new schools in Oakland must go through a rigorous review process and then ultimately be approved by the state administrator in order to secure a new school leadership position. As the Oakland district notes, "While schools are encouraged to develop leadership and shared governance across stakeholders, OUSD demands a strong accountable principal in every school."^{xxxiii}

An important example of partnership support is the New York City Leadership Academy launched in 2003 as an independent non-profit to recruit, train, and support a new generation of outstanding principals. The New York City Office of Portfolio Management works closely with the New York City Leadership Academy to recruit and support new leaders. Other educator development support networks such as New Visions for New Schools has launched a scaffolded apprenticeship model which takes cohorts of educators from selected schools to learn and practice the skills required for effective leadership.

Amend the collective bargaining agreement and request state waivers to allow school leaders to have more time in school with students and more authority for principals over staffing and salary decisions.

Two key elements that dramatically affect student achievement in schools -- particularly for struggling students who are academically behind -- are: 1) more time to spend working on core academic subjects -- particularly in math and literacy; and 2) enhanced authority for principals to hire, place, fire, and compensate their staff. Many districts, including DPS, have moved toward requiring double blocks (or increased time) on certain subjects, however, due to the constrained 40-hour work week, this cuts into student learning time needed to provide appropriate enrichment learning opportunities such as language, music, art, and others that keep students interested and engaged in school, as well as mastering critical literacy and math skills. The current collective bargaining agreement limits teachers' work week and even dictates how teachers' time is used during the day (requirements for lunch, planning periods, etc.). The schools them-

selves would be much better off determining how to schedule days that best meet the needs of students.

Another large roadblock to student success is the limits that principals have over how schools are staffed. If principals are expected to produce rigorous achievement results for struggling students, they must have more flexibility over how time is spent, how their resources are allocated, and maybe most importantly, who is working in their buildings. In addition to amending language in the collective bargaining agreement, the district will likely need to seek state waivers from:

1. Statutes pertaining to teacher evaluation and teacher employment, compensation and dismissal;
2. Automatic waivers from CDE and State Board of Education rules/policies pertaining to teacher evaluation and teacher employment, compensation and dismissal;
3. Automatic waivers from specified district policies; and
4. Automatic waivers from collective bargaining agreements.



A CEO of a company would never be expected to run, let alone turn around, a company without the ability to hire and fire staff and determine their budget. While not all principals are currently prepared for this authority or responsibility, there should be opportunities for smart, entrepreneurial and capable leaders to step into these roles or develop into these roles with proper time, training and on the job support.

Therefore, the collective bargaining agreement and state statues and policies that insert barriers to reform must be addressed. Some progressive teachers unions and reformers around the nation are beginning to partner in unique ways that benefit kids. Additionally, these partnerships are also resulting in teachers unions starting and running charter schools. Some feel this concept enables educators to create schools based on classroom-tested practices and professional knowledge – a concept that was originally part of the charter movement. In a symposium that brought together both charter and labor leaders, United Federation of Teachers (UFT) President Randi Weingarten commented, “To get better schools we have to learn how to merge teachers’ commitments to their daily work with the spirit of entrepreneurship. Today there is too little entrepreneurship within the school district structure and too little [teacher] professionalism in charter schools.” She went on to say that, “What should keep us together...are the things that make great schools...some of the schools that have unions are doing them; some of the charters are doing them.”^{xxxiv}

While there has traditionally been great frustration and little movement in collaboration between the teachers union and the district leadership, these examples of creative partnerships and working together in the best interest of kids are catching on and Denver should take note.

UFT Charter Schools Highlight

A unique movement is underway in New York City where the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) union has opened two new charter schools. In July 2005, the UFT opened a K-5 school and recently started a 6-12 school in Brooklyn. In the UFT's charter schools, the teachers are unionized and the UFT provides both professional development and back office support to the schools. The UFT is also collaborating with the head of Green Dot schools in Los Angeles to open several new charter schools in New York City. Teachers who work in Green Dot schools work under a "thin" contract where their professional days do not have a start and stop time and they do not have tenure. They also have "just cause" where teachers can be dismissed. Many attribute the ability for this unique arrangement to thrive because of their shared values around fairness and professionalism.

As articulated by a UFT employee, the three core principles in UFTs work -- fair treatment, fair pay, and voice in workplace -- have helped foster a better working relationship. Additionally, having UFT run charters is a way to do something to put UFT's ideas into action and illustrates that the union contract is not a barrier to reform. In the union's secondary school, there are longer days, team teaching, advisories, etc. Sufficient data to determine the successes and challenges of this unique charter school operator are not yet available since both schools are quite new.

Beyond Denver: A Metro Area Vision

The vision outlined in this blueprint has focused on the Denver Public Schools (DPS), but it is a strategy that can be applied to all Denver metro area districts and communities interested in providing a top-notch education to students. Although there is a tendency to focus on Denver and DPS in particular, the educational needs of all students' in the metro area extend far beyond Denver's borders. With high mobility rates among families and arbitrary school district boundaries, there is an obligation and an opportunity to work across district, city and county lines to create a metro area network of high-performing schools that serve all students and families. This type of collaboration knows no limits and would certainly be a model partnership for the entire nation.

One way to spearhead such an effort would be to pool the resources and support of community, business and education organizations to create a network or collabo-

ration whose mission is to foster the creation of new, excellent schools and support school transformation efforts across the entire metro area.

New schools could be generated by both attracting new school providers to the area and supporting the replication and development of existing high-quality school providers already located in our community. All new providers that receive support and resources from this network would need to subscribe to the research-based characteristics of high-performing schools (as outlined in this report) to ensure a level of quality.

Services provided by this network for the Denver metro area, might include:

- Raising and bundling seed money to support the development of high-quality, new school models (including replications) and to also attract the highest quality national school providers.

- Developing an educator leadership program that recruits prospective school leaders to start the new schools and/or to transform existing schools.
- Fostering the development of persons or groups interested in starting new schools – a new schools incubator of sorts.
- Providing expanded technical expertise and support for new school and school transformation efforts.
- Conducting outreach to current district leaders and employees with models in place for new school creation under “thin” union contracts. Engage the various unions in an explicit new school or transformed school operations strategy.
- Recruiting community leaders to serve in governance roles for the various new schools to be created; expectation of all involved in this process to serve and recruit others in this critical role.
- Developing comprehensive facilities options to help new school providers work with districts on facilities solutions.

Whether this work begins in DPS and resonates out into the broader metro area, or whether the metro area wants to collectively undertake such an endeavor, to achieve this vision and realize success, all interests – the district, teachers union, and greater metro Denver community – must come together in support of successful schools by removing barriers and working in partnership for the benefit and future of our kids and our city.



- i. Knous Dolan, Kim and Amy Anderson (2007). "Creating a Culture of Success: New School Development in Denver Public Schools." Denver, CO.
- ii. Mitchell, Nancy. "Leaving to Learn" series. The Rocky Mountain News. 13 Apr. 2007.
- iii. Hill, Paul T. (2002). "Making Philadelphia a diverse providers school district." Unpublished work. And Hill, Paul T. (2006). "Putting Learning First: A Portfolio Approach to Public Schools." Washington, D.C.: Progressive Policy Institute.
- iv. National Association of Charter School Authorizers (2006). "Starting Fresh in Low-Performing Schools: A New Option for School District Leaders under NCLB." Chicago, IL. www.charterauthorizers.org.
- v. American Institutes for Research and SRI International (August 2006). "Evaluation of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's High School Grants Initiative Final Report (2001-2005)." Washington, D.C. And The Turnaround Challenge. http://www.massinsight.org/resourcefiles/TheTurnaroundChallenge_2007.pdf.
- vi. American Institutes for Research and SRI International (August 2006). "Evaluation of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's High School Grants Initiative Final Report (2001-2005)." Washington, D.C.
- vii. Adapted from New School Ventures Fund Conference (2007). Panel: "Lessons from the Field: Turning Around Chronically Failing Schools." San Francisco, CA. www.newschools.org.
- viii. Honig, Meredith (2002). "Oakland's Site-based decision making & new small autonomous schools." College Park, MD: Department of Education Policy and Leadership / College of Education – University of Maryland.
- ix. Honig, Meredith (2003). "The view from the edge: Oakland's progress in the implementation of site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools (2002-2003)." College Park, MD: Department of Education Policy and Leadership / College of Education – University of Maryland.
- x. New York City Department of Education. Office of New Schools. <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/NewSchools/NewSchoolCreation/default.htm>.
- xi. Oakland Unified School District (2007). "Expect Success: Making Education Work for Every Oakland Student." <http://webportal.ousd.k12.ca.us/docs/7765.pdf>.
- xii. Chicago Public Schools: Renaissance 2010 Request for Proposals. <http://www.ren2010.cps.k12.il.us/request.shtml>.
- xiii. Louisiana Department of Education Board of Elementary & Secondary Education. <http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/bese/home.html>.
- xiv. New York City Department of Education (2007). "School Choice – Creating a Portfolio of New School Options for 2008." http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/1D70E6B4-C43C-46BA-B3F5-E67C383BDDE1/20738/SchoolChoice_Final.pdf.
- xv. New York City Department of Education, Office of Portfolio Development. "School Choice – Creating A Portfolio of New School Options for 2008." http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/1D70E6B4-C43C-46BA-B3F5-E67C383BDDE1/20738/SchoolChoice_Final.pdf
- xvi. Hess, Frederick (April 2005). Urban School Reform: Lessons Learned from San Diego. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- xvii. Hill, Paul T. (2006). "Putting Learning First: A Portfolio Approach to Public Schools." Washington, D.C.: Progressive Policy Institute.
- xviii. Ibid.
- xix. New York City Department of Education. Empowerment Schools. <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/Empowerment/default.htm>
- xx. New Visions for New Schools: "Ten Principles of Effective School Design." www.newvisions.org/schools/downloads/10principleslong.pdf. And Gates' Foundation Attributes of High Performing Schools. www.gatesfoundation.org. And Center for Performance Assessment. www.makingstandardswork.com. And Achievement First. www.achievementfirst.org.
- xxi. "A vision for a 21st century school district." Editorial. Rocky Mountain News 27 Apr. 2007. <http://cfapp2.rockymountainnews.com/dps/>.
- xxii. Denver Public Schools website. <http://www.dpsk12.org/departments/>.
- xxiii. The Broad Foundation. www.broadfoudation.org.
- xxiv. Hill, Paul T. and Kacey Guin (2007). Unpublished work: "What Others Can Learn From Oakland's School Reform Initiative." Seattle, WA: Center for Reinventing Public Education. www.crpe.org.
- xxv. "High-Performing School Districts: Challenge, Support, Alignment, and Choice" (June 2005). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Seattle, WA. www.gatesfoundation.org.
- xxvi. Ibid.
- xxvii. Hill, Paul T. (2006). "Putting Learning First: A Portfolio Approach to Public Schools." Washington, D.C.: Progressive Policy Institute.
- xxviii. Hess, Frederick (April 2005). Urban School Reform: Lessons Learned from San Diego. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- xxix. Word et al. (1990). "The State of Tennessee's Student/Teacher Achievement Ration (STAR) Project: Final Summary Report." Nashville: Tennessee Department of Education.
- xxx. Kamras, Jason and Andrew Rotherham (2007). "America's Teaching Crisis: Our public schools are failing. To save them, we need to look to the head of the class." Washington, D.C.: Democracy: A Journal of Ideas. www.democracyjournal.org.
- xxxi. Ibid.
- xxxii. "The schools that Katrina built: How New Orleans could end up saving public education in America. Editorial. The Boston Globe 12 Oct. 2007. www.boston.com.
- xxxiii. Oakland's New School Development Group website. www.nsdg.net.
- xxxiv. Hill, Paul T. and Lydia Rainey and Andrew Rotherham (2006). "The Future of Charter Schools and Teachers Unions: Results of a Symposium." Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education. www.crpe.org.

APPENDIX A

SCHOOL OPERATOR EXAMPLES

The following information was collected via interviews with operators of new schools across the country. Additional information was gleaned from conversations with individuals running New School Offices in the various districts interviewed for this report. The purpose of this table is to inform school districts interested in starting new schools about the various types of operators that exist and the key operating conditions and resources of each. The types of new school providers are not listed in any particular order.

Types of New School Operators	Description	Examples	Critical Terms & Conditions	Resources/Other Comments
Charter Management Organizations without collective bargaining (CMOs)	Non-profit organizations with a specific educational and business model; one board of directors oversees multiple school campuses.	Envision Schools (CA), Aspire Schools (CA), YES College Prep (TX), Uncommon Schools (NY), Achievement 1st (CT)	Full control over budget, educational program, staffing, selection of school leader, calendar, school day; independent board governs school; no teacher union contract; most would like option of a district facility and would negotiate varied funding based on use of that facility; generally not interested in “turnaround” schools—prefer to start new; no student assignment (school of choice); may or may not contract with district for services; may want a contract up front that allows for the opening of more than one school; Envision is the only one in this group that is interested in expansion to Denver at this time.	Access to federal charter school start-up funds and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation replication dollars. Also may be eligible for money from the Charter School Growth Fund.
Charter Management Organizations with collective bargaining (CMOs)	Same as above except the teachers that work for the CMO are part of a union and adhere to a collective bargaining agreement.	Green Dot (CA)	Same conditions as above but with a union contract. While the teachers are unionized, the union is unique to Green Dot—teachers are not part of local AFT or NEA unions. They have a “thin contract” (a 33-page contract that offers competitive salaries but no tenure, and it allows class schedules and other instructional flexibility prohibited by the 330-page contract governing most of LA’s schools). Green Dot has primarily opened new schools but recently embarked on turnarounds in LA; require autonomy over staffing, budget, curriculum, school day/year.	Access to federal charter school start-up funds and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation replication dollars. Unknown if Green Dot would be interested in a Denver expansion.
Charter “One-Offs”	Individual charter schools with promising results but only running one site.	Denver School of Science and Technology (DSST - Denver), West Denver Prep (Denver)	Clear process for deciding which programs should be encouraged to replicate (student outcomes, enrollment, etc.). “Fast-track” charter process for those who have already proven that they are successful. Consider granting more than one charter. Same operating conditions as described in the Charter Management Organization sections above. Given reluctance among CMOs to move to new cities, it may make sense to look at a “grow our own” strategy in Colorado that focuses on schools with proven results, especially those serving high-poverty kids.	Access to federal charter school start-up funds and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation replication dollars (DSST). Also may be eligible for money from the Charter School Growth Fund.

<p>District “One-Offs”</p>	<p>Individual district-operated schools with promising results but only running one site.</p>	<p>Denver School of the Arts, Denver Center for International Studies, Sandoval, Polaris at Ebert, International Baccalaureate program at George Washington High School</p>	<p>District would need to initiate a clear process for deciding which schools should be encouraged to replicate (student outcomes, enrollment, etc.), where new programs could be housed, what role the district would play in supporting the replication before and after the school opens, and what autonomies school leaders would have over key areas like staffing (transfers, number/type of personnel, etc.), enrollment, school day/year, professional development (can they opt out if in-service is not applicable to the school’s instructional approach), curriculum, etc. More than likely these schools would operate semi-autonomously (receive some districts services and take care of others on their own).</p>	<p>School Innovation Grant (mill levy dollars) and private foundation grants could be used to support new school start-ups in this category.</p>
<p>School Networks</p>	<p>May or may not be charter schools, but most require autonomy beyond that of a traditional district school. Offer specific curriculum and instructional foci and support to schools that implement their designs. In some cases the design spans the entire curriculum and has a strong culture component (Expeditionary Learning, KIPP) while in others the focus is merely on the curriculum & instruction (Success for All, Direct Instruction, Core Knowledge). These networks do not manage operations of the school in the same way as EMOs or CMOs.</p>	<p>Expeditionary Learning (EL), Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), Core Knowledge, Success for All (SFA), Direct Instruction (DI), New Visions Schools (NVS)</p>	<p>Depending on school type, operating conditions may vary. KIPP only runs charters so will want operating conditions that mirror those listed in the charter categories above. EL is in both charter and non-charter schools but requires certain conditions regardless of school type (e.g. control over professional development, curriculum, instructional approach, final say and inclusion in process for hiring principal). SFA, CK, and DI are instructional and curriculum models combined with professional development but operate in a variety of school types. Do not know if they have specific conditions beyond the curriculum and instructional strategy and number of days of professional development required. NVS will work within existing buildings but must have clear requirements around how schools are organized and how the educational program is delivered in order to support successful school turnarounds. EL and KIPP do not do turnaround schools.</p>	<p>School Innovation Grant dollars could be used to support new school start-ups in this category. EL has access to Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation replication money for schools that have a high school component (e.g. 9-12 or 6-12 grade configurations). Those organized as charter schools have access to federal charter start-up dollars.</p>

Education Management Organizations (EMOs)	For-profit organizations with a specific education and business model; oversee both operational and educational aspects of the school; the EMO contracts with each individual school's board of directors (either charter or district school board depending on type of school).	Edison (Denver schools include Wyatt Edison and Omar D. Blair)	Edison has a variety of models, each with different operating conditions. One focuses on a professional development approach with little control over anything else. A second approach is a partnership school which is either new or a turn-around and key decisions are shared with the district. The third is a charter where all decisions are made at the school site around staffing, calendar, curriculum, budget, etc. With the first two approaches, the district school board maintains control over the school. The third is run by the charter board. Teachers may be unionized in the non-charters.	Those organized as charter schools have access to federal charter start-up dollars.
Post Secondary Education Partnership Schools	University leaders design and lead a school or cluster of schools. University board is responsible for the school if the school is a charter. Often teacher preparation and training are integrated into the model. In some cases, the charter might have its own board and have a formal agreement with the university and co-locate on a college campus (e.g. early college high schools).	University of Chicago Center for Urban School Improvement operates two schools and plans to open five more; Colorado State University in Pueblo operates the Pueblo Charter School of the Arts & Sciences; University Schools in Greeley (University of Northern Colorado); Early College High Schools (ECHS)	Did not interview anyone from these types of schools but imagine that the conditions are similar to other charters. Board from the institute for higher education could operate the school and serve as the board. Or the school could have its own board and develop a formal partnership or contract with the university for specific services.	Key challenge here in Denver is whether interest or capacity exists in local institutions to embark on these types of partnerships. ECHS programs have Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation replication money. Charters would be eligible for federal charter start-up dollars.
Community Partnership Schools	Board of cultural, health & human services or other community entities run or partner with a charter school. Often the board of the agency is the charter board for the school and may or may not run multiple schools.	Youth Connection Charter Schools (operate 22 alternative schools in Chicago); Museum Charter Schools (e.g. San Diego, DC, Miami)	Same operating conditions as other charters. One board could operate several schools (like Youth Connections) or the boards of the cultural or human service agencies could operate the schools.	Denver could take advantage of given community interest in education and the ever-expanding cultural and human services agencies in the city. Opportunity to provide better wrap-around services for high-needs kids and pool other sources of funding for this purpose to be used in the schools.

<p>Teacher-Run Charter Schools</p>	<p>Teachers are the lead designers and operators of more than one school. EdVisions operates a professional association of teachers (co-op of which each is an owner) and contracts school boards to manage all aspects of school operations including educational program, teacher training, back-office services, etc. UFT-run charter schools in NYC operate a few campuses under a modified collective bargaining agreement.</p>	<p>EdVisions Schools (MN), United Federation of Teacher's (UFT) charters (NYC)</p>	<p>EdVisions have the same operating conditions as other charters. One co-op could run several schools. Teachers would need to form a co-op and could call on EdVisions for support in creating this entity properly. Need more information about how the UFT schools operate.</p>	<p>Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation replication money for EdVisions. Eligible for charter start-up dollars. Do not know if AFT has resources available to support replication of efforts like in NYC.</p>
------------------------------------	--	--	--	--

Appendix B

The RFP Process (timeline, screening, community engagement, approval)

The application process can generally be defined as the sequence from publishing the RFP to announcing approval and denial decisions. In order to conduct the process effectively, the district should first determine when it wants to announce decisions. This determination should, in turn, work back from the amount of time that approved schools need to prepare to open. Usually, districts aim to announce decisions anywhere from six to nine months prior to schools' anticipated opening the following fall. Any less time will inevitably make it difficult for operators to have everything ready. More than nine months can seem appealing but often provides only marginal utility for school opening preparation as it is too early for operators to take key steps like recruiting and hiring staff.

Working backwards from the decision date, the district should consider legal as well as substantive requirements to determine the date on which it will publish the RFP and the deadline for submitting applications. The first time it conducts an RFP, the expectations and process will be new to the public and to potential applicants. Therefore, it is preferable for the district to provide substantially more time -- as much as three months -- between initial publication of the RFP and the deadline for applications. As the public becomes familiar with the process and expectations, much less lead time will be required because developers can work on developing their proposals based on previous versions of the RFP. Barring substantial changes to the RFP, as little as one month may be adequate time between RFP publication and the proposal deadline in subsequent cycles. Once submitted, an application usually undergoes several stages of review. Those stages often include a preliminary screening for completeness, a panel review and evaluation, a capacity interview and a public hearing.

Preliminary Screening. Some districts and other charter school authorizers conduct a preliminary review of submitted applications to make sure that they are complete. This type of screening is not a qualitative review and does not indicate likelihood of success. It merely evaluates whether the applicants have included all of the required background information and content sections. If an application does not meet the preliminary screening requirements, it should be rejected without judgment or prejudice regarding the potential merits of the proposal. If included in the process, each preliminary screening should be completed by district staff within two weeks of submission.

Panel Review. As discussed, above, each application should have several reviewers based on areas of expertise and experience with new school development. Depending on the number of applications, one month is usually an adequate and appropriate amount of time for the district to allocate to this stage of the process. That is, the district should budget approximately one month for distribution, evaluation and discussion of the applications by review panels.

Capacity Interviews. Interviewing the founding group is essential to evaluating the group's capacity to successfully implement the plan. It enables the district to assess questions and concerns that the application raises. Ordinarily, a district uses two or three interviewers to ensure multiple perspectives without creating cumbersome logistics for preparing and conducting the interview. The district can give founding teams some discretion regarding whom to bring to the interview. It is important, however, that prospective governing board members and school leaders participate to the extent that they have been identified. If the school intends to work with a management company -- whether for-profit or non-profit -- representatives of that organization may be asked to attend.

Public Hearing. Most charter school laws require a public hearing at some point during the application process. By extension, most districts incorporate a public hearing into the new schools process. The purpose of this stage should be taken literally from the name. It is an opportunity for the district’s decisionmakers (the school board) to hear from the public about an application or group of applications. Apart from managing the process, the district’s role in a hearing should be relatively passive and should not involve inquiry about or evaluation of proposals.

Engaging the Community: Opinions and Partnerships

A public hearing is the most basic way for a district to engage the community in the application process. It is important for districts to consider whether and to what extent they expect applications to reflect community engagement in and support for the plan. At a minimum, most school districts and other charter school authorizers require applications to address community support and partnerships and weigh the strength of those as part of evaluating the merits of a proposal. Taking this consideration a step further, in New York City, new schools are required to partner with a community-based organization as part of the development process.

When Chicago Public Schools first engaged in systematic closure of failing schools, it created Transition Advisory Councils that have an ongoing role in the new school development process including representation on evaluation teams for proposals in their communities. In deciding its expectations for community engagement, it is important that a district balance the substantial value of such prior relationships with the recognition that many successful schools have developed their strong community ties as a result of reaching out to prospective families after approval of the application and, more than anything else, by serving those families well once the school had opened.