

ELEMENTS OF HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Supplement to DPS Blueprint report issued by the Donnell-Kay Foundation, December 2007.

The following information was collected from a number of schools and school organizations successfully serving and working with predominately low-income and minority students. The material was largely compiled by Kim Knous Dolan. The following elements (in no particular order) should serve as a model for all new and existing DPS schools:

Elements / Attributes	Examples	Barriers	Modifications to Consider	By Whom
Firm belief in high expectations for all students	All students expected to take rigorous courses and are provided with additional academic support as needed in order to ensure success.	Current underlying belief among some educators that not all kids can achieve and be academically successful.	Cultural change and belief shift. Ensure every staff member hired in DPS believes that all students can be academically successful. Clear system-wide goals, expectations and shared responsibility for student success.	District, in partnership with schools, and community.
Personalized learning environment for all students	Schools should be smaller (400-600 pupils) to ensure students don't fall through the cracks, are safe, develop meaningful relationships with adults and receive personalized attention.	Lack of incentive to change existing business model that supports funding larger schools (particularly secondary). Cultural shift that focuses on success of every student.	Belief and policy change. Develop a business model that allows for the creation of smaller schools and/or learning communities. Commit to this as a priority.	District, in partnership with schools and community.
Mission-driven and outcome-focused	School has a clear direction in which it is headed and all adhere to the core values and beliefs of the school. Resources are allocated in ways that support the mission, and goals are tied to measurable strategies and outcomes.	Lack of flexibility over resource allocation, staffing, scheduling, and academic program by school leadership to ensure focus around mission.	District and union policy change to empower principals and teachers in schools to lead (more flexibility for greater accountability).	District and teachers union with support from community.
Clear school design and clear classroom practices	There is continuity and predictability from one classroom to another and everyone is focused on academic achievement.	Lack of flexibility and resources (time and support) at the school level to implement a clear school design.	Provide additional support and time to create thoughtful school designs that are well implemented.	District and teachers union.
Rich, standards-based curriculum delivered through rigorous instruction	All students are provided a rigorous and interesting instructional program that may include more time on academic content.	One size fits all curriculum (particularly at the secondary level) is not effective when you have mission-driven schools with intentional school cultures that should drive the curriculum and instruction.	Policy Change. Opportunity for schools to customize curriculum as long as it is rigorous and standards-based. Pilot at secondary level.	District.

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Strong instructional leadership	Principal has authority to build school culture that is focused on student achievement and building community. Leader has flexibility over staffing, budget, scheduling (use of time) and curriculum.	District control over budget, professional development and curriculum. Standardization does not speak to individual school population needs. Teacher union control over staffing and use of time (length of school day, year, etc.).	Policy change. Provide clear expectations for principals and hold them accountable for results (e.g. allow principals to allocate their staffing resources to support their mission).	District and teachers union with community support.
School-based control of school with extensive professional development for staff	Principals and teachers should be the key decision makers at the school site and should have access to rigorous and effective professional development (district can recommend promising practices and support school, but decision-making power should rest at the school level). Schools are held accountable for increased flexibility.	Existing principals are required to adhere to district and/or collective bargaining restrictions over budget, curriculum, staffing, use of time, etc. Restrictions often contradict what is needed in order to best support a school's mission.	Policy change. Set high expectations and provide principals flexibility to operate schools. Provide intense district support that is based on actual needs and challenges that leaders are facing in their buildings. Encourage schools to ask for waivers from district or union regulations if they agree they are necessary in order to fulfill their mission.	District and teachers union with community support.
Meaningful assessments and strategic use of data	Students are frequently assessed and teachers use information as a diagnostic tool to improve learning. The information is analyzed and communicated to inform school improvement.	Lack of understanding of data from educators and lack of communication home about student's skill level and academic needs.	Policy change. Increase professional development around use and understanding of data to drive instruction. Increase communication to students and families about the student's academic status and learning needs.	District.
More dollars are directed into the classroom	Additional dollars flow to schools to support the mission. Schools are held accountable for dollars spent.	Lack of ability of school leaders and staff to use resources in a way that makes sense to support students.	Policy change. Continue the development of school-based budgeting to ensure flexible use of resources to support the mission.	District.