



Report of the Far Northeast Community Committee

We, Denver's Far Northeast Community Committee (FNECC), invested well over 1000 hours of volunteer time to engage in a process with Denver Public Schools (DPS), facilitated by A+ Denver, to explore options for school improvement in our community. We requested, and DPS provided, a set of best ideas for school improvement in Far Northeast Denver. We considered school turnaround options, testing them with our FNECC Values and Principles that were drafted and submitted to the Denver Board of Education in spring 2010. We actively sought and welcomed input from the community at all of our work sessions. In the course of this iterative work process, we drafted FNECC statements of benefits and challenges and developed a set of commitments for stakeholder actions that we believe will be critical for successful implementation. We, FNECC, submit this report to Denver's Board of Education as they consider strategies for turnaround in Denver's Far Northeast schools on November 18, 2010.

1. Benefits and Challenges:

We, FNECC, believe that DPS's comprehensive regional proposal should bring the following **benefits:**

- Higher expectations for student, teacher and parent performance
- Strong and highly capable school leadership
- High quality teachers
- Increased and highly improved choices and options for families
- Greater accountability to the community for FNE schools and DPS
- Proven school models
- Continuity for all students in their current program if that is their choice (No displaced students, so students currently attending Montbello High School will have the opportunity to graduate from Montbello High School.)
- Fresh starts for schools to build healthy and positive school cultures
- Diverse options, such as arts and technology
- Smaller schools and learning environments at the secondary level
- Maximizing use of space in buildings
- Increased and improved options retaining students in the FNE region
- Relieving overcrowding

- High quality instruction and services for special needs students and English language learners

And, the most important cumulative benefit:

- *Significantly higher student achievement and improved outcomes, empowering all students to pursue their postsecondary dreams and preparing them for engaged and productive citizenship.*

We, FNECC, anticipate the proposed school improvement measures will face the following **challenges:**

- Disruption to schools' current operations, including initial challenges, such as transportation and preparation of campuses, and ongoing challenges of co-location tensions as well as ensuring equity between schools and across campuses
- Resistance to change exacerbated by persistent concerns: 1) that something is being done to and not for the community; and 2) that students currently in the schools will be displaced against their will
- Recruiting and retaining highly effective school leaders and teachers committed to the uniquely challenging work of school turnaround
- Providing supports for teachers that will be forced to find positions elsewhere

And, most important, we believe:

- *A new beginning does not guarantee improved outcomes. Success will require persistence, supportive engagement and technical support, vigilance, and long-term commitment from students, parents, teachers, and the broader community.*

2. Implementation requirements

To meet these challenges and enact all benefits, we believe DPS must commit to specific tasks and responsibilities, specifically the following four criteria and their components:

Notes on criteria and components:

The final work session for FNECC occurred on October 26, 2010. At this meeting, FNECC and community members heard alternative proposals for FNE schools and reviewed potential implementation criteria for this statement. They contributed recommendations and modifications that led to the current structure of four criteria with numbered components. In a follow-up survey, 30 FNECC members provided feedback on what they perceived to be the most important of the four larger criteria and their component parts. The criteria are listed in order of their ranked importance. Their components are likewise listed in order of ranked importance, with one being the component ranked most important. All listed components

received an average ranking of above 4 (important) on a scale of 1 (not important) – 5 (very important), and their average ratings are provided in parentheses.

Implementation Plan: Produce a detailed implementation plan with a timeline no later than January 31, 2011, including but not limited to:

1. Specific goals and objectives with a timeline for implementation (4.72);
2. One team leader to ensure there is consistent and clear communication of the process to the community (4.62);
3. Schedule of workshops to provide job search assistance to displaced teachers (4.33);
4. A plan for the immediate establishment of a support structure – a group to support the principals and teachers enacting the plans and to be directly responsible for the progress of this work (4.29);
5. Specific staff or staff team identified by name and their measurable outcomes, in place in school location in FNE (4.03).

Measuring Progress: Establish and broadly publicize the measurements that progress on the implementation plan will be assessed, including but not limited to:

1. Effective surveys of students that provide meaningful and useful information (4.78);
2. Effective surveys of parents that provide meaningful and useful information (4.74);
3. Effective surveys of teachers that provide meaningful and useful information (4.74);
4. Meaningful measures of parent participation that provide useful information (4.67);
5. Schedule and results of tests during year to measure progress (4.38);
6. Meaningful measures of school culture that provide useful information (4.37);
7. Student attendance rates (4.37);
8. Teacher attendance rates (4.35);
9. Budget reports to oversight committees at line item level–specific as possible (4.32);
10. State exam results (4.00).

Communications: Create a robust communications plan, including but not limited to:

1. DPS must implement an effective outreach strategy (4.93);
2. Provide/assign a parent liaison for each school – one person responsible for parent communication and coordination of activities (4.86);
3. Plan to engage Spanish speaking parents (4.86);
4. Monthly meetings with school-level oversight committees (4.41);
5. Quarterly meetings with regional oversight committee (4.41);
6. Develop a mobile phone texting communication function (4.04).

Accountability: DPS must be held accountable to the community and must establish at minimum the following:

1. Publish reports on progress (4.82);
2. Oversight committee at each of the 6 schools (4.78);
3. 3 year timeline for fundamental reevaluation of the reform (4.78);
4. Report on all measures, including budget (4.78);
5. Regional oversight committee (4.52).

88.5% of respondents answered “Yes” to sign on to the following statement:

We, FNECC, commit to do our part: To provide strong community support for school improvement, we will stay well informed and engaged, serve as ambassadors for these efforts in the community, do whatever we can to help our schools succeed, attend quarterly accountability meetings, hold ourselves accountable for our commitments and to continue to be fair, honest, and transparent in fulfillment of our role.