

2017 CANDIDATE SURVEYS  
**DENVER PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS**



# **Denver School Board At-Large**



# DPS AT-LARGE - INTRODUCTION

School board elections offer community members the opportunity to reflect on the state of their public schools and make a choice on a vision for the future. A+ Colorado believes that understanding who the candidates are, what they stand for, and their qualifications is critical if Denver Public Schools is to meet its vision of *Every Childs Succeeds* and the ambitious goals of the Denver Plan 2020.

The purpose of this survey is to give Denver voters a clear picture of where each candidate stands on the most important issues that the board oversees. All registered candidates were invited to complete the survey. Answers are published exactly as received.

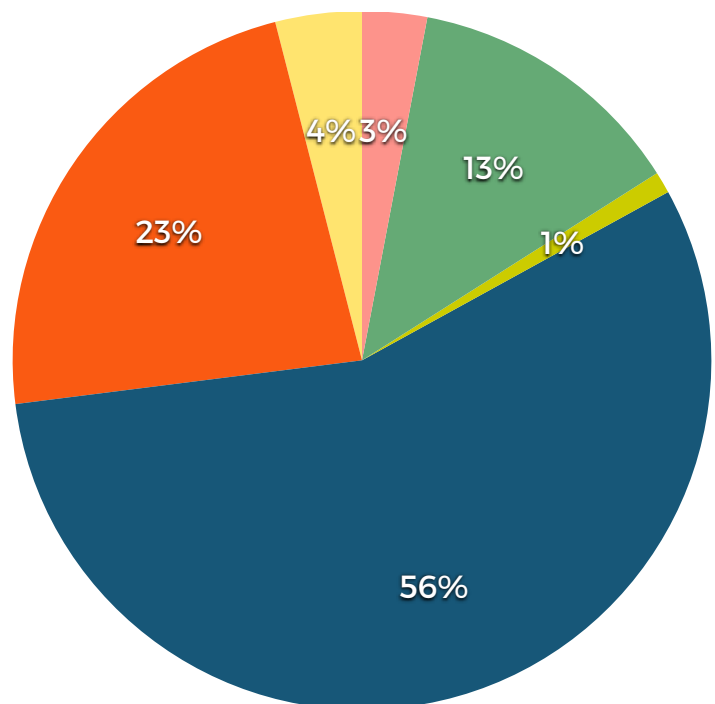
<b>Student Demographics SY 2016-17</b>	
PK-12 Students	90,922
% Free and Reduced Lunch	67%
% English Language Learners	34%

<b>% Students Meeting or Exceeding Grade Level Expectations (2017)</b>	
English Language Arts (ELA)	39%
Math	25%

<b>2016 Graduation Rate</b>	
District Overall	67%
District Overall, Excluding *AECs	80%

\*Alternative Education Campuses

**At-Large Student Race/ Ethnicity SY 2016-17**



- Asian
- Black/African American
- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Two or More Races

# PART 1: DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS STRATEGIES AND GOALS

Rate the following statements on a scale of 1-4, where 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=agree, and 4= strongly agree.

	Julie Bañuelos	Barbara O'Brien	Robert Speth
The district's current strategic plan (the Denver Plan 2020) is the right focus for DPS to improve outcomes for all students.	1	4	NR

NR = No Response

1.1 What might you change in the Denver Plan 2020? How will you hold the district accountable to meeting the goals of the Denver Plan, or to improving student outcomes more broadly?

**Julie Bañuelos:** The Denver 2020 Plan is based on creating "great schools" in every neighborhood. "Great Schools" are synonymous with high test scores. Furthermore, ensuring "access to quality schools" has become nothing more than increasing the number of charter schools that focus on high-stakes testing skills for mainly black, brown and students from working-class homes. Our students deserve nothing more than well-funded schools that offer a comprehensive education which fosters a student's love of learning, develops their critical-thinking skills and provides wrap-around for all in need of those services. The premise of the Plan must be re-calibrated to reflect developmentally appropriate expectations for our students. Such as, less focus on aggregate academic growth/gains. The plan states that 80% of third graders will be on or above grade level, this assumes that all our students are equal in cognitive skills. This is one of many improvements that I would advocate for in the Plan.

**Barbara O'Brien:** I strongly support (and helped to design) the Denver Plan 2020. I am result driven and make tough decisions to create a culture of accountability. There is a long way to go in meeting the goals of Denver Plan 2020. I will not take my focus off progress toward those goals. There is, however, an opportunity to leverage the district's role in affordable housing for the city of Denver as well as work with RTD to ease the burden of traffic on families – both issues are impacting DPS students. DPS needs to partner with the city and other groups to address these two areas.

**Robert Speth:** NR

## PART 2: TEACHING, LEADERSHIP, AND LEARNING

Rate the following statements on a scale of 1-4, where 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree.

	Julie Bañuelos	Barbara O'Brien	Robert Speth
Teachers and school leaders should be held accountable for student academic outcomes.	3	4	NR
The current compensation system (ProComp) is structured to address challenges in attracting and retaining teachers.	1	3	NR

### 2.1 How would you ensure the district is meeting the needs of traditionally underserved student populations (students of color, low-income students, emerging multilingual students, and students receiving special education services)?

**Julie Bañuelos:** Require culturally relevant/responsive training for all our teachers, school administrators, district personnel and leadership. Moreover, our high-needs schools, MUST receive equitable funding to serve these communities. School closer and co-location in communities with high number of students of color, low income, multi-lingual and SPED should NOT be the solution. Finally, priority should be given to recruiting teachers of color, especially those with similar backgrounds/experiences of the students and families that they serve - the ratio of teachers of color hired must parallel the ratio of students of color in the district.

**Barbara O'Brien:** I led the work on the new DPS policy that eliminates expulsions and suspensions for ECE-3<sup>rd</sup> grade students and makes expulsions and suspensions rare (only when required legally) for older students. This combined with training in cultural competencies for all DPS educators will help ensure that at-risk students are in school and learning and that they have teachers that understand them. The district has an obligation to continue to provide (and expand) its' multilingual resources for parents and to be responsive to the unique needs and learning barriers for non-English speaking students. I believe that DPS should have the goal of becoming a bilingual district, with the new Bilingual Certificate a step in that direction. Low-income students deserve access to high performing schools in every part of town; I will protect public school choice for families and work to find transportation solutions to exercising that choice.

**Robert Speth:** NR

**2.2 What do you believe is DPS' greatest challenge to having great teachers in every classroom? How do you suggest the district enhance or change its approach to this challenge?**

**Julie Bañuelos:** The superintendent has done little to bargain in good faith with the Denver Classroom Teachers' Association when it relates to the Master Contract and Procomp, all the while taking advantage of SB10-191 to push out highly-qualified and tenured teachers. The results include salaries that fail to attract and retain quality teachers and a decrease in college students interested in joining the teaching work force. An immediate fix would be to make the starting salary for new and licensed teachers \$48,000/year. Also, the district should invest in a path to teaching for our paraprofessionals and concurrently enrolled high school students.

**Barbara O'Brien:** Housing is a continuing challenge for recruiting and retaining great teachers. That is a long-term barrier that DPS is addressing through the Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative and a partnership with Denver and the Denver Housing Authority. What DPS can control in the short term is the quality of the professional experience it provides to teachers. Teachers have told the school board through round tables and surveys that they want continuous improvement in their knowledge and skills and that they want a career path that allows them to remain involved in classrooms. I have worked to revamp the way teachers are trained and the feedback has been highly positive. High quality professional experiences for teachers and working to keep Denver affordable will help keep great teachers in every classroom.

**Robert Speth:** NR

## PART 3: SCHOOL QUALITY

Rate the following statements on a scale of 1-4, where 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=agree, and 4= strongly agree.

	Julie Bañuelos	Barbara O'Brien	Robert Speth
All families should have the choice to send their students to a school that meets their needs.	1	4	NR
In 2016, the DPS School Board adopted the School Performance Compact, a policy outlining that schools that are persistently low performing (this year, schools that have been red on the SPF for two consecutive years, or have been red or orange for 3 consecutive years) are eligible for replacement, restart, or closure. Do you agree with this policy?	1	3	NR
DPS adequately engages families and community members throughout the school turnaround process.	1	2	NR

**3.1 How should the district define a “high quality” school? What do you like about the current system to capture school performance (the School Performance Framework (SPF))? What, if anything, would you change about how the district measures and communicates a school’s performance?**

**Julie Bañuelos:** High quality schools are defined by the number of proficient and advanced results on high-stakes testing. The SPF and the SQR are flimsy and give a short-sighted picture of the assets our students and teachers bring to the classroom and learning process.

**Barbara O’Brien:** The district ought to look at student achievement, growth, and preparedness in the context of evaluating student well-being at the school. I believe that the current framework that includes engagement and satisfaction for students and parents is a step in the right direction. It is essential that the district consider the whole child when evaluating schools – I believe that more emphasis on emotional health, non-academic factors, etc. need to be included in the evaluation process. The district must do a better job of spreading different school models across the city. As far as the SPF is concerned, I do believe that it is a valuable tool in both measuring academic success and communicating information to families. The board removed several measures from the current SPF to begin streamlining it, but we have more work to do. Finally, DPS needs a way to evaluate and communicate school quality – something that parents tell us is more important to them than test results.

**Robert Speth:** NR

**3.2 Research shows that Denver has seen a growing trend of school resegregation. What do you see as the cause of this trend and what would you do as a school board member, if anything, to address this issue?**

**Julie Bañuelos:** I see this trend to be the result of school choice as it exists in Denver. School choice benefits a few and deprives most. School choice favors those who have the financial means to traverse the district while the majority of our working class and low income (69%) are inconvenienced through the demand on their time and opportunity costs assumed by choice. Neighborhood schools, with comprehensive curriculum and resources must be the first option for our students. Fostering school communities where diversity and inclusivity are both valued and prioritized will empower our students and families.

**Barbara O’Brien:** As a DPS board member, I take this issue seriously and believe we should do what we can to fix this. There are promising strategies like the weighted lotteries used by DSST to diversify their student body. DPS is also examining it’s facilities for their possible use as affordable housing. The board also created the Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative, led by board members Lisa Flores and Rachele Espiritu, to study the effects of gentrification on schools and make recommendations for policy changes to counter this problem. I look forward to hearing the committee’s recommendations and will work with my fellow board members and the superintendent to implement them. This problem is not unique to Denver and the board is actively learning from other urban districts as we forge our own long-term solutions.

**Robert Speth:** NR

## PART 4: GOALS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Rate the following statements on a scale of 1-4, where 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree.

	Julie Bañuelos	Barbara O'Brien	Robert Speth
It is the role of a Board Member to hold the Superintendent accountable to student outcomes.	4	4	NR
The priority of the school district should be improving student outcomes in low-performing schools.	4	4	NR

### 4.1 What will be your two primary goals as a Board member? How will families & community know you are working towards these goals?

**Julie Bañuelos:** I have four priorities: 1) Protect students by removing police/resource officers and instead require full-funding of restorative justice programs; 2) Defend families by ending the wasteful admin-heavy choice system that wreaks havoc on households; 3) Support teachers through a defense of collective-bargaining rights for all teachers and; 4) Watch spending by imposing a moratorium on charter school approvals in favor of existing schools. Since I believe in remaining faithful to my constituents, I will hold virtual town halls and create opportunities for these important stakeholders to understand my reasoning for voting on issues beforehand.

**Barbara O'Brien:** My first priority is deepening the impact of Early Childhood Literacy strategies that I pioneered, then expanding successful strategies to more grade levels and subjects. The gains from the literacy plan were historic and our approach to individualized professional development for every elementary teacher, paraprofessional and principal should be implemented in math and science.

My second priority is to improve our human capital strategies for hiring, developing, retaining, and compensating educators. I applaud the district and DCTA for the new collective bargaining agreement that creates the necessary steps to improve these systems. I'm particularly supportive of the collaborative approach to Whole Child supports through the task force we created. We should work to simplify and make the procomp system more transparent so that teachers and leaders better understand their compensation packages and the incentives for teaching in challenging schools.

**Robert Speth:** NR



#### 4.2 What were one or two decisions that the DPS Board made in the last four years that you strongly agree with? How would you work to support these policies?

**Julie Bañuelos:** I don't strongly disagree with the decisions that the board has made in the last four years, hence, my decision to run. The board has proved time and time again that it will go against the communities' desires, for the sake of reform.

**Barbara O'Brien:** I was proud to have lead the way in implementing the Early Childhood Literacy Strategic Plan which produced historic growth in reading for all groups of K-3<sup>rd</sup> students. I am also proud of the work Anne Rowe and I did to create the School Performance Compact. The School Performance Compact clarifies our expectations for schools and creates predictability for the actions the board will take when a school is chronically underperforming. I have a strong sense of urgency for improving the academic results of students in low-performing schools. I look forward to refining this policy going forward, especially how we have a more authentic community voice in the SPC process.

**Robert Speth:** NR

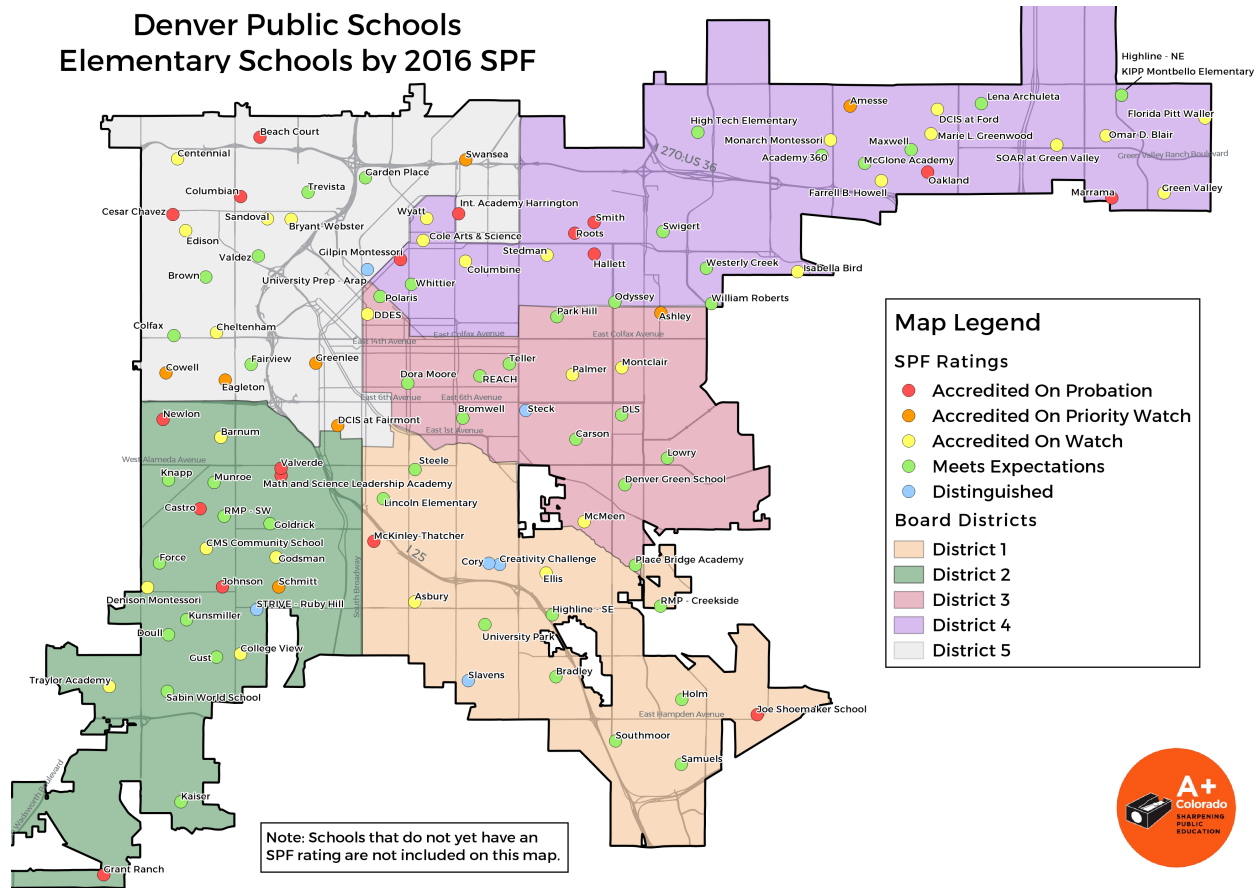
#### 4.3 What were one or two decisions that the DPS Board made in the last four years that you strongly disagree with? How would you work to change these policies?

**Julie Bañuelos:** I strongly disagree with the closure of Gilpin and the co-location of Lincoln High School. By lobbying with my colleagues, I will advocate for accountability of the board's decision to blatantly manipulate Gilpin's SQR score by one point to justify its closure. As for Lincoln, I will push for a stand alone comprehensive high school that will once again exist as beacon and place of pride for its students, teachers and community.

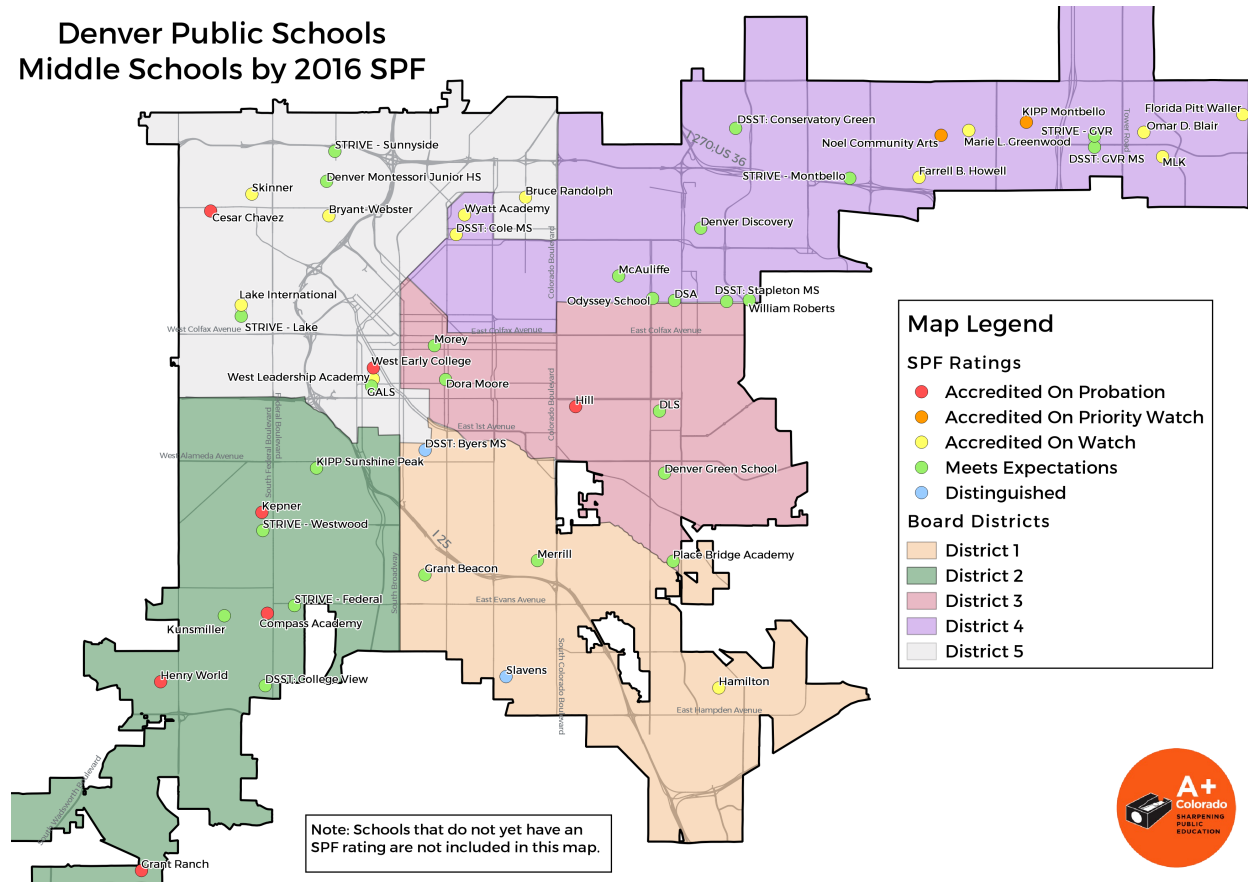
**Barbara O'Brien:** While I am ultimately satisfied with our strategic plan for elementary school reading strategies, I am disappointed in the time it took for the district to finalize this plan. I make it a point in all of my decisions to have a sense of urgency in improving outcomes for kids, yet this specific strategic plan, that is aligned with Denver Plan 2020, took DPS a full 18 months to develop. Ensuring that young children are able to read so they are prepared to learn is vital for future success and we lost valuable time in their development while debating what should have been common sense reforms.

**Robert Speth:** NR

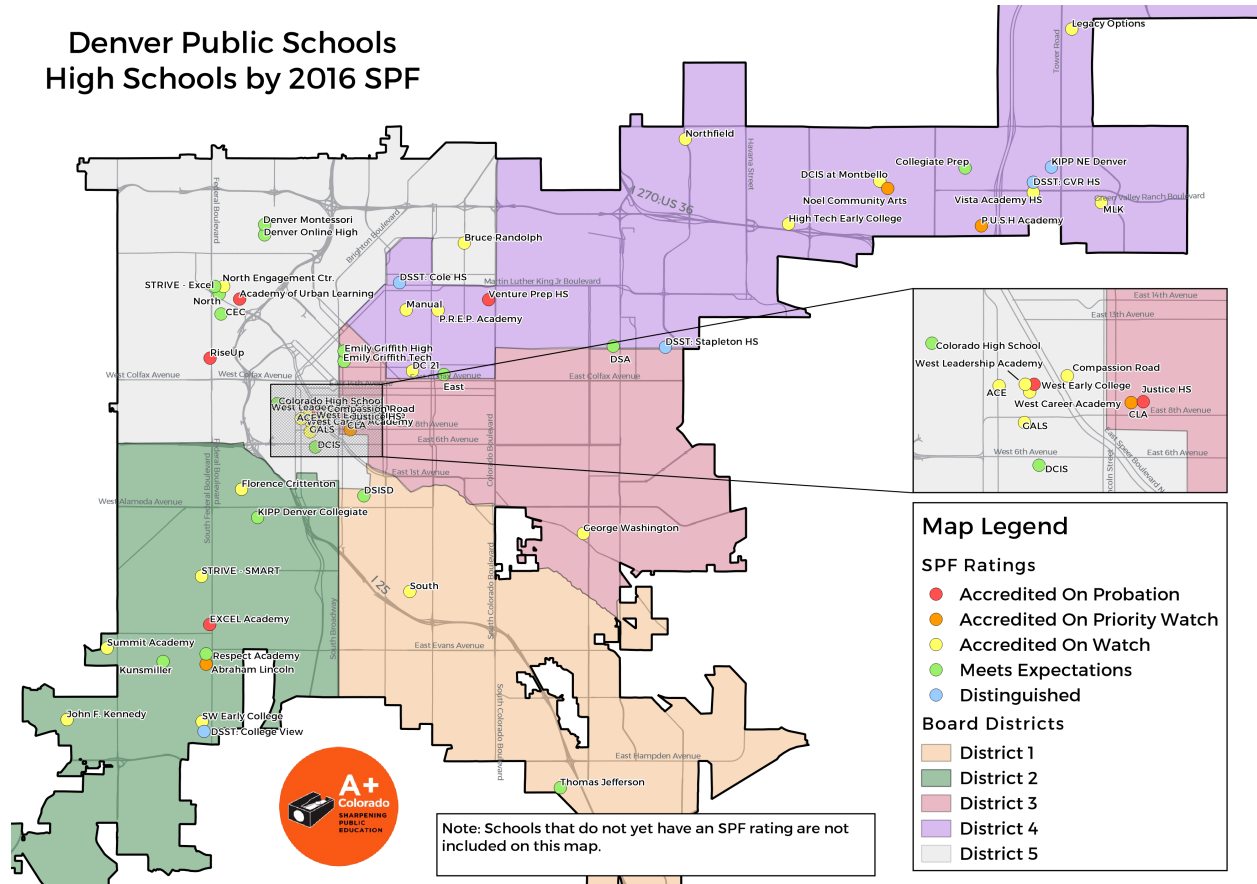
## Denver Public Schools Elementary Schools by 2016 SPF



## Denver Public Schools Middle Schools by 2016 SPF



# Denver Public Schools High Schools by 2016 SPF



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