

2017 CANDIDATE SURVEYS
**DENVER PUBLIC
SCHOOLS**



Denver School Board District 4: Northeast



DPS DISTRICT 4 - 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.

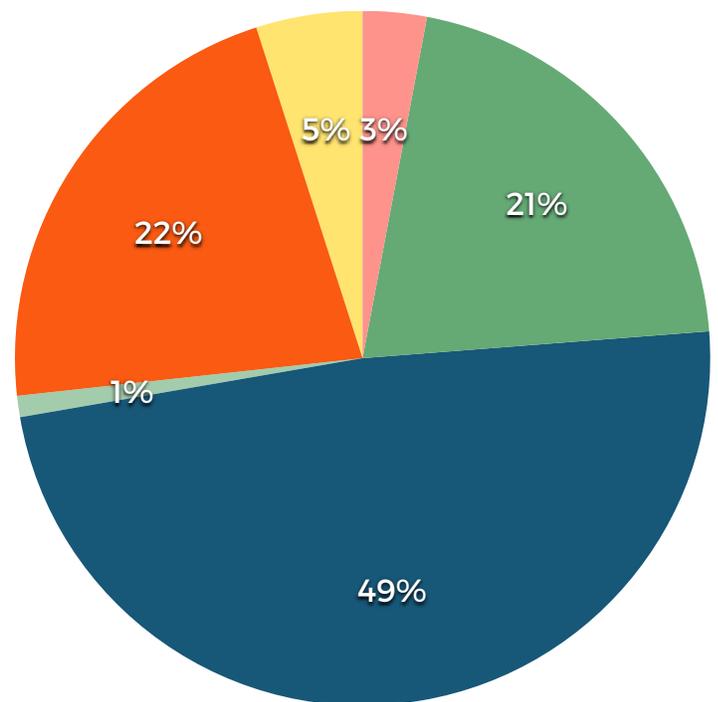
Student Demographics SY 2016-17	
PK-12 Students	31,228
% Free and Reduced Lunch	65%
% English Language Learners	32%

% Students Meeting or Exceeding Grade Level Expectations (2017)	
English Language Arts (ELA)	41%
Math	31%

2016 Graduation Rate	
District Overall	67%
District 4	80%
District 4, Excluding *AECs	84%

*Alternative Education Campuses

District 4 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.

	Auontai 'Tay' Anderson	Jennifer Bacon	Rachele Espiritu
The district's current strategic plan (the Denver Plan 2020) is the right focus for DPS to improve outcomes for all students.	NR	4	4

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?

Auontai 'Tay' Anderson: NR

Jennifer Bacon: As a former teacher, I deeply believe in the the student-focused outcomes outlined in the Denver 2020 plan. When it comes to implementation, I have concerns about the pace of change. By 2020, 80% of third graders should be reading on grade level based on this plan. Last year, only one of the 25 elementary schools in District 4 met that bar. Despite increasing graduation rates overall, the gap between white students and students of color persists. Additionally, DPS seems to lack both a clear definition of what whole child wellness truly means, as well as systems to track and report on data that would demonstrate if this strategy were successful. While I agree with initial efforts to survey health, school nutrition efforts, and programs such as the arts, I believe the district can go much further in its reporting of discipline rates, both total and disaggregated by student groups like race and gender, as a snapshot of how student behavior is managed across the district.

Rachele Espiritu: I am committed to the Denver 2020 plan's vision of Every Child Succeeds and achieving the aspirational goals that are crucial for our students' success. As a board member and professional in children's behavioral health, I believe that we need to clarify what Great Schools in Every Neighborhood looks like. This requires going beyond highlighting the academic outcomes of a school to examining the school environment and culture, the diversity of programing across the district, and the clarification of Whole Child and Educator goals and benchmarks.

The transformational systems are in place for DPS; now it is important to hold DPS accountable for the effective implementation of the policies. I support giving schools more flexibility and autonomy, while holding them accountable to the same performance standards. The use of the Equity Indicator is also crucial to shining a spotlight on the opportunity gaps and educational gains of diverse student groups.

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.

	Auontai 'Tay' Anderson	Jennifer Bacon	Rachele Espiritu
Teachers and school leaders should be held accountable for student academic outcomes.	NR	4	4
The current compensation system (ProComp) is structured to address challenges in attracting and retaining teachers.	NR	2	3

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)?

Auontai 'Tay' Anderson: NR

Jennifer Bacon: As a former teacher, school administrator, lawyer, and parent advocate, ensuring that that all students get a fair shot at success has been my life's work. Based on these experiences, I believe there are tangible steps the board should be taking:

- 1) All decisions should be made using an equity-impact assessment. This includes being sure we deeply understand the community assets and needs of schools in D4, and how each decision might impact different student populations.
- 2) Suspension and expulsion rates should be reported publicly, disaggregated when possible by grade, school, race, gender, and FLR, IEP, and ELL status.
- 3) To combat the disparities that happen within schools, push to remove barriers to enrollment in honors/AP classes like previous minimum grades or standardized test scores.
- 4) Students need to see themselves reflected in their schools. That's why DPS must focus on the recruitment and retention of teachers and school leaders who share background with our students.

2.1 (Cont.) 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)?

Rachele Espiritu: I want every student to have access to a high performing school that meets their social emotional and academic learning needs. To help reach that goal, I will ensure:

- Equity in Funding by providing additional resources to schools identified as needing the greatest support and extra compensation for teachers in our most impacted schools
- Use of the Equity Indicator to highlight high expectations and supports for ALL students
- A Whole Child and Whole Educator focus to address the enormous social and societal challenges that our students and adults face
- Expansion of and access to high quality programing in areas of the city that have been underserved
- Culturally Responsive Education to celebrate, honor, and explore the backgrounds and identities of all students
- College and career readiness opportunities for all students through expansion of our early college opportunities and Career Connect programing
- Expanded access to school options to best meet the needs of students and families

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?

Auontai 'Tay' Anderson: NR

Jennifer Bacon: I have seen the impact of getting great people working in schools and what it takes for them to stay in terms of recruitment, retention, and development. On the front end, the District must focus efforts on recruiting top teacher talent, particularly diversifying our applicant pool with those who have diverse language skills or share background with our students. From a retention standpoint, teacher compensation is clearly an issue. With the rising cost of living in Denver, many teachers have told me they find it hard to envision staying in the classroom long-term. I believe DPS should do a public audit of its pro-comp dollars, study if they are rewarding the appropriate things, and think creatively about how we can restructure those dollars to retain our best teachers. Finally, teachers deserve high quality, research based professional development that is relevant to the needs of their classroom.

2.2 (Cont.) 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?

Rachele Espiritu: It is critical to attract and retain teacher talent to support student success. With a national teacher shortage, Denver is not alone in challenges to having great teachers in every classroom. We need to focus on strategies that attract, retain, and keep effective teachers in our schools, including:

- Enhanced compensation efforts to provide a meaningful differentiation for teachers in our most impacted schools
- Make Your Mark, a city-wide initiative aimed at increasing the awareness and attractiveness of Denver
- Enhanced university/career fair recruitment, focused on diverse candidates

It is vital that we give teachers the resources and supports they need and help them deal with the heavy workload they face. We should improve school leadership training so that leaders support improved practice of our educators; provide non-academic supports for students so that teachers have help addressing those needs; and enhance inclusive school cultures to improve the work environment for teachers.

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.

	Auontai 'Tay' Anderson	Jennifer Bacon	Rachele Espiritu
All families should have the choice to send their students to a school that meets their needs.	NR	4	4
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?	NR	3	4
DPS adequately engages families and community members throughout the school turnaround process.	NR	1	2

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?

Auontai ‘Tay’ Anderson: NR

Jennifer Bacon: Our current definition of quality is based primarily on tests. This is important piece; we always need to know if students are at grade level or if there are gaps in performance. However, test data is only one measure of success. DPS can become a leader in broadening a definition of quality. DPS can measure community engagement with metrics like completed home visits or move beyond an equity measure that only shows gaps to rewarding actions that close them.

DPS must innovatively engage with a community before a school is put up for closure. DPS has the capacity to do this - we’ve seen them give power to a community committee to choose the model for a restart at John Amesse. We have data like enrollment projections and academics to identify the schools where something must change. We have community resources that we could be leveraging to help the school succeed. The Board needs to lead in connecting these assets so we can minimize the trauma of our current school closure process.

Rachele Espiritu: “High quality” schools in DPS:

- Have strong academic outcomes for ALL students
- Engage the Whole Child and Whole Educator
- Prepare students for career and/or college
- Offer diverse programming across the district that allows families to find the best school for their student
- Actively engage families and community members both to support the needs of the school and to give back to the community

The SPF serves many useful purposes: as a tool to assess progress on our 2020 goals, informs tiering of supports for our most high-needs schools, plays a critical role in the SPC, highlights performance discrepancies (Equity Indicator), serves as a common definition of effectiveness, and informs parents regarding the school choice process. The SPF is complicated, with measures that change often and are difficult to understand and communicate. I support simplification of the SPF and the development of communication tools to make it more accessible to parents, community members, and school leaders.

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?

Auontai 'Tay' Anderson: NR

Jennifer Bacon: Segregation is a problem across our country and down to the school level. Our country has a long history of segregation that has systematically led us to where we are today. This is an issue worth addressing; research shows that all students benefit from attending a racially and socioeconomically diverse school.

In a rapidly changing city like Denver, DPS should be working with the City to intentionally map out housing plans to naturally diversify our schools. As we draw attendance zones, we can consider the diversity of neighborhoods zoned to the same school. Denver has great programs within its magnet schools, like Denver School of the Arts; DPS could do more to ensure that those who want to pursue that program come from every part of the city. DPS must also recognize its role in the strength of communities. At the core of every strong neighborhood is a strong school, one that families want to live by and might be a good option for the needs of their students.

Rachele Espiritu: A significant driver of school segregation is that Denver neighborhoods are experiencing significant shifts in demographics and increases in housing prices. As neighborhoods become gentrified, changes in demographics are reflected in the school-aged children who attend our DPS schools.

I am committed to inclusive schools in our communities. We know that giving students choice and access to high-quality, inclusive schools helps achieve better educational outcomes. Students are more prepared as global citizens in our world. DPS has a role to play in driving greater inclusivity in our schools and has engaged a city-wide Strengthening Neighborhoods committee to provide recommendations for this complex issue. I understand that these are complex challenges that require innovative solutions and strategies, I look forward to receiving their best thinking and recommendations. I will support making changes to our policies around boundaries, zones, and choice to do what's best for our students.

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.

	Auontai 'Tay' Anderson	Jennifer Bacon	Rachele Espiritu
It is the role of a Board Member to hold the Superintendent accountable to student outcomes.	NR	4	4
The priority of the school district should be improving student outcomes in low-performing schools.	NR	4	4

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

Auontai 'Tay' Anderson: NR

Jennifer Bacon: After talking with community members across district 4, I heard two themes: stabilizing our schools and prioritizing inclusive, transparent decision-making processes. D4 has been the epicenter of so much change in Denver and education over the past decade: the challenges of schools facing increasing and declining enrollment, the opening and closing of schools, and the implementation of the school performance framework. In order for our schools and our students to realize their full potential, the District needs to work to provide a stable foundation - in its expectations of schools, in the resources it provides, and in its forward looking vision for schools.

As D4 continues to face difficult decisions about the future of our schools, the most effective way to arrive at the best answers will be by including teachers, parents, students, and community members in the process on the front end. Decisions in public education should always be inclusive, transparent, and accountable.

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

Rachele Espiritu: One of the reasons I stood up to serve on the board was to bring the Whole Child perspective to our work, starting with ECE. We know that student academic success doesn't happen in a vacuum. Many of our students face enormous social and societal challenges. If these issues go unaddressed, students are not ready to learn. I will work towards bringing best-practices in trauma-informed schools that support safety, prioritize relationships, integrate engaging high quality teaching, and use a restorative approach to discipline. I support changes to our district policies and practices related to classroom management, teaching and learning, discipline and conflict resolution using a trauma-informed lens.

To achieve our Denver 2020 goals, my other primary goal is to authentically engage community. Families and community will know we are successful when they are engaged and see a positive shift in school culture that supports the social emotional and academic learning of ALL students.

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?

Auontai 'Tay' Anderson: NR

Jennifer Bacon: I'm heartened by the investment in the Teacher Leadership and Collaboration program in the District. Teachers are at the heart of the success of our district and should be treated as such. A program like this, which invests in the professionalization of our teachers and includes them in decisions and processes across the district, has a lot of promise. We still have ways to continue improving, both in how we reward and compensate teachers and how they are engaged in decision-making processes.

Additionally, the board has recently approved the recommendations of the African American Task force, which focus on implementation of culturally responsive practices in schools and investment in proven interventions like the Opportunity Centers. I'm running because while I deeply believe in these policies, Denver needs an advocate on the board to ensure they are implemented with fidelity and high-quality.

Rachele Espiritu: I was proud to support the passing of a resolution in March that stated our intent to end suspensions and expulsions for students in Early Childhood Education through third grades in favor of more thoughtful disciplinary practices. A critical part of this is providing the supports to our teachers and schools that they need to meet the needs of their highest-need students. Knowing that there are significant racial disparities in discipline, I support our discipline report efforts, especially the emphasis on creating supports and strategies to promote positive behavior and prevent problems and use of restorative justice approaches.

As the first immigrant to serve on the Board, I co-sponsored the Safe and Welcoming School District resolution that declared the Boards' commitment to protecting the legal rights of all students, regardless of immigration status, national origin, religion, or race--and I'll continue to fight against the Trump-Devos agenda for the next four years.

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?

Auontai 'Tay' Anderson: NR

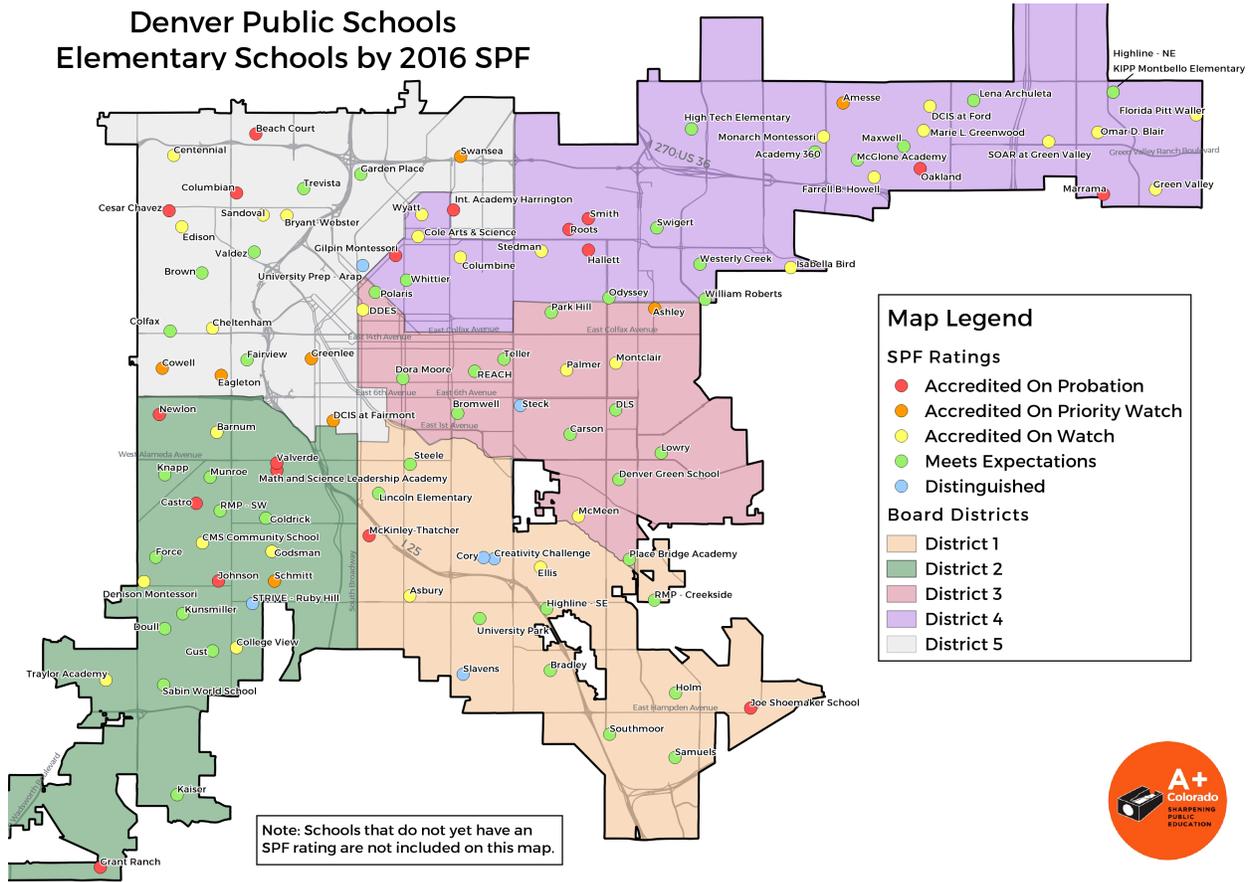
Jennifer Bacon: First, DPS created a system based on choice, so we must ask ourselves, "Do families really have choice?" For choice to work, all schools must be good options. Right now, too many families face a false choice: attend a low-performing school or drive across town. Families must also have access to schools. Voters approved a mill with \$400k reserved for innovative transportation solutions for low-income students. Now, DPS is only studying the issue and is considering rolling the funds back into the general budget. Finally, schools should have unique offerings; right now, most new schools are just one model. We are not living up to the promise of a choice system.

Second, the closure of Gilpin demonstrated that DPS did not fulfill its responsibility to proactively engage with the community. My style of proactive interventions and inclusion of the community differs from the Board's. The district missed this opportunity, and Denver students now have lost a unique school model, Montessori.

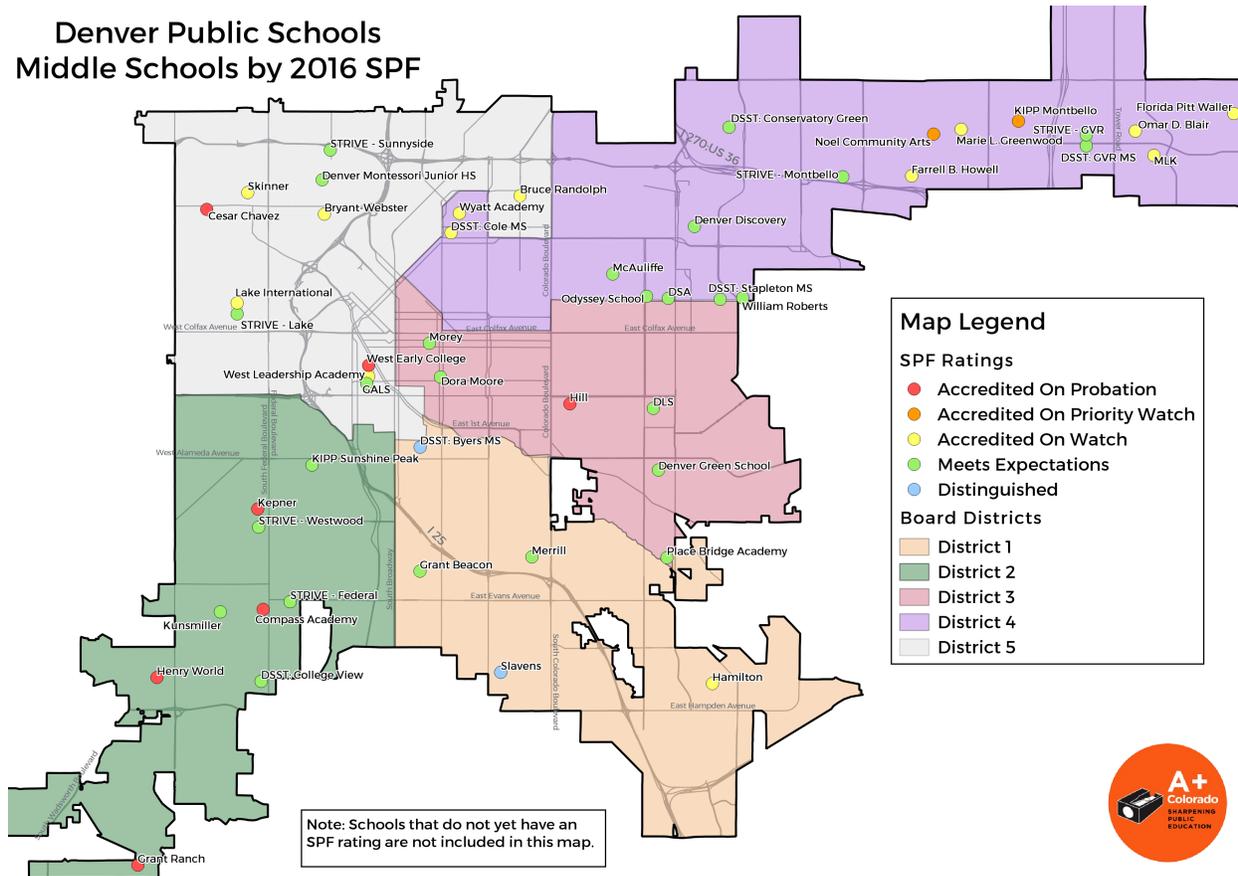
Rachele Espiritu: As the newest member to the board, I have been a part of decision-making since May 2016. We each bring different perspectives and experiences, represent diverse districts, and do the difficult work of coming to consensus when at times we have disagreed with one another.

One decision that I struggled with was the design and implementation of the Community Review Board in providing restart recommendations. The need to engage community in decision-making is real; however I felt that we fell short in providing the vision and expectations for all of the stakeholders involved, including some of our DPS teams. We need to do a better job of defining the roles of leaders in the existing school and FACE, and create equal opportunities for communication and access for all restart applicants. I recognize that the timelines and volume and complexity of information can be overwhelming, so we need to consider meaningful ways to engage family members in the process, without overwhelming them.

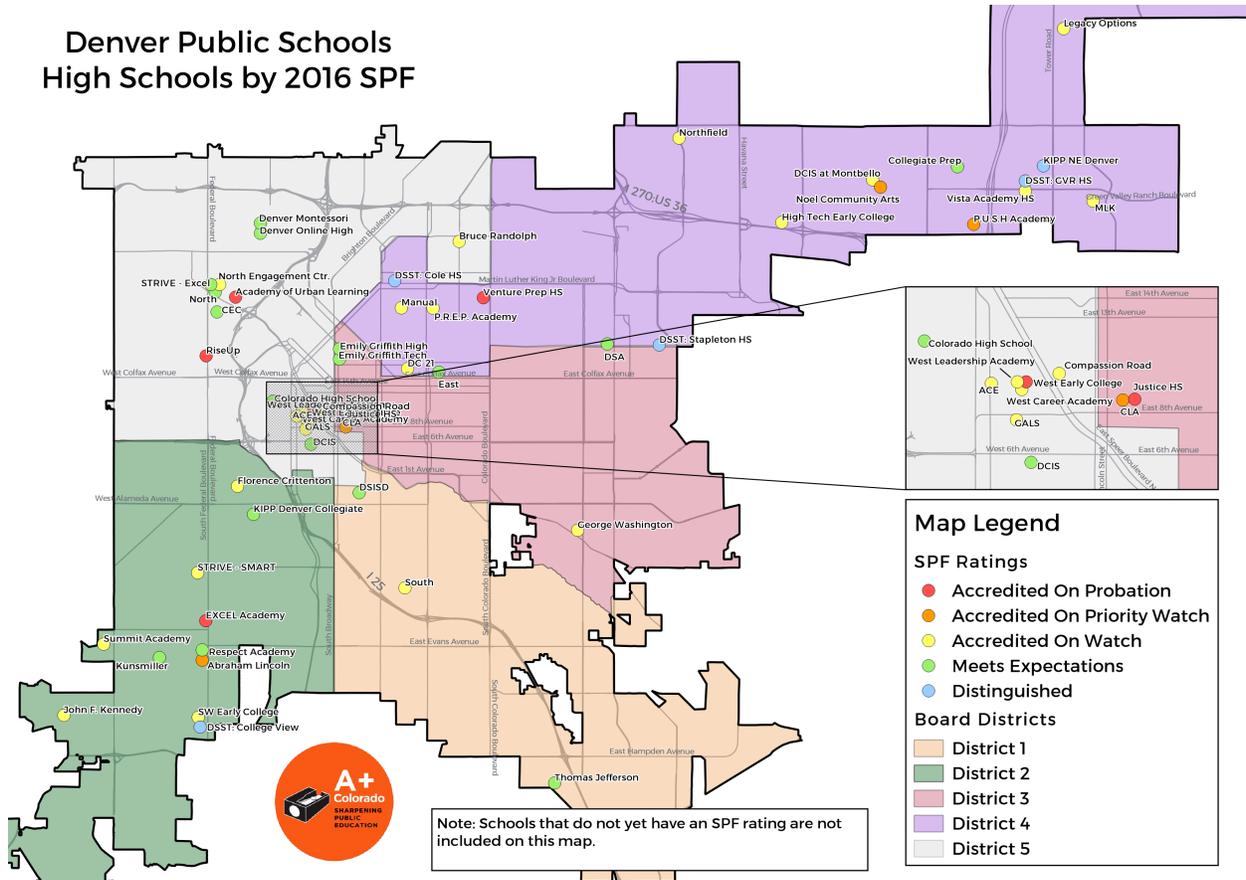
Denver Public Schools Elementary Schools by 2016 SPF



Denver Public Schools Middle Schools by 2016 SPF



Denver Public Schools High Schools by 2016 SPF



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