

# Spotlight on Success

## Denver Public Schools

---



### Denver Plan 2020 Goal 4: Support for the Whole Child

DPS is committed to creating a setting that fosters the growth of the Whole Child. Our school environments will encourage students to pursue their passions and interests, support their physical health and strengthen the social/emotional skills they need to succeed, including managing emotions, establishing and maintaining positive relationships and making responsible decisions.<sup>1</sup>

**D**enver Public Schools (DPS) is a large school district with more than 92,000 students in 207 schools, including traditional, innovation, magnet, charter and pathway schools. The district is among the fastest growing urban school districts in the nation, serving a diverse student population where approximately 67% qualify for free-and reduced-price lunch and 37% are English-language learners.

In 2014, DPS engaged in a year-long process to develop the Denver Plan 2020, a five-year strategic plan to achieve its vision: *Every Child Succeeds*. During the development, district leaders spoke with nearly 3,000 stakeholders — students, family members, teachers, school leaders, community partners and district employees. Based on their input, it was evident that there was robust support for identifying a districtwide strategic goal around supporting the Whole Child. As a result, “Support for the Whole Child” is one of the five overarching goals in the Denver Plan 2020.

Following the release of the Denver Plan 2020, the district established a Whole Child steering committee to develop a plan to measure and track progress on the goal. The committee was co-chaired by students and established the vision of being “committed to providing equitable and inclusive environments where we ensure students are Healthy, Supported, Engaged, Challenged, Safe, and Socially and Emotionally Intelligent.”<sup>2</sup> Students, in particular, advocated for the vision to include Socially and Emotionally Intelligent.

The Whole Child steering committee developed a roadmap for reaching the Denver Plan 2020 goal, recommending the following: 1) an annual, reliable and valid instrument to measure progress in all six areas, 2) tools for schools to share and action plan with students, parents, staff and community partners, and 3) the integration of Whole Child into each school’s improvement plan.

To achieve this, the district established a Whole Child task force comprised of DPS staff, parents and representatives of community organizations. The task force was charged with operationalizing the vision and recommendations, including examining best practices of Whole Child work, defining high-level strategies and overseeing the development of a district menu of resources and initiatives, along with internal and external supports.

Over the last few years, the Whole Child task force and a team of DPS staff representing all areas of the Whole Child model have worked diligently to establish the systems and resources needed to support the Whole Child goal. This includes developing a Whole Child Student Survey<sup>3</sup> to measure student perceptions aligned to the six areas of DPS' Whole Child definition.

The first survey (grades 3 and above) was introduced in 2015-16 and continues to be refined through a process of question development, testing and validation. School leaders are provided school-level reports comparing campus and district-level data and identifying gaps. To date, the survey data has highlighted critical areas of focus, including bullying and chronic absenteeism, and confirmed a strong link between Whole Child factors and success in school.

In addition, DPS developed an online resource bank containing a dynamic list of district staff who can assist as connectors, thought partners and providers in any of the Whole Child focus areas, along with a streamlined process for leaders and educators to request support from centralized district teams. It also developed an online community partnership system that is a comprehensive inventory of local organizations serving DPS schools. Finally, the district is developing systems and supports, including specific examples and descriptors, to assist schools with alignment of Whole Child within their school improvement plans.

## **DPS and the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model**

DPS' focus in this area began in 2010 with its Health Agenda 2015, a five-year strategic plan to promote the health and wellness of every student. The development of the plan was led by the DPS Health Advisory Council and developed with significant input and collaboration from more than 1,200 stakeholders, including students, parents, staff and community members. The plan addressed eight areas of coordinated school health and its implementation over five years led to numerous successful outcomes, including a large increase in the number of students eating a nutritious breakfast and an increase in moderate to vigorous physical activity in physical education classes. In addition, DPS added multiple school-based health centers throughout the district thanks to community collaborations and partnerships. The success of Health Agenda 2015 helped to lay the groundwork for an expanded, more integrated plan to strengthen the health and wellness of students and staff.

The Whole Child, Healthy Child Agenda 2020,<sup>4</sup> launched in 2015, is DPS's second iteration of its health agenda. The DPS Health Advisory Council led the plan's development, using an extensive stakeholder engagement process that included the input of more than 4,000 community members, including focus groups, surveys and meetings. The plan outlines objectives and performance metrics in each of the 10 areas of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model.

Recent funding from a 2016 mill levy approved by voters boosted the financial resources available to schools for Whole Child efforts, specifically to enhance mental health services, evidence-based social-emotional learning curriculum and instruction, and school climates to foster positive social-emotional outcomes for students. Going forward, DPS plans to continue to develop deeper systems of supports for implementing Whole Child goals and objectives, with the focus on ensuring that *Every Child Succeeds*.

For more information on the WSCC model:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wscs/index.htm>

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Denver Public Schools. Denver Plan 2020. Available at:  
[https://www.dpsk12.org/wp-content/uploads/Denver\\_Plan\\_2020\\_English.pdf](https://www.dpsk12.org/wp-content/uploads/Denver_Plan_2020_English.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Denver Public Schools. No date. Whole Child. Available at:  
<http://wholechild.dpsk12.org/>

<sup>3</sup> Denver Public Schools. Whole Child Student Survey. Available at:  
<http://wholechild.dpsk12.org/support-for-the-whole-child/whole-child-student-survey/>

<sup>4</sup> Denver Public Schools. Whole Child, Healthy Child 2020. Available at:  
[http://healthyschools.dpsk12.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/DPS\\_WCHC\\_Agenda-Narrative\\_FINALsmall.pdf](http://healthyschools.dpsk12.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/DPS_WCHC_Agenda-Narrative_FINALsmall.pdf)

## Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model A Collaborative Approach to Learning and Health

