

## State of the District Report

January 28, 2025

### Jeni Gotto, Superintendent of Westminster Public Schools

**Madam President, Members of the Board, Westminster Public Schools Community,**

It is such an honor to deliver my first State of the District Address.

It's with great pride I tell you that the district is **strong** and continuing to move in the right direction. This progress is possible because of the resilience, dedication, and innovation demonstrated by our students, staff, families, and community members. Together, we make Westminster Public Schools a place where every student thrives and prepares for a successful future.

We have a lot to talk about tonight, but I know many in this community are wondering how the actions of the new administration in Washington D.C. will affect us here in Westminster.

There are questions about numerous policies, immigration enforcement and federal funding that have serious implications for public education, but at this point, it is too early to give any definitive answers.

What I can tell you is that we will be fully transparent in our actions and decisions and believe that schools are the ideal place for students, especially during uncertain times.

In a district Where Education is Personal, we all share the **responsibility** to help every individual reach their full potential and that will not change.

As we reflect on the accomplishments of the past year and look ahead to the opportunities and challenges of 2025, I encourage you to reach out to me or your school leaders with suggestions and questions. We are stronger together.

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## Slide 1

Thanks to the generosity of WPS voters and the passage of our bond in November 2024, we now face important decisions about how to invest the hard-earned dollars of our community and plan for the future.

WPS voters approved:

- **\$40 million** for CTE programming at the Iver C. Ranum Campus
- **\$20 million** for district-wide upgrades with a focus on safety and security, and

- **\$40 million** to develop a STEM Campus at the Shaw Heights Middle School and John E. Flynn a Marzano Academy location.

While we shared our big vision for the bond, the hard work of turning plans into reality and prioritizing construction schedules begins now. Community feedback played a critical role in shaping this bond initiative, demonstrating the strength of our partnership with the community.

These investments reflect a long-term vision to prepare WPS for future growth and sustainability, directly aligning with our Destination 2030 goals.

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## Slide 2

Next month, we will host the first meeting of **FTFI** (FIT FIE) the Forward Together Facilities Initiative, a group of district staff and community members tasked with assessing WPS's needs and examining local, regional, and global trends impacting our plans.

To ensure inclusivity and a broad perspective, we have extended invitations to members of the faith-based community, the City of Westminster, Adams County, the Chamber, nonprofits like Growing Home, and organizations like Maiker Housing.

As you know, school districts across Colorado, including WPS, are grappling with declining enrollment and other challenges. This

analysis will ensure we make thoughtful, strategic decisions with our resources.

Our commitment to involving diverse stakeholders reflects our dedication to addressing challenges collaboratively and with a shared vision for the future of WPS.

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### **Slide 3**

In 2025, we enter Phase Two of the Iver C. Ranum Innovation Campus as we continue building a first-class facility that brings public and private resources together to prepare students for tomorrow's workforce.

This semester, we will launch a hands-on STEM Lab for 8th graders to explore STEM pathways. This program will provide early exposure to career opportunities and inspire future learning.

We will also provide continuing education opportunities for adults in our community, including certifications and workforce training. This collaboration with Front Range Community College represents a shared commitment to lifelong learning and community growth.

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## Slide 4

As for work already accomplished by our students at Ranum, there is a lot to celebrate.

The campus opened this fall with pathways in Cyber-Technology, Aviation Engineering, and Biotechnology.

Our students have already earned 60 industry credentials with more on the way.

Thank you to our Advisory Board and the team on the ground for their dedication to this transformative project that will benefit our students and the community as a whole. One student shared, *“This program has shown me that I can achieve my dream of working in aviation. I never thought I’d have this opportunity.”* Stories like these highlight the real impact of our efforts.

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## Slide 5

Our other CTE programs at Westminster High School continue to shine. Last weekend, they hosted the **Westy’s Got Skills** showcase highlighting the 15 CTE pathways currently offered.

Seeing our high school students’ lead the hands-on work sessions and the engagement of younger students and proud parents was inspiring. One parent remarked, *“It’s incredible to see how much these programs prepare our kids for the future.”* Events like this

reaffirm our commitment to preparing students for life beyond graduation and inspire younger students to pursue their passions.

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## Slide 6

For many students, the day after graduation leads to a four-year college experience. I am thrilled to announce that three Westminster High School students are Daniels Fund finalists: **Aubrey Duskin, Lindiwe Manyothwane** (Lindy Man-i-tha-wan-ee), **and Jordy Medina Valverde** (*Val-v-air-day*). Please join me in recognizing their achievement. These students' hard work and dedication exemplify the high standards we strive for in WPS.

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### Slide 7

Governor Jared Polis visited Colorado STEM Academy in October to recognize their exceptional achievement in earning a “Bright Spot” award from the state in late 2023. This prestigious honor, which highlights above-average performance in science, came with a \$50,000 federal grant. These funds will support the continued expansion of science and technology programs, ensuring students have access to cutting-edge resources and hands-on learning opportunities. The Governor’s visit underscored the school’s role as a leader in STEM education and its impact on shaping the future of our students. The grant will be used to further integrate technology into classrooms and provide hands-on learning experiences for students.

### Slide 8

Soundbite from Governor Polis- “outcue here is Westminster”

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### Slide 9

Our commitment to academic excellence is anchored in the **High Reliability Schools (HRS)** framework, which ensures each of our schools has well-documented systems and procedures that are continuously monitored. This is one of the key mechanisms defined in **Goal 1 of Destination 2030**, which focuses on addressing issues we have faced with consistent deep and implementation of our personalized, competency-based system.

We partner with Marzano Resources to certify schools in five key areas:

- Safe and Supportive Culture
- Effective Teaching in Every Classroom
- Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum
- Standards-Referenced Reporting
- Competency-Based Education

These certifications directly impact students by creating safer, more supportive, and effective learning environments.

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### Slide 10

Most recently, **Mesa Elementary** and **Sherrelwood Elementary** achieved HRS Level 5 certification, joining other elite schools like Flynn a Marzano Academy, the Metropolitan Arts Academy, Colorado STEM Academy, Sunset Ridge PK-8, and Harris Park Elementary.

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### Slide 11

In December 2024, we achieved a significant milestone outlined in **Destination 2030**, stating that 100% of schools would achieve HRS Level 2 certification. All schools are now HRS Level 2 or higher.



One principal shared, *“Working through the HRS process has made me a better leader and improved the overall function and climate of our school.”*

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### **Slide 12**

In addition, we now have **17 teachers** certified as High Reliability Teachers at Level 1 or higher. Five staff members have achieved the top certification level for teachers, **HRT Level 3**.

As you may know, Seth Abbott became the first level three certified teacher and not only has he “literally” written the book on teaching in a CBS Elementary school, but he is now in the lofty position of being able to certify other teachers.

### **Slide 13**

Looking ahead, we will host our fifth **Competency-Based Education Summit** next October 6-8. We expect around 300 visitors from across the country to come learn from our educators, leaders, and students about our work to transform the traditional model of public education.

We will also continue hosting one-day site visits for educators to learn about our system. Our next site visit is scheduled for February 25th, with 75 participants from across the country visiting the district. These visits have inspired other districts to adopt innovative practices and then serve as thought partners for our team.

## **Slide 14**

Effective education requires physical and emotional well-being for students and staff. In WPS it is not just talk, but real action.

One of our major district wide initiatives this year has been our “Less Stress with WPS Campaign.

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## **Slide 15**

At the staff level, our Human Resources Department selected Melissa Sandoval to become our WPS Wellness Director to provide ongoing support for our employees to help them live healthier, more fulfilling lives.

Some early accomplishments include staff training in Level 1 Mental Health First Aid which helps them to be more aware of the signs to look for when employees might need support. Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive, with many noting they feel better equipped to support colleagues in need.

In no way do they replace mental health professionals, but they can provide significant help.

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## Slide 16

Our grant funded Project Aware team was invited to lead out a presentation and discussion at the Colorado Department of Education “2024 Landscape of Wellbeing and Belonging” Conference back in September. Our team is doing its part to help educators cope with the pressures of their work.

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## Slide 17

As for our students, I think we all agree that they have so much on their plate that we need to provide more support than ever before.

If you recall, during our Annual Backpack Giveaway, we distributed stress balls and resource cards to emphasize mental health awareness with the overarching message, “*you are never alone.*” It is so important to acknowledge what is going on in your life and know that it is a sign of strength to seek help.

The Colorado Rockies partnered with us to deliver this critical message.

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## Slide 18

**Play embedded clip from Bud Black and Charlie Blackmon**

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## Slide 19

Earlier this month, **Orchard Park Academy** hosted Dinger the Dinosaur and representatives from the Colorado Rockies for a fun, interactive program focused on healthy choices and resisting peer pressure to use drugs and alcohol. The hands-on activities emphasized the importance of exploring new interests and openly communicating with loved ones about personal challenges. Students found the program both engaging and meaningful, and it served as a powerful reminder of the value of healthy living. It was truly an inspiring day for everyone involved.

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## Slide 20

Our newcomer students face significant challenges as they adapt to life in a new country, often after enduring difficult circumstances on the journey to us. As a community and district, with support from the WPS Foundation, we have stepped up to provide vital assistance, including clothing, food, shelter, and financial support.

One family shared, *“The support we’ve received from WPS has made all the difference as we adjust to life in a new country.”* This testimonial underscores our commitment to ensuring every student and family feels welcomed and supported.

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## Slide 21

During the summer, we offered expanded learning opportunities for students and this fall we implemented focused English language support programs at three of our schools. These programs are designed to accelerate language acquisition and help students thrive academically.

Additionally, the **Dan Vallez Center** has played a pivotal role in coordinating support efforts for all families. From connecting families to community resources to offering continuing education opportunities and English language courses, the center serves as a vital hub of support and learning for our community.

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## Slide 22

To further support our newcomer families, we created a comprehensive website with resources to ease their transition. As part of this effort, Westminster High School students took the initiative to design and assemble “**Newcomer Support Bags**” filled with helpful materials to navigate their new environment.

This project exemplifies **Destination 2030’s Goal 3** of fostering a culture of civic engagement, where students actively lead initiatives that promote social inclusion and trust in our community. By stepping up to help, our students demonstrated the power of empathy, leadership, and collaboration in transforming lives.

### Slide 23

In December, another example of Destination 2030's Goal 3 in action unfolded when we sent students to the CASB Student Leadership Academy at the annual Colorado Association of School Boards meeting in Colorado Springs. This event provided an excellent opportunity for students to develop leadership skills and bring their learnings back to benefit our community.

Students Anna Lopez, Kimberly Garcia Lopez, Ida McCoy, Blake Johnson, and Carlos Sisneros spent two impactful days collaborating with peers and Board of Education members from across the state. The conference, titled "*Mission Accomplished*," was described by our students as a once-in-a-lifetime experience that exceeded their expectations and left them inspired.

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### Slide 24

I also want to take a moment to highlight another of the many wonderful achievements we have to celebrate. Last April, Peyton Manning presented the prestigious **18 to 88 Scholarship** to Westminster High School student **Ceezer Garcia** in recognition of his incredible resilience and determination to overcome adversity and reach his full potential.

This scholarship, awarded in honor of the late Broncos wide receiver **Demaryius Thomas**, celebrates individuals who, like

Thomas and Ceezer, have risen above difficult circumstances to achieve greatness.

Ceezer received a \$10,000 scholarship and is now attending **Metro State University**, where he continues to inspire others with his perseverance and commitment to success.

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### **Slide 25**

Play Ceezar on camera sound bite. Outcue “sleeping in the living room.”

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### **Slide 26**

Play embedded clip of Emily Luna. Outcue “My stress”

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### **Slide 27**

In 2024, we proudly introduced you to **Emily Luna**, whose exceptional painting was selected to represent our congressional district in the nation’s capital as part of a prestigious student art competition. Emily’s talent and dedication exemplify the remarkable potential of our students, and we are confident she has an extraordinary future ahead.

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## Slide 28

And finally, I want to highlight an event that perfectly encapsulates the spirit of our district. During Hispanic Heritage Month, Westminster High School hosted a vibrant celebration that brought together our entire student body to honor the diverse cultures and backgrounds represented in our community. The Colorado Department of Education recognized this event by profiling WPS for our efforts to promote unity and inclusivity. It was a moment of pride for our district, showcasing how we celebrate our differences while appreciating the values that bring us together.

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## Slide 29

Play embedded clip :33 seconds students playing violin

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## Slide 30

None of these accomplishments would be possible without our amazing and dedicated staff and the guidance of you, our Board of Education. I encourage everyone to mark **Monday, May 19th** on your calendars for our annual **Retirement Celebration** at Westminster High School.

As the date approaches, we will share more details about the event and the remarkable individuals we will be honoring. While it is bittersweet to say goodbye to such dedicated professionals, we



celebrate their outstanding contributions and look forward to seeing them enjoy the well-deserved rewards of their hard work and dedication.

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### **Slide 31**

In closing, I invite every member of our community to join us in our mission to empower students to learn and grow. Whether through volunteering, attending school events, or simply sharing your ideas, your involvement makes a difference.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership. Together, we will ensure that Westminster Public Schools remains a beacon of excellence and opportunity for all.