DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Denver Schools Thrive Initiative: Reimagining the Student Experience

October 22, 2026

Introductions



Dr. Alex Marrero

Superintendent



Andrew Huber

Executive Director of Enrollment & Campus Planning



Laney Shaler

Executive Director of Strategy & Program Management Office

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District Overview



Our Vision

Every Learner Thrives

Our Mission

Educational equity is our collective responsibility. We prepare students for career, college and life. We create conditions and partnerships where students, families and team members belong and thrive.

Our Core Shared Values

Students First • Integrity • Equity • Collaboration • Accountability • Fun

Who We Are

Denver Public Schools is the largest school district in Colorado by student population and geographic area within the city limits, serving 10% of the students that live in Colorado.

Key Statistics

- **Over 85,000 students attended DPS in 2025-26**
- **Over 18,000 adults support our DPS students and community**
- **Graduation Rate: 81.9%**
- **Over 200 languages are spoken by DPS students and families**
- **203 total schools, 149 district run and 55 charter schools**

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Leadership

Superintendent



Dr. Alex Marrero

Appointed by the board in July 2021

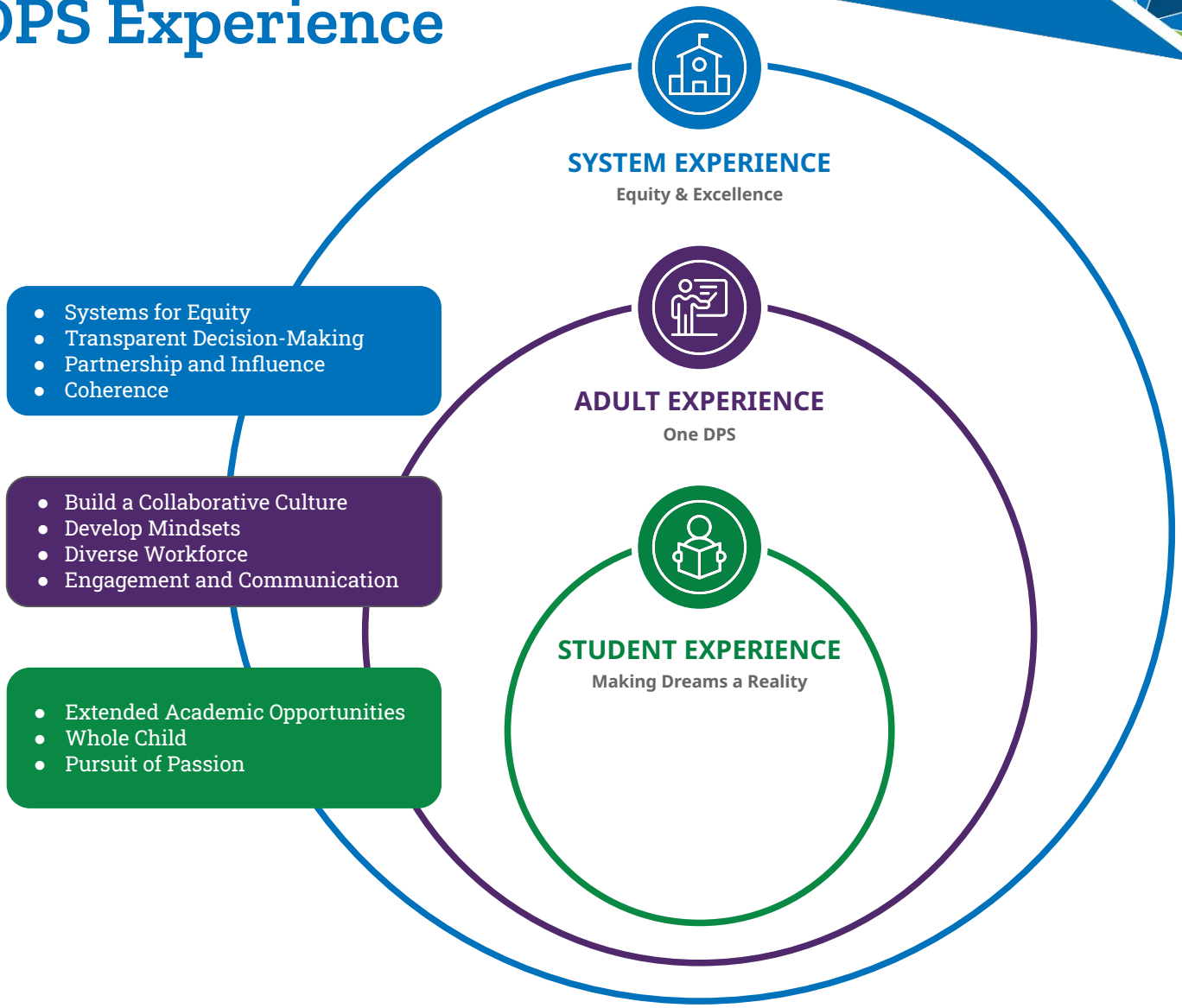
Board of Education



7 member board elected by Denver voters

Xóchitl Gaytán, President, District 2
Monica Hunter, Vice President, District 4
Marlene De La Rosa, Secretary, District 5
Board Member of District 3, *will be appointed*
Kimberlee Sia, District 1
John Youngquist, At Large
Amy Klein Molk, At Large

The DPS Experience



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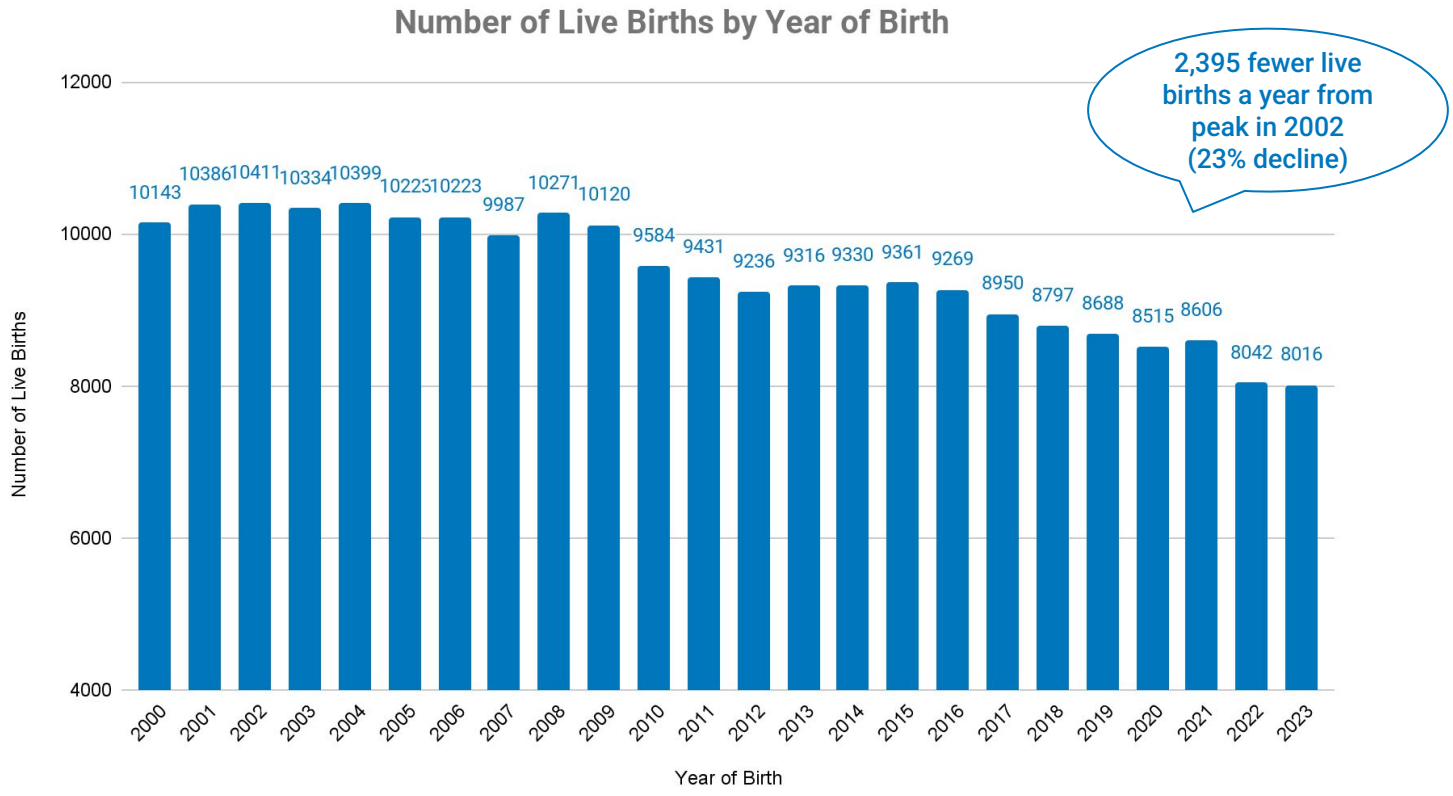
Read the complete **DPS Thrives Strategic Roadmap.**

The Denver Schools Thrives Initiative (DSTI)



Denver's Declining Birth Rates

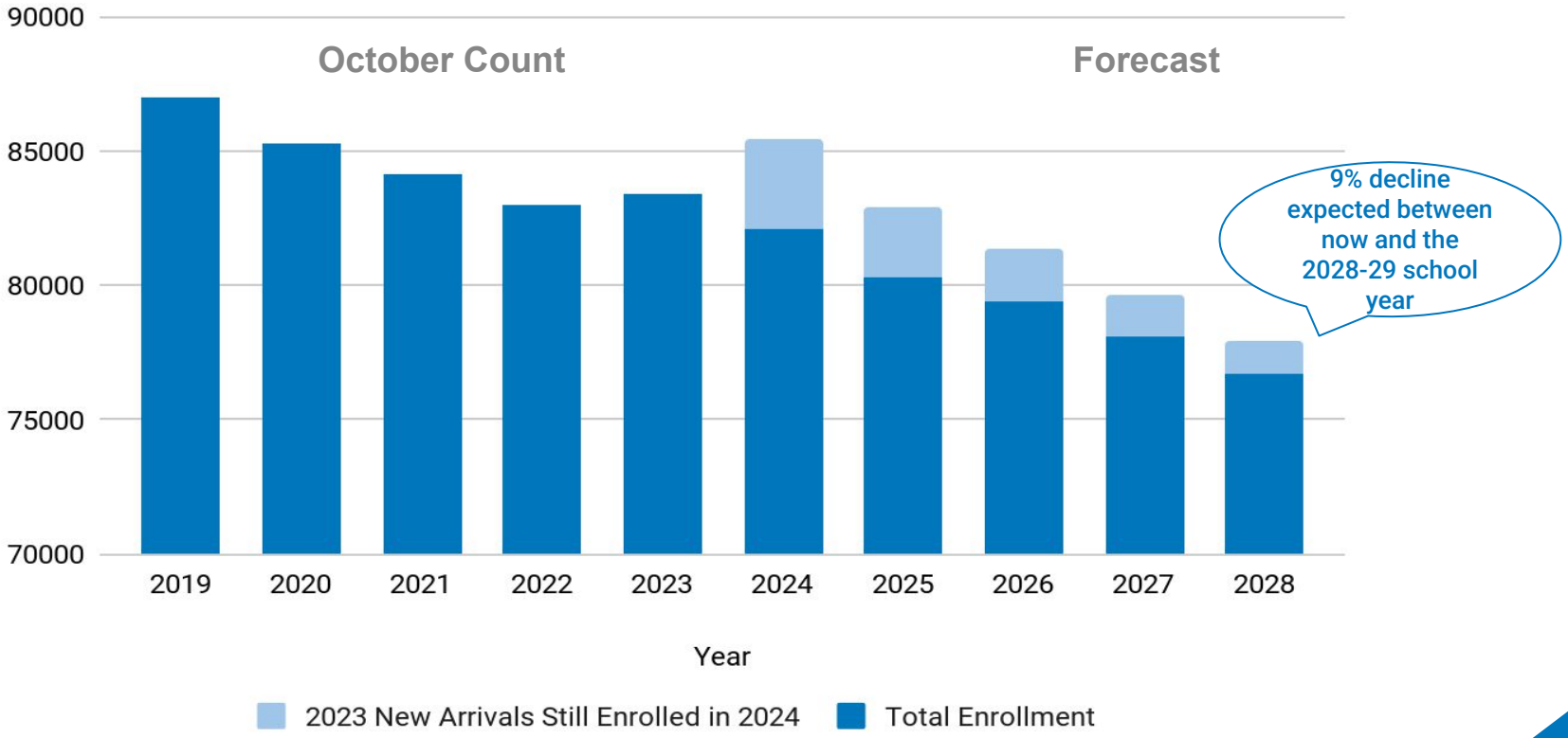
The number of live births in Denver has sharply declined by several thousand from a peak in 2002. Declining births has been a key driver in future student enrollment declines seen in DPS.



Source: Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment; Colorado Health Information Dataset (CoHID), LIve Birth Statistics for City and County of Denver between 2000-2023; Accessed September 2024

Student Enrollment K-12

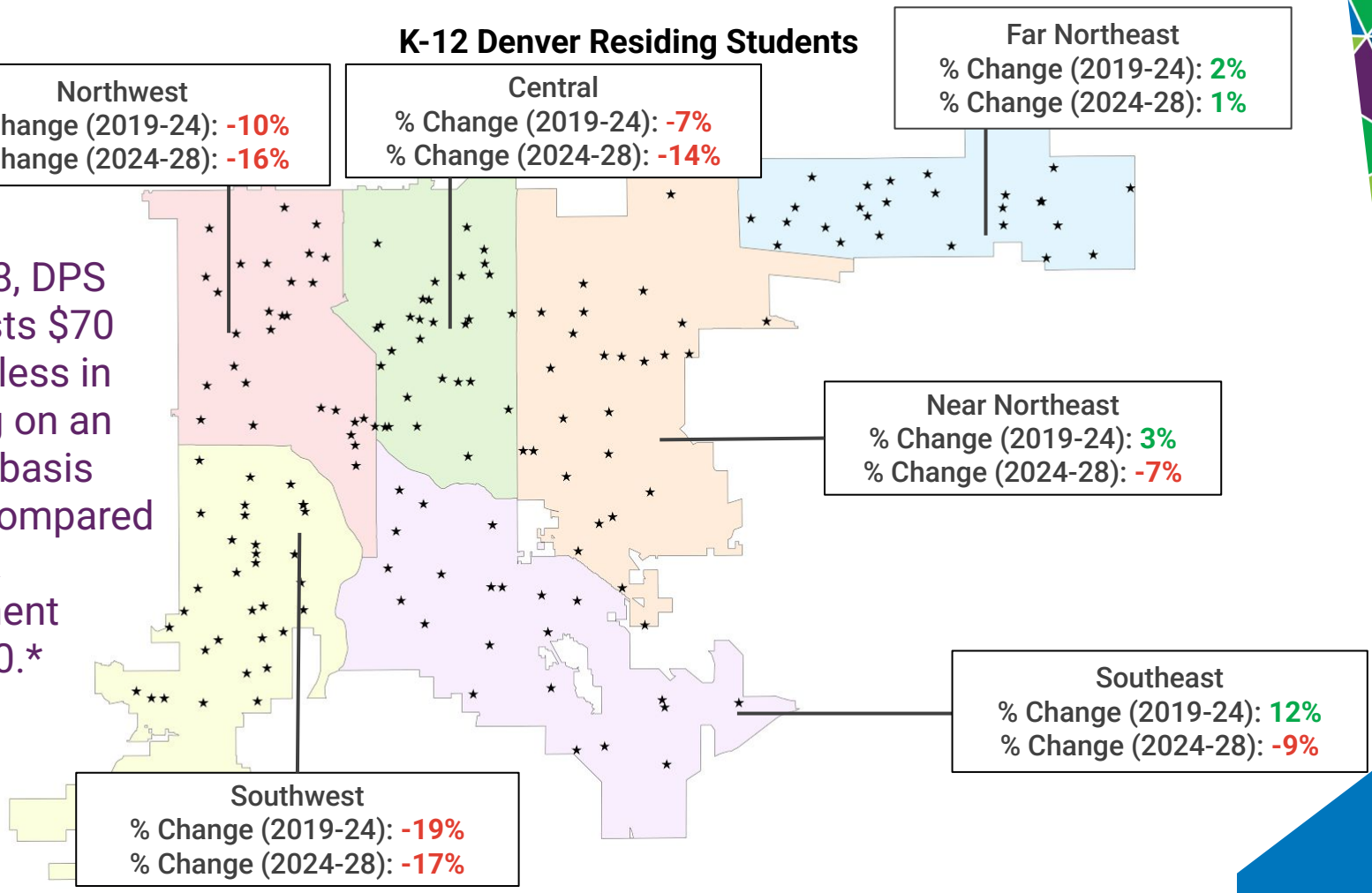
DPS enrollment is lower than it was in 2019, and is expected to continue declining due to lower birth rates and changing housing development.



Forecast data is estimate

Regional Changes in Enrollment

Declining enrollment affects different regions of DPS differently, with the biggest impacts in Southwest, Northwest, and Central Denver.



By 2028, DPS forecasts $70 million less in funding on an annual basis when compared to peak enrollment 2019-20.*

Framework to Support Our Approach

Our Framework incorporates lesson learned, guardrails from our Board, and is rooted in our values and our commitments to Denver's students and families.

Values Statements
our commitments to students & families

Equity Guardrails
our commitments to eliminate the predictability of outcomes based on demographic factors

Essential Data
operational data and broader educational environment and community factors



Values Statements

Our commitments to Denver students and families.

- **Academics & Programs:** Every student attends a school that provides safe and welcoming learning environments, with high-quality instruction and programs to meet the needs of every learner.
- **Neighborhood Schools:** Families across all Denver communities have access to a well-resourced neighborhood school close to home.
- **Facilities:** All students will learn in top-quality school buildings.
- **Enrollment Stability:** Schools will be adjusted to maintain steady enrollment aligned with Denver's future population changes.
- **Long-term Support:** The district will ensure that key systems like transportation and essential services are in place to keep schools running smoothly for the long term.

Equity Guardrails

Our commitments to eliminate the predictability of outcomes based on demographic factors.

- **Ensuring well-rounded educational experiences of all students** with a focus on meeting the needs of our diverse learners.
- **Expanding access** to quality programs and schools regardless of zip code.
- **Financial investment** to ensure high-quality programming across our schools.

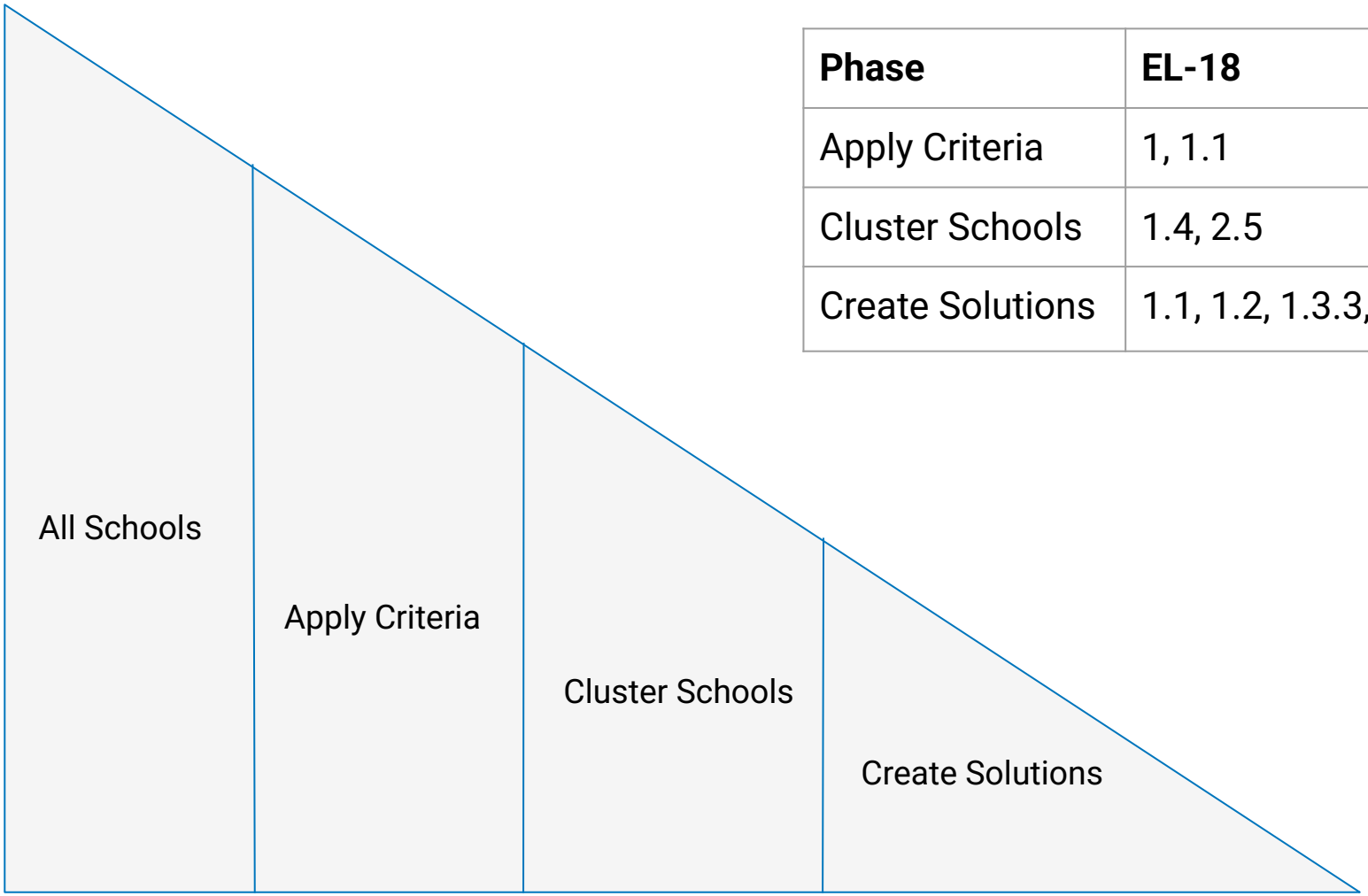
Essential Data

We are examining dozens of data points about schools to inform our recommendations, including but not limited to (in alphabetical order):

- Facility utilization ≤65%
- Facility condition & planned upgrades
- Family choice patterns
- Proximity to other schools
- School demographics
- School enrollment trends (historic, current, future projections)
- School performance
- Special programming (Bilingual programming, Center programs, Gifted & Talented)
- Sub-regional enrollment trends

Methodology

Phase	EL-18
Apply Criteria	1, 1.1
Cluster Schools	1.4, 2.5
Create Solutions	1.1, 1.2, 1.3.3, 1.3.2



Applying Criteria

We started with all schools and narrowed them down to schools that have been affected by declining enrollment.

A list of 70 schools were generated that met the criteria.

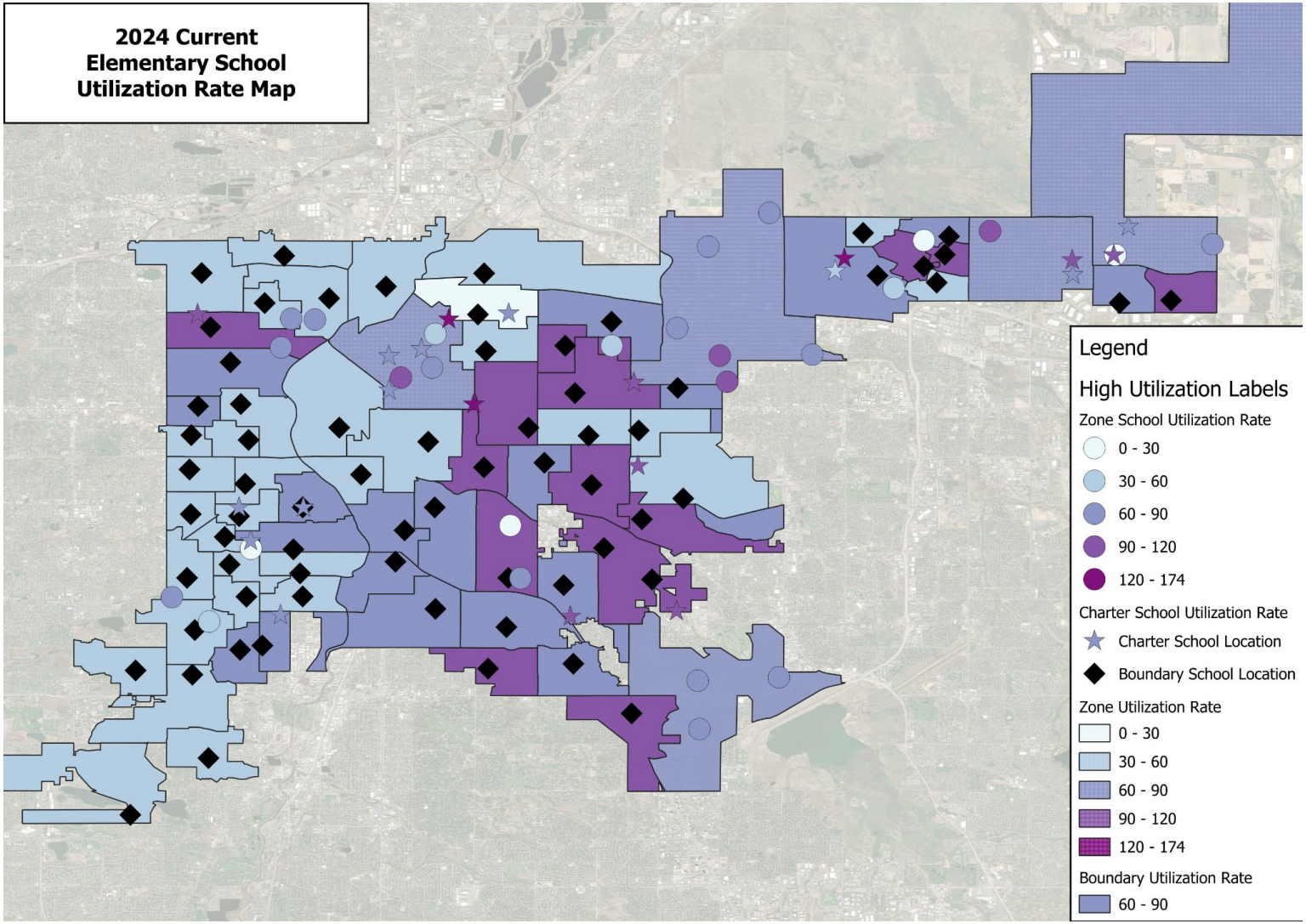
1. Building utilization rate is 65% or lower
2. Located in a sub-region experiencing declining enrollment.

A sub-region is experiencing declining enrollment when:

- Enrollment at the appropriate school level (ES/MS/HS) declined between 2019 and 2024
- Enrollment at that school level is forecasted to decline between 2024 and 2028

Link to Schools Meeting Criteria | Link to Sub-Regional Enrollment Trends

Elementary School Utilization



Cluster Analysis - Elementary

All DPS elementary schools were divided into 31 clusters.

For elementary schools, we created clusters of schools in which each of the following things are true:

1. Travel between locations of schools avoids hazardous roads, defined by DPS transportation
    a. In some cases, we included roads not formally designated as hazardous (example: Colfax Ave, Colorado Blvd)
2. Schools are a maximum of 3 miles of each other

Of those 31, there are 11 clusters with a seat utilization rate of less than 75% AND which contain more than one school. These are the clusters we advanced for further consideration.

Link to ES Clusters | Link to ES Cluster Seat Utilization

Cluster Analysis - Secondary

All secondary (middle and high) schools were grouped into clusters based on existing boundaries.

For secondary schools, we initially clustered schools based on their current zones/boundaries. This created 14 middle school clusters and 11 high school clusters.

We chose to do this because of the much lower number of middle and high schools across the system makes sub-dividing them further for the purposes of data analysis ineffective.

In this recommendation, we focused on a single, distinct cluster of schools that crosses 4 zones/boundaries when creating solutions.

Link to MS Cluster Seat Utilization | Link to HS Cluster Seat Utilization

Assessing Solutions

We utilized a body of evidence to make the best decisions for students within our clusters of schools.

We then examined each cluster of schools and the holistic, collective state of the schools therein, and crafted reconfiguration recommendations in alignment with our Values Statements and Equity Guardrails. The evidence we considered includes the following:

- **Program Availability & Equity Considerations**: Maintaining essential programs such as Bilingual programs and Special Education centers.
- **Enrollment Health:** School-specific and local enrollment conditions and trends.
- **Choice Patterns**: Understanding where families are currently choosing to send their students.
- **Facility Quality**: Assessing the condition and suitability of school buildings to support more students.
- **School Performance**: Ensuring strong academic programs are maintained.

Link to School Characteristics Spreadsheet

Cluster Analysis Sample

	Is building space utilized?	Sustainable enrollment?	More than 1 classroom of students in Kinder?	Are neighbors choosing this school? Choice Patterns (in/out)	How is school performance on SPF?	What types of specialized programming are offered?	How many more students could fit in this building? (capacity minus enrollment)
School A	88%	K-5: 241 K-8: 403	44	Choice Only	Performance	Dual Language	57
School B	38%	143	20	13/31	Turnaround	MI Center Based Program	234
School C	68%	318	59	Choice Only	Performance	Dual Language Montessori	152
School D	44%	388	70	22/68	Performance	Dual Language	487

Assessing Solutions: Zones/Boundaries

In creating solutions, prioritized closures over consolidations and, in doing so, are prioritizing.

In creating solutions, we considered boundary consolidations, boundary splits, and enrollment zones. We prioritized creation of enrollment zones in the following contexts:

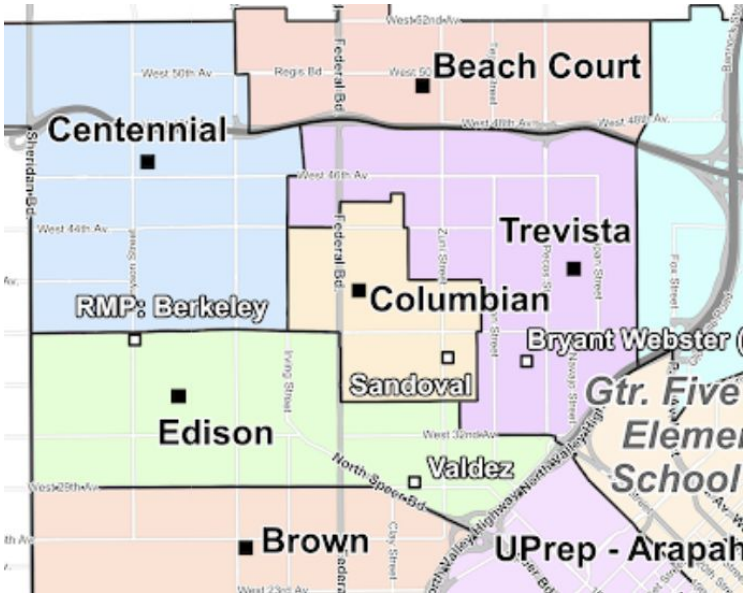
a. Doing so offers opportunity for integration across demographic indicators.
b. Addition of an enrollment zone would reinforce existing family choice patterns and preferences.

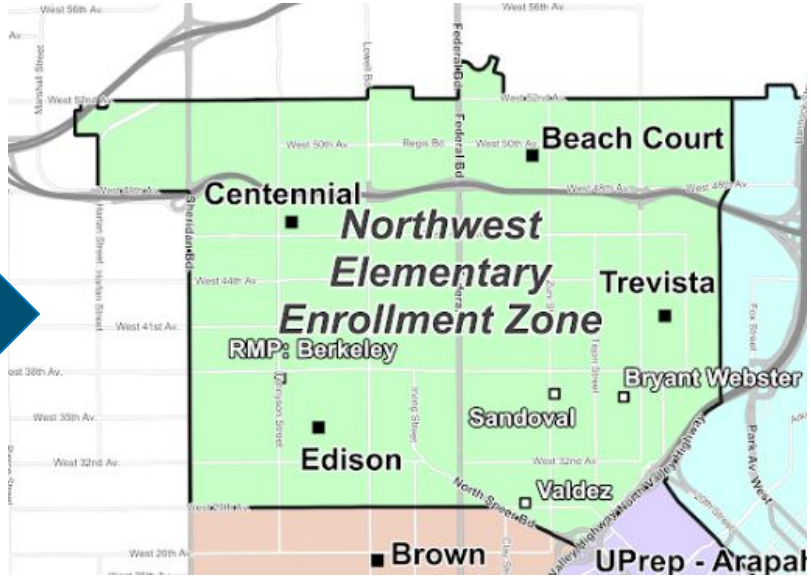
We believe that establishing enrollment zones, and establishing the transportation services associated with them reduces barriers for families choosing the best school for their students.

Link to Integration Data | Link to SchoolFinder (enrollment snapshots for Choice patterns)

Boundaries & Enrollment Zones

Giving families choice after their school closed proved to be a critical step and is setting up a comprehensive boundary review this year.





Impact & Next Steps



What was the ultimate impact of the 2024-25 Denver Schools Thrive Initiative?

Of the nearly 1,100 students impacted by seven school closures and three school restructures:

- **92% of closing school students participated in DPS Enrollment & Choice process**
- **98% of closing school students received their first choice school in DPS for 2025-26 (we ensured they made it to the front of the line in our Choice process)**
- **88% of closing school students are expected to attend a similarly rated or higher rated school next year as measured by the Colorado Department of Education's School Performance Framework**
- **$7M cost savings, and $23M followed students directly to their new schools**
- **Early signs of demographic integration in new enrollment zones**

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Reflections on 2024-25 Process

Addressing declining enrollment is a challenging, sometimes necessary step when the data and Student Experience warrant it. So what made Denver's approach in the fall of 2024 successful?

- **Board of Education's policy** provided guardrails and directed Superintendent action

- **Clear internal processes** to organize team members and project deliverables
  - From working group to senior leadership decision-making
  - Detailed plans to track big and small project needs and milestones

- **Courageous and clear leadership** from all team members across levels of leadership, from schools to central office

- **Community engagement** really mattered at both Board and school level, and both before and after the recommendation. School closures are difficult for their communities, and no one wants their school closed. How District staff show up matters.

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Questions for Discussion



Connect with Us!



Dr. Alex Marrero
Superintendent



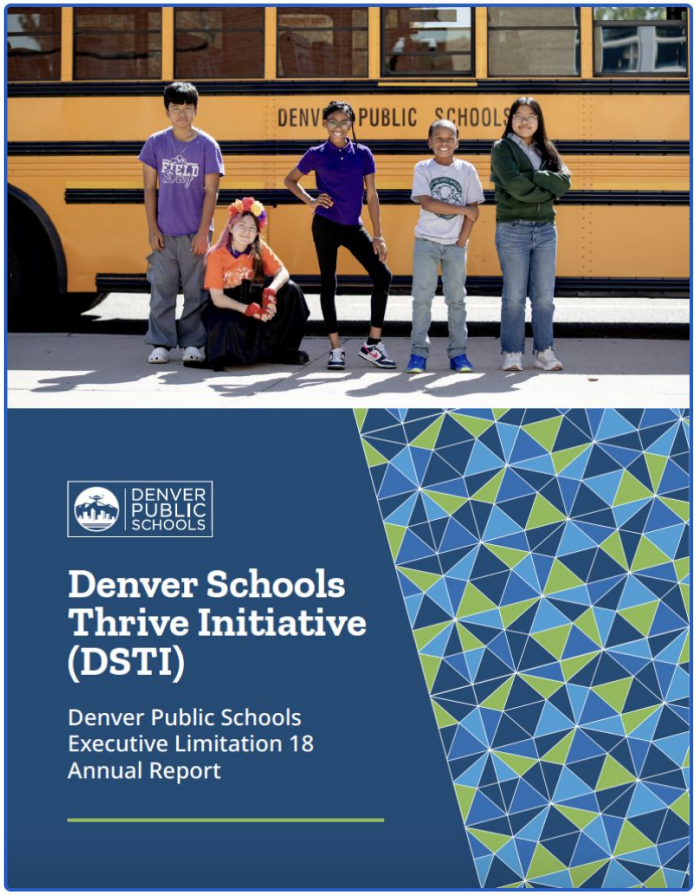
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Denver Public Schools:
Denver Thrives Initiative Report



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