



2022 New Quality Schools Applicants: Spring Community Feedback Report

Learnings from the Feedback Survey

Purpose:

On April 12, 13, and 14, Denver Public Schools' (DPS) Portfolio Management Team hosted virtual community meetings to gather feedback for the DPS Board on three applicants for new charter schools seeking to open in Fall 2023. These meetings included a short presentation from DPS on how applications for new schools are evaluated and how this relates to the district's ongoing work around declining enrollment, a presentation from the applicant about their prospective new school, and an opportunity to ask questions of the applicant. Attendees were given a feedback survey to capture their thoughts about different components of the applicant's program. Recordings of each of these meetings can be found [here](#). This document summarizes the qualitative and quantitative feedback captured in those surveys.

Process:

The feedback survey was provided at the end of each community meeting, as well as posted publicly [here](#) for those who were unable to attend. The responses from these interviews were inputted into a spreadsheet. This spreadsheet was then analyzed by a group of Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) in partnership with the Innovation & Improvement Team. The GRAs used a qualitative analysis approach of Emergent Thematic Coding, meaning, the text of the responses were read through several times to identify themes that were emerging from the data.

Limitations:

- The survey was optional to complete, therefore this document does not capture the opinions of every attendee.
- The population of survey participants does not adequately represent the DPS community
 - Student voice is not captured
 - The majority of respondents identified themselves as a "supporter of the applicant"
 - There were fewer than 20 responses for each applicant



Applicant: STEM School Denver, K-5

April 12, 2022 - Central/Northwest Denver

Summary of Meeting Attendance and Survey Respondents

Meeting Attendees: ~30

Survey Respondents: 1

Breakdown of Survey Respondents

Current DPS Student	0
DPS Alumni	0
Community member	0
Family member or caregiver of a DPS student	0
Teacher in DPS	0
Staff member in DPS	0
Supporter of the applicant	1
Former DPS staff	0

Summary of Feedback Survey

Note: There was only one survey response in relation to the STEM School Denver, therefore the themes listed below are not representative of the community in general.

What do you think about the plan that was presented about the proposed new school?

In support of the plan/ think it is a great idea.

The proposed new school presented their plan for engaging with families/community, how do you feel about those plans?

The plan is comprehensive.

What are some of the benefits you see with this proposed new school?
Are there any specific needs (of students, of community, etc.) this proposed new school would address that are not currently available to students in this community

Students will be taught using real world problem solving skills



Applicant: 5280 Freedom School, K-5

April 13, 2022 - Central Denver/Five Points

Summary of Meeting Attendance and Survey Respondents

Meeting Attendees: ~50

Survey Respondents: 12

Breakdown of Survey Respondents

Current DPS Student	0
DPS Alumni	2
Community member	7
Family member or caregiver of a DPS student	1
Teacher in DPS	1
Staff member in DPS	2
Supporter of the applicant	7
Former DPS staff	1

*** Note - some respondents identified themselves within more than one category ***

Summary of Feedback Survey

What do you think about the plan that was presented about the proposed new school?

In support of the plan/ think it is a great idea	12*
Appreciate the focus on Black students	7
Appreciate the focus on social emotional learning (SEL)	3
Believe DPS is in need of this model	3
Their plan is clear and cohesive	3
The school model is unique	3
Strong school culture	1
Offers a safe, inclusive, identity affirming space	1

* Denotes the number of survey responses that included this theme.

Sample responses:

"I found the plan incredibly compelling, unique and much needed. I saw that all elements of the school from curriculum to staffing were considered with thoughtfulness and great care in order to elevate Black learners. I think this school would be a great asset to DPS and the Denver Metro Community.

"This is an entirely unique model that is needed in DPS despite current declining enrollment

trends. The school ITSELF is Black Excellence: a school model that currently does not exist in Denver.

"I love the model provided by 5280 Freedom School. The focus on social emotional learning with the most marginalized populations in mind is exactly what we need! I love the 13 guided principles.

The proposed new school presented their plan for engaging with families/community, how do you feel about those plans?

Feel positive, excited, and impressed about their plan	8
Strong, well thought out plan	3
The school already has a strong community connection	3
Appreciate that it centers student and community voice	2
Like the summer programming that they offer	2
Curious how they will engage non-Black parents	1
I (a community member) am interested in engaging with this school	1

Sample responses:

"I was very impressed that they have been engaging through so many avenues- summer camp, focus groups, etc.

"I believe that these plans are very strong and outcomes driven. Through their programming and proposed model, they have strong connections with the Black community which will only become stronger and more expansive over time

"I would definitely engage with this school as a community member. I feel like they are really listening and centering the experiences of the community through all aspects of the design process.

What are some of the benefits you see with this proposed new school? Are there any specific needs (of students, of community, etc.) this proposed new school would address that are not currently available to students in this community?

It will center Black students	8
There is nothing else like it. It is greatly needed.	4
Having BIPOC staff will provide examples for students to see themselves	4
It will help close the achievement gap	3

Sample responses:

"This school's culture and curriculum are the benefits. I work at a high school and despite the Black Excellence plans- there is no substitute to being affirmed daily for your existence- in curriculum and culture. Despite what DPS might want to have happening in schools, there is nothing that compares to this. We have a Robert F Smith, so it completely makes sense to have the elementary school.

“Our son currently does not have access to ever being anywhere close to a racial majority in school. He is 5, and has already discussed how he is the only black kid in his class. This will provide him with an experiential education and community that he will otherwise truly lack.

“The intended focus on Black brilliance and Black excellence is fully realized in the planning and execution of 5280 freedom school. Every detail of the school has been planned meticulously to both operationalize this and undo historical exclusion of Black culture in academia.

What are some of the challenges or concerns you see with this proposed school?

None	6
Declining enrollment in DPS	2
Being able to hire a full BIPOC staff	1
Transportation for students	1
Targeted racial violence on the school	1
Complications within DPS and the Denver community	1
Work and self-care balance for the founders	1

Sample responses:

“I know that declining enrollment might be a challenge, but I'd wager Black parents who unenrolled their children during the pandemic would come back for this school.

“Hiring a staff that is all POC might be a bit challenging in Colorado but if anyone can do it, I believe Branta can!

“It sounds like they do not have a bus or form of transportation for students. Since they stated that the building is in 5 Points, this may be a problem. I also worry about the school being targeted for violence by racists.

List of additional questions survey respondents have for the applicant

- Considering historic internalized racism and subsequent divides that can exist between 1st generation African populations and Black or “African American” populations, what level of proactive planning (if any) have you done to reconcile this divide, what are the outcomes, and how will you ensure success?

Applicant: Radical Arts Academy of Denver, K-8

April 14, 2022 - Far Northeast Denver/Gateway/DIA

Summary of Meeting Attendance and Survey Respondents

Meeting Attendees: ~55

Survey Respondents: 17

Breakdown of Survey Respondents

Current DPS Student	0
DPS Alumni	0
Community member	7
Family member or caregiver of a DPS student	5
Teacher in DPS	1
Staff member in DPS	3
Supporter of the applicant	11
Former DPS staff	1

Note - some respondents identified themselves within more than one category

Summary of Feedback Survey

What do you think about the plan that was presented about the proposed new school?

In support of the plan/ like the school model	17
Believe DPS is in need of this model	9
Appreciate the focus on the arts	7
Like their teaching approach (project-based learning and arts-based learning)	5
Appreciate the focus on social emotional learning (SEL)	5
Their plan is innovative	4
Appreciate the focus on students of color/ cultural relevance	2
Creates an inclusive environment	2
Like that students will have ownership of their own learning	2
The plan is very thorough	1
Appreciate the social justice curriculum	1

Sample responses:

“It is incredible to visualize an arts-based school that doesn't require auditions and will work with our local community in the far northeast. I am particularly excited about this arts-integrated curriculum that will weave arts into all topics as well as the social justice focus - both of these focal points are super critical to the wellbeing of our youth!”

"A model our children desperately need. All schools should have models like these where children are being invited to be leaders in their own education. Safety and inclusion and individualized plans are what all children deserve, not just a few. These are groundbreaking education visionaries, I hope DPS will support them and approve this application.

"I believe the Radical Arts Academy of Denver is a necessary institution for the far northeast. The overwhelming focus that is put on the Arts in other areas of DPS is greatly lacking in the far Northeast, despite there being students and families who are advocating for more arts, as well as SEL (which the arts will always support) in schools. I believe the model that RAAD presented would serve an area that currently has an imbalanced focus on science, technology, and math, but leaves artists, musicians, and other creative students underrepresented.

The proposed new school presented their plan for engaging with families/community, how do you feel about those plans?

Feel positive, excited, and impressed about their plan	13
Feel that the mission of the school is connected to community engagement and seen as essential	6
Like that they will be asking for feedback from families in order to co-create	2
The school already has strong community engagement	1
Like that engagement will be continuous	1
The social justice curriculum provides safety for families of color to engage	1
Appreciate that all of the founders live in the far northeast	1
Desire opportunities for parents to be involved in committees and their child's self-actualization curriculum	1

Sample responses:

"I feel great. This is by community, for community. It feels exciting!

"The explicit connections made between students' lived experience and their education seems like a really relevant and authentic way to foster and cultivate these connections. I heard Community & Belonging as a central theme so trust that all efforts will be made to support both student goals as well as the goals of the family and broader local community.

"Many schools engage with families through one-way models where the school designs, plans, delivers, and creates the engagement without direct involvement, but I loved hearing that RAAD is planning to co-create and focus on education.

What are some of the benefits you see with this proposed new school? Are there any specific needs (of students, of community, etc.) this proposed new school would address that are not currently available to students in this community?

Art based learning opportunities	11
Self-love/identity/self-actualization curriculum	4
Makes art inclusive	4

Expands educational opportunities in the far northeast specifically	4
Social justice curriculum	3
Takes into account current mental health issues through intentional SEL	3
Creates a culturally relevant education environment	2
Project-based learning to develop critical thinking	1
Focus on community	1
Makes the far northeast a more desirable area	1
Provides students agency in regard to their education	1
Opportunity to build a school while considering current realities	1

Sample responses:

“Students working toward their own self-actualization is the way all schools should operate. Specifically, the Arts Based Learning model meets a need that is not being met elsewhere.

“The world of arts and creativity is extremely elitist and many people don't feel capable of engaging in artistic pursuits due to their lack of familiarity with these aspects. RAAD offers a space to nurture these abilities from an inclusive and holistic perspective that in turn will respond to this need within the art world to be open and free.

“I believe the Radical Arts Academy of Denver would present a new and innovative approach to teaching all core content classes that currently is not seen in the far northeast. The Denver School of the Arts is the only similar school that allows students the range of artistic outlets, but that school does not serve the needs of every individual in DPS. A school like rad would be culturally responsive to the multitude of students who come from different cultures, backgrounds, and experiences that DSA does not currently support.

What are some of the challenges or concerns you see with this proposed school?

Have confidence in the team/vision to overcome any challenges	4
Declining enrollment in DPS	4
Typical new school challenges - enrollment, staffing, etc.	3
Getting enough families interested in enrolling	3
DPS's general position to not authorize any new schools	2
None	1
Demonstrating success in a quick time frame	1
Budget for music equipment	1
Finding a building	1
Short timeline to get up and running	1

Sample responses:

“The falling enrollment rates across all of DPS is certainly an issue. A school like this will have to fight that trend initially but I expect that it will end up not having a problem once

people start to see how effective its program actually is.

"I think the challenge will be to show people the importance of these types of schools.

"DPS's position that it will not consider new school applications due to low enrollment. The RAAD school model is a unique with arts at the core of its instruction something I think both students and families would be extremely interested in being a part of since there isn't many arts-centered schools in DPS.

List of additional questions survey respondents have for the applicant

- How will SAP be measured and how might students take these plans into their own hands to ensure their own SEL and academic growth that they measure to show self-efficacy and actualization? Is there a rubric or measurement tool and how will the SAP guide the student's learning success? What proactive planning (if any) have you done to reconcile this divide, what are the outcomes, and how will you ensure success?
- What is the plan for mental health support for students and staff?
- How do you plan to create a culture of non-violence in your school?
- What will be your discipline approach for students?
- Does this school have support for students who are ESL students? Does this school have an ESL curriculum?
- How do you hope to complement or compete with Denver School of the Arts?

List of additional questions survey respondents have for DPS about the New Quality School application process

- Please support the 5280 Freedom School and project and be a forefront leader with this.
- Outside of compliance to the law, how will DPS keep an open mind about authorizing new schools? Furthermore, although enrollment is declining across the district, the majority of schools currently in operation are not serving Black students in spite of policies like Black Excellence Resolution (as highlighted by Branta (founder of 5280 Freedom School) today), thus, at what level is that considered in the decision making process of authorizing new schools designed to undo that historic marginalization that current DPS schools continue to uphold (often not intentionally and at varying degrees of course)?
- What steps are taken by the board members of DPS to ensure that they have done their due diligence prior to approving or denying a charter school?
- My concerns mostly lie around school facilities currently within DPS. I am interested in seeing how the district can better support current and future schools with finding and maintaining facilities that are safe for students, staff, and families.
- No questions. I just think it would be a shame not to provide this opportunity (STEM School Denver) to our students. If the Highlands Ranch campus was closer I would send my students there. Additionally my family has considered moving to the Highlands Ranch area just so that my students can attend this school (STEM School Denver)
- I see that DPS is asking for community feedback, but how much weight does community feedback have in the actual decision? Are there other factors that weigh more heavily?
- Although DPS is required by state law to review and hear new school applications, how will DPS still honor these applications being presented as full-value versus what the law requires and the concern that they really aren't at liberty to potentially accept new schools? Is there an alternative process that if denied, because of this rationale, that these applicants could still apply again with the district with a future application? Is DPS looking at new policies that will take these situations into consideration while still trying to honor its focus on great schools in every neighborhood?