

May 18, 2018

To our colleagues of the BOE,

In light of recent discussions at DAC meetings, the DAC respectfully submits this letter with the intention of clearing the air and establishing the spirit in which we offer our 2018 recommendations. Overall, we wish to firmly state our respect for the work and the members of the Board of Education. Everything that the DAC offers in the way of recommendations is solely intended to contribute to our mutual goal of continuously improving the performance and climate of our schools in order to provide the best education possible for our kids. At times, we may recommend something that the BOE is already actively engaged in addressing. At such times, we ask that the recommendation simply be viewed as corroboration that we are all facing in the same direction or that in the DAC's view, additional emphasis is needed. At other times, we may offer a recommendation that comes from a different area of focus. In either event, our goal is not to undermine the BOE, or to do the job of the BOE. Rather, we hope to offer additional perspectives and information as a value-add to the important work that is being accomplished by the BOE. In this way, we aim to only contribute, never detract.

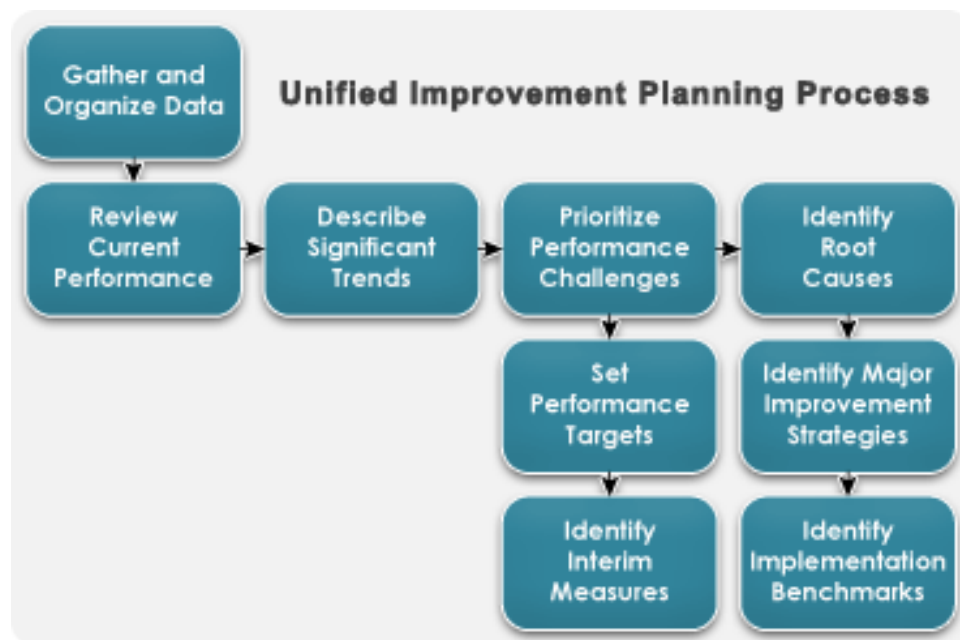
We look forward to continuing to collaborate to make us a stronger community and the best school district we can be.

Sincerely,

District Accountability Committee

**DRAFT: 2018 DAC Recommendations:**

**Recommendations regarding Academic Achievement / Unified Improvement Plan (UIP):** The following recommendations are based on the DAC's investigations and academic research following the UIP process. They are directed at the principal major sections of the UIP (see appendix for UIP overview), including **Prioritizing Performance Challenges, Setting Performance Targets and Major Improvement Strategies.** The DAC feels these strategies will help reverse the general decline in the percentile rank scores in academic achievement performance since 2015.



**After reviewing current performance and significant trends, the DAC identified the following priorities for Performance Challenges for the UIP (for review of the results trends and results, please refer to the document discussed in the March DAC meeting: Colorado District Performance Framework Performance Indicators DAC V3):**

- **Performance Challenge - General decline in academic achievement scores in numeracy and literacy:** The DAC discussed in our March meeting the general decline in test scores as measured by percentile rank, from 8-24 points in numeracy and literacy when compared to the 2014 percentile rank results. Reversing this trend is the most important performance challenge in the DAC's opinion.
- **Performance Challenge – Performance on Academic Achievement at AES:** Aspen Elementary School has suffered the largest decline in the academic achievement scores measured by the Colorado Department of Education and in 2017 was placed on an Improvement Plan.
- **Performance Challenge - Academic Achievement of Minority Groups:** While there have been promising advances in this area and the Family Resource Center is an excellent initiative, there is still a clear achievement gap for minority groups in the ASD.

**All Recommendations are organized in order of priority for the DAC:**

**The DAC reviewed additional data and developed the following recommendations for Major Improvement Strategies to include in the UIP:**

1. **Major Improvement Strategy (general decline in test scores) - Continue to emphasize improvement in ASD Climate:** The DAC recognizes that there has been improvement in the ASD climate, especially at AHS, and that the BOE has been actively working on this issue. As is widely recognized, research shows that good school climate is an important driver of both teacher retention and student performance. Because ASD scored only 2 points above the Colorado average on the most recent TLCC climate survey, there continues to be an opportunity for improvement to reach the levels obtained by the highest performing districts. The DAC therefore respectfully recommends that climate continue to be a very high priority, and as such be clearly stated and included in the strategic plan. (See appendix for additional data.) The DAC's aspiration for the ASD is to have one of the best climate's in the state to promote academic achievement.
2. **Major Improvement Strategy (general decline in test scores) - Increase emphasis placed on the value of great teaching and teachers:** The DAC recommends that a clearer and higher emphasis be placed on the value of great teachers, teaching and instruction as a key to success at ASD. To better reflect this emphasis, the DAC respectfully recommends that great teachers and teaching be promoted, and a clearly stated core value that is integrated into all ASD operations and communications.
3. **Major Improvement Strategy (general decline in test scores) – Continue work on Vertical Curriculum Alignment:** A lot of work has been done on this issue on multiple fronts by both the BOE and the Administration, and progress has been made. However, based on comments from the Community Survey, comments made by teachers in work sessions with the BOE, individual comments from teachers as well as comments from parents, this continues to be an opportunity for improvement and should remain a priority.
4. **Major Improvement Strategy (academic achievement at AES) – Identify low performing schools and low performing areas at individual schools in the UIP:** The DAC recommends that each school continue to identify the root causes contributing to individual school's low performance areas, develop strategies to address the areas of need, and include them in both the ASD UIP and the individual school improvement plans. The DAC believes that taking this action will increase accountability and enable the District to focus on directly addressing our lowest performing areas.
5. **Major Improvement Strategy (performance of minority groups) – Continue to develop plan to address underperforming minority groups and include them in the UIP:** As mentioned above, there have been positive advances in work with minority groups. However, there is still performance gap and the DAC recommends continued development of action plans that focus on increasing academic achievement for minority groups. Currently these groups are not specifically analyzed in the UIP or BOE monitoring reports, and the DAC respectfully suggests that doing so could help increase focus on these issues.

**Upon reviewing the current performance targets in the UIP, the made the following recommendation regarding Set Performance Targets:**

1. **Set Performance Targets - Align Academic Achievement Target with CDE “exceeds”:** The DAC applauds the 2017 UIP target increases. To continue this laudable trend, the DAC respectfully recommends aligning ASD targets with the Colorado Department of Education metric that determines both district and school performance rankings in the “exceeds” category. An overall academic achievement target of 85<sup>th</sup> percentile would align our indicators with the Colorado Department of Education Performance Framework and target putting ASD in the top 15% of Colorado districts, restoring the district to the 90<sup>th</sup>+ percentile we enjoyed prior to the change from TCAP to PARCC. We further suggest using this as an indicator in the monitoring reports so that they are aligned with both the UIP and the Colorado Performance Framework.

**Recommendations regarding Teacher Support/Budget Priorities: Research demonstrates that the largest impact on academic achievement in all areas is having highly motivated (climate comments above) and experienced teachers who are well trained. The budget recommendations target these areas as well as recommending financial benchmarking to uncover opportunities to re-direct funds to those areas.**

1. **Continue to prioritize teacher salaries:** The DAC recognizes the efforts of the BOE to improve the salary schedule and the generosity of our taxpayers in supporting school funding for this purpose. It is a great achievement that ASD has the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest starting salary in Colorado. However, it is also important to note that we have the highest cost of living in Colorado even when you exclude housing from the estimates. The DAC recommends continuing to focus on improving the teacher salary schedule to support teachers in coping with the high cost of living in the ASD area. Additionally, available information on teachers’ salaries in other districts indicates that an important pay gap still exists for teachers with 5-10 years of experience and the DAC recommends that we continue to have a clear goal of closing that gap (see appendix). This would enable ASD to attract more experienced teachers and better retain new teachers with more than 5 years of experience, directly impacting the quality of education at ASD.
2. **Professional development:** The DAC recognizes the important positive changes recently made around professional development, in conjunction with changes to the salary schedule and the DAC recommends continuing to place a high priority on teacher development. The DAC recommends developing a spending target per teacher as well as a system for tracking investment in teacher development (i.e. dollars per teacher) and assessing the effectiveness of said professional development. (nb: This was a very low scoring question on the professional development sections of the TLCC. The ASD overall TLCC professional development score was the same as the CO state average.) Additionally, the DAC recommends establishing clearly stated district priorities and targets for high priority professional development such as Social Emotional Learning, and that progress in these areas be tracked vs. targets. (i.e. 50% have been trained in SEL, and we are targeting 100% by 2020.) so that adequate funding can be assured for these

3. **Assistance with high housing costs:** The DAC suggests setting a clear, long-term target as it relates to housing needs for the ASD staff (e.g. units for 90% of staff). The DAC recognizes that the BOE is currently working on the West Ranch development which will improve overall housing stock by 8-16 units for a total of up to 51-59 units for a staff of over 220, including 146 teachers. That said, in 2017 there were over 20 teachers on the wait list for housing. Real estate trends in Aspen show that it will continue to be very difficult for teachers to find affordable housing. The DAC suggests that setting a long-term target as it relates to housing needs for the ASD will clearly demonstrate the District's commitment to solving this problem.
4. **Implement financial benchmarking to uncover opportunities to direct funds to highest impact priorities:** In 2017 the Colorado Department of Education developed a website that allows comparisons to be made between districts and schools <https://coloradok12financialtransparency.com/#/>. While the website does not show trends, it does allow a drill down into individual spending areas, for example ASD spends \$17,376 per student on operational expenses compared to an average of \$9,960 at the state level. The reporting allows some segregation by categories with statewide comparisons, showing, for example, the spending per student for Activities and Athletics in ASD compared to that of other districts: Aspen \$1,609, Roaring Fork \$400, Steamboat \$674, Garfield 16 \$507. ASD administration compared to that of other districts: Aspen \$578, Roaring Fork \$151, Steamboat \$258, Garfield 16 \$350. We thus now have visibility into categories where ASD outspends or underspends comparable peers. While these spending differences may well be grounded in purposeful policy, the DAC recommends taking advantage of the visibility afforded to us to take a microscope to areas of large discrepancy compared to other districts, such that we may insure the continuing validity of such spend vs. competing priorities.

#### **Recommendations regarding improving parent engagement and functioning of BOE/DAC/SAC's:**

1. **The DAC recommends that the District and BOE develop a strategic plan:** The DAC recommends the development of a transparent strategic plan for the District that sets a clear aspirational vision and defines initiatives and targets for continuous improvement. Including parent participation in a vision setting process would be a great opportunity for engagement. Additionally, as the educational climate changes, such a plan would help to drive improvement and create alignment within both the district and the community about our future direction.
2. **Additional work sessions between DAC and BOE to define roles and expectations:** The DAC requests additional working sessions with the BOE to better define DAC roles and expectations. This is point #1 in the community engagement policy and the DAC feels that there are still areas where it is unclear how to properly comply with "parents to share in school and district planning and in the setting of objectives through participating in school and district accountability committees".
3. **Work in conjunction with the DAC to promote broad participation in parent led SACs:** The DAC believes that having fully functioning SAC's led by parents working in collaboration with the school principals is an important part of family engagement, the accountability framework and the recommendations process. As such, the DAC asks to work with the BOE to build a robust SAC in each school. Adding more SAC input for the DAC would increase overall parent and community engagement.

**Additional topics identified for future investigation and discussion (Ideas to be further developed):**

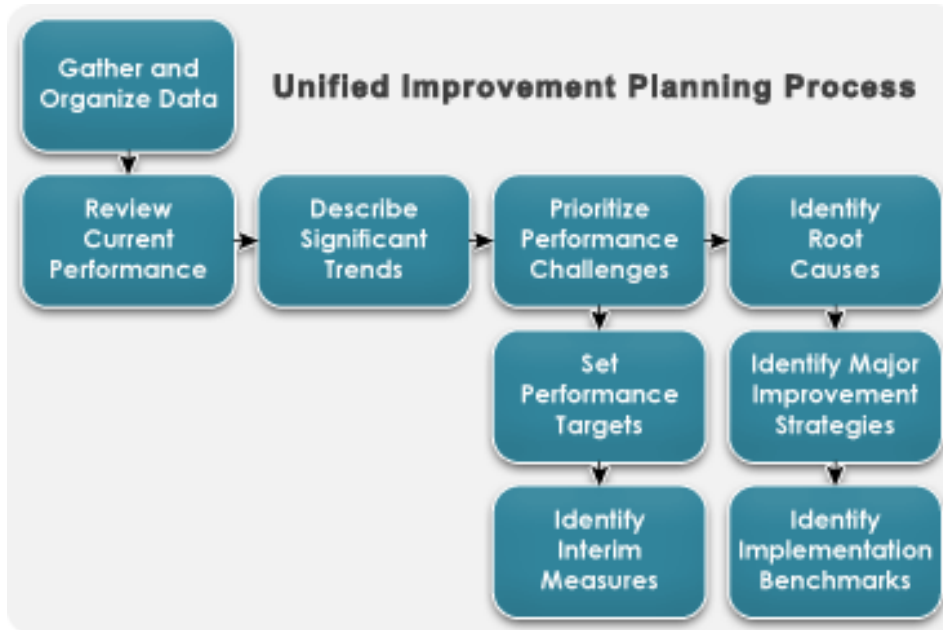
DAC recommends that more information and feedback from the community be gathered on the following topics.

- How to balance student stress vs academic rigor – broaden to social emotional realm, personal life affecting academic life
- Decline in opportunities for Performing Arts
- Math, science and chemistry curriculum concerns raised by parents
- Curriculum alignment
- ELL, Minority students
- Maintain a focus on what we can do together for students based on their needs as we move forward
- Collaborate on a long-range District strategic plan
- Select a rich topic that impacts students for deep study next year- using 5-10 resources to understand issue, etc.
- Participate in conversations that go beyond concern for rules and regulations

**Appendix with supporting data and/or examples as needed:**

Unified Improvement Planning Process: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/uip>

UIP Process map:



**UIP Major Sections:**

**Review of Current performance and significant trends**

**Priority Performance Challenges**

**Setting Performance Targets**

**Identify Root Causes**

**Identify Major Improvement Strategies**

**Identify implementation Benchmarks**

**2017 Community Survey, 2017 Staff Survey, 2018 TLCC.**

While the DAC agrees that there has been improvement in the district climate, information from multiple surveys show that there is still room for improvement in important areas, as shown by the data below.

**Staff Survey:**

- The response to the question on the Staff Survey "There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect amongst staff in my school", 25.6% answered strongly disagree and 14.6% disagree for a total of 40.2% who either disagree or strongly disagree with this statement.
- The response to the question on the Staff Survey "I feel comfortable raising issues or concerns that are important to me with my principal", 20.7% answered strongly disagree and 18.3% disagree for a total of 39.0% who either disagree or strongly disagree with this statement.

Community Survey:

- While there were many positive write-in comments, there were also negative write-in comments for areas for improvement in the Community Survey from the staff related to climate:
  - Communication between departments and between schools
  - The district level administration needs to trust the staff and treat them accordingly rather than making decisions based on distrust.
  - Staff could be more receptive to improvements.
  - Administrators need to be transparent with their work and communication with staff.
  - Toxic place to work. Soap Opera like atmosphere.

TLCC Survey:

School Leadership Composite:

- Slightly below state average (77% positive ASD vs 79% CO Ave.). Reviewing the responses, all of the following questions are 3-7 points below CO average:
  - School is led by an effective team
  - Our work together is guided by a shared vision that is student focused
  - School staff participate in the improvement planning process
  - School staff show respect for each other
  - Staff feel comfortable raising important issues with school leaders

<b>Comparison with Average State Data TELL 2015 and TLCC 2018</b>						
Comparison TELL vs TLCC	TELL 2015			TLCC 2018		
	<u>CO Ave.</u>	<u>ASD</u>	<u>Diff.</u>	<u>CO Ave.</u>	<u>ASD</u>	<u>Diff.</u>
Overall	73	76	3	77	79	2
New Teacher	NA	NA	NA	70	69	(1)
School Leadership	73	66	(7)	79	77	(2)
Teacher Leadership	77	71	(6)	79	77	(2)
Managing Student Conduct	79	89	9	77	72	(5)
Instructional Practices and Support	73	75	2	85	85	0
Professional Development	68	66	(2)	68	68	0
Time	59	67	8	58	61	3
Facilities and Resources	74	83	9	81	94	13
Community Support and Involvement	79	89	9	83	95	12
Overall Reflection	85	84	(1)	89	91	2
District Supports		NA	NA	NA	NA	NA



Comparison of TLCC results with CO State Average and Accredited with Distinction Districts Average								
	Accredited with Distinction Schools with at least 70 positions and high response rate on TLCC					ASD TLCC Comparison to Accredited with Distinction Ave.		
TLCC Composite Score	Steamboat (165/210)	Littleton 6 (726/1068)	East Grand 2 (110/114)	Lewis Plamer 38 (320/476)	Platt Canyon 1 (64/70)	Average Districts of Distinction	Aspen (167/187)	Above / (Below) ASD compared to Acc. W Distin.
Overall	85	81	85	83	91	85	79	(6)
New Teacher	87	82	78	78	100	85	69	(16)
School Leadership	89	80	89	84	91	87	77	(10)
Teacher Leadership	90	83	90	83	92	88	77	(11)
Managing Student Conduct	89	84	87	90	90	88	72	(16)
Instructional Practices and Support	92	87	91	89	91	90	85	(5)
Professional Development	79	74	68	74	89	77	68	(9)
Time	61	63	68	61	84	67	61	(6)
Facilities and Resources	78	81	90	82	96	85	94	9
Community Support and Involvement	89	92	89	90	91	90	95	5
Overall Reflection	97	94	98	97	99	97	91	(6)

#### Increase the emphasis the value of great teaching and teachers:

- Classroom Instruction: In a review of policies and monitoring reports the DAC feels there is an opportunity to reference more directly teaching and great teachers as key elements of our processes. Teachers are not mentioned in any of the results policies and the DAC believes that part of achieving results is in the way they are accomplished, not just in the results themselves. We also feel that Teachers would feel more valued if they were part of the guiding policies that are placed on the wall in the BOE meeting room, just like safety. The same applies to values and culture.
- Review of Elevate magazine shows an opportunity for emphasis and recognition of teachers as part of our communications. A benchmark of Basis Schools (highest rankings by US News) shows clear emphasis “the BASIS.ed network of schools has been actively redefining American K–12 education, a feat that could not and cannot be achieved without instruction by extraordinary teachers and an unwavering commitment to raising the standards of academic success. This is our foundation and we do not stray from these principles.”

#### Continue to prioritize teacher salaries:

Calculations of the percentage of salary paid to teachers is estimated to have dropped from 60% to only 51% of salaries based on information provided to the DAC. This makes sense given that the average teacher salary only increased 1.5% from 2010-2011 to 2016-2017, but overall total salaries increased 22% over the same period.

The new salary schedule has increased the salaries in the early years of teaching experience and ASD now has one of the highest starting salaries in the state for first year teachers (It is important to note that ASD also has the highest cost of living in the state, even when housing is excluded). However, for experienced teachers that advantage disappears, making it more difficult to attract experienced teachers and retain teachers once they are trained and more effective. For example, a new teacher with

a MA degree will earn \$2,866 more in ASD than in Littleton. However, a teacher with a MA degree and 10 years of experience will earn \$10,700 less than in Littleton and \$17,506 less than in Cherry Creek in the ASD (see chart below). It is important to note that these schools also have lower operating costs, spending from \$9,389-\$10,262 per student compared to \$17,376 per student at ASD. Compared to these other schools Aspen spends significantly more on instructional programs, athletics and activities and district administration.

The effect of this gap is likely to cause teachers to come to Aspen early in their careers, but then once they are trained and become more effective and experienced teachers, they will have incentives to move to other higher paying districts. In effect, ASD could potentially be incurring the high costs of training effective teachers in the first 5 years where studies show that up to 50% leave the profession, but then losing the teachers they gain experience (as a side note, many studies quote not feeling valued, and/or lack of a sense of belonging as reasons leaving, supporting improvement strategy rec #3).

This data is consistent with comments that the DAC has continued to receive after the new salary schedule as it relates to the ability of experienced teachers to make more money in other districts. Additionally, in coincides with comments made in the school on the mountain benchmarking exercise and the ability to attract and retain experienced teachers compared to other districts.

Please see the chart below:

	<u>New Teacher BA</u>	<u>Teacher BA w/ 5 YRS</u>	<u>Teacher BA w/ 10 YRS</u>	<u>New Teacher MA</u>	<u>Teacher MA w/ 5 YRS</u>	<u>Teacher MA w/ 10 YRS</u>	<u>Teacher MA+36 Credits w/ 5 YRS</u>	<u>Teacher MA+36 credits w/ 10 YRS</u>
Aspen	42,000	43,000	45,250	47,000	48,000	50,250	51,600	53,850
Littleton	36,754	43,835	54,624	41,014	48,912	60,950	52,057	64,871
Creek	39,405	46,907	61,674	44,134	52,119	67,756	56,463	72,098
Jefferson County	38,760	43,973	52,635	42,248	48,507	60,027	54,892	66,148
Aspen vs Littleton	5,246	(835)	(9,374)	5,986	(912)	(10,700)	(457)	(11,021)
Aspen vs Creek	2,595	(3,907)	(16,424)	2,866	(4,119)	(17,506)	(4,863)	(18,248)
Aspen vs Jeff Co	3,240	(973)	(7,385)	4,752	(507)	(9,777)	(3,292)	(12,298)