

Flexibility FAQ



Our daily work is guided by the ambitious goals of the Denver Plan 2020, the five-year strategic plan developed with our community. Flexibility is one of five key strategies named in the plan to ensure we're on track to meet these goals. The flexibility strategy emphasizes empowering school leaders to create the environments that best meet the academic and social/emotional needs of their students.

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[Click here to see questions and answers from principals during May 21 webinar, morning and afternoon sessions, \(answers in progress – please check back frequently to see our updates\)](#)

Please send additional questions to flexibility@dpsk12.org.
We will continue to update this FAQ as we receive additional questions.

1. Why? What compelled the Board of Education and senior team to emphasize school leader decision-making and flexibilities for the 2015-16 school year?

Board members and DPS staff are committed to challenging the status quo and taking bold steps to produce more accelerated gains for students. DPS has a strong foundation of promoting flexibilities, particularly in the areas of people, time and money. We consider expanding flexibilities to now include curricular resources, interim assessments and professional development a natural next step in our journey towards fulfilling our vision that Every Child Succeeds. We are optimistic that increasing flexibilities will enable principals to accelerate student growth by tailoring their programs to the specific needs of their school communities—students, families and teachers alike.

2. What does flexibility mean for 2015-16?

It means school leaders are the drivers of change in accelerating student progress, with flexibility in 2015-16 to choose curriculum, interim assessments and professional learning for their staff members. This builds on work we have previously done to move decision-making to our school leaders, such as implementing student-based budgeting in 2007. We anticipate this flexibility will extend to other areas in 2016-17 and beyond.

3. Hasn't DPS already selected a curriculum, interim assessments and professional learning?

Yes, and those materials and supports will be available as options for school leaders to choose in 2015-16. These items are the district selected and supported options and school leaders choose whether or not to “opt in” to the district’s choices. School leaders may choose the district option in all three areas, or in one or two areas, or none at all. We do encourage school leaders to consider the district option in all three areas, as there are connections – professional learning related to the selected curriculum, for example – and all are aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards, including the Common Core State Standards.

4. What is the process for making these choices?

We are providing resources to assist in making these choices, including information about district options and guidance or requirements for school leaders to use in selecting other options. Most important of these requirements is ensuring materials meet state and federal statutes, including fulfilling our important commitment to serving our English Language Learners equitably. School leaders are urged to consult with their staffs and school committees in making these decisions; instructional superintendents and other district staff are available as resources and thought partners. Helpful resources, including guidance documents and FAQs, are online at flexibility.dpsk12.org.

5. When do school leaders make their “opt in” decisions?

We are asking school leaders to provide us their initial leaning by 5 p.m., Tuesday, June 2, though we will release the tools for “opting” in by May 26 and will appreciate schools completing the process at their earliest convenience. School leaders will have the opportunity to indicate their initial thinking about which resources/providers - DPS adopted or otherwise - they plan to use in 2015-16 for curriculum, interim assessment and professional learning. Recognizing the tight timelines, we understand that thinking may change after June 7. Final selections must be made by June 12.

6. That is really fast – what if a school leader doesn't opt in but hasn't made other choices?

We understand it's a short timeline but want to ensure our teachers know any required summer professional learning before they leave for break. (We cannot add required professional learning dates at this time so this would be releasing held dates.) School leaders will be asked annually about opting in

to district choices *for that year* so decisions reported by June 12 may be for one year only. There will be a window every year for school leaders to opt in to district choices in curriculum, assessment and professional learning. However it's important to understand that funding associated with district curriculum and assessment choices is available only in tandem with the district adoption cycles. For example, a school leader who opts in to EngageNY language arts curriculum for grades 4-8 this year – but opts out next year – would not be eligible to receive district funding associated with that curriculum for those grades for approximately another 5 – 7 years. The district's curriculum adoption cycle spans, on average, 5 to 7 years but varies based on funding availability. Funding is also not available for schools that decline to opt in one year but desire to opt back in to district curriculum and assessments later, until the next district adoption window for those specific grades and content. Schools can opt in to district professional development annually.

7. What is the district adopting for 2015-16 and why?

- For literacy, grades 4-8: [EngageNY curriculum](#) created by Expeditionary Learning. Based on extensive review and discussions with districts that have already adopted Common Core aligned curriculum, we believe the EngageNY curriculum for grades 4-8 is an exemplary standards-based literacy option for our students, including English Language Learners. The lessons include rigorous and complex texts, meaningful performance tasks, and lessons that will promote differentiation of supports for students at all through choice opportunities.
- For math, grades 6-8: [Connected Mathematics Project 3 \(CMP3\)](#) created by Pearson. CMP3 for grades 6-8 is built around authentic, rich tasks that support students in making sense of mathematics and improving their procedural skill and fluency. The lessons provide materials and strategies that support teachers in developing a deeper understanding of the Colorado Academic Standards and are available in English and Spanish. CMP3 also has a companion online resource that will support personalized instruction for students.
- We will pilot a select number of K-3 literacy programs. School leaders should work with their instructional superintendents if they are interested in becoming pilot sites.
- For more information about the district curriculum selections, please visit [this document](#).

8. What exactly does opting in mean? What about not opting in?

Opting in

As part of the district curriculum adoption process, teachers, school leaders and content experts work together on a curriculum adoption committee to review and rate curriculum options, and to provide recommendations for adoption.

Curriculum – After an intensive review process, we will adopt the [EngageNY curriculum created by Expeditionary Learning](#) in grades 4-8 in literacy starting in 2015-16. In math, the district has selected the [Connected Mathematics Project 3, or CMP3, by Pearson](#) for grades 6-8. We also are offering a number of pilots in K-3 reading. More detail about these choices is available in [this email](#). Schools selecting the district option receive all curricular materials shipped directly to campuses in June. Curriculum in other grades and subjects will remain the same for 2015-16. Moving forward, we will be selecting resources aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards, including the Common Core State Standards, in all grades and subjects. Please see [this schedule](#) for an overview of our adoption schedule by grade, content and year.

Interim Assessments – Interim assessments for 2015-16 are tightly coupled to the district's standards-aligned curriculum and administered only in grades 3-8 in language arts and math. End-of-year interims

in grades 3-8 will be replaced with performance-based tasks embedded in the curriculum. For high school end-of-year course exams, teachers will have two options to choose from - administer district-created end-of-course assessments or administer a small-scale, performance-based assessment aligned to student learning objectives combined with a teacher-developed exam. More details in [this email](#). In addition to the assessments, the district option includes support with loading data and data analysis. **Professional Learning** – The summer professional learning calendar is [available here](#). Teachers in the grades and subjects related to the new curriculum are required to attend professional learning sessions. School leadership weeks, June 10-12 and July 27-31, remains an expectation for all school leaders.

Not opting in

Curriculum – School leaders choosing not to opt in to the district option may continue with the curriculum used in 2014-15 or choose a curriculum other than the district option. District funding for new curricular materials for 2015-16 will be \$100 per student per subject, or \$200 per student if a school declines district curriculum in both language arts and math for the grades in which DPS is adopting (4-8 in language arts and 6-8 in math). These dollars are available in tandem with the district's curriculum adoption cycle. For example, the district has selected a language arts curriculum in grades 4-8 and a math curriculum for grades 6-8 for 2015-16; these curriculum dollars will only be available in 2015-16 in these grades and subjects. In addition, school carry-forward or available student-based budgeting dollars may be used for this purpose.

Interim Assessments – School leaders not opting in to the district interim assessments would be responsible for choosing their own assessments. Information about budget dollars for these assessments will be forthcoming. School carry-forward dollars may be used for this purpose.

Professional Learning – School leaders not opting in to the district summer professional learning in grades 4-8 in language arts and grades 6-8 in math would be responsible for choosing their own summer professional learning. Schools would receive the district rate, \$22.82 per hour per teacher in those grades and subjects, to provide professional learning for teachers. Because of the DCTA contract, schools not choosing the district options would only be able to require training on the same dates already reserved by the district in summer 2015 ([see professional learning calendar](#)). School carry-forward dollars may be used for this purpose.

9. Does an instructional superintendent have to approve choices made by school leaders?

Choices on curriculum, assessments and professional learning are for principals to make. We encourage principals to discuss these decisions thoughtfully with their instructional superintendent and we encourage our IS's to give candid feedback, respecting the fact that the ultimate decision lies with the principal.

10. Does this flexibility apply to all schools? What about turnaround schools?

All schools, including turnaround schools, can exercise flexibility. Schools do not need to “earn” their flexibility through their performance. Schools receiving turnaround incentive grants (TIG) must continue to fulfill all the expectations and programming outlined in their TIG application; we do not want to jeopardize that funding. All schools with TIG grants should contact [Rebecca Grant](#) for questions related to TIG and flexibilities.

11. What about innovation schools and other school waivers?

All innovation school and waiver approvals are still in effect. Should an innovation school or school with an approved waiver seek to opt back in to district choices, they are able to do so.

12. Will school leaders be provided district funding in any areas they chose not to opt in?

Yes. This will vary by year in tandem with the areas in which the district is offering options. For example, for 2015-16, the district is offering EngageNY for literacy in grades 4-8 and CMP3 math for grades 6-8. In these grades and subjects, schools will receive \$100 per student per subject, or up to \$200. Each year, as the district rolls out its new curricular options in select grades and subjects, schools will have the choice of opting in to the district choices or choosing the funding offered instead. [See curriculum adoption cycle](#). Prior to the 2016-17 budget cycle, we will release a detailed two-year list of grades and subjects to be adopted, as well as the accompanying funding for schools declining to opt in to district choices.

For professional learning, the district option is summer professional learning related to the new curricular options. Schools may opt in to this training regardless of whether they are opting in to the curriculum. Schools declining the district option for summer professional learning would receive the district rate, \$22.82 per hour per teacher, for teachers in those grades and subjects related to the district curricular options – grades 4-8 literacy (EngageNY) and grades 6-8 math (CMP3).

We are still working on how funding for interim assessments will be determined and will share that information as soon as it's available.

13. What about accountability, including mechanisms such as the school performance framework?

The SPF will continue, as will all other accountability measures. This emphasis on flexibility is intended to place decision-making squarely at the school level, closest to those who know their kids, families, teachers, support staff and communities best. But our overarching goal in the Denver Plan 2020 is great schools in every neighborhood, and the focus on flexibility is intended to advance us toward that goal. If this is not occurring, we would consider potentially scaling back school flexibility, aligning higher touch supports or closing a school. In this regard, little has changed.

14. How can the district support schools in making informed decisions in these areas?

School leaders are encouraged to see their instructional superintendents and other academic support staff as resources, guides and thought partners in making their opt-in decisions. The district is preparing to distribute a set of guidance documents that detail the services and materials provided to schools opting in to district choices as well as information for schools choosing not to opt in. ELA and SPED experts will review and approve all options to ensure we are fulfilling all our legal obligations.

15. What AIO supports will be available to schools choosing not to opt in?

All schools that seek support from academic support partners will continue to have access to it. We expect all schools, regardless of their selections for curriculum and assessments, will benefit from supports focused on standards implementation, data-driven instruction and fulfilling DPS' vision of a successful DPS graduate and classroom. We do expect that supports for schools that opt in to district resources will be more extensive given the expertise our academic partners have in the specific resources we have adopted. We expect resource-specific supports for schools choosing non-DPS adopted resources will be minimal as our staff does not have deep expertise in other curriculum and assessment offerings.

16. Do all schools still need to focus on the priorities of the Denver Plan 2020?

Yes. The Denver Plan is our guiding document and its goals apply to all schools.

17. Are we still releasing an academic strategic plan?

Yes. We plan to release the academic strategic plan prior to our June 10 School Leadership Week and to provide time during that week to talk more about it. Due to your feedback at the January 22 Universal meeting, we have revised the plan substantively and, at your suggested, added new sections focused on creating a shared vision of a DPS graduate and a shared vision of a DPS classroom, [linked here for your review](#).

18. How does the new academic strategic plan fit into this?

The academic strategic plan is the district’s plan for achieving the goals of the Denver Plan 2020. While it focuses on the district choices in curriculum, interim assessments and professional learning, it also includes strategies and priority areas all schools are expected to follow. This includes data-driven instruction as an anchor for instructional practice.

19. Do all schools need to implement the vision of a DPS classroom in the academic strategic plan?

Yes. See our vision of a DPS classroom and a DPS graduate [here](#).

20. What about other areas such as LEAP, LEAD and Differentiated Roles (teacher leadership)?

All schools are required to continue with these systems. The LEAP and LEAD frameworks outline the district’s standards for quality teaching and leading, and quality classrooms. Teacher and leader performance will continue to be evaluated against these frameworks. In addition, we are moving forward with Differentiated Roles and our goal continues to be to have such teacher leadership structures in place in every school within the next two years.

21. Do schools opting in to EngageNY or CMP3 math need to attend district professional learning?

No. Schools selecting the district curriculum may also opt in to the related professional learning or they may decline to opt in to the related professional learning.

22. Do schools need to attend professional learning at the network level?

Networks will continue to provide support and learning for school leadership on School Leadership Competencies aligned to the LEAD framework, with specific focus on School Culture, Observation and Feedback coaching and accountability, and Data-Driven Instruction. This will include peer sharing and learning on curriculum-agnostic (and assessment-agnostic) instructional best practices. Instructional superintendents will identify in advance any professional learning that is specific to district curriculum or assessments, and school leaders who have not opted into these will not be required to attend.

23. Do all school leaders still need to attend June Universal Principal Meeting?

Yes.

24. Do IS/EDs still have evaluation responsibility for principals?

Yes.

25. Do IS’s still support the development of, and approval for, Unified Improvement Plans?

Yes.

26. Will schools remain members of a network (or do they simply have an IS)?

Yes, they remain members of a network.

27. Can schools choose to build their own curriculum?

No, not for 2015-16, unless designated in a school's innovation plan, given the tight turnaround time. Yes for later years. It will be extremely difficult to build curriculum and obtain the necessary review to ensure state and federal statutes are met in time for implementation in fall 2015.

28. Update on Curriculum Reimbursement Action Steps *NEW*

Schools who have declined district curriculum options and are ordering new curriculum materials should continue following their normal process by submitting their requisitions to [Maggie Wolfe](#) in Strategic Sourcing. Schools will need to use own their account for purchasing the materials but will be reimbursed by the district for \$104 per pupil in the designated grades after the fall adjustment period is complete in mid-September.

Questions from principals during the May 21 flexibility webinars, morning and afternoon sessions, will be updated here. Please check back frequently.

1. Will there be time dedicated during June Leadership Week for leadership teams to process and make decisions as a collective team?

- There will be some time for planning; however, it will be limited. We are working on an agenda and will provide that soon. [A high-level agenda is now available.](#)

2. Can we bring both SLT and ILT Members to the School Leadership Week now that we are going to be processing all of this?

- Schools can bring up to six team members.

3. Can we see an analysis of all of the curricula you reviewed?

- Yes, we can make that available by May 29.

4. Does that mean that, if we choose a different curriculum, we will not be able to access Academic Partners?

- Academic support partners will support the Academic Strategic Plan and will be equipped to provide curriculum supports for schools opting in to the district curricular resources. Those school leaders declining to opt in to the district curricular resources will receive support from a pool of academic partners assigned to support such schools.

5. Can schools opt out of any district-adopted curriculum, such as Everyday Math?

- Yes, schools have the flexibility to choose their curriculum in all grades and content. However, district funding for those not selecting the district options will be provided only in tandem with the district adoption cycle by grade and subject.
- In the fall of 2015, we will form a committee comprised of teachers, school leaders and content experts to research elementary math options. We will adopt elementary math in 2016-17.

6. Will we still receive the mill levy money for textbooks?

- Mill levy is the source of funding for student-facing instructional resources, including textbooks.

- 7. Can you opt in to coaching support (TECs) even if you opt out of district choices?**
- Schools currently allocated TECs will continue to have TEC allocations based on the 2015-16 matching process.
- 8. I am concerned about the impact of ProComp and SLOs. If everything is aligned to the district curriculum and we opt out, will it negatively impact our teachers?**
- SLOs are centered on standards, not the curriculum. They will still need to be completed whether schools opt in or choose an alternative. Effective teachers have learning goals for their students and use assessments to measure progress toward these goals. They have a deep understanding of where students are at the beginning of a course, and what they can achieve by the end. Effective teachers analyze standards, select and administer rigorous assessments aligned to those standards, and measure how their students grow during the school year. They use this data to drive their instruction and are constantly reflecting on and refining their craft. The Student Learning Objective (SLO) process embodies these effective pedagogical practices by helping DPS educators focus on high impact standards, set ambitious learning goals and measure students' progress toward attaining them. This process will yield greater student growth on critical learning outcomes by allowing teachers to plan backward from an end vision of student success, ensuring that every minute of instruction is geared toward our district vision that Every Child Succeeds.
- 9. What if the IS and the principal disagree. What are the implications for our evaluations?**
- There should be no implications to a principal's evaluation. The outcomes of the work (i.e., successful implementation and outcomes of increased student achievement) are what drive rating decisions.
- 10. If I decline to opt in to district professional learning, can I use the funding for guest teachers during the school year to release small teams of teachers throughout the school year?**
- No. If a school leader declines the district choice for professional learning but decides to use the funds for professional learning, it must be used during the summer and will be paid directly to teachers at the rate of \$22.82 per hour for up to 21 hours (provided the school leader requires professional learning for literacy teachers in grades 4-8 and math teachers in grades 6-8, since those are the grades and subjects of the district option).
- 11. It does not appear these flexibilities are available for high schools. Is that accurate?**
- High school leaders have access to all these flexibilities; however, because the district is not adopting high school curriculum for 2015-16, for example, there is no funding associated with the curriculum and professional learning flexibilities for high schools in 2015-16. We are still working through funding for the assessments flexibility.
- 12. If you opt in to curriculum, can you modify the curriculum that you receive? For example, EngageNY is good but doesn't always align to the Colorado Academic Standards.**
- Yes, you are allowed to modify to best fit your needs. The Curriculum and Instruction team can help in that process and has also done some mapping to ensure alignment to CAS.

13. Will there be funding for literacy and math interventions aside from curricular choices?

- Currently, we have only budgeted for Tier I instruction. As part of the District review process we review ancillary materials that would support Tier II instruction and in many cases leverage scale to negotiate access to those resources within the cost frame of our Tier I adoption.

14. Can schools decline the district math curriculum in grade 6 but opt in for grades 7 and 8?

- At this time, no, based on the cohesive design of the curriculum. The design of the curriculum provides coherence both within grades and across grades. Students would not have that coherence if they entered in grades 7 or 8. Furthermore, the design of the problems builds students' conceptual and procedural understanding in ways that provide prior knowledge as students' progress through the grades.
- The standards for mathematical practice are also developed across grades.

15. Will the agenda for literacy training in July be made available to help make our decisions?

- Yes, the agenda is available in the [Literacy Implementation Guide](#).

16. Will funding be available for networks to utilize for leadership development specifically for principals and assistant principals?

- Unfortunately, there is no funding available for networks to use for principal professional learning. Relay is application based so the funding is not available for all principals.

17. I have further questions about assessments, including TS Gold and READ Act.

- For updated information, please read the [Assessments update](#).
- For an update on the district assessment option, please [read this update](#).

Questions we're researching – if you still have a question and do not see it here, please let us know at flexibility@dpsk12.org

- Does this structure allow for autonomy over our school calendars? Specifically, blue/green days and how those are planned?
- If we don't opt in this year, can we save the funds and purchase school wide curriculum for math in 2016-17?
- Do we have projection on how the average teacher salary will further offset general funding? This would help make a decision on pursuing.
- How do we avoid the "Haves vs. Have Nots" due to ranges in school budgets and access to funds paired with flexibility?

