

Flexibility FAQ: 2016-17



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 are 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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1. Why? What compelled the Board of Education and senior leadership team to emphasize school leader decision-making and flexibilities?

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 learning 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 2016-17?

It means school leaders are the drivers of change in accelerating student progress, with flexibility in 2016-17 to choose curriculum, interim and READ Act assessments, and some professional learning for their school. 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 the future.

3. When do school leaders make their flexibility decisions?

School leaders must submit their 2016-17 flexibility decisions by 5pm on February 12th, 2016. Flexibility decisions can be made through a virtual [Flexibility Submission Form](#) (available after January 8th, 2016). Consultations to inform the decision making process are available to all school leaders and strongly recommended for those who are declining to opt-In to district-adopted options. School leaders who are considering declining to opt-in to district resources should not complete the Flexibility Submission Form until after they have had a consultation and met with their Budget Partner.

4. What resources are available to help me in making these choices?

We are providing a series of trainings to guide school leaders through the flexibility opt-in process, as well as to provide information on the district-adopted options. Trainings include:

- **Flexibility Overview Webinars:** Learn about the rationale for school-based flexibility; hear about the available curriculum, assessment, and professional learning options and the associated timelines.
- **Curriculum Roadshow:** Learn more about the district-selected curriculum, including an opportunity to view district-selected curriculum resources.
- **Consultations:** Opportunities to meet with experts from Curriculum and Instruction, ELA, and ARE to discuss your potential choices.

Full training details are available on our website, flexibility.dpsk12.org, under [Training Center](#).

Additionally, we have created resources to assist in making these choices, including information about district options and guidance on requirements for school leaders considering selecting other options:

- [2016-17 Decision Handbook](#)
- [Decision Making Info Sheet](#)
- [Flexibility Website](#)
- [Strategic Planning Questions](#)
- [Decline to Opt-In Guidelines and Legal Requirements Check-List](#)
- [Legal Requirements Screencast](#)

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 staff and school committees in making these decisions; Instructional Superintendents and other district staff are available as resources and thought partners.

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

The district is providing a series of training sessions including webinars and curriculum roadshows to enable school leaders to understand the flexibility decision process as well as to gain insight into the different district options. School leaders are also encouraged to see their Instructional Superintendents and other academic support staff as resources, guides and thought partners in making their opt-in decisions. Training details are available on our website, flexibility.dpsk12.org, under [Training Center](#).

6. Who is eligible to make flexibility decisions for the 2016-17 school year?

All school leaders in direct-run schools are eligible to make opt-in decisions in the areas of curriculum, assessment, and professional learning. Depending on the type of school, school leaders will have to make the following decisions:

School Education Level	Curriculum Decisions (Adoption Years: 2016-2021)	Assessment Decisions	Professional Learning Decisions
Elementary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-3 Literacy • K-5 Math • K-5 English Language Development (ELD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-5 Literacy Interim • 3-5 Math Interim • K-5 READ Act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-3 Literacy Aligned PD • K-5 Math Aligned PD • K-5 ELD Aligned PD
K-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-3 Literacy Curriculum • K-5 Math • K-5 English Language Development (ELD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-8 Literacy Interim • 3-8 Math Interim • K-5 READ Act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-3 Literacy Aligned PD • K-5 Math Aligned PD • K-5 ELD Aligned PD

Middle	No Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-8 Literacy Interim • 6-8 Math Interim 	No Adoption
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9-12 English Language Arts 	N/A*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9-12 English Language Arts Aligned PD

*As per the district’s assessment strategy, interim assessments are only available for grades 3-8. High school course assessments will continue to remain optional.

7. If I plan to opt-in to district options, do I need to complete the Flexibility Submission Form?

Yes, all school leaders in direct-run schools must complete the Flexibility Submission Form.

8. If I plan to decline to opt-in to district options, do I need to complete the Flexibility Submission Form?

Yes, all school leaders in direct-run schools must complete the Flexibility Submission Form.

9. What curriculum is the district adopting this year?

- For literacy, grades K-2: Benchmark Advance/Adelante
- For literacy, grade 3: EngageNY curriculum created by Expeditionary Learning.
- For math, grades K-5: Bridges
- For English Language Arts, grades 9-12: DC Public Schools
- For English Language Development, grades K-5: Benchmark (available for grades K-2) and EL Achieve Systematic ELD (available for grades 3-5 and K-5)

For more information about the district curriculum selections, please see the [2016-17 Decision Handbook](#).

10. What does this mean for grade band/content areas that are not being adopted in 2016-17?

The district does not allocate dollars for new curriculum every year for all subjects and all grades as this is not financially feasible. Rather, the district targets its dollars to those grades and subjects most in need of new curricula. Over time, all grades and subjects will receive dollars for curriculum, but this will happen as part of a multi-year cycle. District funding will be made available to schools in rolling cycles, in tandem with the district's offering of options in these three areas. School leaders can chose to implement new resources in grades/content not up for adoption this year, but no devolvement funds would be available.

11. Can a school postpone the adoption of recommended instructional materials for the 2016-2017 school year?

Yes, schools may opt out of the district supported option during the 2016-2017 school year. Funds will be distributed to the schools budget for the future adoption of materials in the related content area. Schools are responsible for working with their Budget Partner and strategic sourcing to ensure materials are ordered and delivered during the spring of 2017. Schools may also opt-in to the district supported option for the 2016-2017 school year. The materials will be ordered and shipped to the school during the spring of 2016, however, schools would have the choice of not implementing until the 2017-2018 school year.

12. How did the district select these curriculum options?

Request for Proposal: On September 14th, Curriculum and Instruction released [informal requests for proposals](#) for K-5 mathematics, K-3 literacy and 9-12 language arts. For this review, we used an informal bidding process to ensure we are able to broaden the supplier pool to include: Charter Management

Organizations, open education resources and traditional publishers for potential adoption in the 2016-2107 academic year.

Selection Criteria: The materials recommended for adoption are based on quality of materials, as determined by nationally normed, customized rubrics created for each content area. These rubrics are based in the [IMET and GIMET rubrics](#), with slight customization to fit the needs of students in Denver Public Schools. All review of materials is deeply grounded in these rubrics to ensure objectivity in the review process.

Committee Representation: Our priority in forming a review committee was to have exceptional teachers and staff members that are representative of the diverse needs of all schools and aspects of Denver Public Schools. We not only selected exceptional teachers to serve on the review committee, but also targeted departments within DPS central office to collaborate on the review process including Chief Schools Office, Assessment Research & Evaluation, English Language Acquisition, Curriculum & Instruction, Ed Tech, Early Childhood Education, Gifted & Talented and Student Services.

Review Timeline: The review process began in September and ended in early November. All committee members spent extensive time grounding in rubrics to ensure objectivity in the selection process. From there, committee members began reviewing curricular submissions in depth. The first round of scoring occurred on 9/29, 10/3, 10/15 and 10/20. Finalists presented on 10/31 and 11/5. At the end of this process, we made final recommendations to the Chief Academic and Innovation Office and Superintendent.

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

Yes. Information on the curricula we reviewed but did not select is available on our website, flexibility.dpsk12.org, under [Curriculum Resources](#):

- [K-3 Literacy Curriculum Review Findings](#)
- [K-5 Math Curriculum Review Findings](#)
- [K-5 ELD Curriculum Review Findings](#)
- [9-12 English Language Arts Curriculum Review Findings](#)

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

Opting in

Curriculum –

- For literacy, grades K-2: Benchmark Advance/Adelante
- For literacy, grade 3: EngageNY Literacy Modules created by Expeditionary Learning.
- For math, grades K-5: Bridges in Mathematics
- For English Language Arts, grades 9-12: DC Public Schools
- For English Language Development, grades K-5: Benchmark (available for grades K-2) and EL Achieve Systematic ELD (available for grades 3-5 and K-5)

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 2016-17. Over time, we will continue to select resources aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards, including the Common Core State Standards, in all grades and subjects.

Interim Assessments –

- Grade 3-8 Interims: Two Options

- District Interims provided by ANet
- Create your Own Assessments (Item Bank by Key Data Systems) in the Illuminate platform

Interim assessments for 2016-17 will be aligned to the district’s curriculum and administered only in grades 3-8 in language arts and math. Schools may select between ANet or the “Create your Own Assessments (Item Bank)”, which gives schools the tools to create their own standards-aligned Interim assessments in the Illuminate platform. Schools that want to administer ANet in grade 2 may do so for an added cost and will be responsible for complying with all legal requirements, including Consent Decree and House Bill 1323 regulations.

READ Act Assessments –

All schools are required by the Colorado Department of Education to administer assessments that fulfill the READ Act requirements. School leaders may choose between the district option (Istation) or state-approved options.

Opting In to READ Act Assessments

- The only assessment supported by DPS in 2016-2017 will be the Istation suite of assessments.
- Districts must administer a READ Act assessment to kindergarten students in the first 60 days of school to use the data for the literacy component of TS Gold.
- All students in K-3 and those that have been identified as Significantly Below Grade Level (SBGL) in grades 4-8 must be assessed. In order to maintain consistency across grade levels in K-8 schools, these schools may opt their 6-8 SBGL students into Istation as well.

Important Updates/Changes:

- Istation is the only assessment that DPS is supporting as an ‘opt-in’ selection for the READ Act in 16/17.
- DRA2/EDL2 are no longer approved by CDE to meet the requirements of the READ Act in K-3. Schools may elect to continue using the DRA in addition to a READ Act approved assessment.
- STAR will NOT be supported by DPS next year. This includes funding. If you use Accelerated Reader, you will now need to purchase STAR licenses from Renaissance Learning directly.

Professional Learning – The summer professional learning calendar will be available by February 29th, 2016. Teachers in the grades and subjects related to the new curriculum are required to attend professional learning sessions (see pages 24-25 of [Decision Handbook](#) for specific information). School leadership weeks remain an expectation for all school leaders.

Declining to Opt-In

Curriculum – School leaders choosing not to opt in to the district option may continue with the curriculum used in 2015-16 or choose a curriculum other than the district option. School leaders declining to opt-in will receive curriculum devolvement funds that they can use to purchase or build curriculum of their choice. District funding for new curriculum materials will be available in tandem with the district’s curriculum adoption cycle. Devolvement amounts vary by curriculum and grade so please see the [Decline to Opt-In Devolvement Funds One-Pager](#) for specific devolvement amounts. School carry-forward or available student-based budgeting dollars may also be used for this purpose.

Interim Assessments – School leaders not opting in to either of the two options for district interim assessments will receive funds to choose or create their own assessments. School leaders that decline to

opt-in to district-supported interim assessment options will receive \$5.50 per student to apply to their local assessment strategy. School carry-forward or available student-based budgeting dollars may also be used for this purpose.

READ Act Assessments – School leaders not opting in to Istation, the district supported READ Act assessment, are responsible for choosing a READ Act assessment provider from the list of [CDE Approved vendors](#). Schools cannot build their own READ Act Assessments. district funding for READ Act assessments for 2016-17 will be devolved so that schools can purchase a READ Act assessment. Schools that decline to opt-in to Istation will receive \$5.50 per student to purchase a different, CDE approved, READ Act assessment. School carry-forward or available student-based budgeting dollars may also be used for this purpose.

Professional Learning – School leaders not opting in to the district-provided curriculum aligned professional learning are responsible for choosing their own professional learning. Please note that schools who opt-in to the district-adopted ELD options (Benchmark and/or EL Achieve) may not decline to opt-in to the aligned PD. Schools that decline to opt-in to the district-provided curriculum aligned professional learning will receive \$380 per teacher (funds will only be devolved for those teachers that teach the subject area and grade band in question).

15. Can schools choose to build their own curriculum?

Yes, schools may build their own curriculum. School leaders who are declining district options in favor of developing their own curriculum are strongly encouraged to attend a consultation with members of Curriculum and Instruction, ARE, and ELA to ensure that they understand the legal requirements that they must follow.

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

Yes. We are working to finalize this and will communicate specific devolvement amounts in early January. Please check Principal Weekly and the [flexibility website](#) for most up to date information.

17. If I decline to opt-in, what are my next steps if I am purchasing resources?

Strategic Sourcing will be providing purchasing supports to schools that decline to opt-in to district-adopted resources. Larger purchases across schools (and coordinated through Strategic Sourcing) may allow for additional support services to become available to schools. There are no additional fees to schools for this service. More information will be provided about this process after final decisions have been received on February 12th.

18. For how long does my decision apply?

All 2016-17 decisions must be submitted by February 12th, 2016 and will be final for the 2016-17 school year on that date. The length of the decision varies depending on the area of flexibility:

Curriculum: Opt-in or decline to opt-in decisions made around or in conjunction with curriculum areas will be final for the duration of the adoption cycle in terms of devolved funds. For example, if a school opts-in to the district-adopted K-3 Literacy curriculum, the school will have chosen to adopt that curriculum for the full 2016-2021 adoption cycle. Conversely, if a school declines to opt-in to the K-3 Literacy option, the school will receive devolvement funds for the full 2016-2021 adoption cycle and thus would not be able to opt back in to the district option until 2021.

Assessment: Opt-in or decline to opt-in decisions made around interim or READ ACT assessments can be revised on an annual basis, during the flexibility decision process. Please note that for continuity of data,

schools should try to limit changing their assessment selections. Furthermore, interim assessment decisions should be made with careful consideration of how this aligns to the chosen curriculum and data.

Professional Learning: Opt-in or decline to opt-in decisions made around professional learning can be revised on an annual basis, during the flexibility decision process. School leaders can only opt-in to the curriculum-aligned professional learning during the first year of the adoption cycle.

19. 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 as we do not want to jeopardize that funding. All schools with TIG grants should contact [Lauren Durkee](#) for questions related to TIG and flexibilities.

20. 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. They will need to work with their Budget Partner to ensure that funds are available depending on when they most recently received funding to purchase resources.

21. 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 students, families, teachers, support staff and communities best. Our overarching goal in the Denver Plan 2020 remains 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.

School leaders that decline to opt-in are strongly encouraged a consultation to ensure that their replacement resource meets all legal requirements.

22. Will I be held to different performance standards if I decline to opt-in to district-adopted curriculum, assessment, or professional learning?

All schools will be held to the same performance standards regardless of their school-based flexibility decisions. School leaders that decline to opt-in are strongly encouraged to attend a consultation to ensure that their replacement resource meets all legal requirements.

23. Who will monitor my school's performance if I decline to opt-in?

All schools will be subject to the same accountability in the 2016-17 school year. Instructional Superintendents will have insight into the resources implemented at all schools, including those that have declined to opt-in to district resources. This will enable them to coach and hold accountable all schools regardless of the resources used at each school. All schools will be subject to reporting requirements including, but not limited to, Unified Improvement Plans and school visit trackers.

24. Does an Instructional Superintendent have to approve choices made by school leaders?

Choices on curriculum, assessments, and professional learning are for principals to make in collaboration with their Instructional Leadership Team. 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, so long as legal requirements are met.

25. 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, which are based on the LEAD framework and student outcomes. The outcomes of the work (i.e., successful implementation and outcomes of increased student achievement) are what drive rating decisions.

26. 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.

27. Under what circumstances, if any, can flexibility decisions be reversed?

- All 2016-17 decisions must be submitted by February 12th, 2016 and will be final for the 2016-17 school year on that date.
- Assessment and professional learning decisions may be revised on an annual basis, during the annual flexibility decision process. Decisions for assessment and professional learning may not be revised mid-year.
- Since curriculum decisions are made in alignment with adoption cycles, these can be reversed at any time, but associated funding will not be devolved outside of adoption cycles. While curriculum devolvement funds related to school-based flexibility decisions are available based on the length of the adoption cycle, additional curriculum funding *may be* available on a case by case basis (e.g., new school leader; student needs not being met; vendor not meeting stipulations of contract). In order to apply for additional curriculum funding outside of an adoption cycle, a school leader will need to go through a review process in which s/he will need to identify the ways in which students are not being served as well as a plan for how the different option(s) proposed will work to address the gaps in instruction.

28. 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. School-based flexibility is one of the strategies identified to achieve the goals of the Denver Plan 2020.

29. Where can I find the academic strategic plan and how does it fit into this?

The academic strategic plan, [linked here for your review](#), 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.

30. 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](#).

31. What about other areas such as LEAP, LEAD and Distributed Leadership (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 Distributed Leadership and our goal continues to be to have such teacher leadership structures in place in every school.

32. When will additional information, including time implications, about professional learning be available?

The summer professional learning calendar will be available by February 29th, 2016. More information regarding the time implications for the curriculum aligned PD will be available in early January.

33. Do schools opting in to district-adopted options need to attend district professional learning?

For K-3 Literacy, K-5 Math, and 9-12 English Language Arts, no. The district is offering integrated options which include curriculum, professional learning aligned to the curriculum, and aligned interim assessments. However, 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.

For K-5 ELD, yes. When schools opt in to EL Achieve and Benchmark, they will also need to opt-in to the associated professional learning. EL Achieve professional development will also count towards the Teacher Qualification ELD course. Therefore, if teachers have not yet taken their Teacher Qualification required course of ELD or Sheltering, the EL Achieve professional learning will count towards the required Teacher Qualification ELD course.

34. 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.

This document will be updated regularly. Please email flexibility@dpsk12.org with additional questions.

Additional resources are available on our website at flexibility.dpsk12.org.