

# Universal Flexibility FAQ 2018-19



*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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## UNIVERSAL FLEXIBILITY PROCESS OVERVIEW

### **1. What is the “Universal Flexibility” process?**

Since 2015, all schools in DPS have been able to make decisions around their instructional programming—specifically curriculum, curriculum-aligned professional learning, assessment, and small group instruction<sup>1</sup>—to meet the needs of their students. These school-based decisions around instructional programming are now known as “Universal Flexibilities” because they are available to all schools, regardless of structure or governance type. The Universal Flexibility decision-making process is one of the ways that DPS is fulfilling its commitment to empower school leaders to act and lead under a theory of action in which the school is the key unit of change.

### **2. When do I make my Universal Flexibility decisions?**

School leaders must submit their 2018-19 Universal Flexibility decisions by 5pm on Friday, February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2018, in alignment with the annual school budget process. Decisions can be made through a virtual [Flexibility Decision Form](#) (available after January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

### **3. What resources are available to help me make these choices?**

In order to support school leaders in making Universal Flexibility decisions, we have compiled a number of in-person supports and online resources around the decision-making process, the available options, and the key factors that leaders should consider, including how these decisions fit into the broader school strategic planning process. School leaders can learn about these topics by attending or signing-up for the following in-person sessions:

- **School Leader Information Sessions:** These will be held at select December network meetings and/or via webinar. In these sessions, participants will learn about the Universal Flexibility process and timelines, as well as the available curriculum, curriculum-aligned professional learning, assessment, and small group instruction options. If you are curious as to whether or not these sessions will be available at your network meeting, ask your IS.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that while small group instruction has been available as a flexibility to schools since 2015-16, it is new to the Universal Flexibility process for school year 2018-19.

- **Consultations:** One-on-one meetings with experts from C&I and ARE to discuss your choices. Consultations will be available in January.

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

- [2018-19 Flexibility Decision Handbook](#)
- [Strategic Planning Guide](#)
- [Screencasts on the Flexibility Process and the Menu of Options](#)
- [Decline to Opt-In Legal Requirements and Technology Checklist](#)

**4. Who is eligible to make Universal Flexibility decisions for the 2018-19 school year?**

All school leaders (with the exception of charter leaders) are eligible to make decisions in the areas of curriculum, curriculum-aligned professional learning, assessment, and small group instruction. School leaders will make decisions depending on the grades their school serves. The table below highlights those decisions by grade.

Grade School Serves	Curriculum Decisions	Assessment Decisions	Professional Learning Decisions	Small Group Instruction
Grades K-5	K-5 Literacy Bundle:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy Intervention Curriculum-Aligned Summer Professional Learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Math Instructional Supports (5)***</li> </ul>
	Literacy Intervention + READ Act Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Assessment (3-5)</li> </ul>		
Grades 6-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Science</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Science Curriculum-Aligned Summer Professional Learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Math Instructional Supports (6, 8)***</li> </ul>
Grades 9-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Studies (recommended sequence courses)*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Assessment (Pathways schools exempt)**</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Studies Curriculum-Aligned Summer Professional Learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Math Instructional Supports (9)***</li> </ul>
<p>*DPS' recommended sequence of courses is Geography (9<sup>th</sup>), US History (10<sup>th</sup>), Civics/ Economics (11<sup>th</sup>). While schools have the option to determine their sequence of courses, to fulfill graduation requirements, students must take three credits of social studies, including Civics (required course).</p> <p>**9-12 Pathway schools can opt-into the District-supported local assessment, but if they decline to opt-in, they will not receive per pupil funds, as they receive funding for NWEA MAP assessments.</p> <p>*** The District recommends that small group math instruction be offered in transition grades; grade levels and students served by the program can be determined by the school.</p>				

**5. If I am opting-in to District options, do I need to complete the Flexibility Decision Form?**

Yes, all school leaders must complete the Flexibility Decision Form by February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018.

**6. If I am declining to opt-in to District options, do I need to complete the Flexibility Decision Form?**

Yes, all school leaders must complete the Flexibility Decision Form by February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018.

**7. Does the Universal Flexibility process apply to all schools? What about turnaround or tiered schools?**

All schools, including turnaround and tiered schools, participate in Universal Flexibilities. Schools do not need to earn these flexibilities through their performance, as DPS believes that flexibility is a tool to

accelerate student achievement. Schools in the Intensive Tier should reference their school snapshots when making their decisions to ensure alignment with previously identified priorities.

#### **8. What about innovation and IZone schools and other school waivers?**

All innovation school and waiver approvals are still in effect. Innovation schools, including IZone schools, are to follow the same timeline and process as traditional schools in terms of curriculum, curriculum-aligned summer professional learning, assessment, and small group instruction decisions. IZone schools that decline to opt-in are not required to attend a transition meeting (see question 14). Any school can choose to adopt a new resource outside of the adoption cycle, but will need to do so using its own funding.

## IMPLICATIONS OF UNIVERSAL FLEXIBILITY DECISIONS

#### **9. What exactly does opting-in mean? What about declining to opt-in?**

**Opting-Into** a Universal Flexibility area means that you are choosing to implement the option that the District is adopting and supporting. The District will ensure that your school receives all relevant materials and will provide ongoing support for your school through the implementation of the resource or program. Note that for small group instruction, schools may opt-into the Denver Math Fellows program or may opt-into central support of a school-determined math program. The specific support provided by DPS central teams based on a school's small group instruction decision is outlined in the [2018-19 Flexibility Decision Handbook](#).

**Declining to Opt-Into** a Universal Flexibility area means that you are choosing to not implement the resource that the District is adopting and supporting. In exchange, your school will receive devolvement funds (based on the cost of implementing the District-supported resource) which can be used to purchase, create, or implement an alternate resource or program. Central teams will still be able to provide select resource-agnostic supports to your school but do not have the ability to fully support more than the District-supported options. Schools choosing alternative offerings, therefore, will generally have to obtain supports from third parties or develop them through their own internal capacity.

The [2018-19 Flexibility Decision Handbook](#) (Chapter 2) outlines in detail the available curriculum, professional learning, assessment, and small group instruction options, as well as key information to support school leaders in understanding the implications of an opt-in vs. decline to opt-in decision.

#### **10. For how long does my Universal Flexibility decision apply?**

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 (including the K-5 Literacy Intervention Bundle) will be final for the duration of the adoption cycle, which varies in length (typically 5-8 years). Schools may implement new curricula at any time but typically only receive devolvement funds during the first year of the adoption for that specific content area and grade band. One exception of note is that schools declining to opt-in to the K-5 literacy intervention curriculum will receive devolvement funds on an annual basis for 7 years, in alignment with the District's contract with the opt-in vendor.
- **Professional Learning:** School leaders can only opt-into or decline to opt-into curriculum-aligned summer professional learning for the first year of implementation of a new curriculum. Note that after the first year of implementation, any school that has opted-into the District

curriculum can attend professional learning, regardless of whether or not they opted-into the aligned professional learning.

- **Assessment:** Opt-in or decline to opt-in decisions made around local assessments or READ ACT assessments can be revised on an annual basis, during the Universal Flexibility decision-making process. Please note that for continuity of data and student experience, schools should try to limit changing their assessment selections year to year. Furthermore, local assessment decisions should be made in alignment with the school's curriculum and data culture.
- **Small Group Instruction:** Opt-in or decline to opt-in decisions for small group instruction are now made every three years. This is intended to create stability at individual schools such that they can fully integrate the program into their school model. Decisions made for 2018-19 will be effective through the 2020-21 school year; schools will have the opportunity to revisit their decisions during the 2020-21 school year, for implementation in 2021-22 and beyond.

#### **11. Under what circumstances, if any, can Universal Flexibility decisions be reversed?**

- All 2018-19 Universal Flexibility decisions must be submitted by February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, and will be final on that date.
- Schools will have the opportunity to revisit their decisions when the next decision is being made, which is different for each area.
  - Since curriculum decisions are made in alignment with adoption cycles, schools can change their curricula at any time, but associated funding will not be made available outside of the year during which a new curriculum is adopted. The District will not provide additional funding or purchase additional materials for a specific grade band and content area until the subsequent adoption year.
  - Since the District only offers foundational professional learning in anticipation of the first year of implementation of a new curriculum, school leaders can only opt-into the curriculum-aligned summer professional learning at that time; all funding will be devolved during the first year of implementation for the duration of the adoption cycle.
  - Assessment decisions may be revised on an annual basis, during the annual Universal Flexibility process. Assessment decisions may not be revised mid-year.
  - Small group instruction decisions can be revised every three years; schools will have the opportunity to revisit their decisions during the 2020-21 school year for implementation in 2021-22 and beyond.

#### **12. Will I be provided District funding in any areas where I decline to opt-in?**

Yes, school leaders will receive funds from the District, or devolvement funds, to support the implementation of a resource or program in the school. These funds are calculated based on the cost of implementing the District-supported resource in opt-in schools. Based on the Universal Flexibility area, this may be determined based on a per-pupil, per-teacher, per-campus, or per-license cost. Note that for 9-12 local assessments, Pathway schools will not receive devolvement funds, as they already receive funding for NWEA MAP assessments. Specific devolvement amounts are in the [2018-19 Flexibility Decision Handbook](#) as well as in this [summary document](#).

#### **13. If I decline to opt-in, what are my next steps and for what will I be responsible?**

The [2018-19 Flexibility Decision Handbook](#) (Chapter 2) highlights key considerations for school leaders in making their decisions, including steps they will need to take to implement an alternative resource. Specifically, see the "School Responsibility: What is my school responsible for based on my decision?" section for each content area. Schools that decline to opt-into curriculum or assessment will be contacted once their decision has been submitted to schedule a transition meeting with their Instructional Superintendent, as well as content experts from C&I and/or ARE. The purpose of the

transition meeting is for school leaders to share their implementation plans so as to create a common understanding across all parties. These meetings are also to ensure that all legal requirements are incorporated in the plans.

After the transition meeting, strategic sourcing is available to support schools who have declined District resources in purchasing alternative materials, but it is the school's responsibility to ensure that materials are secured. Schools should also prepare their staff and community for the implementation of a new resource or program including, if applicable, notifying teachers of any summer professional learning by March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

### **14. Will I be held to different performance standards if I decline to opt-into the District's curriculum, professional learning, assessment, or small group instruction options? Who will monitor my school's performance?**

All schools will be held to the same performance standards, accountability metrics, and reporting requirements (e.g. UIP, school visit trackers), regardless of their Universal Flexibility decisions. Instructional Superintendents will have insight into the resources implemented at all schools, including those that have declined to opt-into District resources. This will enable them to coach and hold all schools accountable regardless of the resources used at each school.

School leaders who decline to opt-in (with the exception of IZone schools) are required to attend a transition meeting with their Instructional Superintendent and content experts from C&I/ARE to outline their intended implementation plan. The purpose of these meetings is to ensure that the resource or program they have selected meets all legal requirements, as well as to provide support to the school leader and the IS in thinking through how the school intends to implement their selected resource.

### **15. Does an Instructional Superintendent have to approve choices made by school leaders?**

According to the Equity and Empowerment document, in DPS, the default is that decisions are made at the school level. Universal Flexibility decisions are intended to be made by school leaders in collaboration with their school governance body (e.g. ILT, SLT, etc.). We encourage principals to discuss these decisions with their Instructional Superintendent, and we encourage ISs to give candid feedback, respecting the fact that the ultimate decision lies with the principal, so long as the resource, program, or plan identified by school meets legal requirements. More details on the role of the IS are available in the [Equity and Opportunity: School as the Unit of Change](#) theory of action.

## ELEMENTARY LITERACY BUNDLE QUESTIONS

### **16. Why are the Istation literacy intervention curriculum and Istation assessment bundled?**

The Istation curriculum and assessment are bundled because the Istation assessment is an integral component for the implementation of the Istation literacy intervention. In addition, best practice indicates that the efficacy of instruction is greater when interventions and assessments are closely aligned.

### **17. Should my tier 1 students use Istation?**

Istation's online, personalized learning platform is available for all students, not just students reading below grade level. In implementing this resource, schools should consider literacy best practices and the needs of their students. The online component of Istation is recommended as an independent

workstation during the small group portion of the literacy block; however, Istation should never supplant core literacy instruction with grade-level standards and curriculum. Further professional learning on best practices in the implementation of the Istation Reading Curriculum as a supplement and/or intervention will be available for teachers and leaders within K-5 Literacy Professional Learning in summer 2018.

**18. My school currently uses a different READ Act Assessment (not Istation). What should I consider in making my decision?**

Schools should consider how aligning their selected READ Act Assessment to their selected CDE-approved intervention curriculum can support efficient DDI practices and targeted instruction for struggling readers. If this is not possible with the school's current READ Act assessment of choice, it may be worth re-examining the previous READ Act decision to determine if opting-in to the Literacy Bundle (including related supports and professional learning) would result in stronger literacy outcomes for students at the school. Schools should also consider internal capacity and previous successes and challenges in accelerating progress for struggling readers.

## CURRICULUM QUESTIONS

**19. What curriculum is the District adopting this year?**

The curricula below are being adopted this year. For more information please see the [2018-19 Decision Handbook](#) or visit [flexibility.dpsk12.org](http://flexibility.dpsk12.org).

- For K-5 Literacy Intervention: [Istation Reading](#); note that this decision is bundled with the K-5 READ Act Assessment
- For 6-8 Science: [Amplify Science](#)
- For HS Social Studies (recommended sequence):
  - Geography: [McGraw Hill Networks: The Human and Physical World](#)
  - U.S. History: [National Geographic: America Through the Lens](#)
  - Civics: [McGraw Hill Networks: United States Government: Our Democracy](#)
  - Economics: [McGraw Hill Networks: Understanding Economics](#)

**20. What does this mean for grade band/content areas that are not being adopted in 2018-19?**

The District does not allocate dollars for new curriculum every year for all subjects and all grades; it is simply 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 curriculum areas. School leaders can choose to implement new resources in grades/content not up for adoption this year, but no devolvement funds will be available to them.

**21. Can schools choose to build their own curriculum?**

In certain content areas, yes. For middle school science and high school social studies, schools can develop their own curriculum. For elementary literacy intervention, schools cannot build their own curriculum; they must purchase a curriculum that has been [approved by CDE](#).

School leaders who are declining District options in favor of developing their own curriculum will need to meet with their Instructional Superintendent, as well as content experts from C&I, to outline their proposed implementation plan and ensure they understand the legal requirements they must fulfill. These transition meetings will be scheduled for February and March, once decisions are received.

## **22. What are the technology requirements for the different curriculum options?**

In order to implement the student application component of the district-adopted curricula, schools will need to ensure that students have access to devices at appropriate times.

- **Istation:** Refer to this [one-pager](#) for a list of devices that support the Istation curriculum.
- **Amplify Science:** In most modules of 16-20 days, students will need devices (with a 1:1 – 1:4 device:student ratio) four to five times. Refer to this [one-pager](#) for a list of devices that support Amplify.
- **McGraw Hill/National Geographic:** Refer to this [one-pager](#) for a list of devices that support these curricula.

Schools should consider how they are utilizing funding from the [technology bond and mill levies](#) to ensure an adequate number of devices available for student use. In all cases, total screen time should be kept at developmentally appropriate daily limits for students in primary grades.

## **23. Who represented my network/school in reviewing intervention curriculum materials?**

A diverse group of educators representing schools across DPS met over four days to review submitted CDE-approved literacy intervention curricula against a rubric developed from nationally known sources and adapted to meet the unique needs of DPS students. You can view the full list of committee members [here](#).

## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING QUESTIONS

### **24. Do schools opting-into District-adopted options need to attend District summer professional learning?**

This year, schools can opt-into or decline to opt-into curriculum-aligned summer professional learning for elementary literacy intervention, middle science, and high school social studies. If a school has opted-into a specific curriculum-aligned professional learning, it is expected that all relevant teachers attend the centralized summer professional learning. If a school has declined to opt-into that professional learning, teachers and leaders cannot attend the centralized summer professional learning.

Professional Learning beyond that associated with curriculum is not part of the Universal Flexibility process. For questions around requirements of other professional learning offerings outside of that which is offered through the Universal Flexibility process, please contact the [Professional Learning Team](#) or department experts.

## ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

### **25. Why is the District no longer supporting ANet as an opt-in option?**

While ANet continues to be a valuable partner for DPS, ANet assessments will no longer be supported as an opt-in option because DPS has developed a suite of comparable assessments and purchased the Illuminate platform to administer online assessments. DPS contracted with ANet originally in order to provide services while we worked internally to adopt an IMS (Illuminate DnA), train schools on the



functionality of that platform, and develop high quality, rigorous assessments of our own. Since we have the capability to support those resources and services in District schools for the 2018-19 school year, ANet is no longer needed as an opt-in option.

## SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION QUESTIONS

### **26. We have not previously partnered with Denver Math Fellows. Are we able to partner with Denver Math Fellows in 2018-2019?**

The Math Fellows program is available to current partner schools and/or schools allocated at least \$72,108 from the 2012 Mill for Math Instructional Supports. If a school would like to use other funds to supplement their 2012 Mill Allocation (and reach the \$72,108 minimum), they can have the program at their school. You can estimate your 2012 Mill allocation using this [calculator](#).

### **27. What happens if we choose not to opt-into Denver Math Fellows?**

All school are allocated funds from the 2012 Mill Levy to be used for math instructional supports. If you do not want to opt-into the Denver Math Fellows program, you have two options. The first option is to receive a dollar allocation as well as central support, as outlined in the [Universal Flexibility Decision Handbook](#). The second option is to receive a dollar allocation without central support.

### **28. Who hires, trains, and supervises the math fellows and school-determined interventionists?**

The Denver Math Fellows program will hire, train, and supervise all fellows if you opt-into Math Fellows. There is a designated fellow coordinator assigned to your school that will hire and manage your math fellows. If you would like to be involved in these hiring decisions, we can invite you to our hiring events. For schools that do not opt-into Math Fellows, but opt-into central supports, training of interventionists will be provided but no recruitment or hiring support will be provided.

### **29. What grades can Math Fellows serve at my school?**

We recommend serving transition years between elementary and middle school and between middle school and high school, meaning 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grades. This is a recommendation; we will defer to school based decisions on grades served for school specific reasons/data.

### **30. Is there flexibility about how Math Fellows are deployed at my school?**

We work to meet individual needs of schools when possible and in a way that does not compromise the program's non-negotiables, which are outlined in the [MOU](#).

### **31. For schools that do not opt-in to Math Fellows, how can school determined funds be used?**

Funds must be used in connection with math instructional supports, i.e., an interventionist, paraprofessionals, extra duty pay for teacher-led supports outside of the school day, curricular materials, and supplies for math instruction.

*This document will be updated regularly (last update 12/8/17).*

*Please email [flexibility@dpsk12.org](mailto:flexibility@dpsk12.org) with additional questions.*

***Additional resources are available on our website at [flexibility.dpsk12.org](http://flexibility.dpsk12.org).***