

DAC Meeting Minutes

PSD Boardroom

Wednesday, May 14 and Tuesday, May 27, 2025

6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Present

Meghan Archuleta	Ashley Barrett	Stephanie Cotton-Maceta	Adam Cronk
Tina Green	Jess Ellis Hagman	Marcy Lewis	Jodi Quass
Marybeth Rigali-Oiler	Alica Romero	Ian Rutherford	
Mark Strassberg	Michael Werner	Becky Woodcox	

Welcome and Introductions

Dwayne welcomed the committee members.

Approval of Minutes

The committee approved and seconded the April 16, 2025, meeting minutes as amended.

Preview Meeting Design and Announce BOE Approval – Ashley Barrett

Unified Improvement Plan Part 1 – Dwayne Schmitz

The UIP focuses on action steps for key priorities: literacy, mental health and belonging, and graduating with options. Dwayne emphasized that "literacy" extends beyond reading and writing to encompass high-quality instructional materials and evidence-based teaching across all subjects.

Following input from the DAC, the Academic Cabinet incorporates feedback into the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP). Some suggestions may require further vetting with other stakeholders, such as department directors and principals. The Board of Education then votes on the UIP for final approval. Once approved, the UIP is submitted to the state and becomes a public document.

The timing of this process is crucial: by getting Board approval in August, the district UIP serves as a guide for school improvement plans when administrators return in the fall, fostering system-wide alignment and consistency. This proactive approach ensures schools have a clear framework for setting goals. Dwayne highlighted that finalizing the UIP now, alongside recent budget negotiations, creates capacity for the committee to focus on family engagement in the fall.

UIP Action steps (May 14, 2025) group discussion:

Literacy 1A - High Quality Instructional Materials and Evidence Based Instructional Strategies

A notable update in the document is the addition of a comprehensive framework for high-quality instructional materials under point #1, a feature missing in the previous version the UIP now specifies the addition of:

- Essential standards
- Scope and sequence documents
- Pacing guides

- Professional development plans, including onboarding for new administrators.

These additions aim to provide guidance and ensure consistent instruction across the system.

Committee discussion/feedback:

- A question on the effectiveness of the recently adopted EL Education curriculum, specifically its quality and implementation challenges. While some teachers expressed concern, a committee member also raised questions about the alignment of these new literacy materials with academic standards, particularly regarding their grade-level appropriateness and perceived lack of engagement. A principal praised the EL Education curriculum's "Knowledge Block" for its strong content, integration of science and social studies, and promotion of higher-level thinking. However, a potential drawback is the long duration of modules. The "universal instruction" component (60 minutes) is seen as high-quality and provides consistent access for all students.
- The second 60-minute segment, focusing on differentiated and foundational literacy skills, is effective for K-2 students, aligning with best practices and current research. However, the curriculum presents challenges for 3rd-5th graders, as it's not designed to diagnose and address individual learning gaps effectively. Instead, it focuses on moving further with the knowledge block. Concerns are raised about the curriculum being overly scripted, limiting teacher autonomy, and forcing experienced teachers to abandon their best practices.
- A committee member questioned if the difficulties observed in grades 3-5 are linked to the typical age when reading difficulties become more apparent. Another speaker, having experience with the Skills Block (K-2), affirms its effectiveness in catching students with dyslexia and other needs. However, the issue arises when schools attempt to use K-2 Skills Block as Tier 2 support for 3rd-5th graders, as it's repetitive. There's a perceived "hole" in the curriculum for addressing the needs of older students who haven't mastered K-2 skills.

Despite these challenges, Dwayne states that internal "pulse surveys" and achievement outcomes show strong positive data regarding the curriculum's effectiveness district-wide, especially in addressing the needs of students most in need. They confirm the investment was a "good move" based on the science of reading, and that the adoption process was comprehensive. While acknowledging it's "not perfect," they emphasize it's a significant step in the right direction and the system will work out imperfections over time.

Pacing Guides and Syllabi

The discussion focused on the development and implementation of pacing guides and common syllabi to ensure instructional consistency across the school district. These guides are developed collaboratively by curriculum facilitators and lead teachers within each subject area. This ensures that the guides are created by those who understand the practicalities of teaching.

The implementation of these guides is a gradual process due to the cyclical nature of curriculum adoptions (e.g., 5-year plans). The goal is to move away from simply delivering materials to a more structured, system-wide approach.

A "pacing guide" defines the ordering and timeframe for teaching specific units and standards within a course, ensuring students across different schools are generally at the same point in the curriculum. This benefits mobile students and allows principals to monitor instructional progress. However, a concern was raised that strict pacing guides could limit teachers' ability to personalize instruction and respond to individual student needs, potentially hindering the growth of advanced learners. While acknowledged as a "guide" and not a rigid rule, Dwayne emphasized its importance for system alignment, especially in sequential subjects like math, to prevent students from having critical learning gaps when moving between classes or schools.

The current approach, where teachers collaborate to create these guides, aims to establish a shared understanding of appropriate instructional progression for each grade level, thereby improving overall system effectiveness. The committee also briefly touched on the importance of addressing resource disparities between schools to ensure the equitable implementation of these new approaches.

Enhancing Tiered Supports and Clarity

The committee emphasized the need for clearer communication around the district's tiered support system, often referred to as Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). To ensure everyone understands, especially parents, what each tier means:

- The document should clearly explain what each tier (Tier 1: universal support; Tier 2: additional learning opportunities; Tier 3: intensive support) means, moving beyond reliance on hyperlinks.
- Discussions highlighted the importance of empowering parents to advocate for their children and ensuring language used makes them feel heard.
- GT students should be explicitly recognized within the MTSS framework, acknowledging their unique needs and risk factors, similar to how other student populations are addressed. A bell curve diagram was suggested to visually represent that extremes on both ends of the learning spectrum are equally important.
- It's crucial to communicate that students can move between tiers and that tiered support is distinct from an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Family Engagement

A significant addition to each priority's action steps is the formal integration of family engagement. This establishes it as a crucial fourth pillar of the educational system, alongside high-quality instructional materials, data-informed decisions, and professional learning.

The plan aims for families to be engaged in decision-making, progress monitoring, and support strategies. This includes making online pacing guides and all educational materials readily available to parents, with the curriculum department assisting if schools

cannot. While existing resources are accessible, the district currently lacks formal methods for tracking and increasing family engagement.

The DAC will play a vital role in this collaborative process, helping to define effective family engagement, create data collection instruments, and determine how that data will be shared. The wording in section 1A4 of the plan will also be revised to use more active and clear language, consistent with other sections, to improve overall clarity and transparency. These efforts are expected to foster a more transparent and collaborative environment for families, ultimately benefiting students by ensuring parents are true partners in their children's education, rather than simply having access to overwhelming information.

Unified Improvement Plan Part 2 – Dwayne Schmitz (May 27, 2025)

Present:

Ashley Barrett	Clare Barquero	Tena Green	Jess Ellis Hagman
Marcy Lewis	Jodi Quass	Marybeth Rigali-Oiler	
Ian Rutherford	Becky Woodcox		

Dwayne outlined updates to the UIP, noting that the first page remains largely unchanged, with minor language adjustments in the last two paragraphs to specify students with advanced learning needs and those working toward grade level. The significant changes begin on page 2, which details the importance of the Colorado MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) framework for both student groups. MTSS is designed to support "all students" across the entire learning spectrum, and this framework (universal, targeted, and intensive supports) will also be applied to professional learning for adults and new technology rollouts. This indicates a district-wide commitment to the Colorado MTSS framework.

Dwayne also discussed the timeline for presenting the document to the board, opting for the first August meeting instead of June due to scheduling. He expressed confidence that board approval would follow DAC support, allowing schools to receive guidance in a timely manner.

Committee discussion/feedback:

UIP Brief Description, Pg. 1

- Principals have the flexibility to tailor their school improvement plans based on their school's specific data and needs, meaning they might choose to emphasize certain aspects of the district's overall plan. However, some key initiatives are considered district-wide work and will be implemented across all schools regardless of a principal's individual focus. For example, the ICAP (Individual Career and Academic Plan) initiative is a district-wide effort, and all staff, including counselors, will become more aware of and engaged with it due to state legislation and district leadership. Similarly, the implementation of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) is a systematic process from selection to deployment. This means that every school will be impacted by these changes, especially with significant investments in curriculum, regardless of whether a principal highlights them in their

school's specific improvement plan. Dwayne emphasized that the "big three" initiatives—referring to the Colorado MTSS framework, high-quality instructional materials, and ICAP-aligned opportunities—will be integrated into district-controlled professional learning days. This ensures that all staff receive the necessary training and information.

- An elementary school representative voiced a concern that while their primary focus is on teaching foundational skills like reading, writing, and math, much of the district's Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) seems geared towards secondary education, potentially overwhelming elementary staff.
 - Dwayne acknowledged this perspective, clarifying that while the third priority—post-secondary awareness—is more prevalent in high schools and middle schools (with some elementary pilot programs), the first two priorities are highly relevant to elementary schools:
 - Relevance of Priorities to Elementary Education
 - High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM): the HQIM component is a strong focus at the elementary level.
 - Colorado MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports): Similarly, the MTSS framework is also a strong priority for elementary education.
 - Therefore, two of the three main priorities directly impact elementary schools. These three overarching themes will be consistently present throughout the district's plan.
- Here's how we've integrated previously distinct focus areas like dyslexia, career/certification opportunities, and absenteeism/truancy after reducing our main focus areas from seven to three:
 - Dyslexia is now covered within the broader MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) framework.
 - Career and credit/degree/certification opportunities are encompassed under the ICAP (Individual Career and Academic Plan).
 - Absenteeism and truancy are addressed within the section of mental health and belonging.
- Teachers and parents can use the publicly available district plan to ensure that district-wide initiatives, such as MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) and the use of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), are being implemented at their schools. While these first two priorities are relevant to all schools, the third priority, ICAP (Individual Career and Academic Plan), is primarily for middle and high schools, with limited elementary pilots. The plan serves as a tool for accountability, allowing staff and families to initiate conversations with principals if they observe a lack of implementation, reinforcing the district's commitment to these written priorities. The plan is posted on the CDE website annually, ensuring public access and transparency.
- The core, long-term objective of the district's Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) is to provide equitable learning opportunities and disrupt disproportionalities in outcome data. This means the district aims to eliminate the predictability of student outcomes based on characteristics like ethnicity or socioeconomic status, ensuring that work ethic is the primary determinant of success. While acknowledging that this is a complex, long-term goal, the UIP strives to make clear progress toward it.

- Dwayne addressed concerns about the data in the document, clarifying that it currently reflects last year's figures as new data (MAPS, CMAS, PSAT) is still being finalized by the district. Data views will be updated over the summer before presenting the document to the board. A notable concern is a recent downward trend in math growth scores across all levels (elementary, middle, and high school). While overall achievement remains high, the declining growth is prompting the district to explore specific improvement strategies for math, including a potential elementary math curriculum adoption in the near future. This is similar to a previous focus on reading where high achievement was accompanied by declining growth. It was noted that this as an area of "curiosity" that the district will continue to investigate, and while no definitive strategy is in the current plan, one may be added over the summer.
- A participant inquired about the falling graduation rates for students with IEPs. Dwayne responded that this issue has their "full attention," noting that Jody Rommel, the Director of Integrated Services, is actively investigating whether the district is adequately identifying and supporting these students. This pattern is a significant concern for the district.
- A participant questioned the inconsistent bolding in the document, suggesting it diminished emphasis on key points. There is no strict rule to bolding, bolding is used to highlight "core concepts" for quick scanning, like "disrupting disproportionality." Both agreed that overuse of bolding reduces its effectiveness.

Literacy 1A – High Quality Instructional Materials and Evidence-Based Instructional Strategies

Dwayne detailed changes made to the document, particularly on page 21 under the section for High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM). Specifically, Action Step Implementation Benchmarks (25-26): Under sub-letter E, the phrase "administration "look for" guidance" was made more explicit to specify "guidance related to the evidence-based aspects of curriculum implementation."

Key Performance Indicators (KPI) (G): The description was expanded from "evidence-based aspects of curriculum" to include "assessment of student outcomes," making it clear that outcomes should be measured and assessed.

Committee discussion/feedback:

- When questioned about how "high-quality complex text" is managed and defined, Dwayne explained that its measurement involves both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative measures primarily involve reading levels, such as Lexile measures, which can be assessed using electronic tools for any text. However, this only indicates difficulty, not complexity or quality. Qualitative measures involve human judgment, often by licensed teachers or literacy staff working collaboratively in professional learning communities. These assessments consider aspects like the text's purpose, structure, language clarity, and knowledge demands. Rubrics are used to guide this qualitative evaluation. Additionally, reading task consideration is a crucial element. This involves assessing what the reader is asked to do with the text, such as finding evidence for a debate or analyzing information. The complexity

of the task depends on the learner and the environment. Dwayne acknowledged that while the district's curriculum and instruction department trains staff on these methods, fully implementing this across all staff takes time due to competing professional development priorities. Despite this, the district is systematically rolling out these training programs, similar to dyslexia training, with the understanding that full penetration throughout the system will be a gradual process. Dwayne concluded that text complexity is indeed measurable and knowable, though it involves some level of judgment.

Literacy 1B – Equitable Grading Practices

- The discussion centered on the district's shift towards achievement-based grading and away from including "work habits" or "extra credit" in academic grades, aiming for greater equity. The speaker explained that while work habits are crucial, they should be incentivized through non-grading methods like verbal acknowledgment, token systems, or special responsibilities, rather than affecting core academic grades. This is because linking grades to work habits can disproportionately disadvantage students facing home challenges (e.g., parents working multiple jobs). A key concern raised was how this system impacts students with chronic absenteeism, who often feel too far behind to return to school due to zeros or low grades. Dwayne mentioned concepts from "Grading for Equity," including replacing zeros with a minimum grade (e.g., 50%) to prevent students from digging an insurmountable "hole" mathematically. Additionally, opportunities for retaking assessments are crucial, with parameters requiring students to demonstrate effort and rework problems. The core philosophy is to focus on demonstration of learning rather than just a single performance, allowing for various ways students can show mastery. The middle school level is currently leading the charge in exploring and implementing these new grading philosophies.
- The discussion focused on how equitable grading practices align with standards-based grading (SBG). Dwayne explained that SBG naturally supports equity by focusing on competencies around essential standards and allowing diverse ways for students to demonstrate learning. A key principle is that a student's grade should reflect their "highest level of proficiency reliably demonstrated," not an average of all attempts, addressing concerns about students getting stuck with low grades due to early struggles. This approach also encourages retakes, provided students demonstrate effort and rework problems. A participant expressed concern that the document assumes a shared understanding of "equitable grading practices," which is primarily derived from the book "Grading for Equity," potentially leading to misinterpretation. Dwayne acknowledged this, stating the plan cannot be a "cookbook" and relies on other resources. He clarified that middle schools are currently serving as a "lab" for systematically developing and implementing these practices, a multi-year process that began with building readiness among principals. The intention is for these successful practices to eventually spread to high school and then elementary levels. The district has been aware of equitable grading concepts for several years, with initial pilot programs, but is now pursuing a more systematic rollout in middle schools, recognizing the need to study outcomes and unintended consequences before wider implementation. The primary

motivation for this shift is to prevent students from giving up due to being unable to recover from early low grades.

Mental Health & Belonging

2A Positive School Climate and Culture

The district's approach to Mental Health and Belonging, spearheaded by Liz Davis and her team, is grounded in a multi-tiered system of support with a positive behavior intervention focus. The core belief is that every student should feel welcome, valued, included, and respected. Social-emotional learning focuses on helping students develop social competencies and self-regulation skills, recognizing that these are crucial for learning. Due to limited bandwidth, direct education in social-emotional learning is currently focused on 4th and 6th graders, chosen based on connections data, behavior data, and developmental stages. The long-term goal, however, is to expand this support to more grade levels as capacity grows, mirroring the phased rollout of equitable grading practices.

Committee discussion/feedback:

- During the discussion of Positive School Climate and Culture (2A), a participant raised a perceived issue regarding the district's policy on transgender students' access to bathrooms and locker rooms. The participant described a situation where some girls felt unsafe due to the presence of transgender students in their facilities, leading to some girls avoiding these spaces. The participant argued that this policy undermines parental teachings on modesty and safety, suggesting the district prioritizes specific ideologies over the beliefs of some families, thus negating true inclusivity. Dwayne mentioned that this specific issue cannot be resolved within the current meeting or through the UIP. Instead, he proposed a future discussion for the DAC (District Accountability Committee), inviting relevant experts to provide information and discuss PSD policies/practices related to the issue raised.
- One participant asked how the "Mental Health and Belonging" section of the UIP is measured and tracked within a data-driven framework?
 - Connections Data: This provides insight into how safe and connected students feel to their peers and adults.
 - Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Components: We directly measure the five SEL components.
 - Healthy Kids Colorado Survey: Administered at all middle and high schools, this survey yields valuable information.
 - SEL Literacy Adoption: We're considering a uniform SEL curriculum that would include assessments, further enhancing our data collection.
- PSD is committed to fostering a positive school climate and culture, recognizing that continuous growth and learning are needed.
- A participant expressed strong support for the cell phone policy included in the document, advocating for even stricter regulations. They believe research and data support tightening the current guidelines, which offer a balance of "tight and loose" approaches.
- A participant expressed concern that the district's Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) didn't explicitly address discrepancies in suspension and expulsion data for Black

and brown students, a topic previously explored in relation to School Resource Officers (SROs).

- Dwayne clarified that significant work has indeed been done in this area. SRO contracts were re-evaluated and renewed based on clear community support for their role in safety. At that time, the Equity Insight Dashboard was also created to monitor discrepancies in various areas, including academic outcomes, integrated services identifications, and post-secondary opportunities. Dwayne asserted that while disparities still exist, the district has made progress in closing these gaps and continues to monitor them.
- The discussion addressed the impending end of federal grant, raising concerns about negative impact on district support services and possibly student outcomes. Due to shrinking central office department funding the previous model of deploying specialized staff to schools for direct services is becoming less sustainable. The district is focusing on professional development for school-based staff. They also aim to leverage technology and smarter systems to deliver services more efficiently. This means that while some core services will continue, the level of direct service previously provided by central teams is likely to decrease. Dwayne sees this as an opportunity to foster stronger relationships with community agencies, allowing for a more collaborative approach to service provision.
- Conversation revolved around the concept of trauma-informed approach within schools, specifically its placement under "Tier 1" (universal support) in the district's action steps. Initially, a participant questioned why trauma-informed practices, which they associated with more severe issues, were not in Tier 2 or 3.
 - Dwayne and other participants clarified that trauma-informed means being aware of potential past traumas when interacting with students. It's about approaching situations with understanding rather than immediate judgment or assumption.
 - The consensus was that trauma-informed practices are a foundational, universal approach (Tier 1) that should permeate all interactions. While educators aren't expected to be counselors, this approach helps foster a supportive environment where all students can learn.

2B Attendance/Tuancy

- No changes needed

Graduate with Options

3A From Data to Actions: Responsive Systemic Improvement

This section is fundamentally aligned with the district's Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework. This initiative is fully underway, with a district implementation team already formed and actively meeting. The district's primary focus for this initiative is on Tier 1 (universal support), aiming to ensure foundational systems are robust and effective across the board. The rationale is that a strong Tier 1 best serve students and minimizes the need for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. They also emphasized building strong expertise within district leadership to ensure a well-informed rollout. This effort involves collaboration between central office staff and school-based personnel. The speaker

concluded that this is a long-term, multi-year endeavor that will continue to evolve and improve within the district's plan.

Only minor formatting adjustments were needed to this section.

3B Multiple Post-Secondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR) Options

This section focuses on the goal of increasing matriculation to four-year and two-year colleges, skilled trades, military, and work.

Committee discussion/feedback:

- A participant questioned the measurability of "work" in this context, concerned that a broad definition might inflate success rates. Dwayne clarified that "matriculate" simply means "move on" to these post-secondary opportunities. While college and military matriculation are tracked by organizations like the National Student Clearinghouse and state departments, tracking students entering the workforce directly is more challenging, though a consistent senior exit survey now gathers self-reported plans.
- The speaker emphasized that the true goal is not solely about what students do after graduation, but rather ensuring they graduate with the option to pursue their desired path, whether that's college, skilled trades, military, or work, and feel prepared to do so. A suggestion was made to include a self-efficacy measure in the senior exit survey to gauge how prepared students feel for their next steps, which Dwayne acknowledged as a valuable idea to assess the district's impact on student readiness.

Dwayne asked the group for a consensus on whether the current draft of the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP), with the discussed comments and changes, was ready to be presented to the board for a vote. The group expressed general approval, indicating they were comfortable with the UIP moving forward.

DAC Recruitment – Dwayne Schmitz

Dwayne provided an update on recruiting staff for DAC, confirming an elementary principal's interest and the need to secure a teacher and classified staff member over the summer.

Closing Reflections and Next Steps – Ashley Barrett

Closing

The next DAC meeting will be on August 20, 2025, JSSC Boardroom, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Adjourned

Parking Lot Items:

Further discussion is needed on the description of "**Mental Health and Belonging, Positive School Climate and Culture (2A)**" and how it resonates with everyone.