

DSST PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Board of Directors Retreat

October 15, 2014

DSST: Byers Middle School, 150 S. Pearl Street, Denver, CO 80209

Room 227

8:00: Breakfast

8:05: Day Overview, Goals and Tom K recognition (Steve H, Steve M, and Bill)

Goals for the day:

1. Target Exploration
 - a. Series of next steps for DSST in Denver
2. Building capacity
3. How to continue and work together as a Board

8:25: DSST – 10 years in (Bill)

- Why are we here?
 - It is critical we answer this question every year
 - Percent of new enrollments that go to the most selective schools:
 - White- 82%
 - Hispanic 13%
 - African American- 9%
 - People with college degrees earn 98% more than those who don't
 - Drop-outs: 1 every 29 seconds, 6,000 per day, 1.1 million per year
- We've come a long way
- Current reality
 - 6 middle schools, 3 high schools, 3,400 students
 - 80% minority, 65% low-income
 - Opening 4th high school in summer 2015- bringing total number of students to 4,000
 - Between 2015-2021 DSST will open 1 more middle school and 3 more high schools
 - By 2022, DSST will serve 6,500 students in 14 schools- 18% of DPS 6-12 population
 - By 2022, DSST will be the 26th largest CO district
- Gap in Southeast Denver- potential campus 7 location
- Impact
 - Exceeded expectations
- Core strengths
 - Values driven organization
 - Strong team
 - Delivering consistent excellence
 - A model that addresses core societal needs
 - DSST brand
 - Fundraising
 - Strong partnership with DPS and Denver
- Core challenges

- Human Capital pipeline
- Building world-class systems to support growth
- Centralization vs. De-centralization
- Common Core shift (math and reading)
 - DSST students took their first common core math test and scores went down. This does not mean we are underperforming, it means we need to increase our rigor.
 - There are winners and losers with the Common Core, currently a big gap amongst schools that have shifted to Common Core
 - Common Core shift is a big challenge for DPS and the State
- 4 year college readiness for our lowest performing middle school students
- College completion at non-selective colleges
 - Challenge: not enough selective colleges within driving distance of Denver
- Opportunities
 - To build a foundation of excellence
 - Reach a true scale of impact in Denver both on students and the education system that can “flip” Denver
 - Help students inside and outside the classroom. Prepare them for college, career, and life.
 - To redefine the way Colorado views districts- through a new performance paradigm
 - To consider regional or national expansion
 - To re-examine our model and to re-invent ourselves where needed
 - To lead the way on new human capital paradigms
 - Develop teachers and leaders
 - Core challenge to change current status (nation-wide issue)
- Threats
 - Lack of human capital pipeline to fuel growth
 - An inability to strengthen our culture of values, innovation, and ownership as we scale
 - Denver political risk with a board or superintendent change
 - Ed reform is a term we should avoid, it’s too vague
 - How do we define the space we want to dominate?
 - National political risk
 - Resources- the state continues to underfund public education
 - Keeping core leadership team in place
 - Common Core implementation
- Strategic Priorities for 2014-2015
 - Academic Interventions
 - Fulfillment
 - Professional Develop
 - Leadership Pipeline
- Long Term Strategy
 - Strategic questions
 - Targeted learning
 - Capacity building
 - New questions
 - Refinement
 - Action
- Questions for today:
 - What is the opportunity to increase our impact in Denver?

- What is the opportunity to increase our impact in Colorado?
- Denver impact
 - Greater impact= more schools, partnering with DPS
 - More schools- how many?
 - Partnering with DPS- How impactful? Cost-benefit? In what areas?
 - A good time to act- we have maximum leverage and the right politics
- Colorado impact
 - Where will/should we grow?
 - Challenges?
 - What would it take?
 - Parameters:
 - 4 school minimum (2-6-12s)
 - No turnarounds
 - Buildings
 - Equal funding
 - Human Capital?

8:50 Board – How are we working together? How can grow? (Steve M and Heather)

- Board performance and efficiency
 - Overall effectiveness- 4.27 (1-5 scale, 1= very ineffective, 5= very effective)
 - Compare to where we were last year
 - Outliers:
 - No plan for Risk Management (3.27/5)
 - Lack of understanding
 - Financial health of DSST (3.73/5)
 - Lack of understanding
 - High core value scores
 - School Accountability Committees
 - Lack of clarity
 - Who should be on them
 - Still not sure what is going on in schools after meeting
 - Low ranking on succession plan (2.89/5)
 - Board Development
 - Not enough engagement with staff and students
 - Board needs to get up to speed with current education issues (i.e. Common Core shift)
 - Board Meeting
 - Not enough time to discuss issues in depth
 - Re-think format of Board Meetings
 - Board Accountability
 - Do individual board plans increase board member accountability?
 - Grade: B+
- What's next
 - Nominating/Governance Committee will dig into the critical issues
 - Compare results to previous years
 - Come back with to the Board with recommendations
 - Discuss recommendations in depth in the future; deep dive at Board Meeting

9:30 Survey Results Follow up – Discussion of Key issues (George Sparks)

- What's Next for DSST
 - Two buckets:
 - Practical- what we are currently doing
 - Bigger Picture- aspirational aspect
 - Great consistency amongst Board Members, fell into one of these two buckets
 - Two options- a thought leader or a leader in actions
 - Possible to be a thought leader and have impact if we innovate from our core
 - Tons of things to consider= what is our model for impact?
 - Best way to increase our impact- do what we do well
 - We do best by executing on components (values driven, excellence, rigor, STEM) and delivering our mission
 - Don't stray from our comfort zone
 - What does DSST represent?
 - Excellence
 - Integrated model
 - STEM
 - Values driven
 - Culture
 - Our vision and mission never changes
 - Put time, energy, and money into core competencies
 - Community perspective of DSST:
 - Rigorous
 - STEM
 - Super STEM- STEM on steroids (high/upper end students can succeed, an average student can't succeed), do we over sell on STEM?
 - General audience does not connect STEM with DSST (DSST Brand Survey)
 - I don't understand what a charter is?
 - Charter district divide that is not smaller than it was 10 years ago
 - Good results
 - DSST Brand is specialized
- Must have a strategy to bring others in
 - Must deliver in order for people to listen
 - Must have scale to be included in the conversation
- What has impact, what doesn't?
 - Must be gold plated to have impact (highest quality schools)
- Is incremental change a part of the mission?
 - Yes
- One idea: Let's get bigger, let's get a bigger market share
- Not a linear equation, if we do X then everyone else follows
- What do we consider success if we think about a bigger impact?
 - Where would we have the biggest impact
 - What increases impact if we grow larger
 - What decreases impact if grow larger
 - Different ways to have more impact besides opening more seats
- What is the right market place to play in?
 - State?
 - National?
 - Tons of momentum in Denver

- A lot of market left in Denver
- If the goal is to transform urban education- Board needs to agree on a strategy and focus on it
- To transform urban education, does that mean to:
 - Grow in Denver
 - Grow nationally
 - Become consultants

10:30 Break

10:40 Denver Impact – Panel (facilitated by George S)

- **Van Scholes, Executive Director of A+ Denver**
- Urban districts, Denver being one of them, all have changed incrementally over time
- Creating quality seats does not necessarily flip the system; it does have an impact but not the kind of changes you expect to see, more superficial changes
- What should DSST do?
 - Pretty big market; Aurora, as an example, in terms of needs being met
 - Benefit of going cross district, better understanding of what districts are doing well and not doing well
- Applications are going down amongst some of our schools- power isn't STEM, it's a high quality liberal arts school
- Is our vision to be STEM schools?
 - Big market for a slightly different brand of DSST
- DSST has the potential of having a big impact in recruiting, training, and developing high quality leaders
- Need to focus on what happens to students after high school; calibrating what quality looks like from that data
- There is a definite need for more but unsure how much more and what the appetite is
- Senior leadership will need to evaluate what works well and what doesn't work well
 - Continuing to implement what works well
 - Double down on what doesn't work well
- **Anne Rowe, Vice Chair DPS Board, Denver Plan Leader**
- DSST has a great opportunity to grow
- Denver Plan has been revised, now have Denver Plan 2020, a very powerful statement, now we are working on strategies to achieve our goals and implement the plan
- DPS does a horrible job of recruiting, developing, and supporting leaders= must get this right
- Denver marketplace is a good marketplace to expand, Board of Education will be willing to be quite bold moving forward
- Desire to move forward with DSST is there but must have conversations on how we accomplish it
- Some of our high performing schools are performing like high performing charters, this is growing the appetite in areas for DSST schools
- Need to bring in high performing models into schools that are not high performing (turnarounds)= very different way of how DSST has been approaching things previously
- It's really important to remember that it's a two way street- public schools and charter schools need to start putting the walls down, start communicating and getting ideas from each other. We are both working towards the same goal.

- If DSST is going to have long term change then changes need to be made in the fundamental engine room of DPS
- The unit of change is the school and we need to change the structure within DPS to drive changes in every school
- Board is meeting to discuss how they work together to innovate change

11:30 Lunch

12:00 Colorado – is there opportunity for DSST to expand in Colorado (facilitated by George S)

- **Peter Sherman, CDE, Director of Turnarounds**
 - The idea of DSST expanding is fantastic
 - Pathways for underperforming schools= closing them, having a charter take them over, bringing in an external organization to run them
 - STEM brand is very positive
 - Expanding into other districts= selling ourselves that we (DSST) can help with issues the district/school are currently grappling with
- **Rebecca Holmes, CDE Associate Commissioner of Choice, Innovation and Engagement**
 - There is a need for DSST schools outside of DPS specifically in areas of poverty
 - There are communities that haven't seen what's possible within their schools. Parent Engagement is under realized outside of Denver.
 - Consider a proof point strategy to get some listening
- **Elaine Berman, State Board of Education Member, Congressional District 1**
 - The way that Denver approaches charter schools is very unique and Denver is strategic on the locations they place charter schools
 - It would be fantastic if DSST can expand beyond Denver= provide a high quality education for a diverse student population
 - The winners of the elections are key in whether education reform will keep moving forward or be reversed
 - Many schools are looking at ways to get out of certain requirements and are looking at charter status- keep this in mind with expansion
 - Perceptions are arising that charters are bad and are taking money away from other schools; why now? Politics are taking over the education debate
 - Scary time for public education in Colorado and in the nation because it's become so politicized
 - DSST is perceived as having a lot of money and having access to a lot of money= appealing
- Criteria for expansion of DSST outside of DPS:
 - District is:
 - Growing
 - Big achievement gap
 - Welcoming
 - Growth opportunities in the future
 - 4 school minimum
 - 50% diversity
- Challenges we would need to understand for expanding outside of Denver:
 - Superintendent that is welcoming and supportive
 - Majority of school board is supportive
 - How welcoming the teachers union is
 - Relationship between superintendent, school board, and teachers

- Parents
 - Facilities
 - Revenue
- Denver problem: how big is this hurdle for us?
 - Public message must be: a charter would be a good solution for your community
- Is the superintendent and board the only place to go for support?
 - Be careful of mayors, it depends if they got elected by teacher unions
 - Might have to go to multiple state congressional districts

1:00 Break

1:10 Board Discussion on Denver and Colorado Opportunities (Facilitated by George S and Steve H)

- **Outline of factors to consider (Bill)**
- **Board discussion**
- What did we learn today?
- DSST:
 - Talked about future options:
 - More students
 - National, Region, State
 - Help district
 - SVCs
 - Leadership
 - PD
 - Solve problem
 - Spin out leaders
 - Perceived as rich
 - Structure vs. independence, “Gradual release”
 - Accepting more students with special needs
 - Every student reaches potential
 - Human capital/Leadership catalyst
 - Fragile pipeline (geographically)
- Colorado:
 - District perspectives
 - The “Denver” Problem
 - Proof point: Anschutz (Top 5 districts)
 - District size (30 out of 178 are greater than 5,000)
 - State School Board risk
 - Districts get charter/innovation status
 - District accountability
 - Colorado Takeaways:
 - Dual strategy- Denver is primary, Colorado is secondary
 - Looking for a proof point like Anschutz/ Willing to entertain discussions
 - Election in Colorado may change everything. As State may be less supportive of charter growth
 - Not yet ready for Colorado expansion/ Need Denver 1st
 - General DSST Board consensus: do both
 - DSST is at the top of influence, will change very quickly
 - A lot different to build capacity than choose capacity

- Play to make= go to a foundation partner and ask for them to do and commission research for us
- Denver:
 - Leadership sclerosis
 - 2 levels below Boasberg
 - More challenges than we thought
 - Flavors of DSST
 - A DSST “DSA”
 - Not just add “A” to “STEM”
 - DSST= Best school does not equal Super STEM
 - Tipping point?
 - Denver Plan 2020- no clear strategies
 - Boasberg shelf life
 - Grow/Execute DSST 2022 plan
 - Grow in Southeast/Northwest corridor
 - More quality seats, more equity
 - Communicate how we help DPS to build our brand
 - Denver- Tentative decisions/ Hypotheses
 - If opportunity for more schools:
 - Where? How quickly?
 - More charters in the spring (for 2016 and on)
 - Facilities commitment ahead of time (2016 bond)
 - Should know what other charters have planned (where is demand?)
 - Little support for using resources for services to DPS (i.e. capacity building for ourselves)
 - Interest in another theme:
 - Yes, if a distinction without a difference
 - What is facility availability?
- Two-prong strategy:
 - Grow as much as we can in Denver
 - How much?
 - Definitely more room for DSST grow
 - Let’s go for it, the time is now
 - Grow in adjacent district outside of Denver
- Not going to a national strategy is a smart move= different game

2:30 Next Steps for learning, Next steps of DSST

- **Board Growth - next steps**
- **What is next for DSST**
- What do we need to learn about what’s next for DSST
 - Profile/paradigm of what we want to know/ ideal profile
 - Commission research from a foundation about top 5-10 markets for Colorado expansion. Also what resources we need to add to pursue some
 - Conversations with non-Denver residents
 - What do parents/students think of DSST: Brand Survey deep dive
 - Learn about “Reddi”
 - Understand risk of common core testing (scores going down)

- Facilities in Denver?
- Next steps for improving Board Operations:
 - “A” Board from “B+”
 - Reformatting Board Meetings
 - 2:00-5:30pm not 2:30-5:00pm
 - Structuring meetings for a 1 hour deep dive learning/building capacity?
 - Expected to read materials beforehand and ask questions
 - Send questions before meeting
 - Less time on committee reports
 - Focus on results, what have you accomplished?
 - More meat in School Director Reports?
 - Restructure School Director share out?
 - Balance strategy discussions with learning more about school operations
 - Arrive early and tour school
 - Timely delivery of:
 - Committee Charters/ Results
 - Personal Board Plans/ Results
- Retreat Evaluation:
 - What’s Next for DSST- right set of questions, right set of next steps- 5
 - Learning- 5
 - Good steps on improving Board Operations- 3.5
- Deliverables:
 - Next iteration of Denver Plan at next Board Meeting (November)
 - January Board Meeting- Colorado Expansion discussion
 - Nominating and Governance Committee- deep dive into board evaluation

3:00 Adjourn