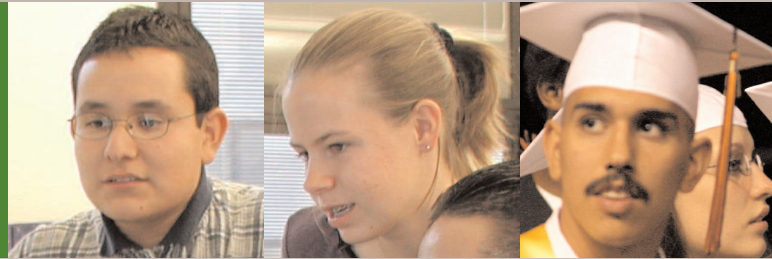


Summit Wrap Up



Of the more than 70 attendees, 89 percent reported that the summit helped advance their schools' specific plans. Another 87 percent rated the summit above average or outstanding in strengthening team relationships. When asked to evaluate the most useful aspect of the Principal's Summit, team members' comments included:

- *"Sharing ideas and creating action plans and next steps to build a better learning community was great."* – North High team member
- *"Having time to talk and plan. These are important issues that deserve great thought and planning."* – South High team member
- *"Time to go beyond 'discussion' and actually get to the planning."* – Thomas Jefferson High team member
- *"Working toward a common goal – graduating kids – and being able to network with other schools."* – West High team member
- *"The concentrated time purely dedicated to strategy. It can be very difficult to take the time to strategize during the school year."* – East High team member
- *"Concrete progress on our RTI process."* – Abraham Lincoln High team member

SPONSORS

America's Promise Alliance

The America's Promise Alliance is a national collaborative dedicated to working together for the success and well-being of children and youth. Its national campaign to reduce high school dropout rates involves summit meetings in all 50 states and in 50 key cities to outline clear, actionable steps for significantly improving graduation rates.

Denver Public Schools

The Denver Public School District (DPS) student population of 73,000 is comprised of students from 74 countries and who speak 81 languages. DPS's mission is to provide all students with the opportunity to achieve the knowledge and skills necessary to become contributing citizens in our diverse society.

The Mayor's Office for Education and Children

The Mayor's Office for Education and Children advocates for the children and youth of Denver, serves as the City's liaison to Denver Public Schools, and develops policies and initiatives to help every child in the City grow up confident, strong, smart and skillful.

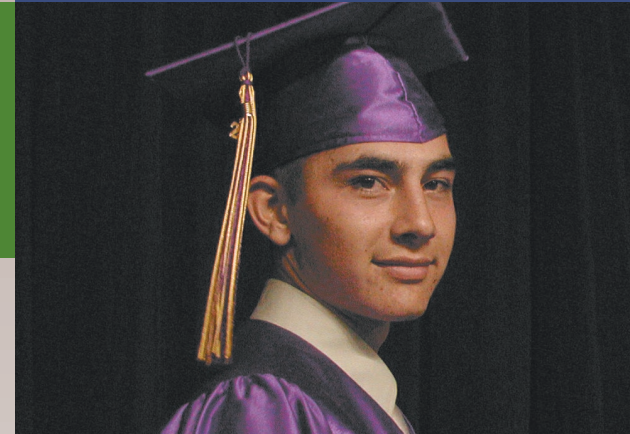
For more information contact:

The Mayor's Office for Education and Children

201 W. Colfax Ave., Dept. 1101, Denver, Colorado 80202
720-913-0900 www.denvergov.org/education



Multiple Pathways to Graduation – Creating Options for Life, Work, and Learning



Participating Denver High Schools

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Principal: Antonio Esquivel

Team members: 2 assistant principals, 3 counselors, school nurse, special education teacher, social worker, restorative justice coordinator, community liaison, parent, school-based mental health therapist

EAST

Principal: John Youngquist

Team members: 5 teachers, AVID coordinator, math peer tutoring coordinator, 2 counselors, counseling intern, Denver Youth Development Initiative resource advocate, student assistance fund administrator, Future Center coordinator, assistant to the superintendent

NORTH

Principal: JoAnn Trujillo Hays

Team members: 2 assistant principals, humanities facilitator, counselor, 5 teachers, special education teacher

SOUTH

Principal: William Kohut

Team members: 2 assistant principals, academic dean, counselor, social worker, Futures Center coordinator, 2 teachers, AVID coordinator, AVID state director

THOMAS JEFFERSON

Principal: Sandra Just

Team members: counselor, teacher, social worker, social work intern

WEST

Principal: Pat Sanchez

Team members: assistant principal, counselor, teacher, West Career Academy director, 3 Colorado Youth for a Change staff, Colorado Uplift staff member, 2 middle school principals, resource advocate

Denver Principal's Summit April 14, 2008

Six Denver Public Schools high school principals and their leadership teams took part in a full-day summit in April 2008 to create individual school action plans for meeting the diverse needs of students struggling to stay in school. The Principals' Summit, sponsored by the Mayor's Office for Education and Children in partnership with America's Promise Alliance, is part of an ongoing effort by Denver Public Schools (DPS) and the City of Denver to address the alarming rate of high school dropouts.

Remarks at the opening plenary by Dr. Jaime Aquino, DPS Chief Academic Officer, stressed the urgency of the dropout problem. Citing the personal and societal costs, he noted that high school dropouts are:

- 2 times more likely to be on welfare
- 3 times more likely to be unemployed
- 8 times more likely to be incarcerated

Sponsors of the Principal's Summit surveyed each principal in advance of the event to determine how best to structure the day to produce optimum results. As a result, the majority of the day was devoted to individual school team work sessions. Sponsors also provided specific information and resources requested by principals to help them address their particular student retention issues. Accordingly, several experts were on hand to share their knowledge of such topics as parent engagement, truancy, the Response to Intervention framework, and restorative justice with the various school teams. Four of the six schools requested a facilitator to lead them through their individual work sessions.



Individual High School Work Plans and Results

ABRAHAM LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

“If real change is going to start happening, it’s got to start right here with us.”

— Domonic Martinez, Assistant Principal

The plan – The team from Abraham Lincoln set out to strengthen and expand its Response to Intervention (RTI) framework to:

- Improve daily attendance
- Increase the skill levels and academic performance of students at all grade levels
- More effectively deal with student behavioral issues

The team planned to develop communication and intervention strategies to be implemented by cross-disciplinary teams and aligned with other school programs.

The process – With the two assistant principals acting as co-facilitators, the team analyzed what was working or not among the attendance policies in place. The group then turned to designing specific strategies to integrate the RTI team into the school’s different departments. It also clarified specifics and accountability procedures for its withdrawal process. The issues of academics and behavior were tabled for another time.

Potential roadblocks – Creating staff and community ownership of the proposed strategies will require ongoing attention, as will professional development to improve capacity, maintain consistency, and assure accountability.

EAST HIGH SCHOOL

“We need common commitment, but small evolving actions can have a tremendous impact.”

— Principal Youngquist

The plan – East’s strategies to increase graduation rates included:

- Better understanding the Response to Intervention model and how to integrate student supports
- Better coordination of tutoring opportunities, including guidelines for consistency and ways to measure success
- Using data on the credit recovery pilot program and other support programs to assess and strengthen efforts
- Creating a post-secondary culture throughout the school to promote students’ success as adults

The process – The principal began with a team-building exercise to foster a common commitment. A Response to Intervention (RTI) specialist spent time with the team to strategize ways of responding to students’ needs. A facilitated discussion in the afternoon led to recommendations on more focused support for students schoolwide, and for 9th graders in particular.

Potential roadblocks – Insufficient systems are in place to obtain data for meaningful tracking of students. Many viable dropout prevention strategies are in use, but implementation and integration is difficult.

NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

“We need to focus on the positive with our students, not always the negative or what’s wrong.”

— Principal Trujillo Hays

The plan – The North team convened around integrating the building’s four separate plans now in place for student engagement – the School Improvement Plan, EXCEerator Schools Action Plan, Innovation Grant Plan, and Adequate Yearly Progress School Improvement Grant – as well as to address:

- Parent engagement
- Improving attendance

The process – The facilitated discussion began with a presentation by the attendance consultant and development of a list of strategies. The parent engagement specialist then helped the team understand the importance of home-school relationships and strategize possible action steps for North, including scheduling staff training on the developmental assets. The team reviewed the considerable work to date on elements of the EXCEerator Plan, but time limits did not allow for an examination of how the various plans fit together. The team committed to developing specific action plans for attendance and parent engagement over the next month.

Potential roadblocks – Continued work is necessary to pull the various plans into a cohesive strategy understandable to all throughout the school community.

SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL

“If we can change the kids’ habits when they’re young, it can solve the problems for when they’re older.”

— Jake Jakoby, Counselor

The plan – The South team’s areas of focus for increasing graduation rates included:

- Expanding elements of the school’s Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program into all classrooms
- Strengthening its two-week Freshmen Academy summer program to better connect with incoming freshmen
- Forming an Attendance Team to strategize implementation of school-family attendance contracts, student incentives, and a “Learning Family” concept of individualized teacher-student relationships
- Aligning School Performance Framework data with the School Improvement Plan

The process – With direction from a facilitator, team members discussed each proposed plan, strategizing the various elements needed for implementation. Names and timelines were then assigned to each action item. Community resources were identified to help inform elements of the plans, including those who could provide sample family/school attendance contracts and student focus groups on school attendance. The School Improvement Plan was tabled for a future meeting.

Potential roadblocks – Teacher buy-in to many of the proposed strategies was considered a potential challenge. Team members also noted a deficiency in data for student monitoring.

THOMAS JEFFERSON HIGH SCHOOL

“We need to have everyone involved in making school a better place for kids.”

— Principal Just

The plan – Team members from Thomas Jefferson addressed the following strategies for school engagement:

- Improving the transition from middle school to 9th grade
- Aligning the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework with the School Improvement Plan
- Reviewing the response protocol for students who miss class

The process – The small team worked without a facilitator to plan for better schoolwide integration and communication around meeting students’ needs. It outlined a “vertical teaming” strategy for working with its two major feeder schools, a strategy for professional development regarding RTI, and a plan for a more proactive response when students show a drop in attendance. The attendance specialist added to the discussion. The group then identified committees needed to address the various issues, defined their roles, and determined the staff expertise that was needed.

Potential roadblocks – More information is needed around monitoring progress for RTI students, how best to engage parents and community members, and how to recruit staff to take on committee work.

WEST HIGH SCHOOL

“The necessary level of data on incoming 9th graders, given to us in a timely fashion, helps us build an intervention that is meaningful.”

— Principal Sanchez

The plan – West invited two middle school principals to join in the planning process to help improve the transition for 9th graders and their families. The other area of focus was actualizing the new mission and vision of the school’s transformation into the “New West High School.”

The process – The principal led the morning discussion to review the school’s new mission and vision and solicit ideas on how to get a shared commitment from all staff. A facilitator led the team through a planning discussion around middle to high school transition. With the middle school principals, the team developed specific strategies. The RTI topic specialist provided Information on the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework. Also, a specialist in restorative justice shared information and offered to train West’s staff in the restorative justice model. A school district representative agreed to inquire about providing data requested on incoming 9th graders that would enhance planning, and to help address public transportation issues.

Potential roadblocks – Generating schoolwide commitment around the “New West” mission/vision and incorporating youth/student voice in the monitoring of behavior will require on-going consideration.