



Innovation Zone Plan

November 2025

Bookmarks

Section 1: Innovation Zone Overview

[Zone Mission and Vision](#)

[Zone Common Interests and Theory of Action](#)

[Zone Academic Goals](#)

[Zone Exit Process](#)

Section 2: Innovation Zone Organization

[Zone Structure](#)

[School Leadership Support and Hiring](#)

[Zone Finances](#)

[Zone Services](#)

Section 3: Alternative Governance Structure

[Board Structure](#)

[Key Responsibilities of the Board](#)

[Experience and Qualifications of the Board](#)

[Oversight of Zone Organization and Staff](#)

[Zone Leader Hiring](#)

[Academic Oversight of Zone](#)

[Financial and Operational Oversight of Zone](#)

[Stakeholder Engagement and Decision-Making](#)

Section 4: Supplemental Materials

[Academic Data and Reflections](#)

[Financial Documents](#)

[Operational Documents](#)

[Governance Documents](#)

[Stakeholder Engagement Tracking](#)

[Innovation Zone Expansion Appendix](#)

Section 1: Innovation Zone Overview

Zone Mission and Vision

Mission

The Luminary Learning Network (LLN) brings together a group of diverse-by-design schools that are committed to providing unique and dynamic learning experiences for all students, including those historically underserved, while empowering teachers, leaders and community members as stewards of excellent schools that support the success of DPS as a collective.

Vision

By leveraging flexibility and the power of self-designed collaboration, the LLN will be a national proof-point for school-based decision making, differentiation in school support models, and excellent and equitable outcomes for students.

Zone Common Interests and Theory of Action

Common Interests

The LLN is a diverse-by-design organization founded by educators, in service of educators. It remains committed to one critical common interest: achieving tangible academic and social-emotional success for all students by leveraging the leadership and governance of an independent organization and its associated supports and opportunities.

While each school designs programs and structures to reflect its community's needs, LLN schools are united by a commitment to equity, empowered educators, and responsive learning environments. This combination of diverse approaches and shared purpose is a defining strength of the Luminary Learning Network. Working together in a consistent network allows schools to build lasting relationships and share practices that help all students thrive. The theory of action articulated below highlights the organization's shared belief system.

Zone Theory of Action

If schools are empowered to partner with families, caregivers and the community in order to develop a vision for schooling that responds to the specific needs of their students AND

If schools are provided genuine flexibility to creatively, nimbly, and collaboratively actualize that vision AND

If schools are supported and overseen by an independent governance structure that holds schools accountable to both their articulated vision and to DPS priorities;

Then, schools will be able to:

- develop in students a lifelong love for learning;
- demonstrate a deep and specific commitment to equity, especially in service of student groups that have been underserved by historically oppressive systems;
- leverage resources strategically to support teacher growth and the school's ability to pursue its articulated vision;
- innovate on existing classroom practices and share lessons learned from those innovations;

And, in turn, achieve tangible academic and social-emotional success for all students.

Collective School Values

LLN schools are grounded in [six key, shared values](#). Each school commits to modeling these values in unique ways that respond to the needs of their specific communities:

- **Equity: Innovation is a tool of empowerment.** We build inclusive and asset-minded schools in which all students and staff members, especially those of color, are successful because they are known and celebrated. Our work is not done until opportunity gaps are closed.
- **Collaboration: Our schools are stronger together.** We facilitate cross-school learning and communication structures for our educators and leaders to support one another and grow in service of our students.
- **Distributed Leadership: Decision-making at our schools is shared.** Staff and community members are engaged in shaping the educational experience of our students. Empowering those closest to students promotes program and leadership continuity.
- **Highly Effective Instruction and Student Support: Our schools are learner-centered.** We offer robust training and development that allows teachers and support staff to deliver highly effective and responsive instruction in support of specific student needs, both academic and social-emotional.
- **Community Partnership: Our schools are designed in collaboration with families and caregivers.** This approach ensures that school goals are responsive to the needs of our students and tied to the values of our communities.

- **Flexible Resourcing: Our schools are nimble.** Hiring, staffing, and budgeting flexibilities allow us to meet student needs. Strategic external partnerships strengthen our teams in service of our communities.

Shared Activities Independent of the Zone Organization

In addition to formal supports and structures facilitated by the LLN staff, schools in the Luminary Learning Network have developed a culture of collaboration that often extends beyond our centrally organized activities. School leaders and staff regularly connect informally to exchange ideas, share resources, and provide thought partnership to one another. For example, teachers and leaders will occasionally arrange site visits to other LLN schools to observe practices of interest, or will reach out directly to colleagues across the Zone to problem-solve around shared challenges.

This informal collaboration has become a defining feature of the network and reflects strong relationships and mutual trust among our schools. While the LLN organization actively supports a foundation of connection, these peer-driven exchanges demonstrate how schools have grown to work well together and independently sustain a community of practice in service of students.

Zone Academic Goals

Three-Year Goals

Denver Public Schools (DPS) Board Policy AB directs schools and the LLN to utilize the State School Performance Framework (SPF) as a benchmark for academic progress and a critical reference point for school improvement planning.

The LLN aspires to support all member schools in demonstrating progress toward achieving a “Performance” (green) rating on the SPF over the next three years. For schools already achieving this level, our aim is to maintain or further strengthen their results. As of the 2025 Preliminary SPF release, five LLN schools are rated “Performance” (green), while three schools are rated below “Performance.” The LLN is committed to supporting all member schools in achieving and sustaining strong ratings, with tailored strategies aligned to each school’s specific needs.

While recent results reflect both strengths and areas for growth, the LLN views them as opportunities to learn and refine, not as reasons to limit the autonomy that enables meaningful improvement. Continued progress relies on preserving the flexibility that allows schools to adapt their strategies to meet student needs in the face of systemic challenges.

While the SPF provides an important common framework for understanding school progress, the LLN also utilizes a broader body of evidence to inform improvement planning. This includes

interim assessments, early literacy measures, and complementary indicators such as student engagement and well-being via the BESS survey.

By incorporating these varied data sources, the LLN is able to take a more holistic and context-sensitive approach to progress monitoring. Together, these measures act as leading indicators for SPF performance, allowing the LLN and its schools to monitor growth and achievement trends throughout the year and determine whether they are on track to reach or sustain “Performance” status. Please reference those plans for additional detail on the unique priorities and goals for each school.

Beyond tracking progress, these data inform how we support each school in achieving its vision for student success. One way this support is operationalized is through our school review process. All member schools participate in at least one formal school review each year. The review process combines quantitative data analysis and qualitative evidence gathered from observations and stakeholder interviews. Reviews are designed to highlight strengths, identify growth opportunities, and recommend actionable steps to advance each school’s unique innovation plan. Aligned tightly to DPS’s goals related to the [student experience, the adult experience, and the overall system experience](#), the process is grounded in the following values-based norms:

Students First

Our school review process is meant to provide a useful lens on schools in support of their improvement for the benefit of students. Hence, we look for the key levers for change that will support growth, wellness and equity for all students in each school. In gathering and analyzing data for this process, we keep the academic and social-emotional needs of all students at the top of our minds.

We Find Solutions That Work For Our Communities

Our school review process can provide key information that schools need to make strong, strategic decisions for course correction. Given this, we are mindful that we are gathering and analyzing purposeful yet confidential data so that we deeply understand the values and needs of our communities, and enable schools to seek innovative solutions that will support students and families. We do this best by maintaining a culture of support when reviewing a school and reflecting deeply in a humble manner in order to seek what could be done better.

Together We Are Stronger

Our school review process is driven by a team approach. Because of this, our process is strongest when each member of the team fully engages in discussions yet remains cognizant that they have but one piece of the puzzle. Listening thoughtfully to the reports of others helps to put the entire puzzle together. We respect the confidentiality

of interviews and observations, and we operate such that our school may grow and benefit from the collective brilliance of the group.

We Lead with Courage

Our school review process can only be done if we face the data we collect head on in a way that takes out any personal bias, but remains honest to our convictions. We are courageous in our reviews by keeping the needs of children in mind, while seeking the best way for our data to be heard and understood by those who educate them.

We Love What We Do

We take pride in our ability to contribute to the teams' recommendations, because we know that these recommendations will aid our ability to ensure unique and dynamic schools that support the success of the Luminary Learning Network and Denver Public Schools as a collective. When asked about the school review day by others, we honor our work and the work of those in the school by reporting that we provided actionable feedback to the school leadership team in support of their success.

In alignment with the LLN's commitment to collaboration and distributed leadership, school leaders across the Zone also participate in structured, Zone-wide learning opportunities designed to drive continuous improvement. School leaders meet twice monthly in differentiated settings. One meeting is centered on system-wide alignment to DPS priorities and key initiatives. The second meeting engages leaders in a structured problem-of-practice protocol, where school teams surface real-time challenges and receive thoughtful, context-informed feedback from their peers.

All problem-of-practice meetings are hosted at LLN schools, offering leaders the opportunity to experience different learning environments and deepen cross-school understanding. The host school identifies a specific area of focus aligned to its strategic goals. Each session begins with classroom walkthroughs and structured feedback, allowing visiting leaders to observe instructional practice and share insights before engaging in the full problem-solving cycle. This embedded reflection creates space for authentic, site-based learning and reinforces a culture of trust, mutual accountability, and shared ownership across the Zone.

These collaborative structures are central to the LLN's belief that we are stronger together. By bringing together leaders who represent a wide range of student populations and instructional models, the Zone fosters learning that sharpens leadership, accelerates innovation, and builds capacity across all schools. Recent educator-led discussions have focused on topics such as:

- Elevating rigor by aligning instructional questions, outputs, and clarity of learning goals
- Deepening the effectiveness of small group instruction to better meet diverse learner needs
- Increasing conceptual thinking in math and literacy when launching new curricula

- Refining instructional feedback systems to increase the frequency, quality, and impact of coaching cycles
- Improving MTSS processes and fidelity to those processes
- Strengthening structures for new teacher onboarding and mid-year staff integration
- Reconfiguring staffing and coverage models in response to new/unforeseen student needs and facilities constraints

In addition to school leader collaboration, the LLN's Teacher Advisory Council (TAC) provides a meaningful structure for advancing educator leadership across the Zone. Composed of 2-3 teacher representatives from each school, the TAC meets monthly to elevate teacher voice in LLN decision-making, foster cross-school collaboration, and co-design professional learning experiences that reflect the diverse needs and interests of LLN educators.

The LLN also convenes DCTA representatives from all member schools twice each year to ensure a consistent platform for discussing and promoting healthy working conditions for educators across the Zone. These meetings create space for representatives to share feedback on school experiences and other collective priorities such as the Innovation Review process. Meetings are held during school-based hours, with class coverage guaranteed to encourage full participation.

Together, these systems (SPF alignment, innovation plan implementation, school reviews, structured cross-school collaboration) demonstrate the LLN's commitment to continuous improvement and community-driven accountability. As a Zone, we are grounded in evidence, driven by purpose, and united by the belief that meaningful change happens closest to students.

As a part of the Denver Public Schools family, LLN schools are proud partners in advancing the District's mission and vision. We remain steadfast in our shared commitment to creating the conditions in which Every Learner Thrives.

Zone Exit Process

In the unlikely event that there is a mismatch between the LLN and one of its member schools, the following process establishes how a school may formally exit the Zone and return to District-managed Innovation status.

Because budgeting and the school choice window for the upcoming school year close in January, any decision to exit the Zone and all required associated actions must be completed prior to the December LLN Board meeting.

1. **Notification to LLN Executive Director and Board:** No later than the scheduled December LLN Board meeting, the school administration must deliver a letter to the LLN Executive Director and Board detailing the reasons for choosing to exit the Zone. Neither the

Executive Director nor the Board is required to take any official action on the letter, although they may choose to partner with the school community to gather additional information from stakeholder groups, including families, caregivers, and school staff.

2. **Notification to DPS:** Following notification to the LLN Executive Director and Board, the school administration must deliver a letter to the DPS Authorizing and Accountability team indicating a desire to participate in the consent vote process.
3. **Consent Vote:** Using the same requirements stated in the Innovation Schools Act and Administrative Regulation ADE-R, district staff will support the formal voting process for teachers, administrators, and the Collaborative School Committee (CSC) or CSC-equivalent. In alignment with the Act, exiting the Zone requires *“Evidence that a majority of the administrators employed at the public school, a majority of the teachers employed at the public school, and a majority of the school advisory council for the public school consent.”* The vote will solely be to exit the Zone. No revisions to the school’s individual innovation plan or waivers will be considered as part of this process. If the consent vote results in the school leaving the Zone, only the school-based waivers included in the school’s innovation plan will continue to apply until the next Innovation Review cycle, while zone-specific waivers will no longer be in effect. The LLN Executive Director and Zone Board cannot compel the school to remain in the Zone if the consent vote reaches the necessary threshold.
4. **Letter to the Denver Public Schools Board:** No later than the scheduled January DPS Board meeting, the school administration must deliver a letter to the DPS Board detailing the reasons for exiting the Zone and the results of the staff vote. The DPS Board is not required to take any official action on the letter and cannot compel the school to remain if the consent vote has reached the required threshold.

Once both Boards have been notified, the school will enter into a planning phase with Denver Public Schools to facilitate its return to district-managed innovation status, effective July 1 of the following school year. The LLN will offer support during this transition as needed. This approach underscores that Innovation, at its best, is about maintaining choice and agency for school communities, and that exiting the Zone is a structured process designed to respect the collective will of educators and families.

The LLN values authentic partnership and recognizes that Innovation looks different in each community. If, over time, a school and the LLN no longer share alignment with the LLN’s theory of action as demonstrated by practical application of the school’s Innovation Plan or mutual benefit from the LLN as a chosen learning community, both parties may determine that the Zone’s model no longer best supports the school’s goals. In such cases, the LLN and school will collaborate to facilitate a smooth transition back to district-managed Innovation status, grounded in mutual respect and shared.

Section 2: Innovation Zone Organization

Zone Structure

The Luminary Learning Network operates as both a nonprofit organization and a collective of public schools within Denver Public Schools, as currently codified in a [Professional Services Agreement](#) (PSA) with the DPS Board of Education. The Zone is governed by an [independent board](#) and staffed by a small, multifunctional team of experienced education leaders who support and supervise schools in alignment with their Innovation Plans.

The LLN currently employs three staff members responsible for [eight primary functions](#) in service of LLN schools, and in pursuit of the organization's mission and vision. Each role is intentionally designed to balance targeted coaching and the preservation of school-level autonomy:

- **Executive Director (ED):** Reporting to the LLN Board, the ED is responsible for the overall health of the organization, including strategic direction, budget oversight, fundraising, and ensuring the Zone's supports are aligned to each school's mission, vision, and innovation plan. The ED manages the Director of Leadership and Learning and supports the overall leadership coaching process. The ED also manages partnerships with DPS and coordinates engagement with the LLN Board.
- **Director of Leadership and Learning (DLL):** Reporting to the ED, the DLL provides direct supervision and evaluation of school leaders through differentiated coaching and feedback aligned to each school's innovation plan. The DLL also leads cross-school professional learning communities, supports teacher leadership development, and collaborates with the ED to ensure coherence across instructional and leadership priorities.
- **Senior Director of Innovation Initiatives and Programs (SDIIP):** Reporting to the ED, the SDIIP provides operational and data-focused support to Zone schools. This includes advising on innovation plan development, assisting with improvement planning, supporting compliance and accountability requirements, and building data infrastructure that helps school leaders monitor progress.

This streamlined staffing model is intentionally designed to reflect the LLN's commitment to "just-right" support that empowers schools to maintain their autonomy while benefiting from collective expertise and shared infrastructure. By maintaining a lean central team, resources are preserved for school-based priorities while still offering robust instructional leadership development, operational guidance, and data-driven improvement planning. Importantly, Zone services are designed in partnership with school leaders, who maintain decision-making

authority over how supports are implemented, reinforcing that the LLN does not operate as a top-down management organization but rather as a collaborative partner to member schools.

The LLN believes that those closest to students (school leaders, teachers, and communities) are best positioned to design the learning experiences that will meet the diverse needs of each student. The staffing structure supports this belief by:

- Ensuring deep, relationship-based coaching rather than compliance-focused supervision.
- Offering differentiated support tailored to each school's goals, innovation plan, and community context.
- Creating structures for collaboration and shared learning without requiring uniformity of approach.
- Sustaining a lean service center that balances efficiency, flexibility, and responsiveness.

This design enables the Luminary Learning Network to deliver on its mission to empower educators and communities as stewards of excellent, diverse-by-design schools while driving strong, equitable outcomes for all students.

School Leadership Support and Hiring

School Leader Support and Accountability

The LLN employs a coaching and evaluation model designed to honor the unique vision and context of each school. Coaching is provided by the Director of Leadership and Learning and, as needed, additional executive coaches, allowing for a differentiated approach that meets the specific strengths and growth areas of each school leader.

This blended model ensures leaders have access to thought partnership and guidance deeply informed by their school's innovation plan, program design, curriculum, and staff. Because LLN staff maintain a small caseload of schools, they are able to build close working relationships with each leader, resulting in consistent, actionable feedback and support.

School leaders are also encouraged to shape the coaching and development they receive. Throughout the year, they have multiple opportunities to request adjustments to support through 1:1 conversations, regular check-ins, and biannual surveys. Additionally, two school leaders serve as voting members of the LLN Board, ensuring school leader voice directly informs the Zone's priorities and direction.

All school leaders in the LLN are evaluated using the DPS LEAD framework and timeline. The Director of Leadership and Learning serves as the primary evaluator, leveraging both independent observations and input from other coaches to build a comprehensive body of evidence. Mid-year progress checks and end-of-year reviews are conducted in alignment with District expectations, and all feedback is framed to be digestible and actionable.

If a performance improvement plan is needed, the DLL follows the process outlined in [Section 10-4 of the Denver School Leader Association Master Agreement](#). Allegations or findings of misconduct, are promptly referred to the appropriate DPS department (Talent Management, Employee Relations, or Investigations) to ensure consistent and transparent handling under District policy.

New School Leader Hiring

The process for hiring new school leaders is conducted in close partnership with each school's community and in alignment with Denver Public Schools best practices. The steps include:

- Establishing a School Principal Selection Advisory Committee (SPSAC) with diverse representation, including parents, teachers, and support staff, as able.
- Grounding the SPSAC in the school's mission, vision, values, and Innovation Plan.
- Determining a plan for community engagement to identify desired candidate qualities and selection criteria.
- Collecting and analyzing data gathered from the community engagement process.
- Collaborating with DPS Talent Management and the LLN to actively recruit and screen a diverse pool of qualified candidates that reflects both the needs of the school and the broader DPS leadership pipeline.
- Hosting a community forum for candidates to share their qualifications and vision for the school.
- Reviewing applicants and selecting finalists.
- Using a standardized hiring rubric to recommend a finalist candidate.
- Requiring approval of the recommended candidate by the school's Collaborative School Committee or equivalent body, the LLN Executive Director, and the LLN Board.

- Conducting a final interview with the DPS Superintendent.
- Hiring the candidate as an employee of Denver Public Schools, supervised by the LLN Director of Leadership and Learning.

Following the hire of a new school leader, that individual begins their coaching and reporting relationship with the LLN Director of Leadership and Learning, in which the implications of being in a Zone structure are continued to be discussed in additional detail. The new hire is invited to participate in shared LLN collaborative structures upon hiring.

Zone Finances

Zone Funding Model

The LLN will adhere to the funding model developed by the DPS Finance Team as outlined [here](#). The linked communication indicates that the model will remain in place for the LLN's entire review period. In the event that the District requests significant changes to the funding model prior to the end of the Zone's review period, the Zone reserves the right to provide feedback and engage in negotiation regarding the funding model in pursuit of fairness, transparency, and preservation of the financial flexibility that makes Innovation viable at the school level. A sustainable and predictable funding model is critical to maintaining both operational stability and the conditions that allow schools to pursue innovation effectively. Consistency in how resources are allocated also strengthens trust between schools, the LLN, and the District.

Funding Sources

The LLN is committed to long-term sustainability and responsible stewardship of public funding. The Zone primarily operates using member fees. Each member school contributes \$150 per pupil annually, billed in two installments. These fees are used to fund core services, including differentiated leadership supervision, targeted operational support, cross-school collaboration, and shared resources. The LLN's approach to budgeting and zone services is grounded in the belief that strategic resource allocation, determined at the school level, is essential to achieving student success.

Where appropriate, the Zone pursues limited grant and philanthropic funding to enhance programming and keep member costs low. The LLN neither solicits nor holds philanthropic funds on behalf of schools, in accordance with District policy. In some cases, the LLN may support member schools with grant writing. Any dollars raised for a specific school are directed through that school's DPS donation account or spent on the school's behalf within 60 days.

In the event of changes to operating practices of the Zone (e.g. the addition of schools, a reduction in services offered, etc.), the fee will be updated to reflect the expected service level to

be provided to each school. The new fee will be voted on and approved by the LLN Board, which currently has two school leader representatives, and one teacher representative.

The LLN prepares quarterly financial reports and an annual audit, in line with nonprofit and public-sector standards. This structure allows for financial transparency, alignment with public expectations, and responsible use of public funds.

[3-Year Projected Budget](#) | [2025 Audit](#) | [2024 Audit](#) | [2023 Audit](#)

The LLN does not charge schools for additional services outside of the Zone fee. However, schools may choose to contract for additional support, professional development, or coaching services based on their own discretionary funds and needs.

Usage of Funds and Economies of Scale

The LLN accelerates the return on investment of public dollars by relying on a funding formula that increases school-based financial autonomies, establishes opportunities for schools to pool resources, and maintains connectivity to DPS priorities and services.

Specifically, the LLN drives efficient use of funds by:

- **Optimizing the performance of individual schools through increased financial flexibilities.** Zone schools receive a modified student base budget allocation that enables them to fund a streamlined service center while retaining more resources for their unique instructional needs. By providing schools increased budgetary autonomy, the Zone ensures that per pupil dollars are invested with intention and aligned directly to each school's strategic priorities.
- **Leveraging economies of scale for strategically selected services operated by the Zone's lean service center.** LLN schools have the ability to pool resources to share costs and increase the impact of services that are more efficient when delivered collectively. Examples of these shared services include professional development and training for teachers and leaders (ex: Orton-Gillingham and Heggerty literacy training), executive coaching and instructional thought partnership, knowledge management tools, and coordination of grant opportunities and external partnerships. Depending on the needs of member schools, the services provided by the LLN may evolve over time, but this collective approach ensures that schools benefit from shared expertise and cost efficiencies without sacrificing autonomy.
- **Utilizing District-standardized services in areas where differentiation does not add substantive value or where participation is required.** The LLN continues to use District services in areas where it makes sense to remain part of a shared system or where

participation is required. For example, transportation services are coordinated centrally by the District because it can deliver those services at a larger scale and lower cost than individual schools could manage on their own. In other areas, such as special education programming and compliance, schools are required to follow District processes and maintain alignment with all applicable laws and agreements, including those outlined in the [PSA](#).

The combination of targeted Zone-provided services and District-standardized supports allows schools to invest resources where they will have the most impact, while retaining strong connections to the broader DPS system.

Zone Services

In alignment with the Luminary Learning Network’s mission, vision, and theory of action, the LLN provides a focused set of services designed to empower schools while honoring their autonomy. These services are adjusted as needed in collaboration with school leaders to ensure they remain responsive and high-quality. In the most recent end-of-year survey (June 2025), all LLN school leaders reported that they were “*Very Satisfied*” with the support provided by the LLN.

Task	Alignment to Mission, Vision, Theory of Action	Replacing District Service?	Service Quality Maintenance
Executive and instructional coaching and thought partnership for school leaders	Leader empowerment in pursuit of excellent outcomes	Yes (<i>Network Director</i>)	Annual ED evaluation, school leader survey feedback, school progress monitoring
Operational supports	Removing barriers so that schools may deliver on the experience they design for their communities	Yes (<i>Operational Services Director</i>)	School leader survey feedback, 1:1 check-ins

Facilitation of collaborative structures (Teacher Advisory Council, leadership meetings, cross-school learning)	Bringing together diverse schools to share learning and resources	Yes (<i>Network structure</i>)	Annual ED evaluation, leader/TAC survey feedback
School leader hiring and retention supports	Empowering communities to select and sustain high-quality leaders	Supplement (<i>DPS HR team</i>)	Process and recommendations approved by school/CSC/equivalent, LLN Board, and Superintendent
School leader evaluation	Accountability to each school's articulated vision and to DPS priorities	Yes (<i>Network Director</i>)	LEAD-aligned evaluation cycle, school leader feedback, progress monitoring
School site reviews	Supporting continuous improvement and accountability to school vision and DPS priorities	No	Annual reviews with written feedback and action steps
Data support - dashboard/report creation (as requested)	Pursuit of equitable and excellent outcomes	Yes (<i>Assessments, Operations & School Support Analytics, though schools may still access elements of these services as needed</i>)	Addressed based on the unique request/context of the requesting school
Innovation plan implementation support	Sustaining each school's unique design and flexibilities	No	

Advocacy for protection and expansion of school autonomies	Proof point for school-based decision making	No	
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** The LLN will provide evidence of replacement services if requested by the District.*

In addition to the services listed above, the LLN regularly assesses evolving needs in partnership with schools. Where appropriate, the Zone supports selection of curricular resources, instructional tools, and professional learning opportunities, particularly when these can be strengthened through cross-school collaboration. Each school retains full autonomy, aligned to its innovation plan and the zone funding model, to direct resources and supports at the school level.

Zone services are adapted if contextual factors (for example, major policy shifts or emergencies) require adjustments to continue delivering on the mission and vision of the LLN. When updates to the Zone's funding model occur, the LLN provides clarity to all schools regarding:

- Which services are included from DPS at no additional cost,
- Which services are available for purchase from DPS,
- And which services are not provided by DPS.

If a school requires a service that neither the LLN nor the District can offer, the LLN partners with school leadership to identify and implement alternative solutions.

When a school in the LLN is identified for state accountability support, the Zone provides targeted and intensive supports aligned to the school's root causes of underperformance. These supports are designed in close partnership with school leadership and are structured to accelerate student achievement and build capacity in a sustainable manner. Interventions may include:

- Additional, external executive coaching focused on instructional systems and leadership team effectiveness.
- Data-driven instructional support through dedicated data reflection protocols and structured performance check-ins.
- Capacity building for new or evolving leadership teams, including job-embedded mentoring and onboarding supports.

- Strategic staffing and/or scheduling to ensure intervention blocks and planning time are optimized for student-level impact.

Zone-level check-ins and internal data reviews are used to continuously monitor progress, adjust support structures, and ensure alignment between school-level actions and performance improvement goals. The LLN maintains a consistent focus on high-leverage practices and shifts time, attention, and resources accordingly to move schools off the accountability clock and toward “Performance Plan” status.

Please see the following links for specific details on plans to support [Ashley](#) and [Cole](#), the two LLN schools that are on the state clock for 2025-2026.

Section 3: Alternative Governance Structure

Zone Governance

The Luminary Learning Network (LLN) is governed by an independent nonprofit board, which provides strategic oversight, ensures mission alignment, and holds the LLN accountable for delivering high-quality support to its member schools. The board also functions as the innovation zone’s governing body per the Innovation Schools Act.

Board Structure

At a high level, the [LLN bylaws](#) outline the structure of the LLN Board as follows:

There shall be between seven (7) and nine (9) voting members of the Board of Directors of the Corporation (“Directors”), except during such time when a Director vacancy is in the process of being filled, as follows:

- (a) between four (4) and six (6) individuals representing the interests of the community (“Community Representatives”), at least one of whom is directly connected to the communities served by the schools in the Innovation Zone, who will select and appoint successor Community Representatives by a majority vote of a quorum of the Community Representatives. Selection of community representatives should consider diversity of membership and the following characteristics: alignment to mission and vision; community connections; experience and expertise; and engagement and advocacy skills;*
- (b) one (1) individual who serves as the Teacher Representative and is elected annually by the Innovation Zone’s teacher council;*
- (c) two (2) school leaders of schools that are a party to that certain Professional Services Agreement between the District, the Corporation and such schools dated August 1, 2023 (“Zone Schools”), elected annually by the majority vote of a quorum of the school leaders of such Zone Schools (“School Leaders”); and*

(d) *the Executive Director of the Corporation as an Ex Officio non-voting member of the Board of Directors.*

The appointments of the Teacher Representative and the School Leaders shall be made by written notice to the Chair or Secretary of the Board. The Executive Director shall be appointed by the voting Directors. Directors need not be residents of the State of Colorado. Voting Directors shall have equal voting privileges to consist of one vote each.

Organizational bylaws may be periodically updated in alignment with updated Innovation Zone Plans and the PSA (or equivalent document) between the Denver Public Schools Board of Education and LLN Board.

The LLN believes deeply that schools are the unit of change and that educators closest to students have the clearest perspective on what their communities need to thrive. Teachers and school leaders hold invaluable insight into how to design responsive learning environments, drive student success, and determine what support is most effective.

By including two school leaders and one teacher as voting members of the Board, the LLN ensures that educator voices shape decisions at the highest level of organizational governance. This design keeps students and school communities at the center of all priorities and decisions.

Community representatives on the Board further anchor the organization in its mission and vision, bringing critical perspectives from the neighborhoods and families the LLN serves.

The LLN bylaws include a conflict of interest policy that defines the voting rights of each Board seat. All Board members serve without compensation.

The Board currently comprises three officer roles and three working groups.

- **Officer Roles**

- **Board Chair** - The Chair presides at all meetings of the Board of Directors and, in general, performs all duties incident to the office of Chair and any other duties prescribed by the Board of Directors from time to time.
- **Board Treasurer** - The Treasurer performs all duties incident to the office of Treasurer and any other duties that may be assigned by the Chair or the Board of Directors.
- **Board Secretary** - The Secretary keeps or causes to be kept the minutes of Board meetings in one or more books provided for that purpose, ensures that all notices are duly given in accordance with the Bylaws or as required by law, serves as custodian of corporate records, and, in general, performs all duties incident to the office of Secretary and any other duties assigned by the Chair or the Board of Directors.

- **Board Working Groups**
 - **Governance** - The Governance Working Group spearheads goal setting for the Board in partnership with the Executive Director and assists with Board member recruitment and onboarding, ensuring alignment with the LLN's key functions and qualifications.
 - **Talent Development** - The Talent Development Working Group is responsible for designing and executing the Executive Director's annual evaluation and ensuring access to professional learning opportunities for Zone staff as needed or requested.
 - **Academics and Accountability** - The Academics and Accountability Working Group periodically keeps the Board informed of schools' academic outcomes and Whole Child progress.

Key Responsibilities of the Board

LLN Board Members will...	
Alignment with Mission & Vision	Demonstrate a deep understanding of and alignment to the organization's mission and vision, and proactively communicate that mission and vision—and the organization's performance toward aligned goals—in order to enhance the organization's reputation in the community.
Connections	Develop and maintain meaningful connections with relevant stakeholders (e.g., regional communities, school communities, DPS) to ensure strategic partnerships in support of the organization's mission and vision and member schools.
Experience & Expertise	Provide insight, thought partnership, and oversight through relevant experience (e.g., leadership, non-profits, governance, short- and long-term strategic planning) and expertise (e.g., education, finance, legal, human resources, communications/marketing, school operations) that contribute to the health and sustainability of the organization and improved performance of its member schools.
Engagement & Advocacy	Champion diversity of perspective and voice in support of the organization's mission, and channel passion for the organization's work toward external decision-makers so they align priorities with what our represented communities and organization need to be successful. Communicate with passion and clarity about why the LLN and its member schools' work matters to those whose decisions impact our mission and vision.

Experience and Qualifications of the Board

Please click [\[here\]](#) to see our current Board members, including their qualifications.

Oversight of Zone Organization and Staff

The LLN Board is responsible for conducting an annual evaluation of the Executive Director. This evaluation is designed to be fair, thorough, professional, and candid, following the process outlined below:

- The LLN Board of Directors sets annual goals in partnership with the ED.
- The Board designates one member to serve as the point person for the evaluation. This person leads the effort to gather feedback from stakeholders, the Board, and the ED, and drafts the written evaluation.
- The full Board approves the process and tools for conducting the evaluation.
- The Board develops a survey or set of questions focused on whether the ED achieved established goals and demonstrated the core competencies needed to excel in the role. See the [24-25 survey framework](#) for reference.
- The ED completes a self-assessment using the same survey.
- The Board and ED collaborate to identify a list of individuals who will be invited to provide feedback via the survey.
- The Board distributes the survey and collects responses.
- All Board members also complete the survey.
- The designated point person compiles and analyzes all input and drafts the evaluation report.
- The draft evaluation is shared confidentially with the full Board of Directors for review.
- The Board discusses the evaluation in executive session.
- The point person incorporates Board feedback, finalizes the evaluation report, and shares it with the ED.
- The Board Chair and ED meet shortly after the report is shared to review findings and discuss strengths, areas for growth, and feedback in both directions. The conversation focuses on what worked well, what could improve, and how the Board and ED can best support one another moving forward.
- Following the meeting, the evaluation is shared with the full Board and placed in the ED's personnel file.
- The Board and ED work together to set goals for the coming year informed by the evaluation.

If the ED is not meeting expectations, based on either feedback from school leaders and/or progress toward Zone goals, the Talent Development work group is responsible for:

- Establishing a performance improvement plan that includes clear expectations and access to training or professional learning to close identified gaps.
- Monitoring progress on the improvement plan.

If the ED does not demonstrate improvement following the implementation of the plan, the Talent Development work group will recommend dismissal to be voted on by the full Board.

Zone Leader Hiring

The LLN Board is responsible for establishing a committee to define the desired characteristics of the Executive Director and design the process to identify, screen, and hire candidates for the position. To ensure continuity of leadership, the Board engages in ongoing succession planning, including periodic discussions of leadership pipeline development and emergency coverage protocols. When a vacancy arises, the established committee leads a transparent selection process involving representatives from the Board and LLN member schools, using both individual and group interviews to assess each candidate's perspective and qualifications. The committee then recommends a single finalist to be presented to the full Board for a vote.

Academic Oversight of the Zone

The LLN Board maintains a focus on governance and strategic oversight rather than direct management of schools. Academic performance and progress toward organizational goals are primarily the responsibility of the LLN Executive Director, who is accountable to the Board as its sole employee.

The Academics and Accountability Working Group of the Board is responsible for reviewing academic and non-academic data throughout the year and facilitating regular reporting to the full Board. Key metrics reviewed include:

- Colorado School Performance Framework ratings (including overall ratings and disaggregated subgroup performance)
- CMAS proficiency and growth data in English Language Arts and Math
- READ Act early literacy outcomes
- Student, staff, and family perception survey results
- Enrollment and attendance trends

LLN staff shares updates on these metrics at scheduled Board meetings, typically at least quarterly, or as needed based on availability of new data. School leaders are also invited to attend Board meetings periodically to share reflections on their school's progress, successes,

and areas for growth. Board members are encouraged to visit schools during the year to understand school culture and observe practices connected to each school's Innovation Plan, though these visits are informal and not part of a required evaluation process.

The Board monitors implementation of each school's Innovation Plan by reviewing school-reported progress and discussing alignment to stated goals during these engagements. While the LLN does not currently monitor Black Excellence Plans independently, the Executive Director is responsible for providing the Board with periodic updates on how schools are progressing toward their Black Excellence Plan commitments as documented in DPS data reporting systems.

When concerns about performance arise (such as declining academic results, gaps between subgroups, or lack of progress toward Innovation Plan goals) the Executive Director and Director of Leadership and Learning are responsible for working with school leaders to develop improvement plans and provide targeted coaching. The Board's role in this process is to review the context and improvement plans, ask questions, and hold the Executive Director accountable for follow-through and progress monitoring. If sufficient progress is not demonstrated, the Board may direct additional supports, adjust resource allocations, or revisit the school's fit within the Zone structure.

This approach ensures that the Board remains informed and engaged in oversight, while school autonomy and management responsibilities rest with the LLN staff and school leadership teams.

Financial and Operational Oversight of Zone

The LLN Board holds fiduciary responsibility for the organization's financial health and overall operational effectiveness. Each spring, the Governance Working Group develops a draft budget for the upcoming fiscal year, beginning in July. The proposed budget is informed by anticipated revenue, expenses, the Zone funding model, and the service needs of member schools. The full Board reviews and votes to approve the budget at the May Board meeting prior to the start of the fiscal year.

Throughout the year, monthly financial reports are shared with the Board to ensure transparency and to monitor short- and long-term financial sustainability. These reports typically include updated revenue and expense statements, balance sheets, and enrollment trends that impact funding. In August or September, the organization conducts an independent financial audit and reviews the results with the Board. Financial reporting to the District is completed in accordance with the current PSA.

The Board relies on the Executive Director and LLN staff to oversee operational support and compliance for Zone schools. The Academics and Accountability Working Group, in

collaboration with the Executive Director, monitors key operational indicators such as enrollment trends, staffing levels, and adherence to Zone and school Innovation Plan commitments.

When operational or financial concerns at the school level arise, the Zone staff is responsible for developing responsive action plans and providing timely updates to the Board. If expectations are not met or issues escalate, the Board may direct the Executive Director to implement additional supports or corrective measures in consultation with DPS as appropriate. The LLN also maintains that, regardless of governance structure, all schools are entitled to equitable service quality from District departments, and the Zone continues to seek productive feedback loops that strengthen shared accountability.

Grievances are handled in alignment with the LLN Board's policy as outlined in the organization's bylaws. For matters involving DPS employees or processes governed by district policy, concerns are referred to the appropriate District channels to ensure consistent and legally compliant resolution.

Stakeholder Engagement and Decision-Making

The LLN's founding vision included building a collective of schools whose demographics mirror the district as closely as possible, while recognizing that enrollment patterns and district policy decisions may limit this goal in practice.

The LLN Board is intentionally structured to reflect the diverse perspectives of the Zone's schools and communities. Two school leaders and a teacher serve as voting members, ensuring that those closest to students help shape governance decisions. Many Community Representatives and other board members are parents of DPS and/or LLN students themselves, bringing additional expertise and strong connections to families and neighborhoods, strengthening alignment between the Board's work and the communities it serves.

Board meetings regularly include updates from school leaders and opportunities for dialogue about successes and challenges. Board members also are invited to participate in school visits and community events to stay connected to the lived experiences of students and caregivers. When making important decisions, the Board draws on this firsthand insight, as well as input gathered by Zone staff, to ensure deliberations are informed by authentic and representative community voice.

Section 4: Supplemental Materials

Academic Data and Reflections

School Performance Framework and Other Common Performance Metrics

In 2023, the LLN's Innovation Plan highlighted the following academic goals:

DPS Board policy AB and this application direct schools and the LLN to utilize the state SPF as a benchmark for academic progress and a critical reference point for school improvement planning. The LLN is committed to achieving "Performance" (green) status for those schools not yet doing so on the state SPF within three years. For those schools already achieving "Performance" status, the LLN commits to maintaining green status over the course of the three years.

This commitment remains unchanged. We know from experience that LLN schools, including those labeled "Turnaround" by the SPF, are capable of making meaningful gains when Innovation, autonomy, and strong support systems are aligned. At the same time, the current SPF results reflect the ongoing and urgent work ahead. While some schools are performing below expectations per the SPF, each school has notable areas of strength and signs of progress. We are committed to addressing challenges head-on, with tailored supports that build on what is working.

The table below shows each school's SPF results from SY22 and preliminary results from SY25, including a focus on academic growth:

School	SY22 SPF Result	SY25 SPF Overall (Preliminary)	SY25 SPF Growth (Preliminary)
Ashley Elementary	Performance Plan	Turnaround (31.6)	Does Not Meet (36.0%)
Cole Arts and Science Academy	Performance Plan	Turnaround (33.4)	Approaching (39.0%)
Creativity Challenge Community (C3)	Performance Plan	Performance Plan (76.4)	Meets (62.5%)
Denver Green School Northfield	Performance Plan - Low Participation	Performance Plan (93.5)	Exceeds (94.8%)
Denver Green School Southeast	Insufficient Data	Improvement Plan (48.7)	Approaching (60.1%)
Escuela Valdez	Insufficient Data	Performance Plan (87.6)	Exceeds (92.4%)
Merrill Middle School	Performance Plan	Performance Plan (77.8)	Meets (78.6%)

Swigert International School	Performance Plan - Low Participation	Performance Plan (91.9)	Exceeds (95.8%)
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These results reinforce the need for ongoing and focused support, particularly for schools currently identified as “Turnaround” by the SPF. However, they also point to promising momentum in key areas that the LLN and its schools intend to leverage and scale.

In addition to SPF outcomes, LLN schools continue to gather and reflect on a broad set of academic data to inform instruction and intervention. While CMAS is the primary driver of school ratings on the SPF, additional assessments like READ Act (early literacy) and ACCESS (English language proficiency) are widely used and offer valuable insight into student learning and guide our improvement efforts.

The links below provide access to Zone-wide and school-specific results from these assessments:

- [CMAS - Zone](#)
- [CMAS - School](#)
- [READ Act \(early literacy\)](#)
- [ACCESS \(English language proficiency\)](#)

District, State, and national data continue to show that students who have historically been marginalized (students of color, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities, among others) continue to experience significant opportunity gaps in the public education system. LLN students reflect these broader trends, though each of our schools also shows clear signs of academic strength and growth.

The table below summarizes just a few of the highlights from each school during the past school year and helps establish a clear case for continuing their work alongside their respective school communities and with the support of the Zone structure. These examples are not exhaustive, but they illustrate where meaningful gains are being made and where we see momentum building. For additional information on the flexibilities and strategies that contributed to these results, please refer to each school’s innovation plan.

School	SY25 Academic Highlights
Ashley Elementary	• Improved foundational literacy, increasing the percentage of K–3 students reading on grade level from 39% in SY24 to 58% in SY25 • From Interim 1 to Interim 2, the average percent correct for Hispanic students at Ashley increased by 10 percentage points, slightly exceeding districtwide

	Hispanic growth (Hispanic students represent 80 percent of the school's enrollment)
Cole Arts and Science Academy	- Increased ACCESS Median Growth Percentile (MGP) to 51, up from 48.5 in SY24 and 45.5 in SY23; this marks the first time in at least 10 years that the school's ACCESS growth exceeded 50 - Increased the percentage of K-3 students of color reading on grade level from 37% in SY24 to 52% in SY25 (by comparison, the districtwide increase for students of color was 5 percentage points)
Creativity Challenge Community (C3)	- Students of color at the school recorded mean CMAS scale scores in the 93rd percentile in both Math and ELA, compared to peers across the state - Increased the percentage of K-3 students with IEPs reading on grade level from 57% in SY24 to 68% in SY25 (by comparison, the districtwide increase for students with IEPs was 5 percentage points)
Denver Green School Northfield	- Recorded a 72 MGP for students of color on CMAS ELA, and a 62 in Math - both among the highest in the District - On NWEA Map test (a nationally-normed assessment that the school uses as an interim), 83% of students with IEPs met reading growth goals, with 72% meeting growth goals in math (compared to District rate of 57% and 48%, respectively)
Denver Green School Southeast	- Achieved an ACCESS MGP of 56.5 - one year prior to moving towards a full TNLI model - Increased the percentage of Black K-3 students reading on grade level by 21 percentage points (13% to 34%) between fall of 2024 and spring of 2025
Escuela Valdez	- Recorded what CDE terms "High Growth" - MGP above 65 - in both Math and Literacy on CMAS, one of only three DPS schools with 50%+ FRL to do so - Hispanic students achieved a 67 MGP in CMAS Math, in comparison to a 49 across the District
Merrill Middle School	- Exceeded the District ACCESS MGP by more than 20 points (74 compared to 53) - Recorded CMAS MGPs above 50 in both Math and ELA for all subgroups referenced in this application - students of color, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners

Swigert International School	- Free and reduced lunch-eligible students recorded a CMAS Math MGP of 69, which ranked in the top 4% of all schools in Colorado with a valid Math MGP score for this group of students - Recorded what CDE terms “High Growth” - MGP above 65 - in both Math and Literacy on CMAS for students of color
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These snapshots, along with the linked data sources and individual school plans, offer a more complete picture of how LLN schools are navigating the current moment. They show that schools are building on their strengths, addressing areas for improvement, and leveraging the flexibilities of the Innovation Zone model to better serve students.

Stakeholder Survey Data

In addition to the academic outcomes achieved by LLN schools, surveys of families, students, and educators highlight a strong and holistic school experience across the Zone:

Response Group	Question	SY25 LLN Positive Response Rate
Students	I feel safe at school.	91% (equivalent to DPS avg.)
Students	If I have a problem, I can go to a trusted adult at my school.	84% (equivalent to DPS avg.)
Students	My teacher understands me.	86% (equivalent to DPS avg.)
Students	My teachers respect both me and my culture.	96% (equivalent to DPS avg.)
Families	I feel like I belong at my child's school.	85% (+5% compared to DPS avg.)
Families	My child's school asks me to take part in making important school decisions.	90% (+6% compared to DPS avg.)
Families	The school works to create a positive relationship between school and home.	94% (+2% compared to DPS avg.)
Educators	Teachers are trusted to teach in the	85%

	way they think is best.	(+8% compared to DPS avg.)
Educators	I am involved in decisions that affect my work.	69% (+11% compared to DPS avg.)
Educators	My feedback is used to drive improvements.	54% (+3% compared to DPS avg.)

These survey findings point to school environments where students feel safe and respected, families feel a strong sense of belonging, and educators feel valued as professionals. Together, these healthy conditions have contributed to strong educator retention across LLN schools, ensuring stability for students and staff alike.

Employee Group	LLN Retention (SY24 into SY25)	DPS Retention (SY24 into SY25)
DCTA	85.4%	81.7%
DSL A	94.4%	80.8%
All Staff	83.1%	80.1%

Financial Documents

[3-Year Projected Zone Budget](#)

[2025 Audit](#) | [2024 Audit](#) | [2023 Audit](#)

Operational Documents

[Zone Organizational Chart](#)

Documented Notices of Concern - there are none

Governance Documents

[Board Member Roster and Resumes](#)

[Bylaws](#)

[Conflict of Interest Policy](#)

[Grievance Policy and Process](#)

Board Minutes for the Previous Year:

- [9/9/25](#)
- [8/6/25 \(Board Retreat\)](#)
- [6/10/25](#)
- [5/13/25](#)
- [*Note: April meeting was cancelled]
- [3/11/25](#)
- [2/11/25](#)
- [1/14/25](#)
- [12/10/24](#)
- [11/12/24](#)
- [10/8/24](#)
- [9/10/24](#)
- [8/8/24](#)

[Zone Leader Evaluation Tool](#)

Stakeholder Engagement Tracking

[Zone Plan Engagement Tracking](#)

Innovation Zone Expansion Appendix

[Willow Elementary Innovation Zone Expansion Plan](#)