



DENVER CHRISTIAN
SCHOOLS

Inspired Equipped Engaged

A
COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF
OPERATIONAL
MODELS

The Vision

September 25, 2012



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Historical Framework

Facilities

Denver Christian Schools has been offering a Christian education, founded on Reformed principles, to families of the Denver region since 1916. The first school building, a three-story brick structure, erected on the corner of E. Florida and S. Clarkson in southeast Denver, provided the initial venue for grades one through nine.

In 1950 a second school building was erected one mile south on S. Pearl Street. This facility provided the opportunity to expand the grades and now DCS was providing Christian education for students through high school.

Within ten years a third school building was erected on the 4100 block of east Warren Avenue, about two miles east of the Pearl Street campus. This building, the Van Dellen Campus, housed grades K through five. The Florida/Clarkson building became the home for grades six through eight.

In the late 1970s the original, Florida and Clarkson, building was sold and grades seven and eight moved to a newly expanded Pearl Street Campus. [I attended 6th grade at the Florida and Clarkson building in 1977-78, then attended the new Pearl St. addition for 7th grade in 1978-79, so dates are a little off here.]

In 1984, with the intention of building a K-12 campus on one site, DCS purchased a parcel of land, approximately thirty acres, on Dad Clark Drive in Highlands Ranch, some twelve miles south of the other campuses. 1987 marked the opening of a grade school on this site and the Highlands Ranch Campus became a second home for the elementary grades of DCS. A few years later a portion of this site was sold.

During the years 2001 and 2002 the Van Dellen Campus and the Highlands Ranch Campus expanded, the Pearl Street middle school was brought to these sites, and grades K-8 were now offered on these two campuses. The Pearl Street Campus continued to provide education for



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grades nine through twelve and be the home for the DCS central office functions. This is the current DCS facility configuration.

Governance

Denver Christian Schools, actually a governing society of members, manages the school through an elected board of trustees. Traditionally, this board of trustees collaborated with the head of school, the campus leaders, the staff, and the community members to make school administrative decisions through a network of school committees. This joint-effort model of governance was changed in 2011 to a policy governance model. Under the new model the DCS Board of Trustees created the Ends Policy (giving the school rationale for existence and goals against which progress is measured), the CEO Limitations (providing the parameters within which the CEO must operate), and the Board Means (setting the structure for board operations). The philosophies and dictates contained within the DCS Guiding Principles, Articles of Incorporation, By-Laws, and Statement of Faith (Foundational Documents) are the basis and reference for these aforementioned policies.

Sustainability

During the 2010-11 school year the DCS Board of Trustees developed and adopted a financial sustainability plan. In summary, this plan expected:

- a) a balanced annual budget that showed all expenses as funded by tuition revenues,
- b) cash reserves for both the operating and plant funds, and
- c) generous fundraising to provide a rich and deep source for awarding tuition scholarships and grants for future years.

Budget

As is the annual habit of the DCS leadership team, a 2012-13 DCS budget was presented to the Board of Trustees during the late spring of 2012. Because this budget proposal was not supported by the corresponding financial sustainability parameters, the budget was not approved by the Board.

In the summer of 2012, the Board of Trustees instructed the CEO to research, create, and present a future operations model that would embrace the DCS mission and provide an operational framework for a thriving school. The operations model is expected to be based on a sustainable enrollment pattern, to be functional within a limited time period, and to ensure DCS financial sustainability into the foreseeable future.



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This Report

In the fall of 2012, Denver Christian Schools is engaged in a significant work of creating a vision for our future which will provide a preeminent Christian educational opportunity for families in the Denver region. This report is a comparative study of the options before us. It includes a description of the DCS vision and an analysis of the operating structures, the options that are available, the research data that inform our decisions, and the optimal paths forward.



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Identity

More than 95 years ago, a small group of people with vision founded Denver Christian Schools. They established a school of distinction—a school that would partner with home and church to raise up covenant children who would embrace and embody a Reformed understanding of life.

From that small beginning, Denver Christian Schools has grown to occupy three campuses, proudly and gratefully serving a community that includes a wide variety of families, congregations, and denominations.

Ever Reforming

Across the last seven years, Denver Christian Schools has engaged in an intensive process of discernment, seeking to draw upon its rich history in order to clearly and powerfully rearticulate its fundamental and compelling identity—and the model of teaching and learning that flows from it—in ways that are relevant to today’s students and today’s educational challenges and that will take the DCS legacy forward for the next hundred years.

How We Got Here: A Brief Timeline of the Discernment Process

- | | |
|------|--|
| 2005 | The 2005 North Central accreditation self-study raises awareness of the need to build and sustain common understandings of the nature and value of Denver Christian Schools’ distinctive vision of education.
<i>Outcome: implementation of several faculty-development activities focused on developing a shared understanding of teaching from a Reformed perspective</i> |
| 2006 | The Board asks a small committee of DCS community members to begin a conversation regarding Denver Christian’s future.
<i>Outcome: formation of a long-range planning committee</i> |
| 2007 | Working with Kathryn Scanland, a professional strategic planner, the long-range planning committee conducts interviews, implements a web-based survey of the Denver Christian community, and establishes six areas of strategic focus for coming years.
<i>Outcome: the Graystone/Scanland report</i> |
| 2008 | The long-range planning committee is expanded to include additional staff and community members, and is subdivided into six task forces, each charged with developing a goal and a set of objectives, metrics, and evidences for its specific area of strategic focus. |



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Outcome: draft of a strategic plan presented to the Board in fall of 2009

- 2009 The Board edits and approves the document as Denver Christian Schools' strategic plan.
Outcome: adoption of Strategic Plan: 2008-2018 and creation of a strategic planning committee to oversee its implementation and annual revision
- 2010 As part of the implementation of Strategic Plan: 2008-2018, Denver Christian contracts with Art and Business One to undertake a perception survey and brand development on behalf of the school. The purpose of the survey is to identify the dominant psychographic profiles of current parents and to assess migration trends of "A" segments for use in future planning.
Outcome: insights that Denver Christian had no declared brand (value) proposition; was defined by the marketplace, not by itself; and that parents are primarily concerned with their children's future, not the school's history. Recommendation that the school develop a new brand declaration; define its vision, mission, and values as an organization; create new decision-making criteria; and rally its internal and external audiences to increase advocacy and word-of-mouth marketing.
- 2010 Pursuing the recommendations of the AABO Report, the academic task force (Goal 1—Excellent and Distinctive Christ-centered Education) of the Strategic Planning Committee drafts a set of "guiding principles" for teaching and learning at Denver Christian.
Outcome: "Teaching and Learning at Denver Christian Schools: Guiding Principles" approved and adopted by the Board in January of 2011. Identification of the words "inspired, equipped, engaged" to describe the DCS graduate; creation of a new vision statement; and creation of a revised mission statement
- 2011 The brand (value) proposition "inspired, equipped, and engaged," introduced and described in *Guiding Principles*, is used as the basis for development, by AABO, of a new logo.
Outcome: a new logo—a torch symbol comprised of three colored swaths representing the characteristics "inspired, equipped, engaged" and two spaces, representing home and church (a reference to the three-legged stool philosophy of Reformed Christian education)
- 2012 Denver Christian rolls out its new brand (value) proposition and commits to its new vision and message.



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Outcome: New signage, installed at all three campuses; new messaging in both internal and external communication; and a new web site

2012 Discussions among the high school faculty produce a first draft of *Core Competencies: A Framework for a Denver Christian Education* [Appendix], envisioned as a companion to *Guiding Principles*, and designed to articulate essential student outcomes, thereby taking the first step toward bridging the gap between the vision of teaching and learning articulated in *Guiding Principles* and the daily realities of teaching and learning at Denver Christian.

Outcome: a draft of Core Competencies: A Framework for a Denver Christian Education

2012 As part of a comparative study of operational models mandated by the Board, a small task force revises the 2011 version of *Guiding Principles*, reaffirming the core principles introduced in the original document and elaborating more clearly the distinctive characteristics of a Denver Christian education and the community that provides it.

Outcome: a draft of Teaching and Learning at Denver Christian Schools: Guiding Principles (2012) [Appendix]

Where We Are Now: Three Steps to a ‘Re-formed’ Denver Christian Schools

The vision for a renewed and ‘re-formed’ Denver Christian Schools is built on **three scaffolded documents** which trace the route from the vision of a Denver Christian graduate, education, and supporting community that is outlined in the revised (2012) version of *Guiding Principles* to the description of a reborn school, detailed in this section of the report.

Understanding the relationship among these documents is critical to appreciating the force of the recommendations for a renewed Denver Christian contained herein. The first two documents, *Guiding Principles* and *Core Competencies*, are products of the strategic planning process and recent discussions among the high school faculty, respectively. The third—a new document which we here introduce in draft form—is called *Components of a Denver Christian Education and School* [Appendix]. It reflects the direct implications of the two earlier documents, essentially translating into pragmatic educational and logistic terms what a Denver Christian education and school will need to include in order to achieve the vision outlined in *Guiding Principles* and *Core Competencies*.

The following schematic illustrates the relationships among these three documents.



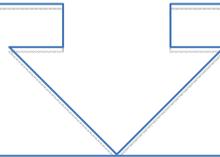
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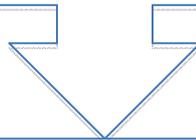
Guiding Principles

- Presents a high-level vision of the graduate Denver Christian Schools produces, using the key descriptors “inspired, equipped, engaged”;
- Articulates a set of abstract terms that describe the education which will produce such graduates; and
- Describes, in broad terms, the commitments and characteristics of the community which produces such graduates.



Core Competencies

- Defines the essential student outcomes that will characterize the “inspired, equipped, engaged” graduate in terms of eight areas of competency; and
- Fleshes out each area of competency with dynamic descriptions of what the Denver Christian graduate can do and is committed to doing.



Components of a Denver Christian Schools Education and School

- Reflects the work of inductive reasoning from *Core Competencies*—that is, answers the question, “What kind of educational experiences and interactions must be ensured in order to produce graduates who possess these competencies?”; and
- Reflects the work of inductive reasoning from this account of the necessary educations and experiences—that is, answers the question, “What kind of school facilities and organization must be ensured in order to enable and facilitate these educational experiences and interactions?”



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Education

Identity: From the ‘What’ to the ‘How’

Components of a Denver Christian Education and School [Appendix], the draft document that completes the triad of foundational documents that set forth the vision for teaching and learning at Denver Christian Schools, represents the results of original thinking, but not entirely new ideas. Rather, it completes the line of thought begun with the description of Denver Christian’s **identity** in *Guiding Principles* and continued with the description of the “**what**” of the Denver Christian graduate in *Core Competencies*. Specifically, *Components of a Denver Christian Education and School* outlines the direct implications that *Guiding Principles* and *Core Competencies* have for how Denver Christian Schools organizes, implements, and assesses teaching and learning. By supplying the “**how**” of a Denver Christian education and school, this document provides the final, logical step of a critical trajectory that will lead to a “re-formed” Denver Christian Schools.

How Did We Get to the ‘How’?

The following graphic emphasizes how this account of the kind of education and school necessary to support Denver Christian’s identity as outlined in *Guiding Principles* has been developed. The graphic can be read in two different directions.

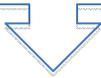
- To understand how we have arrived at the description of a school that will produce inspired, equipped, and engaged graduates, read from the top down.
- To imagine how a school, elaborated and operated as described in the following pages, will produce inspired, equipped, and engaged graduates, read from the bottom up.



Vision

IDENTITY: *Guiding Principles*

Denver Christian’s identity as a community dedicated to presenting an education which produces “inspired, equipped, and engaged” graduates



THE “WHAT”: *Core Competencies*

Spiritual Discernment	Critical Evaluation & Analysis	Communication	Technology & Information Literacy	Creativity & Innovation	Personal Maturity	Social Interaction	Christian Commitment & Vocation
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THE “HOW”: *Components of a DCS Education and School*

Educational **experiences and interactions** that nurture these competencies



Components of an **education** that produces these experiences and interactions



Components of a **school** that supports this education

Breaking Down the “How”: An Education and a School

As the above graphic makes clear, “how” we achieve the vision outlined in *Guiding Principles* and spelled out in educational outcomes in *Core Competencies* **has two parts:**

An **Education**...and
the **School** that supports it. [This format is confusing. Not sure whether to read across or down. Can we take out the space b/t the columns and add either an ellipsis before the “and” or add a comma?]



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These two parts do not flow directly from *Core Competencies*, but are connected to the competencies by an account of those **educational “Experiences and Interactions”** which nurture the competencies that we aim to produce in our students.

In the Appendix we provide a draft of *Components of a Denver Christian Education and School*. As a central feature, this document offers a sketch of each of the eight core competencies, elucidating how an analysis of the **experiences and interactions** necessary to nurture each competency can help us articulate the kind of **education** we will need to provide students, as well as the kind of **school** necessary to offer and support that education.

Summary of Findings

A review of the analysis provided in *Components* reveals that key implications of Denver Christian’s commitment to graduating students who are inspired and equipped to engage the world with Christ’s transforming love and power recur again and again. These implications point to important realities about both the kind of education and the kind of school that are required to bring about these outcomes.

For example, implicit in the analysis, but nevertheless a necessary conclusion is that curricula at Denver Christian are seamlessly integrated, both vertically, from grade to grade, and also horizontally across disciplines, and between in-classroom and out-of-classroom (i.e., extra-curricular) activities and experiences. Even policies and processes related to student discipline flow naturally and inevitably from the vision of the mature, self-reflective young man or woman whom Denver Christian aspires to graduate. In this model of teaching and learning, students encounter vertically and horizontally consistent and coherent expectations and pedagogies, and are continually challenged to deploy in all aspects of life what they have learned and to build on this foundation in age-appropriate ways.

Moreover, teaching strategies at Denver Christian emphasize intellectually and physically active manipulation of content and resources. Students learn by doing. Teachers listen, ask questions, and challenge answers as much or more than they disseminate information. Indeed, content is delivered via a wide range of media, and cutting-edge technologies promote and facilitate both student and teacher creation, collaboration, and communication. Wherever possible and appropriate, instruction is personalized and differentiated, not only through flexible grouping and enrichment, but also through appropriate acceleration so as to optimally meet the learning needs of every student.

Even more immediately and tangibly, providing the kind of education that Denver Christian aspires to offer requires a certain kind of school, with certain key characteristics. Primary among these characteristics is a low student: teacher ratio. This characteristic appears again and again in this analysis.



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In fact, one of its most undeniable conclusions is that you simply cannot produce students who are familiar with and formed by the kind of reflective habits and abilities we desire to develop in our graduates without committing to primarily discussion-based activities and highly interactive experiences and then making that format feasible by also committing to low student: teacher ratios.

But these commitments also entail other equally indispensable implications. For example, they lead to undeniable conclusions regarding the characteristics and attitudes of faculty. Specifically, this vision of education places extremely high demands on faculty—this is simply unavoidable, because classroom methods that are less demanding on the teacher simply will not adequately engage students in the kind of thinking and communicating and interacting with others, ideas, and the world that are required to bring about the desired outcomes. This reality entails two crucial things.

First, WHO the teachers are is absolutely crucial. Not just any personality or ability level will be able to hold its own in the kind of daily intense practices of communal and individual dialogue that this model demands. The “re-formed” Denver Christian Schools requires faculty *who are*:

- Very bright and highly analytical;
- Able to engage in discussion, meta-level analysis and self-awareness exercises across subjects ranging from technology use to interpersonal relations and spirituality;
- Willing and able to engage in authentic and vulnerable discussions with students, especially about hard topics and in highly personal ways;
- Extremely secure in their Reformed faith and thus able to engage in religious grappling with students without resorting to totalitarian strategies or making students feel unsafe in expressing themselves honestly;
- Committed to and skilled in inquiry and discussion-based modes of teaching and able to sustain the highly demanding teaching activities, including timely, detailed, and thoughtful feedback that delivering these kinds of curricula will require; and
- Eager and professional in engaging with other teachers in order to ensure vertical and horizontal alignment of curricula and to remain in close communication about individual students’ spiritual, emotional, social, and academic progress.

Second, it follows, then, that Denver Christian must create an environment that not only attracts such faculty, but also helps and allows them to succeed, grow, and feel fulfilled in executing the daunting task laid before them. This means that faculty *are provided*:

- Optimal numbers of preps per day in order to have time to plan for and engage wholeheartedly in intellectually complex and emotionally demanding lessons and dialogical engagements with students;



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- Administrative aides to take administrative and clerical work off their plates;
- Classroom teaching partners and aides to allow them to divide up classes, differentiate instruction, and engage in frequent one-on-one and small-group interactions with students;
- Access to and support for excellent and up-to-date technological, textual, artistic, athletic, and scientific resources; and
- Frequent and enjoyable opportunities for professional development and collegial engagement.

In addition to the demands with respect to faculty of an intensely discussion- and reflection-based curricula, this model of teaching and learning also calls for a high percentage of seamlessly integrated off-campus learning opportunities. For example, in order to truly integrate service into students' identities, offer students meaningful cross-cultural experiences, and allow students to effectively explore their vocations and gifts, this school must:

- Have daily and semester schedules that allow for the frequent inclusion of off-campus experiences, including extended travel;
- Develop and sustain relationships with professional, academic, cultural, and service partners which will allow our students' education to expand to and encompass off-campus experiences; and
- Be geographically located in an area that will make the inclusion of such off-campus experiences on a regular basis logistically feasible.

Furthermore, this model calls for very specific types of interactions among students, students and faculty, and faculty members, and this has implications not only for the kinds of people who comprise the Denver Christian community, but also for the physical facilities that house and make possible their work together. Thus, the success of this model requires conducive classroom and building designs that include:

- Classrooms and meeting rooms that foster discussion and regular teacher-student and student-student interaction and, conversely, discourage teachers from utilizing pedagogies that do not require their full intellectual and emotional presence with their students;
- Building design that encourages regular exchange and dialogue among teachers, whose work must be closely coordinated if it is to achieve the horizontal and vertical integration required of this model; and
- Spaces that invite and enhance displaying, sharing, and celebrating the outcomes and products of student artistic, athletic, and intellectual efforts and self-expression.

And finally, although not explicitly stated in any one of the eight analyses, in order to sustain and further develop the education that it desires to offer, the "re-formed" Denver Christian Schools commits to a



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program of regular and rigorous self- and external evaluation. Student assessment measures not just content, but skills, and recognizes not just raw achievement, but also, as an indicator of the development of the attitudes and behaviors that characterize an inspired, equipped, and engaged graduate, effort and improvement. Similarly, student discussion about test results with peers, teachers, and counselors promotes practices of self- and group reflection that nurture students' own self-assessment skills and help students set goals and measure progress toward accomplishing those goals. Regular and focused faculty and staff evaluation encourages and facilitates continual faculty self-reflection and growth, both personally and professionally. And necessarily and perhaps most critically, at an "ever-reforming" Denver Christian Schools, periodic and intensive program assessment meaningfully informs practice, in an unending cycle of measurement, reflection, revision, implementation, and re-measurement.



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Staff

We believe that the community of employees which holds the responsibility for the education described above must be committed to the following core values.

- **authenticity and transparency** – We strive to participate in regular, open, and honest dialogue about organizational activities, initiatives, priorities, and decisions.
- **diversity** – We desire to be and to serve a school community that reflects the family of God, including and celebrating individuals and families from a wide range of economic, educational, and ethnic backgrounds and with diverse abilities, interests, passions, and needs.
- **consummate professionalism** – We understand and strive for professional excellence—for example, Christian behavior, professional competence, meaningful collaboration, appropriate communication, and consistent growth and improvement—as a spiritual duty.
- **fellowship** – We are brothers and sisters in Christ, united in affirming God’s faithfulness, encouraging one another in discipleship, and graciously accepting correction from others.
- **mentorship** – We engage students in meaningful dialogue about important issues in their lives and develop relationships of spiritual mentorship, striving daily to cultivate the emotional intuition, the spiritual acuity, and the personal openness to be effective instruments of the Holy Spirit’s work in our students’ lives.
- **grace and restoration** – We work together with one another, students, and families to build and sustain a community of grace that acknowledges the realities of sin and pain, but also affirms and celebrates the redemption and restoration made possible in Christ.
- **transformative work that is ever being transformed** – We strive to ensure that all that we do as a school and as Christian educators reflects our calling to help transform the world.

Every employee of DCS demonstrates a deep respect for these values, develops personal habits that embrace these values, and invites accountability measured against these values.

The key DCS employee group comprises educators who are charged with leading curriculum development, advocating for the best technology and facilities, and evolving and nurturing best pedagogical practices. These people understand, explain, and defend Christian education from a



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Reformed perspective. Their lives provide evidence of their commitment to the aspirations outlined in *Guiding Principles*. Faculty members are determined to be certified, to continually grow their professional skills and performance, and to actively support their colleagues. They find joy in being educators and are willing and able to adjust teaching responsibilities as those responsibilities are identified by the needs of the system. They believe that it is a privilege to be a DCS educator. DCS faculty are broadly recognized and appreciated as outstanding professionals.

These DCS educators include classroom teachers and counselors with subject area and pedagogical expertise; they are facilitators of many types of learning, including online; and they are educational leaders engaging in the athletic and fine arts activities of the school. They see every student activity as an educational opportunity and challenge. As mentors, they walk alongside students in their academic journeys. They extend classroom learning environments as they bring a variety of educational enrichment opportunities to their students, and in turn, their students to a variety of enrichment opportunities. DCS educators also include instructional aides who support all teaching/learning activities.

Educational experts, including those who may be known as principals, lead and coordinate the instructional activities. They are skilled in curriculum development, in pedagogical strategies, and in personnel advancement. They have expertise that is focused on particular grade levels and/or on particular subject matters.

The head of the school, who reports directly to the Board of Trustees, along with those who direct academics, finance, operations, and development form the administrative sector of the staff. They are as visionary as they are operational; they are as skilled in communication as they are in meditation; they are as inspirational as they are functional; and they demonstrate as much passion as they do wisdom. These institutional leaders are professionals with experience in institutional leadership and they possess special skills that contribute richly to successes in their areas of responsibility.

Employees who support the teaching/learning activities are office personnel, the maintenance and custodial team, and the information and educational technology staff. These are customer-centric and highly skilled people who see their calling to be positively influencing DCS educational practices by enhancing the teaching/learning environment. In many situations these employees directly connect the school and the community. Their high level of environmental awareness provides them the opportunity to meet needs even before they are identified by others. They are employees who contribute in substantial ways to a smoothly operating and highly functional organization.

All employees of DCS are compensated at levels that reflect their high level of professionalism. Their competitive benefits include a health plan, a retirement plan, and supportive provisions for vacation and personal leave days and for holidays. For educational and development purposes, DCS provides its



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educators with the opportunity to extend their contracts past the traditional school year and DCS encourages them to do so.

Job descriptions exist for each position. Written contracts provide documented agreements between DCS and its employees. The timing and the substance of these contracts are specified by DCS policies. DCS and all employees are expected to honor contract intent and provisions. All employees are responsible to fulfill their duties and are accountable to their supervisors. They expect documented annual performance reviews which are both summative and formative.

DCS employees are eager to grow their knowledge and skills through professional development. With regularity, they read professionally, they engage in professional debate, and they attend classes and/or conferences. DCS supports these activities financially and embraces these activities with documented professional growth recognition.



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Partners

Denver Christian Schools is founded on a world view that is rooted in a Reformed perspective of God and His redemptive work. Our *Guiding Principles* fleshes out the meaning of this perspective by explaining that we offer an education that is founded on the conviction that all truth is God's truth, that we are called to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, and that we do this by engaging His world in the work of transformation and restoration. This is the value proposition we offer to our community: our DCS education is firmly anchored in and is daily exercised around our belief that God created, man fell, Christ redeemed, and the Spirit recreates. We live, teach, and learn within this emotional and cognitive structure. Those who partner with Denver Christian Schools in the exciting and important work of Christian education understand and embrace this common world view.

DCS seeks to partner well with churches. Indeed, we believe that our Reformed perspective of education arises from a covenantal understanding of God's relationship to His church, i.e., the community of believers. This perspective provides DCS with the goal to unite the family, their place of worship, and the school into a community of partners that support each other and work in harmony to educate the whole child. Our world view, as explained by our *Guiding Principles*, encourages us to graduate students who increasingly see God's world as He sees it, who grow their abilities to understand His world and its interrelationships, and who seek the opportunity to effect healing of His world's brokenness. Our DCS students and their families understand and embrace this world view and our students worship with their families in communities which can provide the invitation and the pathway to know and trust God more deeply.

DCS also seeks to partner well with families. Specifically, DCS seeks to partner with parents whose children will prosper within an environment in which the family values and the school values are common, well-identified, thoroughly understood, and actively exercised. These core values, as defined in our *Guiding Principles*, comprise integrity and authenticity within an appreciation for diversity and fellowship. Even more importantly, these values comprise a deep appreciation for God's works of grace and restoration and for His passion for transformative and reformative activity in our world. Children of parents who understand and embrace these values will benefit significantly from being students at Denver Christian Schools.

The operation of our schools is financed by tuition alone. Costs incurred by salaries and associated employee benefits, administration, operations, maintenance, and property replacement are all covered by the income which DCS receives through tuition and associated fees. In many cases, a DCS family's total tuition can be reduced through scholarships and/or financial aid that are available through the generous donations of friends of the school and other school-related funding mechanisms.



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Our DCS vision of education provides a more focused picture of the families (parents and students) that may fit well with the educational experiences provided by DCS. This picture is summarized below.

Religious Orientation:

- Our family members are reflective and growing Christians. They are deliberate in their determination to become that which God intends them to become, spiritually, socially, intellectually, and emotionally.
- They are captivated by the implications of *Guiding Principles*. They are committed to developing their abilities to live as inspired, equipped, and engaged people and they realize the potential of students who are educated at DCS.

Educational Orientation:

- Our family members are truth seekers. They understand that all truth is God's truth and that education is the business of truth discovery.
- They envision the educational process as a continually conscious effort to ask important and challenging questions, to establish investigative procedures, and to evaluate answers within a defined and critical perspective.
- Students are willing to work hard to achieve important and realistic educational objectives.

Values Orientation:

- Our family members are authentic and vulnerable. They possess the ability to both offer and receive criticism and are willing to involve themselves in discussions that promote and lead to excellence.
- They appreciate and honor diversity and they delight to live in the creation-fall-redemption framework.

Financial Implications:

- Our partnering families are eager to commit to their tuition responsibilities.



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- Our society members support DCS in its commitment to providing all partnering families with the opportunity to profit from a DCS education, and involve themselves in fundraising and volunteer activities as ways to exhibit their committed engagement with the school.

Location Implications:

- Our partnering families take advantage of the realistic transportation options that DCS provides so that the educational experiences of the students are optimized.



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Financial

Sustainability

Sound stewardship forms the foundation for all financial matters pertaining to a sustainable future for Denver Christian Schools. This stewardship must honor God and our stakeholders – parents, staff, community, and vendors. All resources entrusted to DCS first belong to God and must be a basis for all decisions. The stewardship (use) of people, facilities, and money should communicate faithfulness, diligence, excellence, and fairness.

A sustainable financial model for DCS requires sufficient annual cash flows to timely meet payroll, debt service, and vendor obligations. As a fee-based, not-for-profit institution, cash inflow sources are payments from families for tuition and fees. Insufficient inflows prohibit a sustainable school system. Outflows cannot exceed inflows – DCS lives within its means. Therefore, sustainability requires diligent budgeting and cash flow projections, and accountability for operating within these business decisions.

Accountability is a mutual endeavor. DCS is accountable to its stakeholders by:

- providing an education commensurate with the tuition rate
- recruiting and retaining quality staff
- maintaining good business relationships by timely paying vendors
- obtaining annual audits by independent accountants

Stakeholders are accountable to DCS by:

- parents: making tuition/fee payments per agreement terms
- staff: fulfilling their duties with integrity, diligence, and excellence
- donors: giving generously and consistently
- vendors: providing quality services and goods
- volunteers: supporting the schools with time and resources.

Policies and procedures are continually reviewed to accurately convey the expectations of each party and to ensure accountability of all parties, with the understanding that not all relationships may be in the best interest of both parties.



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Reserves

For DCS to continue, cash reserves will be budgeted for and set aside in each operating cycle (fiscal year) so the school system is proactively prepared for capital facility needs and for unforeseen or unusual circumstances that may arise. A budgeted cash reserve will be set to meet the Board required operating reserves of 5% of Revenue or \$500,000 (whichever is less). In addition to the cash reserves a plant reserve fund will equal 8% of the revenue to a maintained level of \$500,000.

DCS policy requires the adoption of an operational model that includes financial strategies for reserving funds to be used for future tuition assistance, which is beyond the cash reserve previously discussed. By prefunding future tuition assistance, DCS becomes less vulnerable to short term donor trends and to enrollment fluctuations, both of which may be influenced by regional economic conditions.

Property/Obligations/Debt

As of June 30, 2012, DCS owes \$1.77 million and its annual debt service (principal and interest) is \$207,000 or approximately \$320 per student (at an enrollment of 650 students). The note matures in 2023, carries an interest rate of 5.15%, and is secured by DCS' Pearl Street property. Per the underlying bond ordinance, the interest rate is variable, so interest costs are subject to change. Debt service is a fixed cost to DCS and is covered by operating revenues (tuition). The Pearl Street Campus net property and equipment value of approximately \$7.5 million (historical cost less accumulated depreciation) exceeds the indebtedness. Though valuable, DCS' capital assets do not translate into cash flows. Therefore, DCS will diligently prepare an operating budget that includes, at a minimum, the required amount of annual debt service. Any additional debt incurred by DCS increases the amount of cash inflows needed to service that debt.

Tuition Assistance

Tuition assistance enables qualifying families to send their children to DCS when they cannot otherwise afford to do so. Tuition assistance at DCS is comprised of funded scholarships and aids (cash is received from donors or other third party payers) and policy-aligned tuition reductions for employees. DCS utilizes a third party agency to receive and process applications for financial aid in order to ensure the most equitable and fair distribution of assistance to qualifying families. Families are notified of this process and relevant timelines via electronic and print communications. DCS encourages all families to apply for aid within the confidential confines of the stated process and timeline. DCS expects that families will accurately and honestly report their financial information to the third party agency in order to ensure that all applicants are treated fairly and equitably. DCS also reserves the right to request additional clarifying information from any applicant family as the situation warrants. If a qualifying



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applicant family is awarded tuition assistance, they remain accountable for timely payment of the remaining financial commitment to DCS. DCS will evaluate its tuition assistance policies and processes on an annual basis and improvements will be implemented.

DCS is a fee-based, not-for-profit institution, and stewardship plus sustainable business practices require achieving a balance between revenues and expenditures. Every dollar not paid by one party will be paid by someone else or cut as an expenditure. DCS will sustain the provision of an excellent academic program and will meet its obligations when adequate revenues and cash flows exist. DCS values its stakeholders and they value DCS. Therefore it is reasonable to expect that families may adopt a sacrificial lifestyle as they undertake and fulfill appropriate financial commitments on behalf of their children's Christian education.

Staff Compensation

DCS staff members represent a key stakeholder group in its mission, excellence, and sustainability. All staff members will be equipped with the resources they need to fulfill their duties in an effective and efficient manner – including teaching tools (e.g. textbooks, art materials, etc.), supplies, and technology (hardware and software). Both the annual budget and longer-term strategies will address this need so that the DCS staff is equipped to meet academic and operational standards of excellence.

Employee compensation (salary and benefits) is the largest component of the Schools' expense categories. DCS will adopt an operational model that allows for recruitment and retention of qualified staff members committed to the highest standards of excellence, integrity, and accountability. Pay scales are developed based on multiple factors including education, licensure, competitors' pay rates, the regional economy, and budgetary needs. Total compensation represents a balance between academic and operational needs, and the Schools' financial resources.

Non-Tuition Revenue Sources

The Director of Development position is recognized as an integral part of DCS. Providing a consistent message and rich promotion of the school to both existing and new donor sources will provide a much needed resource to the school. DCS expects that this development direction will result in increased funds to provide tuition assistance along with support to the DCS Foundation and other fund-raising activities. The DCS tuition assistance fund will be established ahead of the budget year and will be available to the financial team as they distribute these funds to qualifying DCS families.

The development and retention of a committed donor base is critical to the sustainability of DCS. Contributions will continue to be a valuable DCS resource. Our Director of Development will grow our current efforts to locate and communicate with DCS donors. DCS will develop and implement a plan for



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expanding and retaining a donor base that is committed to DCS' sustainability, mission, and excellence. This plan will include staffing, resources, and specific desired outcomes.

The Denver Christian Schools Foundation, Inc. is established as a separate 501(c)(3) organization to support the operations of the DCS. Assets held by the Foundation have accumulated from gifts made by donors who intended such gifts, and their earnings, to generate benefits for multiple fiscal periods. The Foundation will provide annual gifts to the school for use in tuition assistance and other specific purposes. The Foundation remains an important DCS partner as it continues to grow an endowment for annual tuition assistance and DCS support. The deep-rooted partnership between DCS and the Foundation will continue into DCS's vibrant future.

ReNew Upscale Retail, Inc. is established as a separate organization to generate additional financial resources for DCS and it operates as a retail thrift store selling items such as furniture, clothing, housewares, and electronics. ReNew has a volunteer board for oversight and is managed by paid staff. It relies on many dedicated volunteers to perform the tasks necessary to operate, such as merchandising, cashiering, delivery and pickup, and monitoring. Expenses and obligations offset the revenues the store generates. ReNew is undergoing a comprehensive internal evaluation as to the necessary elements required to capitalize on its strong start as [or, "toward becoming"] a thriving funding source. Options for volunteer resourcing and other operational issues will be analyzed to best utilize this funding source. ReNew will provide financial assistance to the operations and/or tuition assistance funds of the school.



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Facilities

As an educational institution, the primary function of our facilities is to support education. The classrooms and ancillary amenities will promote collaboration and the use of technology. They will support the various curricular and extracurricular activities as students are learning and growing through their educational experience at Denver Christian. Facilities' appearance, functionality, and locations will allow current and future constituents the ability to promote and encourage friends and family to attend events as well as enroll at Denver Christian.

The Arts

At DCS arts includes vocal, performance, instrumental, and visual (painting/drawings etc.) activities. Involvement in many areas of the arts is part of the Denver Christian experience. Opportunities to participate in the arts at Denver Christian exist from Preschool to 12 and the school will maintain and enhance this focus on the arts at every level. The DCS facilities will accommodate opportunities for students to practice and perform for the greater community at the highest achievable level. Spaces provide the opportunities to develop the performance arts and integrate this learning with other educational activities. Adequate storage will protect and secure the assets that are a part of each program. All artists will be provided with places to display their talents in venues that enhance the experiences for the artists and their audiences. The DCS arts program should provide a culturally enriching experience for the DCS community and its neighbors.

Sports/Physical Education

Physical education classes and organized sports activities will have dedicated venues and spaces. In these classes and programs, students participate in activities that encourage sportsmanship and refine talents. Teamwork and healthy competition are not only essential to student success, but also promote rallying points for the school and community. Through sports, we will exhibit the Christian ideals we constantly strive to teach and live. Ideally, a strong sports program has multiple fields, courts, or other facilities to allow venues for practice as well as competition. Having a "home field" is advantageous and develops a sense of pride and identity for the institution. Venues will provide opportunities for students to actively participate in traditional interscholastic sports such as golf, football, soccer, baseball, volleyball, basketball, cross-country, and track. Denver Christian at all sites and levels should continue to provide the opportunity for all students to learn within a variety of physical activities and to compete in a variety of sports.



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Technology

Technology will be embraced by staff as a tool for teaching, by students to enhance learning, and by the community for building and sustaining relationships. The technology infrastructure, hardware/equipment, and software all shall be adaptable to changes. Infrastructure shall be in place to allow for teachers, students, and parents to access the wide range of information and educational tools available. Denver Christian will address the infrastructure so that current technological equipment and infrastructure can be used effectively for many educational purposes. Future advances can be easily incorporated into the system.

With the proper infrastructure and hardware systems, the educational teams will effectively use technology to educate the students. In addition to these items, a school management system (in the first stages of implementation) will allow for effective management of the central office functions as well as all scheduling, communications, and development activities at all grade levels. A properly planned technology system will provide a reliable tool for all aspects of the schools activities.

Technology development will be budgeted for, monitored, and implemented so the faculty and staff are equipped for efficient teaching and management of the school systems. Planning and implementation will allow for better and easier management of the school technology without providing "band-aids,"

Community

Facilities will invite participation and involvement from the community as a whole. Volunteers, parents, grandparents, and community members are proud of the facilities when they attend programs and activities. Facilities will have cross functional spaces that can be used for community gathering and meetings.

Access

Understanding access concerns and needs of our constituency is of paramount importance. Access is vital to maintaining sustainable tuition levels and attracting new customers who desire the educational experience at DCS. Facilities that are accessible for all grade levels will allow for cross functional staffing as well as an economy of scale. Equally important, Preschool-12 accessibility will increase our customers' willingness to participate and live within the total Preschool-12 Denver Christian educational experience. Current and future customers, at all grades levels, will promote the school when its convenience is balanced with its value.



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Accessibility also affects a unified sense of pride and recognition. If the system is located in multiple locations, a well-organized transportation system will be necessary to make the facilities comfortably accessible to all constituents.

Collaboration

Facilities will promote collaboration between all aspects of the school system. DCS facilities will promote and enhance the vertical and horizontal integration of educational experiences by providing staff and students easy access to multiple teaching/learning touch points across multiple grade levels and across multiple disciplines.

Student collaboration will take place between and within all grades of the system, as students equipping each other, as students demonstrating an inspired life to other students across the Preschool-12 continuum and as students engaging the world in the work of healing restoration.

The students' educational experiences will be enhanced as the teachers have greater opportunities for professional development through collaboration. Sharing across grade levels and team teaching creates a creative and cohesive environment. Inconsistency and competition will be minimized as collaboration is increased across all areas of the Denver Christian system. Facilities will support the sharing of techniques and curriculum allowing Denver Christian to provide a preeminent Preschool-12 educational experience.



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**Teaching and Learning at Denver Christian Schools:
Guiding Principles**
September 10, 2012 [Draft Revision]

Vision

Denver Christian Schools will offer, within the Reformed tradition of Christianity, a distinctive and outstanding education, pre-school through 12th grade.

Mission

Denver Christian Schools inspires and equips children of Christian parents to engage the world with Christ's transforming power and love.

The Critical Importance of a School's Worldview

Every school has a worldview, a way of understanding and explaining life and of interpreting people and events, that dictates not only *what*, but *how* it teaches. This worldview permeates and shapes every aspect of a child's experience in school, influencing and forming that child in a myriad of often-subtle but critically important ways.

It is vital, therefore, that parents understand and support the worldview that underlies and guides a school's approach to education.

To that end, Denver Christian Schools offers the following description of its worldview, together with an explanation of the impact that this worldview has on teaching and learning at our school.

Denver Christian Schools' Worldview

We worship, honor, and seek to glorify God. We believe that the triune God is sovereign. Because God is Lord over all, we know that any truth that we discover not only

originated with God but points to Him. Therefore, all truth is God's truth. Because we understand that academic and religious truths are congruent, we need not fear exploring and learning about all aspects of our world. Indeed, we are called by our Creator to do so.

We view God's truth through the narrative of the Creation, the Fall, and the Redemption. God created the universe perfectly. We, humankind, destroyed that perfection through our fall. Christ, through His sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection, has redeemed us, and working in us and through us, His image bearers, seeks to restore His creation. This understanding of the world embraces and informs every aspect of life.

As Christians, we belong to God and are called to live in His world, glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. The nature of our presence in this world is determined by God's own redemptive work: specifically, saved by Christ's atoning sacrifice and enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit, we experience transformation ourselves and are called to increasingly become agents of renewal to help reclaim and restore the world for God's glory.

Educational and Organizational Implications

At Denver Christian Schools, the "what" and the "how" of education—what we teach and how we do so—flow directly from our understanding of God, of the world that He created and rules, and of humankind as made in His image. Specifically, our belief in the sovereignty of the triune God over His whole creation and His active desire to reconcile fallen creation to Himself has the following implications.

Our Graduates

Denver Christian Schools aspires to produce graduates who are inspired, equipped, and engaged. Students educated from this perspective are confronted in their homes, in their churches, and in their school—indeed, in every aspect of their educational experience—with the Biblical call to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and mind. They are instructed in ways of Christian discipleship and called to develop Christian virtues and practices. They are challenged to experience, celebrate, and participate in God's redemptive work. In sum, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Denver Christian graduates

are **inspired** to see themselves and the world through the eyes of the Father, who delighted in his creation and desires for it to be reclaimed for Him;

are **equipped** with the ability to understand and apply God's truth wherever it is found, both in the created world and in the mind of Christ as revealed in Scripture; and

integrate their faith and their learning by approaching every subject they study and every activity in which they participate as an opportunity to become **engaged** in the redemptive work of God here on earth.

At Denver Christian Schools, then, educational excellence is defined as the development of those understandings and attitudes that enable students to see their world, themselves, and their calling through the lens of God's redemptive vision for His creation, and the attainment of the knowledge and skills that will enable them to act out their calling as agents of renewal in a broken world.

The Education We Offer

We believe that an education which accomplishes this must have the following characteristics.

It is **covenantal**—that is, it is offered to children of Christian parents, so as to promote the consistency in the child's experience at home, school, and church that is vital to faith development.

It is **holistic**—that is, it is integrative, taking a “head, heart, hands” approach to teaching the whole child, and seamlessly exploring, affirming, and applying faith to every subject and in every aspect of every school day.

It emphasizes **critical thinking** and **discernment**—that is, it fosters the development of inquiry skills that children can bring to any problem they face, and that are required in order for children to understand, evaluate, and successfully navigate the times.

It is **rich**—that is, it is as broad as life itself, offering a myriad of opportunities for children to explore and delight in the world, learning, themselves, and others.

It is **personal**—that is, it focuses on knowing, loving, and nurturing each child as a unique image-bearer of God. Which includes helping them grow the special gifts with which each of them is endowed

It is **relevant**—that is, it is interesting, meeting children where they are, and useful, focusing on the development of those intellectual, social, and emotional skills that best help children interact productively with a complex and ever-changing world.

It promotes **self-reflection**—that is, it helps children learn to analyze themselves, to observe, celebrate, and apply their strengths, as well as to understand, accept, and work hard to overcome their weaknesses.

It is **transformational**—that is, it is about growth and change, about helping children strive always to improve, about encouraging children to invite the Holy Spirit to be always at work redeeming their hearts, and about challenging children to actualize the resources that they have been given to help restore a fallen creation to its Maker.

The People Called To Offer This Education

The community of believers who provide this education understand themselves as pilgrims in the same journey of discipleship in which we encourage our students. As such, Denver Christian faculty, staff, and administrators strive to embody the same inspired, equipped, and engaged qualities that we nurture in our students. Indeed, *it is most explicitly in our work as educators that employees of Denver Christian Schools work out our own calling to bring Christ's transforming power and love to a broken world.* Indeed, the core values that characterize Denver Christian reflect our conviction that everything we do as employees and representatives of the school not only fulfills our duty to act as Christ's hands and feet in this world, but that *the work itself* is one of the vehicles through which the Holy Spirit continues its sanctifying activity in our ever-broken, ever-being-reformed hearts.

We believe that the community of staff members, parents, and friends which provides the education described above must be committed to the following core values.

authenticity and transparency – We understand that as part of a broken world, Denver Christian Schools is a flawed organization, made up of fallen human beings. Despite this reality—which our Biblical perspective requires us to acknowledge—we nevertheless strive to participate in regular, open, and honest dialogue about organizational activities, initiatives, priorities and decisions, always aware of the ways in which brokenness pervades every human interaction and yet always inviting and trusting the Holy Spirit to chastise, inspire, and redeem our efforts even as He chastises, inspires, and redeems our hearts.

diversity – We understand ourselves to be engaged in Christ's work on earth, which is not limited by race or class, but rather abolishes such distinctions in the face of God's inclusive love. Thus, we desire to serve a constituency that reflects the family of God—that is, Christian families from a wide range of economic, educational, and ethnic backgrounds—and to educate effectively students with a wide range of academic abilities, interests, passions, and needs.

consummate professionalism – Because we believe that our work as educators is a site of our ongoing sanctification by the Holy Spirit, we understand striving for professional excellence as a spiritual duty. Our confidence in the ongoing work of grace in our own lives and those of our colleagues allows us to call ourselves and one another to the highest possible standards of behavior—that is, to Christian behavior, professional competence, meaningful collaboration, appropriate

communication, and consistent growth and improvement—both in and outside of the workplace.

fellowship – As a community of believers, we are more than professional colleagues—we are brothers and sisters in Christ, united in our shared work as members of His body. As such, we acknowledge and pray that the Holy Spirit may use us as instruments of sanctification in one another’s lives. Not only do we strive for Christ-like behavior in our interactions with one another, but we further commit to engaging honestly and vulnerably with one another, affirming and celebrating together God’s faithfulness, encouraging one another in the journey of discipleship, and graciously accepting correction from others, grateful for the love which Christ offers us in the form of Christian fellowship.

mentorship – As Christian educators, we owe our students more than an excellent academic education, which may be gained at a secular institution. Because we understand that positive relationships with Christian adults are vital aspects of and contributors to a child’s spiritual development, we deliberately involve our students in meaningful dialogue about important issues in their lives and we actively cultivate relationships of spiritual mentorship. Moreover, each of us strives daily to develop the emotional intuition, the spiritual acuity, and the personal openness to be effective instruments of the Holy Spirit’s work in our students’ lives. Indeed, we affirm this as one of the principal benefits of a Denver Christian education—that in every interaction with our students, we watch for ‘teaching moments,’ not only in the intellectual sense but in the spiritual sense as well, always striving to imitate and praying to be a vehicle for the gentle, diversified, persistent pedagogy that Christ exercises on all His children, in all things, throughout our lives.

grace and restoration – As individuals saved by grace and being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, we work together with students and families to build and sustain a community of grace that acknowledges the realities of sin and pain, but also affirms and celebrates the redemption and restoration made possible in Christ. Thus, the goal of student discipline is to help the child understand and acknowledge his/her/the world’s brokenness, experience God’s gracious love and forgiveness, and commit to accepting and offering the gift of restoration. Our pervasive awareness of the grace which we ourselves have been afforded, and our gratitude for the restorative work of the Holy Spirit in our own hearts informs all of our human interactions, including those involving disagreement, conflict, correction, or discipline, whether such interactions involve students, families, or one another as employees of Denver Christian Schools.

transformative work that is ever being transformed – Our commitment to helping to transform the world through education includes even addressing the broken state of education itself. Our own teaching is a primary and continual site of transformation, not only of ourselves personally but of ourselves as educators. But it is also the case that everything that we do in faculty meetings, in the

boardroom, and in collegial interaction is focused on transforming the very way in which we discharge our calling to educate. Thus, our investment of time, caring, effort, expertise, and passion in the day-to-day work of education is supported and even more valuable by our investment of time, caring, effort, expertise, and passion into individual and corporate planning, assessment, reflection, discussion, and revision, all focused on addressing honestly, joyfully, and productively the many challenges and opportunities that attend pre-K – 12th grade education.



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Core Competencies: **A Framework for a DC Education** **September 10, 2012 [DRAFT]**

As stated in Guiding Principles, Denver Christian Schools defines educational excellence as “the development of those understandings and attitudes that enable students to see their world, themselves, and their calling through the lens of God’s redemptive vision for His creation, and the attainment of the knowledge and skills that will enable them to act out their calling as agents of renewal in a broken world.”

The inspired, equipped, and engaged graduate has the following characteristics.

With respect to *spiritual discernment*, the Denver Christian graduate sees and lives all of life through the lens of faith. That is, the DCS graduate

- understands and applies the creation-fall-redemption framework;
- demonstrates Biblical literacy and is able to apply that literacy to the evaluation of real-life issues;
- identifies and critiques worldviews and cultural messages implicit in media, events, and behaviors;
- reflects on, shares, acts consistently with and defends his or her faith;
- grows in his or her personal relationship with Christ; and
- articulates coherent Christian perspectives on gratitude, service, justice, and stewardship.

With respect to *critical evaluation and analysis*, the Denver Christian graduate uses multiple approaches and explores diverse perspectives to understand ideas, solve problems and seek and recognize truth. That is, the DCS graduate

- identifies and poses authentic and significant questions for investigation;
- organizes and analyzes information, discerns patterns, identifies implications and trends, and predicts outcomes;
- uses symbols, metaphors, analogies, models and simulations to represent, explore, evaluate and communicate complex concepts, relationships, systems and issues;
- compares and critically evaluates diverse perspectives and conclusions;
- uses evidence to form, communicate, and defend a position or point of view; and
- applies the Word of God as the ultimate standard of truth

With respect to ***communication***, the Denver Christian graduate understands and effectively expresses and supports ideas—others’ and his/her own—through written, oral, and visual media. That is, the DCS graduate

- understands and explicates both explicit and implicit/inferential content of written, spoken, and visual communication;
- capably articulates arguments, can offer support for and counterevidence to them, and can explain why they are significant;
- writes clearly and effectively for a variety of audiences and purposes;
- displays both analytical and interpersonal skills and confidence in discussions and oral presentations;
- uses visual rhetoric skills to interpret and communicate information; and
- adheres to appropriate standards of style, format, fair use, and documentation.

With respect to ***technology and information literacy***, the Denver Christian graduate values and makes appropriate and effective use of print and digital media. That is, the DCS graduate

- uses print and electronic resources to find, organize and communicate information;
- critically reads, explicates, analyzes, critiques, responds to print and digital information sources;
- uses digital media and environments to communicate, collaborate, and create with others;
- shows awareness of and commitment to information/technology safety and citizenship; and
- reflects thoughtfully on the social and moral implications of information technology and demonstrates a commitment to utilizing such technologies in ways that further and do not obstruct God’s redeeming work.

With respect to ***creativity and innovation***, the Denver Christian graduate values, generates, and extends new questions, ideas, processes, and products. That is, the DCS graduate

- creates and displays or performs original works as a means of individual or group expression;
- discovers and develops new techniques and skills to support personal and corporate expression of ideas and emotions;
- suggests hypotheses, forges new connections, represents ideas in new ways, and imagines alternate outcomes;
- actively promotes an environment that supports creativity, collaboration, prudent risk-taking, and innovation; and
- values and nurtures creativity in self and others as an aspect of the image of God reflected in humanity and understands that the responsible exercise of human creativity glorifies God.

With respect to ***personal maturity***, the Denver Christian graduate understands, appreciates, and manages self, time, change, and relationships. That is, the DCS graduate

- values learning and demonstrates the attitudes and skills required to initiate and sustain learning;
- understands his or her personal strengths and limitations, and demonstrates a desire to grow, a willingness to take on new challenges, perseverance, commitment, resourcefulness, and independence;
- makes healthy lifestyle choices and honors God in recreational activities;
- advocates for self and others, and knows when and how to seek appropriate help; and

- represents himself/herself thoughtfully, honestly and authentically.

With respect to ***social interaction***, the Denver Christian graduate participates in building and sustaining community. That is, the DCS graduate

- understands and values diversity;
- possesses the self-confidence, attitudes and skills required to participate in and enjoy an active and fulfilling social life;
- interacts respectfully and effectively in a variety of social and cultural contexts;
- demonstrates cooperation, teamwork and the ability to resolve conflict;
- displays leadership skills, including initiative, seeking input, priority-setting, project management and encouragement; and
- understands daily interactions with peers as a key forum for sharing the love of Christ and looks for opportunities to combat social alienation with inclusiveness and affirmation.

With respect to ***Christian commitment and vocation***, the Denver Christian graduate nurtures a relationship with Christ that manifests itself in a commitment to acting out Christ's redemptive and transforming love in every area of life. That is, the DCS graduate

- prioritizes his/her personal relationship with Christ, such that his/her life is increasingly aligned with his/her profession of faith;
- values his/her talents as gifts from God, recognizes a 'fit' between the world's needs and his/her gifts, and is committed to developing and using those gifts to the further glory of God;
- understands that God's sovereignty and his/her relationship with Christ have implications for all of life, and lives out that understanding by bearing hardship patiently, serving others, rejoicing in the good, and pursuing excellence in everything that he/she does; and
- aspires to live in such a way that every choice reflects his/her commitment to his/her calling to be an agent of transformation in a broken world.



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Components of DC Education and School

September 7, 2012 [Draft]

Breaking Down the ‘How’: An Education and a School

‘How’ we achieve the vision outlined in *Guiding Principles* and spelled out in educational outcomes in *Core Competencies* has two parts:

An **Education** and
the **School** that supports it.

These two parts do not flow directly from *Core Competencies*, but are connected to the competencies by an account of those **educational “Experiences and Interactions”** which nurture the competencies which we aim to produce in our students.

In the following pages, we provide a sketch of each of the eight core competencies, elucidating how an analysis of the **experiences and interactions** necessary to nurture each competency can help us articulate the kind of **education** we will need to provide students, as well as the kind of **school** necessary to offer and support that education.

IDENTITY: *Guiding Principles*

Denver Christian’s identity as a community dedicated to presenting an education which produces “inspired, equipped, and engaged” graduates

THE ‘WHAT’: *Core Competencies*

Spiritual Discernment	Critical evaluation & analysis	Communication	Tech. & info. literacy	Creativity & innovation	Personal maturity	Social interaction	Christian commitment & vocation
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THE

‘HOW’: *Components of a DCS Education and School*

Educational **experiences and interactions** that nurture these competencies

Components of an **education** that produces these experiences and interactions

Components of a **school** that supports this education

Core Competency 1: Spiritual Discernment

Core Competency 2: Critical Evaluation & Analysis

Necessary Experiences and Interactions

Practice describing reality (as encountered in books, the news, experience, etc.) in creation-fall-redemption framework; Practice analyzing the motives behind events and the values behind motives and evaluating them against creation-fall-redemption; practice engaging the world as the redemptive phase of the cycle; experience of service as integral to identity, not an 'add-on'; practice identifying and evaluating the worldviews implicit in the Bible, stories, literature, and others' actions; practice reflecting on the state and progress of relationship with Christ; practice reflecting on one's specific gifts and how they correspond to the world's needs; experience exploring and reflecting on different ways of addressing the world's needs

Implications for the Education

Discussion-based curriculum that emphasizes analyzing events through a particular narrative lens (the biblical one); opportunities for service learning must be seamlessly integrated as major part of the curriculum; ability to tailor service work to students' growing sense of their gifts and vocations; global curriculum that gives students the opportunities to develop in-depth understandings of the challenges that face the world and of how people are and can be involved in addressing them; self-reflection in multiple medias built into the curriculum

Implications for the School

Low student: teacher ratio; highly intelligent teachers who can direct and sustain intense dialogues and who are very comfortable in their Reformed faith; fewer preps per day to allow teachers to engage in demanding discussions; geographical access to and integrated partnerships with service learning opportunities

Necessary Experiences and Interactions

Practice deploying a set of basic investigative questions that are useful across a range of subjects and topics (e.g., being given a problem, choosing the right question and articulating why it is relevant; tailoring questions to better fit specific topics and scenarios); practice generating unique questions to ask in new circumstances; practice identifying key information contained in a variety of resources; practice generating tables, graphs, and other visual depictions of information; practice interpreting information presented graphically and making predictions based on observed patterns and trends; given regular and sustained experience in moving back and forth between verbal and visual depictions and representations of information (e.g., metaphors, symbols, models); practice reading articles, describing an author's position, and identifying the support given for that position; practice researching and arguing both sides of controversial questions; practice identifying and critiquing authors' values and motives, as evidenced in writing and other forms of communication; practice recognizing the differences in assumptions, definitions, and interpretation of evidence that leads to/supports different perspectives on issues; practice recognizing the core issues in controversies; significant practice reading, reflecting on, and applying Scripture

Implications for Education

Inquiry-based activities that emphasize interacting with content rather than memorizing content, including well-moderated classroom debates; vertical alignment so that analytical abilities build and horizontal alignment so students hone their ability to deploy questions in multiple subjects; curricula that offers myriad opportunities to interact with and comparatively reflect on the efficacy of different visual and verbal means of communication

Implications for the School

Low student: teacher ratio; teachers who understand and can model a question-posing (rather than answer-teaching) approach to education; fewer preps per day to allow teachers to engage in demanding discussions

Core Competency 3: Communication

Necessary Experiences and Interactions

Practice describing the explicit and implicit (inferential) content of written, visual, and auditory communication; practice mapping arguments, including identifying claims, supporting evidence, and lines of logic; practice evaluating evidence and describing how new evidence can make arguments stronger; exposure to a wide range of genres and media; practice writing and speaking across a wide range of genres and to a wide range of audiences; practice converting verbal information to visual forms and vice versa; practice editing one's own intellectual products as well as those of others; practice reflecting on discussions and identifying particularly salient or game-changing points; practice formatting and documenting intellectual work appropriately

Implications for the Education

Inquiry-based activities that emphasize analyzing rather than memorizing content; curricula that utilize a wide range of textual and visual sources, including a rich diversity of genres and styles; creation of opportunities to practice engaging with various audiences for a variety of purposes (real or imagined); activities that emphasize practicing and then reflecting on the effectiveness of various communication techniques and media

Implications for the School

Low student: teacher ratio; very analytical teachers who themselves communicate very effectively and can engage in higher order discussions about the significance and use of information; fewer preps per day to allow teachers to prepare for and engage in demanding discussions; access to rich information resources and communication tools; school design/space that facilitates student-student and student-teacher discussion and collaboration

Core Competency 4: Technology & Information Literacy

Necessary Experiences and Interactions

Practice using a wide range of information sources and technological tools for locating, organizing, and displaying information; practice evaluating information for relevance, currency, credibility, and usefulness for particular purposes; practice justifying and critiquing choices of information and sources used; practice justifying and critiquing methods chosen to organize and display information; practice communicating and collaborating electronically to share ideas, examine perspectives, complete projects, and generate products; practice reflecting on the social and moral implications and applications of past, current, and future technologies; practice reflecting on ethical and public policy implications of new technologies; practice recognizing and critiquing the messages and worldviews implicit in particular representations of information; practice recognizing and reflecting on both appropriate and inappropriate applications/uses of technology, especially communication technology

Implications for Education

Authentic and seamless integration of technology in daily classroom experience; curricula that challenge students to interact with diverse technologies in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes; diverse opportunities for electronic interaction and collaboration with peers and experts from outside the DCS community; discussion-based activities emphasizing awareness and analysis of the implications of information usage and sourcing, as well as online safety and digital citizenship

Implications for the School

Up-to-date technological resources that students and teachers can interact with daily in all classrooms and settings; very thoughtful teachers who can engage in higher-order discussions both about the use of information and the moral implications of information and technology use; tech-savvy teachers who model and can teach effective and ethical engagement with technology; fewer preps per day to allow teachers to prepare for and engage in demanding discussions

Core Competency 5: Creativity & Innovation

Necessary Experiences and Interactions

Practice reflecting on and expressing ideas about self, others, life, and the world; practice envisioning and creating original works; opportunities to experiment with new techniques, media, and strategies for self-expression; practice identifying interesting and important questions for investigation; practice proposing alternate answers to questions; practice designing, implementing and communicating the results of experiments intended to help evaluate hypotheses; practice recognizing, affirming and celebrating creativity in others; opportunities to take risks and innovate, and to reflect on the outcome; practice recognizing and celebrating creativity and the human capacity to innovate and reform as a gift from God

Implications for the **Education**

Curricula that emphasize opportunities to engage in, express, and defend original thinking, rather than the assimilation of content produced by others; integration of and reflection on different media as diverse laboratories for self-expression; discussion-based reflection on self-expression and uniqueness, including the opportunities and the challenges they entail; individual attention to students' development of their unique self-concepts and preferred modes of individual expression

Implications for the **School**

Low student: teacher ratio to allow for both effective reflective discussion and one-on-one attention to the projects and self-expression of individual students; possession of and access to a range of artistic media, textual sources, and scientific implements to facilitate the production of new ideas across a range of disciplines; spaces that provide opportunity to display, experience, and celebrate student self-expression across a variety of disciplines and genres

Core Competency 6: Personal Maturity

Necessary Experiences and Interactions

Reflection on learning as an opportunity to enjoy and rejoice in God's creation, as an act of worship and gratitude, and as a reflection of a desire to grow personally; reflection on learning as itself restorative, in addition to it being preparation to help restore a broken world; periodic reflection on strengths, limitations, goals, opportunities, achievements, challenges, and resources available to support for personal growth; reflection on physical, social, and emotional health and those experiences and behaviors that either advance or damage health; practice performing behaviors that promote health; reflection on the importance of recreation as a gift from God; reflection on both Scriptural and cultural perspectives on sexuality; practice building community and reflecting on group culture, norms, and behaviors; practice reflecting on communication with others and both explicit and implicit messaging

Implications for **Education**

Discussion-based activities that engage in meta-level analysis of what happens in the classroom and in the school, its value and its meaning especially in terms of creation-fall-redemption; opportunities for self-analysis both privately and in groups built into the curricula regularly and in a variety of manners; comprehensive and vertically aligned health education program that provides both extensive biological instruction as well as opportunity for personal and group reflection regarding a wide range of significant health and personal wellness topics, including the uses, meanings, and expression of human sexuality

Implications for the **School**

Low student: teacher ratio to allow for both effective reflective discussion and one-on-one attention to the victories and struggles, goals and growth of individual students; teachers who are comfortable engaging in potentially difficult conversations with students about maturity and growth, including discussing sexuality thoroughly and openly; vertically aligned personal and career counseling program designed to foster discussion related to personal development and behavior, and to career and educational support and guidance; fewer preps per day to allow teachers to prepare for and engage in demanding discussions

Core Competency 7: Social Interaction

Necessary Experiences and Interactions

Regular encounters with diversity; practice reflecting on and celebrating both similarities and differences among people, experiences, perspectives, and cultures; practice engaging in authentic dialogue about benefits and challenges of diversity; opportunities to study, visit, and talk and work with people from a broad range of ethnicities, cultures, and ages; practice identifying and correcting pervasive cultural “isms” (e.g., racism, sexism, class-ism, able-ism, age-ism); practice collaborating with others on projects and products; practice structuring, evaluating, and dialoguing about group process; practice giving and receiving feedback; opportunities to engage in individual and group discussion about behavior, social interactions, and peer pressure; practice providing leadership to others; opportunities and support for showing initiative and resourcefulness; practice with and reflection on goal-setting and prioritization; practice analyzing, talking about, and resolving conflict; opportunities to experience a wide range of social and cultural settings, contexts, and expectations and reflect on the outcome

Implications for the **Education**

Curricula that emphasize exposing students to different cultural experiences and then engaging in sustained reflection on these experiences, in an ongoing back-and-forth of experience and reflection; discussion-based curricula that emphasizes meta-level analysis of social interactions, from global world events and meetings of cultures to interactions in the hallways and during group work

Implications for the **School**

Access to settings and populations in which students can encounter and grapple with national, ethnic, racial, religious, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity; classroom and semester schedules that allow for the frequent inclusion of off-campus and traveling experiences; low student: teacher ratio; culturally aware and literate teachers who are comfortable encountering diverse cultures and engaging in authentic and vulnerable discussions with students about intercultural and interpersonal experience; vertically aligned personal and career counseling program designed to foster discussion related to personal development and behavior, and to career and educational support and guidance; fewer preps per day to allow teachers to engage in demanding discussions

Core Competency 8: Christian Commitment & Vocation

Necessary Experiences and Interactions

Practice dialoguing with others about faith; practice narrativizing one’s own and other’s stories in terms of creation-fall-redemption; practice identifying stated and manifested relationships between claims about God and behavior; practice identifying brokenness in the world and life; practice recognizing and reflecting on God’s work to redeem that brokenness; practice describing and manifesting behaviors that reflect a claim of commitment to Christ; practice evaluating behavior in terms of what it communicates about commitment to Christ; practice reflecting on personal strengths and limitations and matching strengths to the world’s needs; practice reflecting on and charting courses of action focused on developing strengths and mitigating limitations; practice using gifts in explicit and authentic acts of service and reflecting on the outcome; exposure to and opportunity to discuss the world’s problems and how Christians are and can be active in addressing them; participation in career-choice discussions and activities and reflection on how choices and actions can help operationalize a commitment to be an agent of transformation in a broken world

Implications for the **Education**

Discussion-based activities that train students in communal reflection and personal sharing and listening about matters of faith; activities that engage every aspect of life as a choice that bears directly on relationship with Christ; integration of off-campus service and professional experience and regular reflection on its meaning as a central part of the curriculum

Implications for the **School**

Vertical scaffolding that allows students to explore and commit to ever-more specific forms of service and engagement with the world as they discern their vocations; access to service, academic, and professional off-campus settings in which students can explore and begin to act out their vocations; low student: teacher ratio; thoughtful, authentic, and vulnerable teachers who can direct and sustain intense dialogues and who are very comfortable in their Reformed faith; fewer preps per day to allow teachers to engage in demanding discussions