

Douglas County School District Community Survey

Employee Interviews, 2017



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Overview and Context

This report summarizes interviews of 20 DCSD employees that was conducted in early 2017, for the purpose of following up on specific issues of interest observed in an earlier survey. It is part of a larger community research project that includes the following reports:

- ➔ High School Student Survey Report
- ➔ High School Student Interview Report
- ➔ High School Student Data Breakouts and Open-End Summary
- ➔ Employee Survey Report
- ➔ **Employee Interview Report**
- ➔ Employee Data Breakouts and Open-End Summary
- ➔ Parent and Community Survey Report
- ➔ Parent Interview Report
- ➔ Parent Data Breakouts and Open-End Summary
- ➔ Community Data Summary and Open-End Summary
- ➔ Higher education and Employer Interview Report
- ➔ Summary of Top-Level Findings

District Satisfaction

Section 1

Major changes in the District have caused longer-term employees to be less satisfied

- ➔ When asked why satisfaction with the District was lower among longer-term employees, many pointed to major changes in the District that began in 2009, such as changes in the pay and evaluation systems.
 - > Many felt that these changes happened extremely quickly, and without input from employees.
 - > These changes also caused uncertainty and a feeling of a lack of stability.
- ➔ Many employees felt that in addition to changes in policies, there was also a shift in culture and it did not seem as if employees were as valued as they once were.
 - > Teachers in particular felt that they no longer had a voice and were not valued.
- ➔ Several employees also recognized that growth in the District caused many changes, such as a decrease in personal interactions, and an increase in workload.

“

The biggest changes occurred when we got the new superintendent. Up until that point, the District was very teacher oriented. It was built upon the idea that if you could improve teachers, you could improve education. After the new superintendent and board, we became the bad guys. One thing I think they did is they tried to change too much too quickly. They reverted to a process of making us think we had input, but didn't listen. We have lost trust in our own administration.

–Licensed Employee

Change could be better managed in the future by building buy-in and having a clearer path

➔ Many employees felt that changes in the District occurred very quickly, and would change often.

> They believed that to better manage change in the future, it would be ideal to have a more clear path forward, and change things gradually, rather than all at once.

“

I think they need to have a better road map. They came in and tried to change too much too fast and they lost a lot of wonderful leadership that really held this District together. They came up with a plan that they had no plan. They had the GVC and the WCOs and nobody knew what that looked like.

–*Licensed Employee*

➔ Employees also felt that talking with employees about changes before they were rolled out was very important.

> They felt that the Board and Superintendent should be listening to employees who would be impacted by changes, and ask their input on how to best move forward.

“

If they would go to the staff and the teachers and ask them, “What can we do to help you out?” They were doing that 12 years ago when I first started. They would come around and have meetings and say what our board wants us to do and they wanted our input on the best way we could meet that goal. The new board doesn’t even look at recommendations anymore.

–*Classified Employee*

➔ Employees also wanted changes to be communicated better and for there to be more transparency in decision-making.

Valuing employee input and spending time in the field may increase trust in the future

- ➔ When asked how the District could increase trust, many employees suggested that both the Superintendent and the School Board spend more time at schools talking with employees and listening to their ideas and feedback.
- ➔ Several employees also mentioned that creating a more welcoming and open atmosphere at board meetings may also help.
 - > They generally wanted the board to focus more on improving students and education, and less on politics.
- ➔ There was also a desire for more clear and transparent communication about decisions and the direction of the District.

“

I think you need to be in schools and meeting people and attend meetings at schools. Engage in conversations and learn people's names. You have to put the work in, and then take the suggestions and use them. When you have as close an election as we've had the last couple of swings in the board, and you declare that you can do anything you want and it's a mandate, that doesn't account for the 47% of people who didn't vote for you. If you are trying to build trust then you have to take into account that their ideas are different than yours and don't villainize those who don't.

–Licensed Employee

Evaluation Systems

Section 2

Employees feel that the current evaluation system doesn't accurately measure their effectiveness

- ➔ While employees believe that evaluations are important to ensure that employees are held accountable, many do not feel that the current system is effective.
- ➔ Licensed staff generally feel that the types of things they are evaluated on are good in concept, but often very hard to measure and quantify.
 - > Many believe that uploading evidence is not a good way to show effectiveness, as it takes away from teaching time and can potentially be fabricated.

“ I think evaluating teachers and making it fair is very difficult. I think the documentation portion of the CITE evaluation is very overwhelming. And I think it's really hard to measure the things that are really important. I don't think it measures what's really important. I think teachers that are really good at documenting stuff and willing to take time to document and upload it get a higher rating, but that doesn't make them a better teacher. *–Licensed Employee* ”

- ➔ Classified staff feel that their evaluations are not targeted for their specific job duties.
 - > In general, they feel that the evaluations are more geared toward teachers and are often not relevant to them.

“ The evaluation doesn't work. It has nothing to do with [my job role]. It is all geared toward the teachers and admin. There are no questions about our department. *–Classified Employee* ”

The amount of time that evaluations take is considered a burden among licensed employees

- ➔ Many licensed employees commented that the evaluations took an extraordinary amount of time, as they needed to upload evidence for everything that they were doing.
- ➔ Several commented that the time they spent uploading evidence was taking away from time in the classroom, which ultimately results in students learning less content.
- ➔ While some mentioned that the burden of uploading evidence had been decreased in the past year, this was not true for all licensed employees, and not consistent across schools.

“

The evaluation process became more about what was turning out on paper rather than quality in the classroom. Everyone has to have so much evidence and things were required to the point that we couldn't spend time teaching. It was geared more toward filling things out and it took so much time to do all that, that the quality of our education went way down because we were too worried about getting that evidence.

–Licensed Employee

There is a desire for more frequent observations and qualified evaluators

➔ Many classified employees mentioned that their evaluators did not have a good understanding of what their job entailed.

- > They expressed a desire to have an evaluator who understood their job, and was able to observe and evaluate on their performance of their job functions.

“ A lot of times the person doing the evaluation might not even know the job you do. They haven't shadowed you and don't know how you work. I would say anybody doing evaluation must shadow that person once a quarter, see the quality of the job, look at what they're working on. The evaluator should understand the level and quality of the work you're doing.

–*Classified Employee*

➔ Licensed employees frequently said that they wanted evaluators to be coming into the classroom more often to get a more accurate picture of their teaching abilities.

- > They felt that the current system was just a single snapshot, and since every day in teaching is different, was not an accurate reflection of their entire performance.
- > They also believed that more frequent observations would allow evaluators to understand things that are harder to quantify, such as interactions and relationships with students.

“ They only see one particular moment when you get observed so they are basing the rubric on that one class period or whatever day you get observed. I don't feel like it's an accurate representation of what you do every day. Taking a sampling over a series of weeks instead of just one day would be a better representation.

–*Licensed Employee*

The current evaluation system creates unwanted competition among employees and doesn't encourage learning and growth

- ➔ Many employees expressed frustration that there were a very limited number of employees who could be rated “highly effective”.
 - > They felt that this made the system unfair, as the District should want as many “highly effective” employees as possible. Instead, many mentioned that evaluators would be punished if they rated too many employees as “highly effective”, so it was nearly impossible to achieve that rating, even if the rating was deserved.
- ➔ Employees often felt that because they were all competing to get the top evaluation rating, they were less likely to be willing to share great or innovative ideas with other employees, thus creating a culture of competition rather than collaboration.
 - > Most employees viewed this as a negative thing, as they felt that education should be collaborative so as to offer the best possible experience to students.

“

If you could actually reward someone, that would be one thing, but how it translated is you can only have one highly effective teacher out of so many. They wanted to tell everybody that schools could have as many highly effective employees as they had, but that was a lie. If you had too many highly effective, the administrator would lose their job. I would make certain that there were no limits on the number of highly effective, effective, etc. There should be nothing to punish an administrator that sees highly effective teachers.

–Licensed Employee

Pay Systems

Section 3

Employees feel that pay in DCSD is not up to par with other districts

➔ Classified employees felt that compared to other districts, and especially compared to similar jobs in the private sector, pay in the District was very low.

> They also felt that raises were usually so minimal that they were not very meaningful as they barely, if at all, kept up with cost of living.

“ I am not making a whole lot more than I made when I started 10 years ago. Raises are so minimal that you hardly notice that you’ve got one. I think they need to re-evaluate and they don’t value classified as much as they should. They should do a comparison study and I think that they need to do a cost of living raise. There are some years we didn’t even get a raise, so it needs to be equal to what others are paying. *–Classified Employee* ”

> Many classified employees also said that it was a challenge to recruit qualified employees because of the low pay.

“ I knew there is a problem finding qualified employees because we don’t pay as much as the private sector and that creates issues. The people that they can hire can make 10-15 dollars more per hour outside of the District. They have several openings that can’t be filled. *–Classified Employee* ”

➔ Licensed employees expressed similar frustrations about low pay compared to other districts

There is currently no incentive or reward for loyalty, and many employees believe that there should be

- ➔ Employees who had been with the District for a long time felt that their tenure was not valued.
 - > There was a strong feeling that employees with a lot of experience in the District were valuable, as they helped mentor new employees, as well improved their craft over many years of experience. There was a belief that employees should be compensated for this.

“ There used to be longevity bonuses, and that’s a great idea. Just appreciating that you’ve spent a long time in the District. People right now feel like they are expendable. *–Licensed Employee*

- ➔ Due to hiring freezes in the past, and a restructuring of pay scales, many employees mentioned that new employees were often making the same amount or more money than employees who had been with the District for many years.
 - > They felt that there were huge pay gaps that needed to be closed to ensure that all employees are paid fairly.

“ Years of experience should count for something. They need to consider employees that have been here a long time. Maybe they need to re-adjust older employees salaries before they match the person who has been here for three years. You have to start honoring these people.

–Classified Employee

“ They need to level the pay system and make sure the veteran teachers are making the amount they should be making. The teachers who got frozen have not had enough of a raise, so make sure that happens. Make sure new teachers aren’t making more than teachers who have been here a while.

–Licensed Employee

A lack of stability in pay is a very large challenge for licensed employees in particular

- ➔ Many licensed employees said that one of the appealing things about being a teacher (aside from impacting students) was that it was stable and predictable.
 - > The current pay system in the District is not stable or predictable, which has been challenging for employees.
 - > In the old system, employees knew what they would make, and what raises would look like each year, depending on their education and experience, however, that is not the case any longer.
 - > Many employees expressed frustration around the unpredictability of pay from year to year since it was so linked to evaluations.
- ➔ Many employees were also frustrated that they were no longer compensated for continuing education, such as a Master's degree, as they believed that this discouraged continual learning and improving their craft.



Teachers don't go into this business to get rich, but we don't want to struggle to make ends meet. The step and lane system had its limitations, but it was predictable and you could plan for your kids college and pay back student loans. When I started my degree, I was expecting to make a certain amount, and I'm still behind. It's totally unpredictable and when you are already at the margin of what we make, that uncertainty is unnerving. I have no idea what to expect next year. I have no idea if I'm going to get a raise, or how much it would be.

-Licensed Employee

Most are not against the concept of pay for performance in concept, but disagree with how it has been implemented

- ➔ Most employees did not disagree with the concept of pay for performance—they believed that employees who went above and beyond should be compensated for it, and those who were not performing up to par should not. However, many did not agree with how it had been implemented in the District.
- ➔ Many employees felt that the District should implement a system that combined pay for education and experience with performance.
 - > Ultimately, many believed that base pay should be determined by education and experience, while raised for performance would be more of a bonus. That way, pay would be predictable, but also rewarding good teachers.
 - > However, many did mention that they felt the evaluation system would need to be revamped to make it more fair, as was mentioned in discussions about evaluation systems.

“ There has to be an evaluation process that evaluates their abilities in the classroom, but experience does have to count for something. I don't think you should get an automatic raise, but if you have put in another year of quality teaching, you should get rewarded. I feel like the message they have been giving us is that I'm not a better teacher because of my experience. *–Licensed Employee* ”

“ I would like if the District had a way to say we will put you on a more traditional pay schedule with years of experience and training as key components, with a cost of living raise. And hey, if you've been highly effective, we'll give a bonus. *–Licensed Employee* ”

Licensed employees tend to disagree with pay bands in both concept and implementation

- ➔ In general, licensed employees believed that the pay band system created competition, pitted employees against each other, and gave the impression that teaching some grade levels or subjects were more important than others.
 - > There was a general feeling that no subject or grade level is more important than another, so compensation should not be based on this.
 - > Many mentioned that the system was set up based on the number of applications received for open positions, however, the quality of applications received was not considered.
- ➔ Employees recognized that some positions were harder to fill than others, so suggested that a signing bonus may be a way to attract candidates to these positions, but generally disagreed that base pay should be increased.

“

The way the systems was devised as market based pay was flawed completely because they based in on the number of applicants, but it assumes applicants are of similar quality and it's as easy to hire a social studies teacher as a math or science teacher. Maybe you have a one-time signing bonus for hard to fill positions, but you don't change the base salary based on what you teach. I've known math teachers who don't work at all and PE teachers who work their butts off. To say one subject is more important than another is really detrimental. A school atmosphere is supposed to be like a family.

–Licensed Employee

More personal communication from HR is preferred to help build trust

- ➔ There was a sense of distrust among many employees for the HR department, often due to a lack of transparency and good communication.

“ The old pay scale was so cut and dry that we didn't have questions. By developing this system, they developed a hardship for HR so maybe that was overwhelming. So they just shut it off so you couldn't talk to anybody. *–Licensed Employee* ”

- ➔ Employees felt that it would take time to increase trust for HR, but that more in-person interactions may help.

- > Many suggested that HR should go out to schools and be available in-person for employees to ask questions and give feedback, instead of sending out blanket emails.

“ They put out a newsletter every month, but I think sending somebody to a school or to a site and offer a chance to speak with them would be better. Face to face is a lot better than sending an email. Show me that you are interested and give me time and a chance to hear what I think instead of just sending out an email that nobody reads. *–Licensed Employee* ”

- ➔ Classified employees felt that increased and improved communication was greatly needed, as there was sometimes little to no communication about basic things such as receiving a raise or changing the pay schedule.

“ I hear nothing, so any communication would be great. A good example was me getting a raise and I didn't even know about it. *–Classified Employee* ”

Professional Development

Section 4

There is a desire for more tailored professional development depending on job role

- ➔ Many classified staff felt that they didn't have access to very much professional development.
 - > They felt that most professional development was more geared toward teachers than to classified staff.
 - > They wanted to have access to opportunities that were more directly related to their job. If it was not possible for the District to offer job-specific opportunities, they wanted to be able to seek professional development outside of the District.

“ The courses they offer are geared toward educators. So a lot of the training doesn't pertain to my position. The training I would like to do, I would have to do outside of the District through a private company. I have brought it up, but that is as far as it's gotten.

–*Classified Employee*

- ➔ Several licensed staff mentioned that they wanted to have professional development that was more tailored to their subject area or grade level.
- ➔ Employees who had been in the District for a long time also desired more advanced levels of professional development so they could continue to build upon their skills, but not take the same basic classes over and over again.

“ The problem I have is that I've been here so long that I feel like they need to differentiate on our experience and background. Sometimes I have already had the training, so differentiating based on years of experience would be valuable.

–*Licensed Employee*

Many want more opportunities to collaborate with other professionals in the District

- ➔ Several employees felt that some of the best professional development could come from talking with others in the District.
 - > There was a desire for more opportunities for employees across the District to collaborate and teach each other tips and tricks.
 - > However, because of the competition in the District due to the pay and evaluation systems, this is not something that most employees see happening.

“

I would like to be working with other groups of teacher in working groups or on matters of policy and curriculum that can have a direct impact on students, and try to make our professions better. There's no end to the number of tools you can incorporate into any lesson or environment, but we simply don't have the time. We aren't given time to work with our colleagues for the betterment of our students. We do that to a degree in our schools, but there isn't an atmosphere of collegiality across the District because we are pitted against one another.

–Licensed Employee

Curriculum

Section 5

Most employees agree with the Districts curriculum initiatives in concept, but not in implementation

- ➔ Employees generally agreed that the Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum, World Class Outcomes, 4C's, and 21st Century skills were good things to help guide teachers and give them something to strive for, but didn't feel like the District did a good job implementing them.
 - > Many employees said that these things were thrown at teachers with very little explanation of what they meant or how they should be used in the classroom, and they felt that administrators also didn't know how to use them.
 - > They were implemented very quickly, and have also changed quickly, so teachers have had a hard time fully understanding what they are supposed to be doing.
 - > There are also different interpretations of how to implement these things depending on the school or the teacher.

“ I think the concepts are great, but the implementation has been too much at one time. It's been handed off with no instruction on how to make it work in a classroom setting, so it's flying by the seat of your pants. *–Licensed Employee* ”

- ➔ Some employees also feel that while these things are good in concept, there is currently so much emphasis on them, that they are taking away from teaching content.

“ Maybe too much emphasis has been placed on this. They have taken over the emphasis of our classroom. Our kids are leaving math class without necessarily understanding math. They can recite World Class Outcomes, they can learn problem solving, but not necessarily be successful at math. *–Licensed Employee* ”

Incorporating curriculum on a broad scale and linking them to evaluation have been challenges

- ➔ Many employees felt that the 4C's were great skills for kids to be learning and for teachers to be working on in their classrooms, however they felt that these were extremely hard to measure.
 - > There was a general feeling that teachers should be incorporating these things into their classrooms anyway, but should not be required to measure them for evaluations.
- ➔ Many employees also felt that the World Class Outcomes and 21st Century Skills were good concepts and targets to be striving for, but often felt that they were just buzzwords that didn't mean much.
 - > Many employees said that because they had no instruction on how to implement these, the World Class Outcomes were written on their board, but were not used much beyond that.
 - > Many employees also felt that it was essentially impossible for every class and every subject to be focusing on every outcome or skill. They believed that some subjects lent themselves to the targets better than others and it was unreasonable to expect teachers to be hitting the targets for all of them.

“ The concept of them is good, but the implementation was awful. They said that you had to focus on all of them every day. But now they say you can focus on one. Some of them fit for some classes, and some don't. When you make these things mandatory and say you have to have a specified amount, it's hard. I can see it as something that we say, but not part of the evaluation.

–Licensed Employee

Appendix

Methodology

➔ Research mode

- > All interviews were between 30-60 minutes long and conducted via telephone in February and March 2017.

➔ Recruiting

- > Participants were recruited from a list of survey respondents who indicated they would be willing to participate in further research.
- > Participants were selected randomly after being stratified by employee type to ensure a good mix of licensed and classified employees.

➔ Confidentiality

- > Participants were promised confidentiality. Names and other identifying information of participants are not included in this report.

➔ Incentive

- > All participants were offered \$80 as an incentive for their participation.

Participant Profile

General characteristics of the participants from the interviews are summarized in the chart below

Gender	Employee Type	Length of Time Working in DCSD
Male: 7 Female: 13	Licensed: 10 Classified: 9 Protech: 1	0-5 years: 4 6-10 years: 3 11+ years: 13

About Corona Insights

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