To: Board of Education

From: Noemi Donoso, Chief of Innovation and Reform through Tom Boasberg, Superintendent

Subject: Recommendation on Innovation Plans for Denver Center for International Studies at Ford (“DCISF”) Denver Center for International Studies at Montbello (“DCISM”) Noel Community Arts School (“NCAS”)

Date: April 22, 2011

Recommendation: Approval

The purpose of this note is to provide a recommendation on the innovation plans for the above three schools and an overview of the plan development and review process. Following the review process described below, the Superintendent is recommending approval of the three plans. Rationale supporting this recommendation is detailed below.

**Background**

Denver Center for International Studies at Ford (“DCISF”) and Denver Center for International Studies at Montbello (“DCISM”) responded to the District’s 2010 Call for Quality Schools by proposing comprehensive new school plans. Both plans were approved by the Board of Education in June 2010. In November 2010, DCISF and DCISM were selected to be part of the Far Northeast turnaround effort. As part of the turnaround work, the schools have updated, and in some cases expanded upon, their original plans to address the unique factors in the Far Northeast and to secure innovation status, which the leaders believe is necessary to improve achievement in the Far Northeast.

Noel Community Arts School (“NCAS”) was approved as a new school by the Board of Education in November 2010 to open in August 2011 at the Rachel B. Noel Middle School building. The NCAS design team developed their innovation plan with the assistance of a dedicated third-party school development consultant.

All three schools were supported by a project manager from OSRI who was responsible for the following:

- Helping school leaders understand the Innovation School Act.
- Facilitating the development of innovation plans with the school design teams.
- Serving as thought partners for school leaders to ensure plans have the necessary detail and supporting documentation.

The school leaders, consultant and project managers worked collaboratively to support the development of each plan. Additionally, as described in the individual plans, DCISF and DCISM engaged other stakeholders, including parents and/or community members.

**Application and Review/Feedback Process**

OSRI implemented two changes to the application and review process to enhance the quality of the innovation plans and the likelihood that such plans will produce significant gains in student achievement. First, the
innovation school application was modified to align with the Board of Education’s Innovation School Policy. The modifications require schools to address the following elements in greater detail:

- Leadership capacity to improve student achievement and ensure fiscal and operational sustainability.
- Leadership succession planning that is transparent and collaborative and will support the school’s innovation plan.
- School culture that supports the professional growth of teachers.
- Robust support services for ELL and SPED students
- Governance structures that are robust and participatory and will provide accountability and support to the school.

Second, the review process was modified to resemble the process used to evaluate new school proposals submitted through the Call for Quality Schools. Similar to the new school review process, an Application Review Team (“ART”) comprised of subject-matter-experts from the CAO’s office, Human Resources, Budget, the Office of School Turnaround, and OSRI was created to review each proposal. The primary goal of each ART session was to assess the quality of the plans and to identify opportunities for improvement. Feedback was communicated to the schools by the project managers.

The reviewers assessed the vision and mission of each plan to ensure they inspired a shared vision for student achievement – one that would unify school stakeholders (teachers, parents, students, and leaders) and empower them to make school-level decisions that would drive improvements in student achievement. The reviewers also considered the following criteria consistent with statute:

- Demonstrated teacher support. **CRS 22-32.5-104(3)(f) & CRS 22-32.5-109(1)(c)**
- Whether the budget is financially viable. **CRS 22-32.5-107(3)(II)**
- Whether the innovation plan is likely to result in increased student achievement. **CRS 22-32.5-107(3)(I)**
- Other statutory requirements such as how innovation status would improve student achievement.

**Teacher and Staff Support**
All three schools are following the precedent established by the Denver Green School – a Performance School that secured innovation status in May 2010 with a 7-0 vote by the DPS Board of Education prior to the school opening in August 2010. The Colorado Department of Education approved the plan with a 6-1 vote.

As part of the ongoing staff recruiting and hiring process, all schools have expressed to job applicants and new hires that innovation status is being requested. The schools have clearly communicated key elements of the innovation plan, including the employment terms and conditions.

**Common Waivers**
Below is a summary of common waivers that will be found in most plans. Waivers specific to each school and replacement policies and procedures are summarized in each innovation application.

**Education Program:**
DCISF is requesting a curriculum waiver from the District and is working directly with the CAO’s office to secure approval. NCAS and DCISM will be using District curriculum, but tailoring it to better align with the mission and performance goals of their schools.
Promotion and Graduation:
DCISM and NCAS are proposing promotion and graduation standards that exceed District requirements.

Time:
All three schools are proposing an extended school year and school day. Additionally, the schools are proposing customized schedules to allow additional time for professional development.

Human Resources:
All three schools are proposing waivers to provide flexibility in the areas of staff hiring, job assignments, professional development, compensation and retention.

The employment terms for teachers proposed in the innovation plans replicate the employment terms at Martin Luther King Jr. Early College and Valdez Elementary, two innovation schools approved in June 2010:

- Teacher employment status with the schools and the District will be “at-will” and will not be subject to the Teacher Employment Compensation and Dismissal Act of 1990.
- Teachers employed by the Denver Public Schools who obtained non-probationary status in the Denver Public Schools prior to their employment at the school will be at-will. Teachers will regain their non-probationary status with DPS upon securing, without break in service, a mutual consent position within another DPS school.

To ensure consistency in employment terms for all employees, the three schools are proposing “at-will” employment for classified staff.

The schools intend to provide teachers an additional $5,000 in compensation to be paid in three installments throughout the school year.

Consistent with the Board of Education’s Innovation School Policy, all schools have outlined a leadership succession plan that is transparent and collaborative and that will produce at least two recommendations to the Superintendent.

Governance and Parent Engagement:
All schools are proposing to consolidate all school-based committees, including the Collaborative School Committee, into a single governing body comprised of school administrators, teachers, parents, other community members, and, in some cases, students. NCAS will also maintain a School Leadership Team.

Budget:
The schools have selected to create budgets using actual rather than District average salaries. If actual salaries are below the District average, the difference – or the “savings” – will be provided to the school to fund innovations in their plans. Potential savings from budgeting on actual salaries have not been incorporated into school budgets.