This memo provides an update on the policy development for the new DPS Graduation Requirements based upon the Colorado Department of Education’s (CDE) minimum expectations released in the fall of 2015.

The proposed DPS Graduation Requirements provide us the opportunity to define what we want a diploma to mean and do for our students; it has been developed based on the vision of a DPS graduate. The following guiding principles have framed the design and discussions as we’ve developed the policy.

- **Equity**: We believe all students can graduate from high school ready for college and career. By supporting each learner’s individual needs in meeting rigorous graduation requirements, DPS will close historic opportunity gaps.

- **Significance**: A diploma from DPS will ensure that a student has demonstrated mastery of core standards and is ready for college and career with no need for remediation. A DPS diploma will be meaningful, signifying a rigorous bar was achieved.

- **Mastery & Completion of Relevant Learning Experiences**: Graduation will be based on demonstration of mastery of English and math plus successful completion of relevant learning experiences which include the development of 21st Century Skills to prepare students for success in college, careers, and life. As students pursue graduation, learning is the constant, and time is the variable.

- **Flexibility**: By holding mastery of standards and completion of learning experiences constant, DPS will empower communities, schools, and students to choose from multiple, equally rigorous pathways to graduation.

- **Transparency**: DPS will provide students, teachers, and parents with progress measures of what students know and can do and where a student is on the path to graduation.

- **Whole Child**: DPS encourages each student to pursue individual passions and interests through personalized approaches to meeting graduation expectations. DPS will ensure learning environments are safe, equitable and inclusive, enabling all students to develop positive relationships and make responsible decisions throughout their academic careers.

Based on CDE’s new graduation guidelines, DPS conducted a stakeholder engagement process to make recommendations to update the current graduation policy. The new proposed policy aligns with the Denver Plan 2020 goals for college and career readiness and integrates competency-based demonstrations of mastery in English and mathematics. Adoption of the policy will complete the first key milestone on the CDE timeline to support competency-based graduation requirements for the graduating class of 2021.
Implementation Timeline:

“Within three years - when the class of 2021 starts ninth-grade in fall 2017 - Colorado school districts will begin implementing revised local high school graduation requirements that meet or exceed the Colorado Graduation Guidelines approved in September 2015 by the Colorado State Board of Education. This includes offering a list of options that students may use to demonstrate their readiness for college and careers in order to graduate from high school.” Colorado Department of Education

Board of Education Policy Development Process: The Board of Education (Board) first engaged on graduation requirements in the fall of 2015 shortly after the CDE published the minimum expectations. The Board then continued to receive updates and provide leadership, feedback, and guidance to inform the policy creation, resulting in the publication of a first policy draft on March 22, 2016. Additional board input and direction then lead to the publication of a second policy draft on April 18, 2016 and the final proposed policy, which will be voted on at the May 19, 2016 board monthly decision making meeting, was published on May 6, 2016.

Rationale for Policy Requirements on Course Units of Study and Flexibility for Students: DPS believes that its schools should prepare students for success in college and career upon graduation. As a result, the recommended graduation requirements include a course of study that reflects many of the requirements for students to gain access to higher education institutions. This course of study also reflects the district’s emphasis on flexibility at the school level, such that schools may tailor course offerings in core academic and electives to meet student needs. Through an individualized approach to career and academic planning, students will choose courses based on career aspirations, talents, passions and interests, which honors the district’s emphasis on supporting the whole child.

Students will continue to have opportunities to take courses in the arts, physical education, world language and Career and Technical Education, as well as the opportunity to choose from a variety of advanced coursework (e.g., Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and/or Concurrent Enrollment).

The DPS High Schools Procedures guide and the DPS Budget Guidance Manual remain key supporting procedural documents for this policy, and will provide schools with implementation guidance on appropriate use of funds to ensure diversity of course offerings for students in DPS high schools.
Key Project Milestones:

Next Steps:
Following board action, the district will continue engagement with community and school stakeholders with a focus on creating awareness of the approved policy. Ongoing engagement efforts will include an emphasis on next year’s eighth graders and their families as they will be the first class impacted by the revised requirements. The district will also initiate the work to align existing guidelines, processes and procedures with the revised high school graduation policy so that the appropriate support structures are in place. This will enable schools to ensure that the graduating class of 2021 is able to meet the new expectations by starting with the right course of studies when they enter the ninth grade in the fall of 2017.