



Dear DPS Families and School Leaders,

Discovery Link (formerly Kaleidoscope Corner) has been honored to serve DPS families and schools for over 20 years. As our district has grown, we have grown with it, serving over 2,500 youth in our programs each year. While the tremendous growth in DPS has allowed us to offer our quality programs to new communities, certain challenges have prevented us from expanding more broadly.

The biggest challenge we face is not being able to serve every student and family that wants to participate in our program. We are often asked why we have large waitlists at some sites and why we cannot clear them by the time school starts. The reasons we cannot serve more students vary from school to school. Barriers to serving more families include:

- **Staffing Challenges:**
 - All of our programs are licensed through the State of Colorado and require that we run a particular student-to-staff ratio.
 - Denver Public Schools pays no employee less than \$12.00 per hour. This rate is higher than similar positions in other districts. In spite of this, it is difficult to hire and retain staff in positions that must work split shifts (early morning and early evening) and are part-time in nature.
 - Strategic Solution: In 2015, the District supported us in implementing a pay-for-performance system with all our site staff as a way to reward our best performers and hopefully retain them.
 - Strategic Solution: We have hired a Human Resources position that is leading retention and recruiting efforts for the department.
- **Licensing of Physical Space:**
 - State of Colorado licensing regulations require that our programs have a certain amount of square-footage of usable space per student. Some of our school buildings physically cannot accommodate large groups of students due to this regulation.
 - The State of Colorado also determines which spaces are age appropriate and can be used for our youngest children (3-4 year-olds).
 - Strategic Solution: We work closely with school leadership to secure space that is eligible for licensing to accommodate more students when we can. These conversations are ongoing as need demands.
 - Strategic Solution: We work with schools new to the District to bring our programs into new communities and buildings that can accommodate licensing requirements.
- **Quality of Programs:**
 - Finally, research shows that programs that serve smaller numbers of students have a greater positive impact on student outcomes.
<https://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Principal/2006/M-Jp34.pdf>

What we are already doing:

- We work actively year round to bring students off of our waitlists and into our programs. We look at student daily numbers to see if we can accommodate more students on some days and still maintain state mandated ratios. We shift youth within appropriate developmental groupings in order to maximize our daily numbers.

As we continue to address our unique expansion challenges at each site, know that we hear your concerns and are working fervently on solutions. We are always open to hearing new ideas to navigate these situations so please do not hesitate to reach out to us if you have a suggestion.

Best,

Heather Intres
Interim Director of DPS Department of Extended Learning
heather_intres@dpsk12.org