

Effectiveness Assessment Report 2025-2026

EAR 1.0 CULMINATING ASSESSMENT | 1

Executive Summary

Over four years, Davis School District moved from constructing foundational civil-rights systems to institutionalizing a substantially more reliable organizational response to protect the equal protection of students. The district created an Office of Equal Opportunity, formalized reporting and investigative procedures, strengthened policy and monitoring, expanded professional learning, and established recurring cycles of student inquiry. These changes created *an infrastructure of care* through which DSD could recognize harm, respond more consistently, learn from evidence, and hold itself accountable.

The evidence also supports another overarching conclusion: organizational capacity improved faster and more consistently than student experience. The average EAR domain rating increased from 2.10 in 2022–2023 to 3.80 in 2025–2026, with every domain remaining substantially above its baseline. Student surveys and focus groups suggest that this organizational growth was accompanied by stronger adult responsiveness, greater understanding of reporting pathways, and reductions in repeated harassment, with particularly meaningful improvement among Black secondary students. These gains, however, did not produce a uniformly positive experience. In 2026, fewer than half of secondary students described reporting processes as clear and easy to use, exposure to racist comments remained common, and students’ experiences continued to differ across schools, student groups, and individual adults.

Central finding *The central finding of EAR 1.0 is not that systems failed. It is that systems are necessary, but students experience those systems through people.*

The evidence base

This culminating assessment triangulates four annual EAR cycles with student surveys, student focus groups, teacher and leader focus groups, Office of Equal Opportunity operational data, policy and implementation evidence, and external review. Across four years, DSD analyzed 74,295 valid student survey responses and conducted 142 student focus groups involving 1,156 participants. The district also conducted 40 adult focus groups involving 298 teachers and leaders. Because grade spans, participants, and several measures changed across years, the report treats longitudinal findings as convergent evidence rather than a single controlled causal study.

Four integrated findings

1. DSD developed durable civil-rights capacity. Formal reporting, investigation, policy, monitoring, training, and accountability systems became substantially more mature and remained strong after the settlement period.
2. Formal systems became more reliable than they became universally trusted. Reporting clarity improved modestly, but confidentiality, retaliation, follow-through, and confidence in meaningful action continued to shape whether students used formal processes.

3. Progress was real but uneven. Several student outcomes improved, especially among Black secondary students, while racial disparities and school-to-school variation remained visible.
4. The evidence points beyond safety toward academic belonging. Students want safety and connection, but they also want rigorous learning, meaningful participation, equitable opportunity, useful feedback, and confidence that adults believe in their capacity to succeed.

Four strategic anchors that supported progress

Strategic anchor	What it contributed
Civil rights and student dignity	A stable moral and legal center: every student is entitled to protection, dignity, and equal access.
Specialized organizational response	OEO expertise, defined procedures, cross-functional coordination, and consistent case oversight.
Evidence-driven improvement cycles	Annual surveys, focus groups, EAR scoring, case review, and recurring opportunities to learn and adjust.
Universal expectations with targeted interventions	Common protections and expectations, combined with differentiated attention to schools and groups experiencing greater harm or weaker implementation.

Direction for next cycle

The EAR 2.0 attempts to preserve the compliance infrastructure built during Belonging 1.0 while extending belonging into leadership, instruction, academic opportunity, and whole-school improvement. The next cycle will measure the organizational conditions DSD creates; the fidelity and quality of implementation; the experiences those practices produce; and the academic, wellbeing, and accountability outcomes that follow. In doing so, DSD is anticipating a recommitment to civil rights through academic achievement.

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93 **Introduction, Purpose, and Context of the Report**

94 Over the past four years, the Effectiveness Assessment Report has served as an anchoring document
 95 for Davis School District (DSD), providing the organization with an improvement roadmap in the area
 96 of belonging and a key strategic and operational tool for addressing the tenets of DSD’s Settlement
 97 Agreement with the United States Department of Justice. During a season in our organization’s history
 98 filled with competing interests, internal and external pressures, and ample opportunity for missteps,
 99 the report anchored our efforts in principle, data, and critical cycles of learning.

100 Over the past four years, the report has evolved in its format, length, and design. However, it has
 101 maintained focus on measuring key performance indicators identified at the outset of DSD’s
 102 belonging efforts triggered by the Settlement Agreement. The measurement of these indicators,
 103 triangulated through qualitative and quantitative methods described in the next section, has provided
 104 DSD with opportunities for inquiry, reflection, and growth. Learning has been a foundational principle
 105 of DSD’s approach to changing a narrative and culture, and the EAR has served as an important
 106 vehicle to drive that learning.

107 The 2025–2026 report extends the scope and purpose of the first three EAR publications. The first
 108 three iterations of the report, published from 2022 through 2025, primarily analyzed the annual
 109 effectiveness of DSD’s belonging efforts. The analysis considered how effectively DSD was meeting
 110 the intended outcomes of the Settlement Agreement and whether annual progress was being made
 111 across the categories identified within the district’s theory of action. Across those three reports, the
 112 organization learned significantly and used that learning to drive improvement efforts throughout
 113 DSD. The annual assessments also allowed the district to evaluate year-to-year growth and develop an
 114 increasingly meaningful longitudinal analysis.

115 This year’s report represents the first full four-year analysis of DSD’s belonging efforts. It serves as a
 116 culminating assessment of the EAR 1.0 improvement cycle and as a bridge to the district’s next cycle
 117 of improvement. The report is both concluding and generative; it recognizes what DSD accomplished
 118 under a compliance-centered approach while using the lessons of that work to seed a broader, more
 119 rooted approach to belonging and continuous improvement.

120 Accordingly, this culminating analysis examines four years of evidence to identify patterns of
 121 progress, persistent challenges, and organizational learning. It considers which strategies and
 122 organizational conditions contributed to improvement, where implementation remains inconsistent,
 123 and what DSD has learned about creating belonging at scale.

124 The report also looks forward. Its second objective is to identify and recommend the “what” will be
 125 necessary for sustainability as belonging operates as a core element of DSD culture and strategic
 126 foundation for academic progress. The intention is to create a transitional document between the first
 127 phase of DSD’s belonging efforts and the district’s growing embrace of belonging as a pivotal
 128 component of academic achievement and continuous school improvement. In doing so, the report
 129 connects the lessons of EAR 1.0 to the development of EAR 2.0 and to DSD’s next generation of
 130 strategic and continuous improvement.

131 Each section therefore performs a distinct analytical function. Section 1 establishes the strength and
 132 limits of the evidence; Section 2 describes the four-year developmental arc; Section 3 interprets the
 133 major findings that emerge across sources; Section 4 examines the strategies, systems, leadership
 134 actions, and conditions associated with change; and Section 5 translates that learning into the priorities

and accountability architecture of EAR 2.0. This progression is intended to reduce repetition while preserving the layered evidence required to support the report’s conclusions.

How the Report Is Organized

The 2025–2026 Effectiveness Assessment Report is organized into five interconnected sections:

1. *Evidence Base and Methods*

Describes the qualitative and quantitative evidence used in the analysis, including the methods used to triangulate findings across sources and years.

2. *Four Years of Progress: 2022–2026*

Examines longitudinal progress across the EAR domains and identifies patterns of improvement, persistence, and variation.

3. *Integrated Findings and Themes*

Synthesizes the most significant findings emerging across surveys, focus groups, EAR ratings, operational data, and stakeholder perspectives.

4. *Factors Contributing to Change and Improvement*

Identifies the strategies, leadership actions, systems, and organizational conditions associated with improvement, along with lessons for future implementation.

5. *Belonging as an anchor for whole-school improvement:* Priorities for the next improvement cycle. The next phase of DSD’s work is a deliberate integration of belonging as an enduring anchor of whole-school improvement. Safety, dignity, meaningful relationships, academic access, high expectations, and accountability create the conditions in which students and adults can succeed.

Section 1: Evidence Base and Methods

This section provides a brief description of the qualitative and quantitative evidence used in this fourth-year analysis, including the methods used to interpret the findings presented. Over the past four years, the richness and diversity of DSD’s evidence base have been strengths of the district’s reform efforts. The scale, continuity, and methodological approach represent an extensive district-level effort to understand students’ experiences and use that evidence to guide improvement.

Several characteristics distinguish DSD’s approach.

1. Partnership with an External Research Team (KND consulting)

DSD partnered with an external research team that included experienced professionals from universities in Utah and elsewhere in the United States. The variety of professional experience and research interests represented on the team added to the richness of the data and analysis. The researchers’ ability to understand the district’s context while maintaining a healthy level of professional distance from DSD’s leadership team has been instrumental in the integrity of the inquiry.

2. Mixed-Methods Approach

DSD’s inquiry employed a mixed-methods approach that accounts for both the importance of large-scale analysis through surveys and the personal narratives that surfaced during focus-group interviews. Each method has been practical in allowing a fuller understanding of students’ experiences from year to year. Surveys identified broad patterns across large numbers of students, while focus groups provided depth, context, and insight into how students experienced those patterns. Triangulating these sources allowed a more complete story of safety, dignity, belonging, discrimination, and adult responsiveness to emerge. The evidence base also included observations and analyses provided by partners who worked closely with DSD while retaining sufficient professional independence to offer candid assessments. These perspectives included the external research team, KND Consulting, the legal analysis of Heidi Alder, and, during the first three and one-half years of the improvement cycle, the monitoring and legal review conducted by the United States Department of Justice team assigned to the case.

3. Scale and Prioritization of Student Voice

From 2022–2023 through 2025–2026, DSD collected 78,718 student survey responses, of which 74,295 met the criteria for inclusion in the final analyses. During the same period, students participated in annual focus groups on 1,156 occasions. Together, these quantitative and qualitative evidence sources represent a substantial and sustained effort to understand students’ experiences of safety, dignity, belonging, discrimination, and adult responsiveness.

Because students may have completed surveys or participated in focus groups across multiple years, these totals represent instances of participation rather than an unduplicated count of individual students. Nevertheless, the size of the evidence base demonstrates the seriousness with which DSD approached this work and the priority the district placed on understanding students’ experiences. Over four years, DSD conducted four large-scale survey cycles and four annual focus-group cycles.

Beyond student responses, DSD also solicited the perspectives of employees working closest to the district’s daily practices, including teachers and school and district administrators.

Although this inquiry did not include large-scale employee surveys, focus groups with these important stakeholders revealed significant information for district leaders to consider and incorporate into broader strategic decision-making. In total, DSD conducted 35 teacher focus groups involving 195 K–12 teachers and five leadership focus groups involving 103 school and district leaders, including principals, assistant principals, interns, and district administrators. Together, these studies included 298 adult participants across 40 focus groups.¹

Collectively, the student and adult studies provide a substantial mixed-perspective record of how belonging, inclusion, adult responsiveness, and improvement systems are understood and experienced across DSD. One of the most important characteristics of this inquiry is not simply its scale, but what that scale represents: a sustained prioritization of student voice. DSD’s research positioned students’ experiences as a primary source of evidence and a central driver of improvement.

Table 1 - Survey & Focus group participation

Academic Year	Grades Surveyed	Survey responses analyzed (valid)	Student focus Group participants	Number of individual Focus Groups
2022-2023	7-12	21,123	198	26
2023-2024	3-6	15,433	309	39
2024-2025	3-12	22,426	399	47
2025-2026	7-12	15,313	250	30
Four-year total		74,295	1,156	142

4. Intentional Inclusion and Disaggregation

The inquiry was designed to identify districtwide patterns, but also to examine variation in students’ experiences. Survey findings were analyzed across relevant student and school characteristics, while purposeful and affinity-based focus groups created opportunities to hear from student populations whose experiences might be obscured within districtwide averages. This approach was particularly important to the civil-rights purpose of the work because it allowed the district to consider both the overall student experience and the experiences of groups that have historically encountered discrimination, exclusion, or unequal access to adult support.

5. Sustained Longitudinal Inquiry

The annual repetition of surveys, focus groups, and effectiveness assessments created a four-year record of organizational progress and student experience. Although the participating students and surveyed grade bands were not identical each year, the sustained inquiry allowed DSD to identify recurring themes, emerging concerns, areas of progress, and differences across annual cycles. This longitudinal perspective moved the district beyond a single snapshot and created an evidence base through which patterns could be examined across time.

6. Learning Cycles and the Integration of Findings (evidence to action)

The strength of DSD’s methodology has also been its ability to triangulate evidence across methods, participants, and years, creating a longitudinal roadmap that allows the organization to look both backward and forward. The district incorporated findings into multiple learning cycles involving senior leadership, principals, teachers, and the broader DSD community.

Each annual report provided recommendations that district leaders worked to synthesize and incorporate into policy, training, leadership practice, student supports, and broader improvement efforts. The annual publication of the Effectiveness Assessment Report was designed to capture learning across the various methods, assess progress against benchmarks established around DSD’s primary objectives, and synthesize recommendations from year to year. The distinguishing feature of this process, therefore, was the collection of evidence, and most importantly the creation of an evidence-to-action cycle through which findings could inform organizational learning and improvement.

7. Methodological Considerations

The evidence should be interpreted with several considerations in mind. Survey grade spans differed across years, and annual participants were not tracked as a single longitudinal cohort. Survey participation was voluntary, and focus-group participants were selected through purposeful recruitment rather than random sampling. Focus-group findings therefore provide depth and insight into participant experiences but should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all DSD students or employees. In addition, observed changes cannot be attributed to a single district action or initiative. These limitations do not diminish the value of the evidence; rather, they reinforce the importance of interpreting findings through triangulation across methods, participants, schools, and years.

A final interpretive distinction. EAR domain ratings measure the development and reliability of organizational systems; surveys and focus groups measure how those systems are understood and experienced by students and adults; and OEO case data describe the operation of reporting, investigation, and response. These sources are related, but shouldn’t be confused as interchangeable. The strongest conclusions in this report emerge when multiple sources converge, while apparent contradictions, such as stronger procedures alongside limited trust, are treated as findings rather than errors to be reconciled away.

Section 2: Four Years of Progress: 2022–2026

Section two of this report examines longitudinal progress across the EAR domains and identifies patterns of improvement, persistence, and variation. The past four years of improvement can be categorized into three distinct but interrelated cycles or phases of improvement. Although not intentionally designed to follow this trend line; our data suggest DSD has moved through three phases of organizational development.

The phases are categorized as the following:

Phase 1, 2022–2023: Foundation and baseline. A stage of proactive design and building the district’s belonging architecture.

Phase 2, 2023–2025: Implementation, learning, and institutionalization. A stage defined by strengthening consistency, visibility, organizational capacity, and school-level ownership. This stage concluded with the United States Department of Justice’s determination that DSD had satisfied its obligations under the Settlement Agreement; a remarkable accomplishment in its own right.

Phase 3, 2025–present: The current phase of district improvement is defined by integration, sustainability, and transformation. Phase 3 has become a bridge period connecting the previous three years of work with future improvement in academic spaces directly related to belonging.

Each of these three phases provided DSD with important findings the organization continues to adopt and learn from. The phases are not precise boundaries within student experience, nor do they perfectly define the entirety of DSD’s journey. Rather, they are practical parameters that capture seasons and context within the district’s experience. Organizational systems established during one phase may not produce visible effects—or be experienced consistently by students—until much later. This insight has persisted since the beginning of DSD’s belonging efforts in 2022. The district should therefore anticipate lagging outcomes, overlapping findings, and uneven distributions of progress across schools and student groups.

The EAR domains also represent two important dimensions of this work. First, they capture DSD’s priorities during this four-year period. Their contents were designed to help the district fulfill the Settlement Agreement with the United States Department of Justice and, more importantly, establish the systems necessary to provide equal protection to every child who attends DSD schools. Second, each domain contains multiple benchmarks that were individually scored through a layered review involving third-party evaluators, the Office of Equal Opportunity, and representatives from the Superintendent’s Office.

Phase 1 Foundation & baseline, 2022-2023.

The first phase emphasized the development of conditions required by the Settlement Agreement. This phase included the implementation and operationalization of most strategic components of our belonging efforts. It was a period of testing ideas, developing structures, monitoring implementation, and making timely corrections when the evidence demonstrated a need for course correction. During this first season DSD established an "infrastructure of care" that included the following components:

1. Creation and staffing of the Office of Equal Opportunity.
2. Establishment of the Harassment and Discrimination Reporting System, or HDRS, connected to the district’s technology platform.

3. Adoption of a School Board policy governing harassment reporting, response, and investigation.
4. Districtwide training on recognizing harassment, understanding reporting mechanisms, and fulfilling the duty to report.
5. Implementation of student surveys and focus groups documenting the prevalence and intensity of students' experiences with racism, discrimination, bullying, and harassment.
6. Creation of accountability mechanisms for reviewing harassment data. These included quarterly leadership reviews, regular external monitoring, expectations for schools to analyze local data, and quarterly updates to the Board of Education.
7. Development of consulting relationships with outside experts who provided independent review and analysis of district efforts.
8. Creation of the annual Effectiveness Assessment Report to consolidate evidence, incorporate perspectives from multiple sources, assess progress, and promote transparency.
9. Establishment of a process for evaluating disproportionate discipline, eventually contributing to the development of a revised student code of conduct during the second stage.

During Phase 1 DSD's average EAR domain rating was 2.10. Interpreted through the EAR rubric, this score described a system in which most components were still developing, with some benchmarks rated as not effective. This baseline was consistent with the nature of phase 1: the district had begun establishing important systems, but those systems had not yet reached consistent implementation or institutional maturity.

Phase 2: Implementation, Learning, and Institutionalization | 2023–2025

During the two academic years following initial implementation, DSD strengthened and institutionalized its civil-rights, reporting, investigation, training, and accountability systems. The Office of Equal Opportunity refined its practices and developed significant expertise in investigation, report writing, and evidence-informed decision-making. Within a relatively short period, the office established a level of capacity that became an important organizational strength for DSD; and set a standard for belonging efforts in the state of Utah.

An important component of the district's process has been the implementation of multiple accounting process that include: annual evidence cycles, quarterly evaluation of trends, and school-level analysis that has allowed the district to test implementation. An important insight these learning cycles built into the district's work has been the identification of variation across schools; a pattern throughout this analysis. An important endeavor during this stage was the deliberate strategy to mirror effective internal practices from our student and family services department, particularly the Complaint Consultation Process, and build school-level capacity by transferring specific investigative protocols and responsibilities to schools. Increasing local ownership became has become foundational to the sustainability of DSD's efforts.

During this period, DSD also developed strong partnerships with local businesses, faith-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and major community partners, including Hill Air Force Base and the NAACP. These partnerships expanded community awareness and strengthened the district's ability to incorporate perspectives beyond its own institutional boundaries and perspective. Phase 2 produced substantial organizational progress and meaningful, though uneven, improvements in student

experience. It concluded with the Department of Justice’s determination that DSD had satisfied its obligations under the Settlement Agreement in the first quarter of 2025.

The most dramatic EAR gains occurred during this second phase of the work. The average domain rating increased from 2.10 to 3.77, a gain of 1.67 points from the first year of implementation. Significant growth was documented in Engagement and Communication, Culture and Climate, Operations, Policy and Monitoring, and Reporting and Response.

These gains support several conclusions. First, they suggest that DSD embraced belonging across multiple levels of the organization and through a multidisciplinary approach. Second, they indicate that the district moved beyond responding to individual requirements and began constructing a more systematic and a sustainable organizational approach.

Student surveys and focus groups during this stage showed corresponding improvements in several areas, including understanding of reporting systems, perceptions of adult responsiveness, explicit racial harassment, safety, and the experiences of Black students at the secondary level. For example, reported bullying among Black secondary students declined from 34.8% in 2023 to 20.9% in 2025. The percentage of Black students reporting that they felt unsafe or very unsafe also declined from 19.8% in 2023 to 9.8% in 2025. Overall, students reporting threats or harassment two or more times declined from 21.5% in 2023 to 19.8% in 2025. These findings demonstrate that meaningful changes in some student experiences occurred during the same period in which DSD’s formal systems and organizational capacity strengthened most substantially.

It is important to note the gains the district has observed have not been uniform. Variation in implementation and results existed from the earliest stages of the reform effort. Some schools have demonstrated significant progress, while others did not develop the same capacity or produce the same student-experienced results. This variation has emerged as one of the most important lessons emerging from Phase 2.

Phase 3: Integration, sustainability and transformation

The 2025–2026 academic year marked the beginning of a new phase for DSD. For the first time since the Settlement Agreement began, the district entered an academic year without active federal monitoring. The challenge and opportunity DSD is currently encountering is whether the system established under the external requirements can be sustained and integrated as the districts broader culture and school improvement practice.

The 2025–2026 evidence demonstrates a high level of organizational capacity to sustain many of the systems established during the first two phases. The overall EAR domain average increased slightly from 3.77 to 3.80. Reporting and Response increased from 3.53 to 3.84, Training and Professional Development increased from 3.58 to 3.72, OEO Operations increased from 3.90 to 3.98, and Policy and Monitoring remained at 4.00. These ratings demonstrate that DSD maintained highly effective formal and operational structures following the conclusion of federal monitoring.

Two domains experienced modest declines. Program Evaluation and Culture declined from 3.80 to 3.64, while Engagement and Communication declined from 3.83 to 3.61. These changes warrant discussion and continued inquiry, but they should not automatically be interpreted as a reversal of DSD’s broader organizational gains. The 2025–2026 benchmarks were revised and expanded to place greater emphasis on student experience, accessibility, family engagement, transparency, and continuous improvement. Consequently, direct comparisons with earlier scores require some caution. The application of a broader and more demanding standard may account for part of the change. More importantly, the pattern reinforces the central challenge of Phase 3; maintaining strong formal systems

while extending their influence into trust, communication, adult practice, school-level consistency, and daily student experience.

The student evidence presents a similarly balanced picture. The 2026 survey produced 15,313 valid secondary responses and a response rate of 45.1%, a substantial increase from 28.9% in 2025. Across several measures, Black students continued to show some of the strongest improvements from the 2023 baseline. The percentage reporting that they liked school increased from 52.0% to 60.8%, and the percentage reporting very good relationships with classmates increased from 69.7% to 78.1%.

At the same time, progress remained uneven. Black students continued to report some of the least favorable experiences in safety and treatment, while American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students experienced declines on several measures. Districtwide, explicit racist comments declined, but remained persistent: in 2026, 18.9% of secondary students reported that a racist comment or joke had been directed toward them, and 48.0% reported hearing such a comment directed toward another student.

These findings reinforce an essential distinction. DSD has developed stronger systems for preventing, reporting, investigating, and responding to harm. Those systems matter and must be sustained. However, the existence of an effective system does not ensure that every student experiences safety, dignity, trust, or belonging consistently in every school.

Table 2 – Phase 2 & 3 emphasis

Phase 2 emphasis	Phase 3+ emphasis
Meeting settlement obligations	Sustaining progress beyond the settlement
Building and refining central systems	Embedding reliable practices in schools, and classroom
OEO centered stewardship of equal protection work	Distributed ownership of equal protection work with oversight by the OEO
Policy refinement, procedural knowledge.	Adult judgement, efficacy, and application of policy in daily practice.
Incident response	Prevention, relationship, instruction, and culture
Annual compliance assessment	Continuous organizational learning and transition of assessment
Belonging as an initiative	Belonging as a school-improvement condition
Structural implementation	Cultural and instructional integration

Summary of four years of progress:

Across four annual assessment cycles, DSD’s average EAR domain rating increased from 2.10 in 2022–2023 to 3.80 in 2025–2026, and every domain remained substantially above its original baseline. The strongest current rating captured in Policy and Monitoring, OEO Operations, and Reporting and Response, demonstrate that DSD maintained the formal infrastructure developed during the settlement period. The pattern also clarifies the main challenge of Phase 3 of sustaining that infrastructure while translating it into distributed adult capability and the development of student trust.

414 The next section of this report integrates the four-year record of EAR ratings, surveys, focus groups,
 415 operational evidence, and stakeholder perspectives. It identifies the major themes that emerge when
 416 organizational progress is considered alongside student and adult experience. These integrated
 417 findings clarify where change has taken hold, where meaningful variation remains, and which
 418 conditions appear most important to DSD’s next cycle of improvement.

419 The following graphic visualizes points of emphasis during the first and second phases of DSD efforts,
 420 with points of emphasis in phase 3.

421 **Table 3: Domain-Score Table**

EAR Domain	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	Four-year change
OEO Operations	2.28	3.05	3.90	3.98	+1.70
Reporting & Response	2.43	2.75	3.53	3.84	+1.41
Program Evaluation & Culture	1.97	2.65	3.80	3.64	+1.67
Engagement & Communication	1.66	2.90	3.83	3.61	+1.95
Training and PD	1.87	2.56	3.58	3.72	+1.85
Policy & Monitoring	2.38	2.69	4.0	4.0	+1.62
Average	2.10	2.77	3.77	3.80	+1.70

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Section 3: Integrated Findings and Themes

The preceding section examined DSD’s progress through three overlapping phases of organizational development. This section integrates four years of evidence; including EAR domain ratings, student surveys, student and adult focus groups, reporting data, stakeholder observations, and major institutional milestones; to identify the findings that emerge from the record as a whole.

Over three years, the OEO processed 7,954 student-on-student cases, demonstrating that DSD developed a substantial and active civil-rights reporting and the corresponding investigative practices and response infrastructure. The analysis also highlights how improvement occurs in a large organization through deliberate action, and how belonging is experienced across the varied ecosystem of large school district. The findings capture both the progress achieved and the challenges that naturally surface in any meaningful change process.

Four integrated findings emerge from the observations and data.

First, DSD created a stable civil-rights and improvement infrastructure grounded in compliance, while continuing to develop culture-driven systems.

Second, the systems developed have matured more rapidly than student trust and lived experience, with trusted adults serving as the critical bridge between the two.

Third, progress was real across the district in the aggregate, but closer examination reveals that progress was unevenly distributed; highlighting the importance of school-level leadership and practical adult capacity in closing gaps between highly successful schools and those making less progress.

Fourth, student voices have become an important district capability and increasingly points DSD toward academic belonging and the integration of belonging with continuous school improvement.

The reader should resist the extreme interpretations of this section as a successful declaration of completion on one end, and on the opposite spectrum as evidence of persistent institutional shortcomings that fail to protect children. Rather, the findings offer the description of an organization that has developed substantial capacity and produced meaningful progress supported by an abundance of evidence. Further, the findings also describe the attributes of a learning organization that has progressed through various stages of growth. The opportunity that lies ahead for DSD is the preservation of the protections and accountability systems already constructed while ensuring that they are expressed consistently across all schools, and ensured by all adults.

The integrated findings should also be read as evidence of association and organizational learning rather than proof that any single district action caused a particular student outcome. The four-year record is strongest when it identifies converging patterns, plausible contributors, and the conditions under which improvement appears more or less likely.

Finding 1: DSD Built a Durable Civil-Rights and Improvement Infrastructure

DSD implemented a compliance-based structure that included the following significant components:

- a. An office of equal opportunity that operates with important organizational independence;
- b. A board approved policy(Policy 11IR-100) governing belonging efforts

- c. HDRS and complaint-management procedures
- d. Investigation and consultation protocols
- e. Training systems for staff, teachers, and students
- f. Monitoring and accountability cycles
- g. External evaluation of the work
- h. Survey and focus groups
- i. Annual effectiveness assessment report.
- j. Committee structures to support implementation
- k. A culture/climate plan, an engagement plan, and a structure/orgnaization plan.
- l. Development and implementation of a student code of conduct

Evidence highlights

The evidence below highlight a core transformation experienced at DSD. Four years ago, DSD’s response to harassment varied from school to school, including methods for intervention and documentation of those responses. The fragmented responses lead to students experiencing a system that either did not appropriately react to their experiences with racial harassment, or left students with a significant lack of confidence on the system responses that intended to protect them. Today, DSD has built institutional capacity that lives in embedded policy, in staffing, governance, reporting, and organizational structures. Four years of data provide a glimpse into that transformation.

Table 4: Institutional Capacity

Indicator	Evidence of progress
Overall EAR average from 2022 to 2026	2.10 to 3.80
OEO operations, 2025-2026	3.98
Policy and Monitoring 2025-2026	4.00
Reporting and Response, 2025–2026	3.84
DOJ determination	Settlement obligations satisfied in 2025

Remaining work

The strong infrastructure highlighted in this finding has reduced the need for individual initiatives based on school to school on how to address harassment, and a reduction of variance in how those structures operate. However, infrastructure alone does not guarantee how students experience adults, classrooms, and every other aspect of the schooling experience. Thus recognizing the monumental lift to reach this point, DSD work around organizational culture remains.

489 **Organizational learning**

490 When isolating the organizations learning within this category, several critical insights surface that
 491 will continue to be foundational for DSD. First, the organization has learned that civil-rights and equal
 492 protections work is not separate from culture and academics. The thread of school success weaves
 493 through all three of these important aspects of schooling. Civil rights compliance establishes
 494 expectations and accountability upon which a healthy culture can be built, and should be built.
 495 Second, building an accounting system with meaningful evidence and systems to evaluate those data
 496 naturally leads a school system toward learning. Ironically, large bureaucracies are challenged by the
 497 rigidity and layers of history where learning is not prioritized. Breaking those trends rest on good
 498 evidence and self-reflection that DSD institutionalized.

499 If the structure and systems is a strength of DSD; to what extent have students experienced the
 500 intended effects? Finding 2 provides some insight.

501 **Finding 2: Formal Systems Improved Faster Than Student Trust and Lived Experience**

502 Students experience the culture that adults create, tolerate, or excuse. Whether riding a school bus,
 503 walking in a hallway, reading in a library, or learning in a classroom; the environment that adults help
 504 shape and create is the determining factor on which students in our school system ultimately
 505 experience belonging. As finding 1 demonstrates, DSD created mature policies to provide equal
 506 protection across every school, a comprehensive reporting system, and procedures to investigate and
 507 curtail harassment. However, students do not primarily experience a “system”, they experience the
 508 adults who animate, who embody, or in worst case fail to, represent that very system. Thus, belonging
 509 is created through accumulated daily experiences that compound over the course of a school year, or
 510 years, through visible and tangible follow-through.

511 This finding suggests that reporting, how students perceive the situations were handled, depends
 512 heavily on the relationship trust and confidence on the adults. Reporting is worth highlighting because
 513 the action is primarily a proxy for institutional trust and a reflection of student’s beliefs on various
 514 aspects of the institution. A student’s willingness to report tells us more than whether the student
 515 knows where to find a form or website. It reflects whether the student believes the adults and systems
 516 surrounding them are credible, safe, confidential, responsive, and capable of producing a fair outcome.
 517 A student may understand the procedures in place to support them but decline to use it because they
 518 do not trust the response. Conversely, a student may know very little about HDRS but readily
 519 approach a trusted teacher or principal. The first student has procedural awareness without trust; the
 520 second has relational trust without formal-system awareness.

521 Consequently, the effectiveness of DSD’s reporting system cannot be assessed by reporting volume
 522 alone. It must be evaluated through the relationship among awareness, accessibility, trust,
 523 responsiveness, follow-through, and recurrence.

524 **Evidence portrait: Progress and Persistence**

525 Data aligned with this finding reveal several patterns that capture the paradoxical notion of aggregate
 526 improvement with noticeable variance when individual context is considered.

527 Perception of safety at school has quantitatively improved between 2023-2026, and a pattern trending
 528 toward the type of culture DSD efforts is working to establish. Several data points are worth
 529 highlighting. Between 2023 and 2026, Black secondary students who reported feeling unsafe or very
 530 unsafe declined from 19.8% to 9.8% . During this same period districtwide reports of racist comments

or jokes directed at a student also declined from 21.6% to 18.9%, and reports of racist comment or jokes made by adult declined from 5.2% to 3.9%.

Racist language and jokes persist in our schools and remain a pattern requiring attention. In 2026, 48% of secondary students reported hearing a racist comment or joke directed at another student. Although Black secondary students reported increased feelings of safety, 64.8% still reported that a student had made a racist comment or joke to or about them in 2026.

Patterns Across Sources of Evidence

Systemically, DSD has implemented a robust reporting system supported by districtwide training, technology infrastructure, data warehousing, and policy. The student evidence presents a necessary contradiction. Among students in grades 7–12, agreement that reporting processes were clear and easy increased from 42.8% in 2023 to 45.6% in 2026; a modest net gain of 2.8 percentage points. Black students reported the strongest improvement, increasing nearly 10 percentage points over the same period. Yet fewer than half of secondary students endorsed the item in 2026, and focus groups continued to show low familiarity with HDRS and OEO. Students were more likely to identify a trusted teacher, counselor, principal, parent, or school office as a reporting pathway than the district’s formal system. DSD therefore improved procedural awareness without yet achieving widespread system recognition or institutional trust.

Table 5: Evidence of Growth & Student Experience

Organizational evidence	Student-experience evidence
Strong EAR growth	Meaningful but uneven survey improvement
Mature policies and procedures	Limited clarity and confidence in reporting
Improved investigation systems	Inconsistent adult interventions and follow-through
Sustained training	Persistent racial and ethnic differences
Greater monitoring & training	Substantial variation among schools.

Case Data Review

Case data provide this report several layers of depth. First, they provide evidence of the operational strength of DSD. The OEO’s capacity to highlight patterns that have developed, areas of strength, areas of improvement, and demonstrate an ability to utilize those data as operational advantage is commendable. These case data also support earlier evidence presented of meaningful improvement but persisting patterns that will continue to demand our organization’s attention. Case data also demonstrates areas of improvement that are not uniform. Several trends align between surveys, focus groups, and case data:

Total student cases declined 14.6% in the most recent year, from 2,865 to 2,446.

High-school cases declined every year and were 44% lower in 2025–2026 than in 2023–2024.

560 Staff-on-student cases declined from 57 to 23.

561 Appeals declined from 67 to 34.

562 A pattern to monitor is the emergence of junior-high data as a critical development and organizational
 563 intervention point. In the past three years Junior Highs have accounted for 44.5% of cases in 2023-
 564 2024; 43.6% in 2024-2025; and 48.9% this past year. High-school improvement appears substantial,
 565 while junior-high incidence has remained comparatively resistant to improvement and now represents
 566 almost half of all student-on-student OEO cases. Junior highs may need a differentiated design
 567 addressing adolescent peer dynamics, identity-based language, social status, online behavior, adult
 568 supervision, restorative response, and the transition from elementary school.
 569

570 **Table 6: Case Count Summary**

Indicator	2023–24	2024–25	2025–26	Three-year change
Student-on-student cases	2,643	2,865	2,446	–197 (–7.5%)
Elementary cases	1,138	1,342	1,066	–6.3%
Junior-high cases	1,177	1,250	1,196	+1.6%
High-school cases	328	273	184	–43.9%
Harassment findings	576	504	357	–38.0%
Policy-violation findings	1,600	1,538	1,631	+1.9%
Insufficient evidence/did not occur	415	448	395	–4.8%
Staff-on-student cases	57	28	23	–59.6%
Appeals	67	55	34	–49.3%

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Harassment findings declined every year, falling 38% over the full period; but broader derogatory language that doesn’t quite elevate to harassment remains, and is identified as policy violations persist.

Table 7: Language Category

Language category	2023–24	2024–25	2025–26	Interpretation
N-word	863	913	823	Remains the most frequently tracked racial epithet
“Monkey”	272	280	179	Meaningful decline in 2025–26
Asian comments	109	100	97	Relatively stable
Jewish/religious comments	60	83	87	45% increase across three years
F-slur/“gay”	562	745	673	20% above 2023–24
Disability-related R-slur	185	279	316	71% increase across three years

Student and Adult voice

Student voice related to this finding can be summarized through several quotations that have persisted in various forms over the past three years and illuminate the broader data trends. In the 2023–2024 focus groups, one student said, “*The school has tried to do things to help, but they haven’t helped me.*” In 2024–2025, another student expressed a sentiment that could apply to multiple schools: “*The best thing I love about this school is the principal, honestly.*” A different student reinforced that sentiment by stating that they trusted the administration “*just because I can go to them for a lot of stuff.*” These competing voices express in spoken language what students report in broader surveys. DSD appears to have developed a strong institutional intake and investigation system, but students do not yet consistently experience themselves as knowledgeable, confident participants in that system.

Institutional learning

Civil-rights compliance is not separate from culture; it establishes the protections, expectations, and accountability upon which a healthier culture can be built. DSD has learned that policy creates the expectation for belonging, but adult practice determines whether students experience it.

Across surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder observations, students’ descriptions suggest that belonging becomes tangible when adults consistently demonstrate the following practices:

- 595 *Knowing students personally within the professional boundaries of teaching.*
- 596 *Noticing changes and listening without minimizing.*
- 597 *Intervening when harm occurs*
- 598 *Protecting confidentiality*
- 599 *Explaining to a student what happens next, and following through consistently*
- 600 *Maintaining high expectations while providing support.*

601 Because adult practice is developed and supported locally, the gap between systems and experience
 602 does not appear uniformly across DSD. The next finding (Finding 3) highlights this tension.

603 **Finding 3: Progress Was Real and Measurable, but Unevenly Distributed**

604 This finding presents the biggest challenge and opportunity for DSD as it progresses into another
 605 phase of belonging efforts. How to think about the variation that exists in schools; and how to adopt
 606 the practices that are working in some schools, but not others, is the work that lies ahead for the
 607 district. We understand that school level leadership and adult capacity shape whether the district
 608 systems become consistent student experiences; assuring the right systems are in place for both
 609 leadership and adult capacity is fundamental.

610 Variation in experience appears across multiple aspects of schooling. Differences are noticeable across
 611 schools and classrooms, across racial and ethnic groups, across grade levels, individual adults, in
 612 reporting awareness and confidence, and in access to certain aspects of school programming

613 **Evidence**

614 The 2026 survey provides direct evidence of meaningful school-level variation. To understand the
 615 variance, we utilized the student experience index; a component of the survey that combines responses
 616 to 29 survey questions about racism, discrimination, bullying, harassment, safety, belonging, and
 617 school response into a single 100-point measure. Higher scores indicate more favorable reported
 618 student experiences and allow DSD to examine patterns and variation across schools and years.
 619 Composite student-experience scores ranged from 62.39 to 72.31 across secondary schools, a spread
 620 of nearly ten points. Among the 27 schools with comparable results in 2025 and 2026, 15 improved
 621 while 12 declined. The magnitude of change also varied substantially, ranging from a 3.58-point
 622 increase to a 3.61-point decline. These patterns reinforce that districtwide progress has not been
 623 distributed uniformly and that students' experiences continue to be influenced by local conditions.

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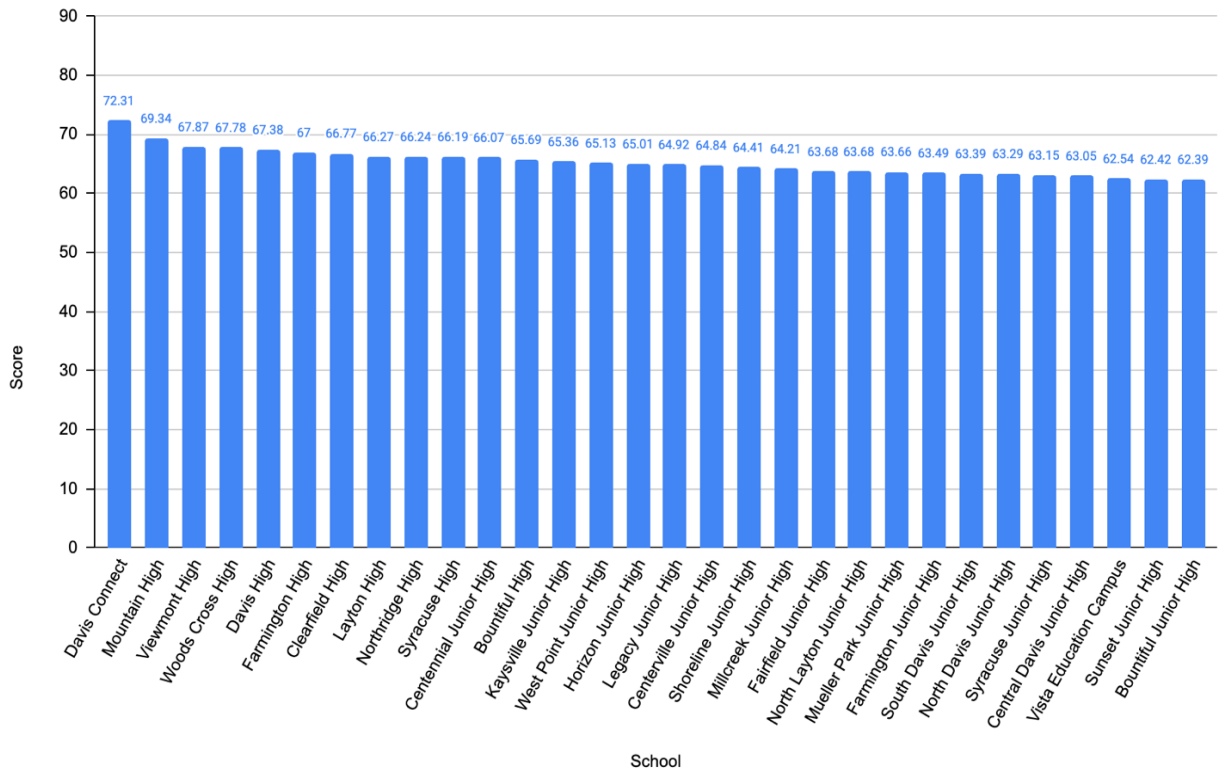
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630 **Table 8: Student Experience Index**

Student Experience Index by School



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632 A second pattern appeared across school levels. High schools and alternative settings were more
 633 frequently represented in the upper survey quintiles, while junior high schools were more frequently
 634 represented in the lower quintiles. This pattern should raise important questions about whether
 635 developmental stage, school structure, transitions, peer relationships, or differences in local
 636 implementation contribute to the experiences reported by junior high students.

637 Variation was also evident across racial and ethnic groups. Black students reported some of the
 638 strongest gains in administrative responsiveness: the percentage agreeing that principals or
 639 administrators listen when discrimination is reported increased from 39.8% in 2023 to 51.1% in 2026.
 640 Yet Black students also remained considerably more likely to report unfair treatment by staff and
 641 harsher punishment because of race or ethnicity in comparison to white counterparts (18.9% in
 642 contrast to 5.0%). Similarly, American Indian or Alaska Native students and Native Hawaiian or
 643 Pacific Islander students reported less favorable experiences on several measures. A quick assertion
 644 that judges schools as either good or bad would be the wrong lens to apply to these data. The
 645 differences reported here demonstrate that overall improvement can coexist with persistent disparities
 646 and that progress for one student population should not be interpreted as evidence of equivalent
 647 progress for all.

648

649 At a more nuanced level, the survey also shows that the same group can improve in one dimension
 650 and decline another. For example:

651 Black students showed strong growth in administrative listening but continued to report serious
652 disparities in safety and treatment.

653 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students reported improvement in treatment by peers but less
654 favorable access to forming student groups.

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656 American Indian or Alaska Native students experienced some of the weakest trends across safety and
657 policy measures.

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659 Asian students showed improvement on several policy measures but not uniformly across school-
660 experience measures.

661 The survey and focus-group evidence demonstrate that progress remains unevenly distributed. DSD
662 has established increasingly consistent districtwide systems, addressing variation in organizational
663 expectations, yet students continue to experience meaningful differences across schools, grade levels,
664 racial and ethnic groups, and individual adults. The variation in experience invites DSD leaders,
665 teachers, and staff to a more disciplined examination of the local conditions that translate district
666 expectations into daily practice.

667 **Table 9: Variation Among Student Groups**

2026 survey indicator	Districtwide	Selected subgroup difference
Principal/administration listens when discrimination is reported	37.4%	Black students: 51.1%
Staff treats student unfairly because of race/ethnicity	6.2%	Black students: 18.9%; White students: 5.0%
Punished more harshly because of race/ethnicity	4.4%	Black students: 18.6%; White students: 3.4%
Reporting process is clear and easy	45.6%	Black students: 40.3%; White students: 46.5%
Staff treats some groups better than others	31.4%	American Indian/Alaska Native students: 45.8%; Asian students: 24.8%
Allowed to form student groups like other students	57.8%	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students: 43.0%

668

669 **Student and Adult Voices**

670 The dialogue with teachers and administrators through DSD’s adult focus groups provides insight into
671 the conditions that may help explain the variation explored in this finding. Across both groups,
672 participants generally expressed support for and endorsement of DSD’s work of belonging. However,

673 that support was typically accompanied by recognition for the need to strengthen adults’ practical
674 capabilities. Four areas emerged:

675 A. *Greater clarity*: reflected in uncertainty about district expectations and appropriate responses to
676 sensitive situations.

677 B. *Development of practical skills*: reflected in employees’ fear of making mistakes and their limited
678 access to practical, role-specific preparation.

679 C. *Greater coherence in communication*: reflected in perceptions of inconsistent messages across
680 policy, professional learning, and leadership.

681 D. *Improvement of organizational conditions*: reflected in concerns about time constraints,
682 professional isolation, staff and leadership turnover, and uneven readiness across roles and schools.

683 Together, these themes suggest that variation among schools is not simply a matter of staff
684 commitment. It may also reflect differences in the clarity and organizational support available to
685 adults as they translate district expectations into daily practice.

686 **Conditions Associated with Stronger Implementation**

687 One of the most important lessons associated with this theme is that DSD and staff members influence
688 the conditions that appear to render best results for students navigating issues of racial harassment.
689 Narrowing the variation between schools will be a byproduct of sustaining the systems that have been
690 established, and converting expectations into practical solutions within schools that have shown
691 stagnant progress. Some of the conditions DSD’s data are identifying with stronger implementation
692 include:

- 693 ● principal visibility;
- 694 ● consistent expectations;
- 695 ● adult confidence and willingness to intervene;
- 696 ● staff stability;
- 697 ● clear communication;
- 698 ● meaningful student groups and activities; and
- 699 ● use of student evidence in improvement planning.

700 The work that remains associated with this finding is focusing on achieving equivalent consistency in
701 school-level implementation and student experience. Narrowing that variation will require schools to
702 use student experience as evidence and to connect belonging more directly to their core academic
703 mission

704 **Finding 4: Student Voice Points Toward Academic Belonging**

705 The school district has developed the capacity to collect and interpret student voices at significant
706 scale. Student voice has become a district capability. Student voice provides a lens into spaces and
707 conditions that adults rarely experience in the same way, even within the same school building. At our
708 current intersection, student voices are moving us to consider the integration of belonging, academic
709 access, high expectations, and school improvement.

710 Evidence

711 Students experience belonging through safety and relationships, but also through access to rigorous
 712 instruction, belief in their capability, fair correction, meaningful participation, and confidence that
 713 adults will support their success. The evidence suggests that students connect with academic
 714 achievement when they experience support from teachers, counselors, administrators, and other adults
 715 who interact with them as part of their schooling. In some circumstances, a relationship with an
 716 employee in a non-teaching role becomes the student’s most significant connection to the school.

717 The evidence also suggests that students are aware of unequal treatment, academic favoritism, and
 718 limited access to opportunity. Students can and should experience correction, consequences, and high
 719 expectations, but those experiences must be delivered with dignity. Behavior can be corrected without
 720 defining the child by the behavior. This distinction connects civil-rights protection to the academic
 721 and developmental purposes of schooling.

722 The scope of DSD’s data over the past four years strongly supports the district’s efforts to understand
 723 student perspectives. In the aggregate, DSD’s research portfolio includes the following:

724 **Table 10: Survey & Focus Group Participation**

Four-year evidence base	Participation
Submitted student survey responses	78,718
Valid student responses analyzed	74,295
Total number of student focus groups	142
Student focus-group participations	1,156
Adult focus groups	40
Adult participants	298
Total focus groups	182
Total focus-group participants	1,454

725

726 Student voice

727 Across the four-year record, student voice can be understood through three increasingly expansive
 728 levels of meaning.

729 First, at the protection level; students have voiced the need for safety in the classroom, in the hallways,
 730 and all environments where they interact. This safety is related to feelings of fair treatment, responsive

731 reporting, and ultimately protection from harm. Schools should understand the importance of feedback
732 loops in this logic.

733 Second, at the connection level; students see and experience the various environments places that
734 uphold their dignity. Whether classrooms, clubs, teams, or trusted adults; the pattern is that students
735 experience belonging as opposed to isolation. =

736 Third, the most significant level of belonging that student voice identifies as is academic belonging.
737 Academic belonging translates into access and participation in programming that is preparing students
738 for career, life and college. At the elementary level it means identifying a student’s learning needs and
739 meeting the child with the adequate supports to match their academic needs. A teacher’s and adults’
740 belief in the students capabilities is the strongest measure on whether a child experiences that
741 academic belonging they give voice to.

742 **Organizational learning**

743 The central insight from this finding is that academic belonging is a set of conditions rather than a
744 separate initiative. It does not reduce accountability or behavioral expectations; but rather weaves
745 accountability with dignity, support, and an orientation toward growth. Students generally do not ask
746 to be singled out or treated differently. They ask to participate in systems that recognize their capacity
747 and open credible pathways toward achievement. The priority, therefore, should be the daily culture of
748 instruction and opportunity.

749 **What remains incomplete**

750 The four findings present evidence of a district that has experienced growth, implemented change,
751 and is impacting how students experience school. The findings also suggest that while DSD has
752 managed important reform; variance in how students experience belonging and schooling persist. At
753 the core of this variance is access to the academic core of the schooling experience. Compliance
754 structures must now be integrated into leadership, instruction, HRS, PLCs, and everyday adult
755 practice.

756 The next section of this report examines the condition that appear to have been catalysts for change at
757 DSD; and considers how DSD can reproduce them more consistently across schools.

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Section 4: Factors Contributing to Change and Improvement

Identifies the strategies, leadership actions, systems, and organizational conditions associated with improvement, along with lessons for future implementation.

What created change?

What were the forces that produced and sustained change in DSD over the previous three phases of belonging efforts? Section 3 identified the principal findings emerging from DSD’s four-year evidence record. Section 4 performs a different analytical function by examining the strategic choices, organizational systems, leadership actions, and enabling conditions that appear to have contributed to that change. The evidence supports the emergence of sustainable progress through the cumulative and interacting effects of four strategic anchors:

1. Grounding the work in civil rights and student dignity.
2. Building a specialized organizational response and developing specialized capabilities among staff.
3. Creating evidence-driven cycles of inquiry, learning, and improvement.
4. Establishing universal districtwide expectations while providing targeted interventions and support to schools.

These anchors are improvement mechanisms and should avoid being lumped with the findings of section 3, or seen as additional findings. Each anchor gave, and continues to provide, direction to DSD while corresponding systems convert that direction into repeatable practice. Apparent leadership actions sustain attention, establish accountability, and align resources. Organizational conditions, including expertise and trust, contribute to how consistently the strategies are implemented. The analysis that follows asks four questions of each anchor: *What organizational purpose did it serve? Through which systems was it enacted? What leadership actions advanced it? What conditions allowed it to operate effectively?*

Strategies, Systems, and Leadership

A strategy is a deliberate and coherent approach to achieving a defined goal. It reflects the choices an organization makes about how resources will be used, where attention will be directed, and what will be prioritized. Strategies may be established at the beginning of an improvement cycle, but they are often understood more fully when looking back across the journey and examining which choices contributed most meaningfully to change.

Systems are the vehicles through which strategies are carried out and sustained. A system is coordination by design: an organized set of connected structures, processes, roles, and resources that work together toward a shared purpose. Systems exist at both the macro and micro level.

The role that leadership most significantly embraces is the merging of good strategy to healthy systems. Leaders establish direction, align resources and expectations, build organizational capacity, and reinforce the behaviors necessary to move a strategy from intention into practice. For this reason, this section also examines the leadership behaviors and conditions that helped create and sustain alignment between DSD’s strategies and systems.

Strategic Anchor 1: Civil Rights and Student Dignity

DSD balanced the challenge of addressing racial harassment as a legal responsibility and compliance endeavor with the stronger cultural component tied to our obligations a public institution. This balancing approach has prevented belonging from becoming something passing, something symbolic, or optional. DSD accepted the seriousness of the original findings of the settlement and utilized civil-rights law, and policy, as nonnegotiables. Clear standards reduced ambiguity about what conduct was prohibited and established institutional responsibility for intervention. From these structural foundations emerged cultural concepts like “daily dignity”, belonging, and fueled the decision to build beyond compliance into academic spaces without diminishing the compliance safeguards it established.

Table 11: Systems, Leadership, and Conditions for Civil Rights & Student Dignity

Systems	Policy 11IR-100; definitions of prohibited conduct; communication and notification procedures for affected parties; school reporting requirements; supportive measures for all parties; retaliation protections; corrective action for staff and students found in violation of policy; annual compliance and effectiveness review.
Leadership behavior	Acknowledged the seriousness of the original findings; established nonnegotiable expectations; communicated that student protection was an institutional responsibility; sustained attention after DOJ oversight ended; connected compliance to belonging and daily dignity; developed expertise and skill within OEO leadership and staff.
Conditions	Philosophical clarity; willingness to acknowledge institutional shortcomings; explicit standards; consistent communication; legal and policy literacy; organizational candor; protection from retaliation; sufficient trust for concerns to be raised; alignment between stated values and actual decisions.

Strategic Anchor 2: Specialized Organizational Response

DSD’s specialized organizational response transformed a broad commitment to equal protection into professional capability. OEO centralized expertise in complaint intake, consultation, investigation, documentation, remedial action, appeals, repeat-behavior monitoring, and cross-departmental coordination. This design allowed the district to recognize patterns that individual schools could not easily see and to establish greater consistency across cases and settings. Senior leaders have contributed by creating and resourcing the OEO, assigning clear authority, maintaining access to decision-makers, and requiring cooperation across departments.

822 **Table 12: Systems, Leadership, and Conditions for Specialized Response**

Systems	OEO development and establishment; HDRS and other reporting pathways; centralized case management; standardized investigations with defined timelines; communication with affected parties, including supportive and remedial measures; appeals process; centralized documentation and record retention; data collection and a data warehouse; repeat-behavior monitoring; E-ACT; OEO–HR–director coordination.
Leadership behavior	Created and resourced OEO; appointed specialized personnel; assigned clear authority; required schools and departments to coordinate; maintained senior-leadership access to OEO; reviewed staff-on-student and student-on-student cases; escalated concerns when necessary.
Conditions	Specialized expertise; sufficient staffing and protected time; clear authority; defined roles; access to accurate information; timely cooperation from schools and departments; procedural consistency; confidentiality; cross-departmental trust; reliable technology and documentation.

823

824 **Strategic Anchor 3: Evidence-Driven Improvement and Accountability Cycles**

825 Repeated measurement of the districts effectiveness is allowing the discovery of patterns, of testing
 826 whether the systems are working, and the discovery of unintended consequences that inform future
 827 efforts. The cycle of adult learning has defined the work within DSD. The number of micro
 828 accountability systems built into the work of belonging align with the ethos of a high-reliability
 829 organization.

830

831 **Table 13: Systems, Leadership, and Conditions for Evidence-Driven Improvement and**
 832 **Accountability Cycles.**

833

Systems	Annual EAR; student surveys; student focus groups; teacher and leadership focus groups; school-level analysis; annual professional-learning review; continuous-improvement cycles; external consultation; DOJ review.
Leadership behavior	Continued collecting evidence even when findings were uncomfortable; required recurring review; brought multiple sources together; examined disparities rather than relying on district averages; used findings to identify priorities; reported progress and limitations to senior leadership and the Board.
Conditions	Prioritization of student voice; data quality; stable measures where possible; access to disaggregated information; analytic capacity; psychological safety to discuss unfavorable findings; willingness to revise prior assumptions; regular review time; clear decision rules; timely feedback; communication back to participants.

Strategic Anchor 4: Universal Expectations with Targeted Interventions

Universal expectations at DSD has established a common floor for student protection, while targeted interventions allows DSD to respond to differences in school context and student experience. Districtwide policy, reporting procedures, and training is defining the expectations applicable to every school. Beyond the policy adjustments, targeted technical assistance has increased the intensity of support where evidence indicate greater need. DSD leaders have made the strategy actionable by maintaining common nonnegotiable at their own school.

Table 14: Systems, Leadership, and Conditions for Universal Expectations with Targeted Interventions

Systems	Universal staff and administrator training; common reporting and response procedures; priority-school and priority-staff processes; student instruction; differentiated professional learning; targeted technical assistance; remedial plans; culture liaisons; student-support groups; school-improvement planning.
Leadership behavior	Established a common districtwide standard; directed more intensive support toward schools, employees, developmental levels, and student populations with greater need; moved from centralized response toward shared ownership.
Conditions	A clear universal standard; timely and sufficiently granular data; differentiated capacity; willingness to allocate resources according to need; functioning guiding coalitions; principal ownership; staff stability; practical professional learning; coaching support; local flexibility within district expectations.

Section 5: Belonging as a School-Improvement Anchor

Examines how civil-rights protections and belonging practices connect to adult behavior, classroom experience, academic belonging, leadership, and cyclical school improvement.

The final section of this report, *Belonging as an Anchor for School Improvement*, serves as a bridge between the organizational learning of DSD’s first improvement cycle and the strategic direction of its next. Belonging 1.0 appropriately began with civil-rights protection, student safety, reporting, response, and the development of trusted relationships. DSD’s evidence, reinforced by the broader field of educational research, now points toward a more expansive understanding: belonging is also an academic condition that influences whether students participate fully, persist through challenging work, seek assistance, access meaningful opportunities, and believe they are capable of succeeding.

This understanding aligns with the Board of Education’s renewed focus on whole-school improvement and with one of the clearest messages expressed by students. Students want to feel safe, respected, and connected, but they also want to experience belonging throughout their academic journey. Academic belonging is reflected in rigorous instruction, meaningful participation, equitable access to learning opportunities, trusted relationships, useful feedback, appropriate support, and confidence that adults recognize and believe in each student’s capacity to succeed. Although the first improvement cycle revealed the importance of these conditions, it was not designed to measure them directly or comprehensively. Developing that capability will be a central priority of DSD’s next cycle.

Drawing from the findings and organizational learning presented throughout this report, this section examines the relationship between belonging and whole-school improvement, the academic evidence requiring renewed district attention, and the lessons DSD must carry forward from the past four years. It then identifies the priorities, accountability measures, and organizational conditions necessary to translate that learning into EAR 2.0. The central premise is that DSD’s next improvement cycle must protect the civil-rights infrastructure established through Belonging 1.0 while extending its principles more deliberately into leadership, instruction, academic opportunity, and the continuous improvement of every school.

Belonging as an anchor for whole-school improvement

What is the connection between belonging and whole-school improvement? Over the past decade the idea of belonging has been treated as an addendum, or an adjacent cultural initiative, separate from the academic work of schools. This misplacement has forced schools into a false binary of choosing between belonging initiatives or more important academic reforms. The point schools have missed, at the expense of academic gains for the whole, is that belonging is a condition that directly influences whether a student can access instruction, participate fully, persist through challenging academic tasks, ask for academic support, develop trust, and experience high expectations. A detrimental mistake we make in education communities is that we prioritize high expectations absent of relationship trust; or conversely we focus on relationship trust absent of academic accountability. The connection between belonging and whole-school academic improvement should be obvious; you cannot have one without the other.

What does belonging look like in an academic environment that is maturing from primarily safety and protection, and into the core of our academic value proposition? Belonging embedded in academic culture looks like safety for a child, it is reflected in appropriate professional relationships between adult and students. Beyond safety and appropriate relationships, belonging translates into active participation with a student taking ownership of their learning with the mentoring of their teacher. Participation thus becomes a flow between the teacher providing feedback, giving opportunities for

engagement, and expressing belief on the child’s capacity to learn. Participation for the child is active, deliberate, and with clear understanding of expectations. For someone looking into a healthy relationship, we would translate it into engagement. Belonging embedded in academic culture helps the learner build an academic identity that is rooted in respect. An identity that has the potential to break stereotypes of who learns, where they learn, and what they become. And the final component is that belonging embedded in academic spaces opens doors of opportunity. It provides students a vision of themselves that perhaps they have yet to conceive. It builds that vision through open doors that are academically challenging but personally rewarding.

Students who experience dignity in schools, who are able to differentiate between a safe environment and one that ignores them at best, and at worst hinders their progress; repeatedly identified in our focus groups trusted teachers, counselors, admin and other adults as a sources of safety and connection. Our data over four years crystalizes this insight. For students, belonging is not an abstraction or addendum, it is an experience perceived through teaching, expectations, participation, support, follow-through, and access.

In a mature system, belonging can be integrated into various school-level structures that define the student days to day experience. The most prominent structures are the following: Classroom tier 1 instruction, academic engagement, intervention support, behavior, attendance, corrective measures/discipline, opportunities for academic advancement, extra-curricular activities, school improvement goals. The high reliability system model has the potential to provide schools the operational reliability through which schools organize improvement; belonging then determines whether that reliability is experienced by every student.

912 **Academic Performance and the Improvement Imperative**

If belonging is an anchor for improving the academic environment; then where does the academic evidence demonstrate that DSD must act? Which schools need support, what student groups, and against what standards? Related, what is the baseline level of academic expectations, and what is the ideal?

A response to some of the more poignant academic inquiries leads us down two related strands. The first is through the understanding of state and federal expectations of school improvement and how DSD fares when weighed against these measures. The second, and arguably the most critical, is what is the academic culture of our district in 2026; and how does an ethos of improvement fit into that culture?

Utah’s current school-improvement model recognizes that school quality is measured by more than overall proficiency. The model considers multiple indicators, including achievement, academic growth, postsecondary readiness, and the disaggregated performance of student groups (see figure below). Each year, Utah establishes a Title I cut score by rank-ordering Title I schools according to the percentage of available accountability points earned and identifying the upper boundary of the lowest-performing 5 percent.

The model is similar to the overall player ratings used in EA Sports’ popular *Madden* football video game. A player’s overall rating does not represent a single skill; it combines speed, strength, awareness, and other attributes that contribute to the player’s performance. In the same way, Utah’s cut score is not a proficiency percentage but a composite accountability score drawn from multiple measures. Depending on the designation, a DSD school may be identified for improvement when either its overall performance or the performance of one or more student groups meets state-defined criteria associated with the performance of Utah’s lowest-performing Title I schools.

935 Belonging becomes an even more poignant lens because the school improvement model asks schools
 936 essentially how academic belonging is experienced across subgroups that make up their entire school
 937 population.

938

939 **Table 15: Federal School Improvement Criteria**

For elementary schools and middle schools	High schools are evaluated through:	Student Groups evaluated
1. Academic achievement - 37% 2. Academic growth- 37% 3. English learner progress-9% 4. Growth of the lowest performing 25%	1. Academic achievement - 25% 2. Academic growth- 25% 3. English learner progress-6% 4. Growth of the lowest performing 11% 5. Postsecondary readiness 33%	a. Economically disadvantaged students. b. Students with disabilities. c. English learners. d. African American/Black students. e. Asian students. f. Hispanic/Latino students. g. American Indian/Alaska Native students. h. Multiracial students. i. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students. j. White students.

940

941 **Table 16: Federal School Improvement Categories**

Targeted Support & Improvement (TSI)	Additional Targeted Support & Improvement (ATSi)	Continuous School Improvement (CSI)—Low Performance	Continuous School Improvement (CSI)—Low Graduation
A student group in a Title I or non-Title I school is identified when its accountability score falls at or below the statewide bottom-5% Title I cut score for two consecutive years.	A currently or previously TSI-identified student group is compared using a three-year average against the lowest-performing 5% of Title I schools.	Title I schools are rank-ordered statewide using three-year average accountability performance; the lowest 5% are identified.	Any qualifying public high school can be identified when its three-year average graduation rate is 66.67% or lower.

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944 **How is DSD doing?**

945 As DSD turns toward whole-school improvement, our response to the evidence must be measured,
 946 disciplined, and proportionate. The district cannot overreact to a single indicator or one year of results,
 947 nor can it underreact to persistent disparities that appear across multiple measures, years, and student
 948 groups. The purpose of this analysis is inform how DSD will move forward to determine where
 949 inequities persist, which students and schools are most affected, and whether the district’s systems are
 950 responding with sufficient urgency and precision.

951 The evidence also requires DSD to confront a more difficult question: If asked whether the district has
 952 been deliberately indifferent to the experiences and academic outcomes of particular student groups,
 953 how would it respond? A credible response cannot rest solely on districtwide averages, stated
 954 commitments, or the existence of formal systems. It must be supported by evidence that DSD
 955 identifies disparities, investigates their causes, directs support where needs are greatest, monitors
 956 whether interventions are working, and changes course when progress does not occur.

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 958 **Table 17: District Wide School Improvement Status**
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Measure	Data represents active schools as of academic year 2025. Data for 2026 will be released in October of 2026
Total schools identified & Percentage of district share	43 – 44.8%
Designation type	TSI – 10 ATSI – 27 CSI – Low Performance – 2 CSI – Low Graduation – 1 CSIA – Low Performing Student Groups – 9 <i>*43 unique schools; several schools fall in multiple categories</i>
Student groups represented	Number of schools by identified group
School level	Elementary – 25 of 63 – 39% Junior High – 13 of 18 – 72% High School – 5 of 10 – 50%

964 **Table 18: School Improvement Comparison, Utah Districts with 20+ Schools**

DISTRICT	TOTAL SCHOOLS	ACTIVE 2024	ACTIVE 2025	2025 SHARE	CONTINUED FROM 2024	NEW IN 2025	NO LONGER ACTIVE
GRANITE	85	53	53	62.4%	46	7	7
WEBER	55	31	32	58.2%	30	2	1
TOOELE	27	18	15	55.6%	14	1	4
NEBO	49	28	25	51.0%	22	3	6
OGDEN CITY	23	13	11	47.8%	9	2	4
SALT LAKE CITY	36	21	17	47.2%	16	1	5
DAVIS	96	45	43	44.8%	40	3	5
JORDAN	70	29	26	37.1%	22	4	7
PROVO	22	7	8	36.4%	7	1	0
BOX ELDER	25	12	9	36.0%	9	0	3
CACHE	26	10	9	34.6%	9	0	1
WASHINGTON	55	25	16	29.1%	14	2	11
ALPINE	91	32	24	26.4%	23	1	9
CANYONS	50	11	12	24.0%	9	3	2

965 **Lessons learned from Belonging 1.0**

966 The four-year journey produced many individual observations and recommendations. The seven
 967 lessons below identify the broader organizational learning DSD should carry into the next
 968 improvement cycle. Together, they explain how civil-rights protection, adult practice, student
 969 experience, and academic improvement must operate as a connected system.

970 *1. Belonging is people-oriented, relational, and grounded in evidence.*

971 Reliable systems matter, but students experience those systems through people. Institutional reliability
 972 becomes student-experienced reliability when adults translate policy, expectations, and evidence into
 973 timely, trustworthy, and skillful practice.

974 *2. Culture is built through daily deposits.*

975 Belonging is rarely created through a single program, initiative, or event. While tempting to adopt a
 976 large scale program, Belonging develops through daily moments in which students are known, invited
 977 to participate, held to high expectations, protected from harm, and treated with dignity. Over time,
 978 these individual experiences accumulate into the broader culture of a school.

979 *3. Civil rights and student dignity provide durable anchors.*

980 Compliance created a necessary platform for change, but compliance alone could not complete the
981 work of cultural transformation. DSD must preserve the civil-rights infrastructure established during
982 Belonging 1.0 while continuing to expand the work toward prevention, relationships, purpose, and
983 daily dignity.

984 *4. Commitment does not automatically create capability.*

985 Adult support for belonging is essential, but support alone does not prepare professionals to navigate
986 complex situations. Employees need clear expectations, practical and role-specific preparation,
987 coherent communication, and continued opportunities to strengthen their practice.

988 *5. Formal systems improve faster than trust and perception.*

989 Policies, reporting processes, and organizational structures can be developed more quickly than
990 student trust. Trust grows through repeated experiences of fairness, responsiveness, communication,
991 and follow-through. Progress must therefore be examined through system capacity, adult practice, and
992 student-experienced impact.

993 *6. Universal expectations require differentiated support.* DSD needs common nonnegotiables paired
994 with support calibrated to school context, leadership capacity, student need, and implementation
995 readiness. Variation should trigger a more precise response—not a lower expectation.

996 *7. Accountability and organizational learning must operate together.*

997 Accountability helps DSD determine whether expectations are being met; organizational learning
998 helps the district understand why outcomes vary and what should happen next. Student voice must
999 remain central to this process through a recurring cycle of listening, acting, communicating what
1000 changed, and returning to students to assess whether those actions improved their experience.

1001 **Transition to EAR 2.0: priorities and conditions**

1002 What is next for DSD’s accountability infrastructure and how do we assure reliability in the phase of
1003 the work that lies ahead as DSD integrates belonging and academics? IN answering this question there
1004 are three considerations; first, what priorities will be at the forefront (our theory of practice)? Or What
1005 do we plan to accomplish? Second, what conditions need to be in place for those priorities to thrive
1006 (our theory of action)? Or What must be present for our priorities to succeed? And third, how will we
1007 measure success (our theory of measurement)? Or How do we know if we’re making progress or
1008 falling behind? This report concludes by presenting a rubric that outlines the interplay between our
1009 next priorities, the conditions associated with that priority, and the accountability possibilities that will
1010 be reflected in our revised EAR 2.0.

1011 The next iteration of the EAR 2.0 reaffirms DSD’s commitment to continuous improvement. The EAR
1012 2.0, like the first iteration, is rooted in the principles of High Reliability Schools and DSD’s Belonging
1013 Framework. EAR 2.0 organizes the district’s next improvement cycle around five domains:

- 1014 1. Leadership, Development, & Organizational Capacity
- 1015 2. Governance, Systems, and Reliability
- 1016 3. Teacher efficacy, learning, and academic excellence
- 1017 4. Student opportunity & program effectiveness
- 1018
- 1019
- 1020
- 1021
- 1022

1023 5. Student Experience and wellbeing

1024 EAR 2.0 will measure a connected sequence rather than relying on isolated indicators. The EAR 2.0
 1025 focuses on the conditions DSD creates; the quality and consistency of implementation; the
 1026 intermediate experiences produced for students and adults; the resulting academic, wellbeing, and
 1027 opportunity outcomes; and the district’s performance against external accountability expectations.
 1028 This sequence will allow DSD to distinguish a missing condition from weak implementation, and a
 1029 delayed outcome from a failed strategy. Another way of thinking about the EAR 2.0 is as report card,
 1030 or a district wide HRS survey, for senior administration on the effectiveness of addressing school
 1031 improvement with a belonging as an anchor. The EAR 2.0 provides district executive leaders with a
 1032 common structure for assessing whether DSD’s systems and practices are strengthening leadership,
 1033 organizational reliability, instructional excellence, equitable opportunity, and the conditions necessary
 1034 for every student to learn, grow, and thrive.

1035 **Table 19: The Interaction of Priorities, Conditions, and Accountability**

Priority	Conditions	Accountability & EAR 2.0 alignment
<i>Establish a coherent direction and shared expectations for school improvement. Align belonging, HRS, PLCs, MTSS, behavior, instruction, and OEO efforts.</i>	Common language and direction; a district leadership team responsible for overall alignment; clear roles for cabinet, directors, principals, coaches, guiding coalitions, and departments; a limited set of nonnegotiables; awareness of initiative overload.	Functioning guiding coalitions; quarterly review of school-improvement plans and self-assessments; evidence of alignment among HRS, PLCs, MTSS, behavior, instruction, and belonging.
<i>Strengthen and build leadership capabilities as a primary lever.</i>	Capable and stable principals; clear leadership expectations; differentiated principal development; onboarding for new leaders; director coaching and supervision; distributed leadership through guiding coalitions; planning for leadership turnover.	Leadership stability and mobility; role-specific development; onboarding completion; director coaching evidence; principal and guiding-coalition implementation; student and staff experience.
<i>Move professional learning into adult capability and action.</i>	Role-specific learning; practical scenarios and rehearsal; job-embedded coaching; time for collaboration and application; clear decision rules; feedback on implementation; psychological safety to ask questions and acknowledge uncertainty.	Demonstrated practice, not training completion alone: observation, rehearsal, coaching records, adult confidence, response quality, and student feedback on daily adult practice.
<i>Apply universal expectations with differentiated support.</i>	Clear districtwide nonnegotiables; timely school and subgroup data; defined criteria for levels of support; additional coaching and resources for identified schools; distinct elementary and secondary improvement designs; specific attention to junior-high conditions; support for students with disabilities, English learners, economically disadvantaged students, and identified racial and ethnic groups.	School- and subgroup-level dashboards; defined support tiers; intensity and duration of assistance; implementation checks; movement toward state exit criteria and local experience targets.
Build an integrated accountability and learning system with shared responsibility.	Explicit district and school responsibilities; defined improvement measures, review routines, dashboards, decision rules, and escalation processes.	EAR 2.0 benchmarks; surveys and focus groups; OEO operational evidence; attendance, opportunity, growth, proficiency, graduation, and state accountability; documented decisions and feedback loops.

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1038 **A Note of Appreciation**

1039 This report concludes with deep appreciation for the many people who have carried this work forward
1040 at Davis School District. I am grateful to the Board of Education for its sustained commitment and
1041 support of Belonging as a hallmark and distinct value of our organization; to Superintendent Linford
1042 for his relentless commitment to children and the steady leadership he’s providing at DSD during
1043 complex times in our environment; to our superintendent’s team for their own unique contribution to
1044 the work, for their trust, and for their willingness to confront difficult truths and voice them with a
1045 desire to improve our schools and do better for children (they never hold back); to our school directors
1046 and school leaders for translating district commitments into daily practice; and to the Office of Equal
1047 Opportunity for providing the expertise, discipline, and persistence necessary to build and sustain this
1048 work. I also want to recognize the teachers, staff members, students, families, community partners,
1049 and countless others whose voices, courage, and contributions have shaped DSD’s journey. The
1050 progress described in this report belongs to all of them. Much remains ahead of us, but we enter the
1051 next phase with stronger systems, deeper understanding, and a clearer sense of our shared
1052 responsibility. I am profoundly grateful for what has been accomplished, and equally grateful for the
1053 opportunity to continue this work together on behalf of every student.

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