July 2026 - Draft

DeKalb County Schools Central Office Organizational Assessment

Prepared by

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Executive Summary

Purpose and Scope

In spring 2026, RTI International conducted a Central Office Organizational Assessment of DeKalb County School District (DCSD). The assessment examined how the district's central office is organized to support its most fundamental work: ensuring that students learn and that schools have the resources and assistance they need. It was guided by three questions: whether the central office is structured for efficiency and effectiveness; where redundancies, gaps, or unclear responsibilities exist; and how well the structure and its practices align to DCSD's strategic priorities and the needs of schools.

The assessment offers a structural and organizational perspective. It is intended as one input among several and should not serve as the sole or definitive basis for structural or organizational decisions. Importantly, it was conducted without insight into individual staff performance; its observations concern roles, structures, and functions rather than the people who occupy them, and it should not be used to evaluate specific employees. Findings are best weighed alongside other data sources and leadership's own knowledge of the district.

The work took place during a period of transition. Following a change in leadership and the appointment of an interim superintendent, and amid budget pressures and heightened public attention to district operations, the timing gives questions of structure, efficiency, and strategic alignment particular relevance.

Approach and Insights

The assessment drew on two complementary bodies of evidence. A comparative organizational analysis examined DCSD's staffing, structure, and role composition against 10 peer districts in Georgia and nationally, using position files, organizational charts, and job descriptions, with staffing expressed in full-time equivalent units (FTE) per 1,000 students to control for differences in size. A stakeholder engagement process then captured how the organization functions in practice, through executive interviews, eight central office focus groups, five principal focus groups, and a questionnaire completed by 226 central office staff. The two are designed to be read together.

Comparative Analysis Synopsis

DCSD's central office footprint is larger than most peers. Its budgeted staffing of 29.9 FTE per 1,000 students is the third highest in the sample; on a filled-positions basis it is 26.22, still above most comparable districts. A higher ratio is not, by itself, evidence of overstaffing—service delivery choices, student needs, and external requirements all shape it—but the size of the footprint warrants examination of how staff are distributed and whether the organizational design supporting that investment is working as intended.

Two structural features stand out. DCSD's cabinet of fifteen division chiefs is the largest in the comparison group; districts of similar or greater enrollment operate with six to twelve members. Related functions—academics, school leadership, and student support—sit in separate cabinet verticals with no integrating position below the superintendent, leaving the superintendent as the primary coordination point across all divisions. Student support in particular is spread across three cabinet leaders.

DCSD's Schools and Leadership division also differs from peers. Each of its seven area offices carries embedded coordinators organized by content and support domain—literacy, mathematics, English language learners, special education, and behavioral and mental health—mirroring expertise that also exists in central departments. No peer district organizes its area offices this way, and the design creates two sets of staff, central and area-based, whose work touches the same schools and principals.

Other areas were found broadly consistent with peers once context is applied. Operations staffing, although the highest in the sample, is driven largely by in-sourced transportation and tracks comparable Georgia districts. Overall management density—the share of positions classified as managers—sits near the middle of the sample and is not an outlier in either direction.

Staff Engagement Synopsis

Across every stakeholder group, participants distinguished the district's people from its systems. They described colleagues as knowledgeable, responsive, and committed, and noted that work often succeeds because staff go beyond their formal responsibilities. Against that backdrop, five organizational themes emerged consistently across interviews, focus groups, and the questionnaire:

- Roles are clear within divisions but become less clear when work crosses divisional boundaries.
- Cross-divisional collaboration depends more on personal relationships than on consistent structures.
- Decision-making and communication follow hierarchical pathways that slow coordination and implementation.

- Operational systems, workflows, and approval processes create inefficiencies that reduce responsiveness.
- Access to central office expertise is inconsistent under the current school support model.

These themes describe organizational patterns rather than individual shortcomings. Read together with the structural findings, they point to coordination, role clarity, and coherence as the district's central organizational opportunities.

Considerations Overview

The considerations below are not recommendations. They are an evidence-based framing of the organizational design choices available to DCSD, with options identified where the data and peer district models suggest meaningful alternatives. Each names a pattern the analysis identified and points toward how the district might respond.

1. **Cabinet Structure and the Coordination of Related Functions.** DCSD's 15 division chiefs constitute the largest cabinet within the sample, and related functions report separately to the superintendent. The district might create an integrating executive such as a deputy superintendent, consolidate into fewer and broader cabinet portfolios, or retain the current size while formalizing cross-cabinet coordination structures.
2. **Division and Department Alignment.** Several divisions hold portfolios structured differently from peers, most notably student support split across three cabinet verticals and the Access and Opportunity division's mix of functions. Options include consolidating student support under one leader, redistributing the Access and Opportunity functions to more natural homes while preserving access as a districtwide priority, and revisiting how communications sits within community engagement.
3. **Coordination Between Area Offices and Central Departments.** Area offices and central departments carry parallel domain expertise with informal coordination between them. The district might shift some coordinators' reporting lines to central departments, create domain-based coordination structures, and standardize expectations across area offices.
4. **Professional Learning and Talent Development as a Coherent Strategy.** The IGNITE Teacher Residency, professional development, and leadership development sit in different cabinet areas without a defined connecting strategy. The district could establish a unified talent-development strategy and consolidate these functions under a single leader.
5. **Clarity in Cross-Divisional Roles, Ownership, and Accountability.** The most consistent finding was uncertainty about ownership when work crosses divisions. The district might map decision rights for recurring cross-cutting work, develop a navigation resource so

schools know whom to contact, and define ownership at the outset of cross-divisional initiatives.

6. **Durable Structures for Cross-Divisional Collaboration.** Collaboration currently depends on relationships more than on structures. Options include standing cross-divisional teams, early-involvement protocols for shared decisions, a strengthened coordinated communication model for schools, and mechanisms to sustain effective collaborative practices over time.
7. **Streamlined Decision-Making and Reduced Unnecessary Approval Layers.** Decisions move through multiple approval layers and parallel positions. The district could clarify decision tiers and delegation of authority, reduce approval steps for routine transactions, enable more direct communication across levels and divisions, and assign a single accountable owner for implementation.
8. **Operational Systems and Workflows.** Outdated systems, manual workflows, and duplicate data entry slow work and reduce responsiveness. Options include mapping and streamlining high-burden workflows, reducing duplicate entry across disconnected systems, establishing consistent standard operating procedures, and aligning approval requirements to risk and value.
9. **School Support Model and Access to Expertise.** Staff and principals support coordinated service but describe uncertainty about when functional experts may work directly with schools. The district might clarify communication protocols, preserve direct access to specialized expertise, define shared roles between functional divisions and Schools and Leadership, and establish a feedback loop with principals on responsiveness.

The considerations vary in scope. The first four concern structure and would involve organizational change; the remaining five concern process and culture and can advance regardless of whether structural changes are made.

1. Overview

Introduction to the Study

In spring 2026, RTI International conducted a Central Office Organizational Assessment of DeKalb County School District (DCSD). The data, findings, and considerations in this report are intended to give DCSD leadership insight into the central office's organization and practices that can inform planning going forward. In RTI's discussions with DCSD staff, RTI was charged with focusing on investigating how the district central office is arranged to support the most fundamental work of any school district: ensuring that students learn and that schools and buildings have the assistance and resources they need to support student learning.

Background

The data collected and used in this report came from district data including position files, organizational charts, and job descriptions, as well as interviews, focus groups and staff reflections. A key aspect of the report includes a comparative analysis of the organization of DCSD's central office with other districts in the state of Georgia and around the country.

The study was guided by three focus questions:

- **Alignment to Schools, Teachers, and Student Outcomes |** To what extent are the current central office structure and practices aligned to DCSD's strategic priorities and the needs of schools?
- **Organizational Structure |** Are the structure and membership of the DCSD central office organized for efficiency and effectiveness?
- **Redundancies and Gaps |** Where do redundancies, gaps, or challenges exist across divisions and departments?

The report is organized into four key sections:

- Section 1: An overview of the study including national, local, and strategic contexts
- Section 2: An analysis of central office structure as compared with other districts
- Section 3: An analysis from staff listening sessions, including interviews with district leaders, staff, and principals
- Section 4: A summation of findings and considerations to guide leadership

Scope and Qualifications

A few qualifications should frame how this report is used. The assessment offers a structural and organizational perspective on the central office—how it is designed, where responsibilities align or overlap, and how well it supports the district's priorities. It is intended as one input among several and should not serve as the sole or definitive basis for structural or organizational decisions, which are best made by weighing these findings alongside other data sources and leadership's own knowledge of the district. Importantly, this assessment was conducted without insight into individual staff performance; its observations concern roles, structures, challenges and functions rather than the people occupying them, and it should not be used to evaluate or reflect the performance of any specific employees.

Beyond these focus questions, our work surfaced notable insights around the district's day-to-day practices that we believe are relevant to providing the best possible service to schools. In particular, two themes emerged: **systems, processes, and practices**—where inefficiencies may limit effective, school-focused work—and **culture and trust**—the extent to which the central office supports collaboration, accountability, and a shared orientation toward student outcomes, and where the most significant gaps appear. We did not study these areas systematically, and they fall outside the formal scope of this assessment; we include them because they recurred consistently enough that we consider them relevant to DCSD's continued improvement. This is supported by our undergirding research base, highlighted in the section below titled *Evidence-Informed Practices for Effective Central Office Organization*.

Strategic Plan Alignment

DCSD's current strategic plan gives this assessment a clear anchor. The 2024–2029 plan was built to guide every administrator, teacher, and staff member toward a shared teaching and learning mission and was shaped by input from thousands of stakeholders during its development. The DeKalb County School District Strategic Plan for 2024-2029 sets a course for improved student success and is meant to ensure that every district administrator, teacher, and staff member is clear about and aligned with the core teaching and learning mission. Because the central office exists to enable that mission at the school level, an assessment of how the office is structured and how well it serves schools speaks directly to the plan's central purpose.

The study's first focus question—How well is the central office aligned to DCSD's strategic priorities and the needs of schools?—maps most directly onto the plan's student achievement goals, which include raising literacy and numeracy proficiency, improving academic growth as measured by College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI), increasing graduation rates, and ensuring equitable access to programs and pathways. The plan calls for increasing proficiency rates in numeracy, raising the 4- and 5-year cohort graduation rates, ensuring equitable access to academic programs and career pathways, and improving student academic growth as measured by the CCRPI. A central office organized around these priorities is a precondition for achieving them, so examining that alignment is a natural complement to the plan's outcome targets.

The other two focus questions—whether the office is structured for efficiency and effectiveness, and where redundancies, gaps, or unclear responsibilities exist—align with the plan's workforce and stewardship goals. The plan aims to retain highly effective staff in critical-needs positions to ensure the sustainability and efficiency of integral district programs and services, and to develop employee pathways for key positions to ensure the long-term viability of essential programs. Questions about organizational efficiency, role clarity, and the systems and processes that may slow school-focused work bear directly on whether the district can sustain and efficiently deliver those services—the same efficiency and sustainability the plan names as priorities.

DCSD Current Organization and Context

DCSD Current Organization

At the top of the structure sits the Board of Education, to which the Superintendent of Schools reports. The Superintendent's Office anchors the district and houses a small set of direct reports while overseeing 15 chief- and officer-level leaders who each head a division. These include the Chief of Staff, Chief Legal Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Human Resources Officer, Chief Information Officer, Chief Academic Officer, Chief of Accountability and Research, Chief of Access and Opportunity, Chief of Schools and Leadership, Chief of Student Services, Chief of Wrap Around Support and Intervention, Chief of Capital Improvement, Chief of Police and Public Safety, and Chief of Community Engagement and Innovative Partnerships. Several of these roles are currently held in an interim or acting capacity.

The Division of the Chief of Staff functions as a governance and oversight hub. It contains the Executive Director of Audits and Compliance (with financial, compliance, and internal audit functions), a Director of Organizational Effectiveness, and the Executive Director to the Board of Education and associated board logistics support. The Division of Accountability and Research is organized around Research, Data and Evaluation; Assessment Administration; and Federal Programs, the last of which encompasses Title I, Title II, and Equitable Services along with parent center and budget support.

Academic work is concentrated in the Division of Teaching and Learning, led by the Chief Academic Officer. It splits into a K–5 and a 6–12 Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction and includes directors for Literacy, MTSS, FLEX, Educational Media and

Instructional Materials, CTAE, and the Fernbank Science Center, supported by senior coordinators across content areas (mathematics, English language arts [ELA], social studies, science, world languages, health/PE, visual arts, and music) and Early Intervention. The closely related Division of Schools and Leadership manages site supervision through Area Superintendents organized by level and type—Elementary Areas 1–4, Secondary 5 and 6, and Specialty/Theme schools—each staffed with a parallel set of coordinators (ELA, math, English language learners [ELLs], exceptional education, mental health, and culture and climate), a Facilities Maintenance Manager, a Regional Transportation Manager, and Executive Administrators. This division also holds Professional Development and Leadership Development.

Student supports are divided across three divisions. The Division of Student Services covers Exceptional Education and Special Education, GNETS, ELLs, Early Learning and Pre-K, GLRS, gifted education, 504/Homebound services, and a block of related-service providers (speech-language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists, nurses, interpreters, audiologists, and psychologists). The Division of Wrap Around Services handles counseling, student health services, social work, PBIS, student relations and hearings, homeless services, Safe Centers, and Title IV prevention work. The Division of Access and Opportunity oversees school choice and assignment, charter schools and school governance, school innovation, athletics, FACE advocates, student mentorships and partnerships, and special education for charter schools.

The district's business and infrastructure functions are spread across four divisions. The Division of Finance manages budget, allotments, the comptroller and accounting/financial reporting, payroll, procurement, treasury, vendor services, local school accounting, position control, and School Nutrition Services. The Division of Human Resources runs talent acquisition, certification, retirement, HRIS, benefits and total rewards, compensation, substitutes, employee relations and investigations, evaluations, Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, employee experience, and the IGNITE Teacher Residency. The Division of Information and Instructional Technology, under the Chief Information Officer, contains Information and Innovation, Enterprise Applications and Data Services, instructional technology, student information systems, state reporting, information and network security, technology support services, and physical security. The Division of Legal Services covers employee and student relations, Title IX, risk management and workers' compensation, contract administration, exceptional education legal counsel, and open records.

The Division of Operations, led by the Chief Operating Officer, includes an executive team with distinct departments for Student Transportation (regional managers, district and assistant supervisors, routing, dispatch, and safety/training), Fleet Transportation, Business Services (supply chain, warehousing, printing, and sustainability), and Planning and SPLOST. It also houses managers for employee engagement, board governance, and talent acquisition specific to operations. Recently, Capital Improvements, formally in Operations, was moved into a Chief position reporting to the superintendent.

Finally, Public Safety operates as a law-enforcement structure under a newly named Chief of Police and Public Safety, with a major and lieutenants commanding detectives and school resource officers, a criminal investigations unit, an internal affairs/professional standards office, campus supervisors, security associates, and school crossing guards.

The current organizational chart is available publicly on the district website and can be found here.

DCSD Context

The assessment takes place during a significant leadership transition. Dr. Devon Horton, who had led DCSD since 2023, resigned in late 2025. The board subsequently appointed Dr. Norman Sauce as Interim Superintendent and authorized an audit of district contracts and spending.

This transition follows a longer period of leadership turnover and public scrutiny of district governance and accountability. Combined with a new interim superintendent, an ongoing audit, and heightened attention to how the district operates, this context makes an assessment of the central office's structure, efficiency, and alignment to strategic priorities timely.

Last, DCSD faces some looming budget constraints including laws that cap how much revenue districts can raise locally and state decisions that shift more fixed costs onto districts. Additionally, there is federal funding uncertainty layered on top of the budget outlook. Given these realities, there are strong incentives for districts to find operational efficiencies.

Evidence-Informed Practices for Effective Central Office Organization

This section provides a brief synopsis of what is known about effective central office operations generally and can ground the assessment's findings in established research and best practice, giving DCSD leadership a benchmark against which to interpret the report's observations and prioritize improvements.

The design of a district's central office has important implications for how effectively it supports schools, implements strategic priorities, and coordinates work across the organization. While school districts organize their central offices in a variety of ways, reflecting differences in size, governance, community context, and local priorities, a growing body of empirical research and evidence-informed practice has identified several characteristics that consistently contribute to effective central office organizations.

Over the past two decades, the role of the district central office has evolved from primarily overseeing compliance and business operations to serving as a strategic partner in improving teaching and learning. As a result, both empirical research and evidence-informed practice increasingly emphasize that effective central office organizations are defined not only by how they are structured, but also by how they operate, collaborate, and support schools.[1,2]

The principles that follow are not drawn from a single study or framework. Rather, they represent a synthesis of recurring concepts that emerge across empirical research and evidence-informed practice related to central office transformation, organizational coherence, and continuous improvement. While they do not represent a prescriptive model for organizational design, they reflect common characteristics of central offices that effectively support teaching, learning, and school improvement. Collectively, these principles provide an evidence-informed framework for interpreting the organizational analyses, stakeholder perspectives, and comparison district findings presented throughout this report.

Principle 1: Organizational effectiveness extends beyond structure.

Evidence consistently emphasizes that improving central office effectiveness requires more than reorganizing departments or redefining reporting relationships. Meaningful transformation occurs when districts intentionally redesign how the entire central office works in partnership with schools through aligned governance, coordinated operating practices, shared ownership, and a common focus on service. Honig and colleagues (2010) explain:

> "*School district central offices routinely attempt to reform themselves by restructuring formal reporting relationships within central office hierarchies, adding or removing units, or revising their standard operating procedures. While structural changes can be helpful, a transformation strategy is fundamentally about remaking what the people in central offices do—their daily work and relationships with schools.*"[3]

This perspective has become a foundational principle of central office improvement efforts, emphasizing that organizational effectiveness is shaped as much by governance, communication, collaboration, and decision-making as by formal organizational structure.[2,4]

Principle 2: Effective central offices build the capacity of schools through coordinated support.

Evidence consistently emphasizes that the primary role of the central office is to strengthen the capacity of schools to improve teaching and learning. This includes developing the instructional leadership of principals and school leadership teams while ensuring that schools receive coordinated instructional, operational, and administrative support aligned to district priorities. Rather than operating as independent departments that provide isolated services or primarily ensure compliance, effective central offices intentionally organize their expertise and resources around helping schools solve problems, implement improvement efforts, and achieve stronger outcomes for students. This service orientation requires shared responsibility across divisions so that schools experience the central office as a coordinated system of support rather than a collection of independent departments.[2,4]

Principle 3: Effective organizations intentionally design governance and operating practices.

An organizational chart establishes reporting relationships, but effective organizations also intentionally define how work moves across the system. High-functioning central offices establish governance structures that clarify roles, decision rights, ownership, accountability, communication pathways, and expectations for cross-functional collaboration. These operating practices reduce duplication, improve coordination, and enable staff to respond more efficiently and consistently to school needs. As districts become increasingly complex, organizational effectiveness depends not only on the expertise of individual departments but also on the organization's ability to create coherence across functions through shared expectations, aligned processes, and coordinated implementation.[2,4,5]

Principle 4: Continuous improvement includes the work of the central office.

Evidence-informed practice also emphasizes that effective central offices continuously examine and refine how they organize and deliver services to schools. High-performing organizations regularly use stakeholder feedback, organizational data, and continuous improvement processes to evaluate the effectiveness of their structures, systems, and operating practices. This ongoing reflection enables districts to strengthen collaboration, improve organizational coherence, adapt to changing school needs, and better align organizational practices with district priorities over time. [1,4]

While districts may organize their central offices differently to reflect local priorities and strategic goals, the evidence consistently suggests that effective organizations share several common characteristics. Effective central offices are distinguished not only by their organizational structure, but by the degree to which their governance, operating practices, and service delivery models work together to support schools and advance district priorities. These evidence-informed principles provide the conceptual framework for the analyses that follow and serve as a lens for examining how DCSD's organizational structure and operating practices support the district's strategic priorities and the needs of its schools.

2. Comparative Organizational Analysis

To assess the structure and staffing of DCSD's central office, the RTI team worked with DCSD staff to identify a group of peer districts based on their enrollment size, demographic profile, geographic context, and organizational complexity.

The analysis is organized around four levels of examination: overall staffing size, distribution of staff across functional areas, cabinet and division structure, and department-level organization and role composition. Together, these levels of analysis provide a layered picture of how DCSD has organized its central office relative to comparable districts, including where its investments and organizational choices are consistent with peer practice, and where they differ in ways that are relevant to the study's focus questions. The comparative analysis does not, on its own, explain why those differences exist or whether they are appropriate for DCSD's context.

District Selection

Comparison districts were identified based on similarities in (1) demographics, (2) context, and/or (3) size. Comparison districts located in Georgia were selected to prioritize large districts in the Atlanta metro area, as well as two districts with much smaller enrollment situated outside the region. Nationally, districts were selected both for their comparability to DCSD and to identify organizational structures that could inform DCSD decision-making and potential alignment.

In total, 14 districts were invited to participate in this analysis, with 10 districts providing data. Among them, eight provided both an organization chart and position data, including individual staff members' titles, departments, and full-time equivalent units (FTE). These data form the basis for this section of the study. Some districts provided limited data in the form of org charts or budgetary documents. These differences are outlined below.

An analysis that features 10 districts across multiple states presents unique contextual challenge when engaging in a comparison. Namely, each of the respondents, within and outside of Georgia, collect, categorize, and report these data differently. These differences are outlined throughout our analysis and both shape the interpretation of findings and provide opportunities for additional study. Regardless of the variability in the data and information provided, each district willingly provided information to assist with the assessment for DCSD.

Georgia Comparison Districts

Five Georgia school districts were selected, representing districts similar in size and proximity to Atlanta, as well as contrast districts that are smaller and serve different regions of the state. The descriptions below provide a brief summary of the districts and rationale for their selection.

Cobb County School District (Cobb), Georgia—The Cobb County School District is the second largest school system in Georgia and the 23rd largest in the nation, serving over 105,000 students across 112 schools. Located immediately northwest of Atlanta, Cobb serves a diverse suburban community and consistently outperforms its peers on Georgia Milestones assessments and leads the state and national averages on both the SAT and ACT.

Cobb provided organizational chart data but did not provide a personnel file in a format suitable for staffing comparison. Cobb is therefore included in the cabinet structure analysis where organizational chart data were available but is excluded from all staffing comparisons.

Fulton County Schools (Fulton), Georgia—The Fulton County School System is one of the oldest and largest school districts in Georgia, serving over 86,000 students across 102 schools. Fulton spans both urban and suburban communities across the length of Fulton County, from the city of Atlanta northward through Sandy Springs and southward through communities including Union City and Palmetto. The district was selected for its comparable enrollment to DCSD and its position as a neighboring metro Atlanta district operating in a similar policy and labor market environment.

Griffin-Spalding County School System (Griffin-Spalding), Georgia—Griffin-Spalding County School System serves just over 9,000 students across 18 schools in Griffin, Georgia, with a student population that is 70 percent minority and 63.9 percent economically disadvantaged. As the smallest district in this comparison group by a substantial margin, Griffin-Spalding is included not as a direct organizational peer but as a regional Georgia district that shares a similar student demographic profile with DCSD. Its inclusion provides a reference point for how a smaller urban-adjacent Georgia district with comparable student need organizes its central office functions. Where Griffin-Spalding's scale makes direct comparison less meaningful, that is noted in the analysis.

Gwinnett County Public Schools (Gwinnett), Georgia—Gwinnett County Public Schools is Georgia's largest school district, serving more than 182,000 students across 142 schools. It is also the largest district in this study. The district's student body is characterized by high diversity, with no single student group constituting more than

37 percent of the student population. Gwinnett was selected as the largest district in Georgia and a metro Atlanta peer operating at substantially greater scale than DCSD, providing a comparative reference for how organizational structures and staffing ratios shift at higher enrollment levels.

Muscogee County School District (Muscogee), Georgia—Muscogee County School District serves nearly 30,000 students across 53 schools in Columbus, Georgia. Columbus is Georgia's second largest city, and the district serves one of the most economically diverse urban communities in the state. The district serves as the designated school district for all parts of Muscogee County and operates across a fully consolidated city-county government structure. Muscogee was selected for its similar student demographic profile to DCSD and its status as a midsized Georgia urban district.

Muscogee's personnel file includes staff from the Columbus Public Library and Columbus Museum, both of which operate under a joint funding arrangement with the district and Columbus city government. Because these institutions serve the broader public rather than functioning as district-operated educational facilities, their staff were excluded from the central office count for purposes of this analysis.

National Comparison Districts

National comparison districts were selected based on similar student enrollment, urbanicity, and student demographics. These large urban and suburban school districts were included across four states to provide a wide range of organizational approaches. The descriptions below provide a brief summary of the districts and rationale for their selection.

Baltimore City Public Schools (Baltimore), Maryland— Baltimore City Public Schools is the fifth largest school district in Maryland, serving more than 76,000 students across 150 schools and nine programs. It was selected due to its similar student demographic makeup, and because the district was recently listed as a “District on the Rise in Math and Reading” by the Education Scorecard, a collaboration of Harvard, Stanford, and Dartmouth researchers tracking academic performance at the district level nationwide.[6]

Baltimore provided an org chart but did not provide a personnel file. Instead, the district’s adopted budget was provided, which reports staffing levels by office rather than by individual position. Baltimore is therefore included in functional area comparisons but excluded from department-level and role-level analysis that requires position counts.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (Charlotte-Mecklenburg), North Carolina—Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools serves over 141,000 students across 185 schools and is the second largest district in North Carolina. It serves a diverse, urban and suburban community and in the 2024–25 school year reported historical academic gains.[7]

Dallas Independent School District (Dallas), Texas—Dallas Independent School District (ISD) is the second largest school district in Texas and serves nearly 140,000 students across 228 schools. Its enrollment is about 90 percent minority and 71 percent Hispanic/Latino, with roughly 20 percent Black students, and it serves a heavily low-income population—state data put it above 80 percent economically disadvantaged.

Denver Public Schools (Denver), Colorado—Denver Public Schools is a large, urban district serving the capital city of Colorado. It is one of the closest districts in size to DCSD, serving over 85,000 students in 198 schools. Denver reorganized their central office in 2022.

Wake County Public School System (Wake), North Carolina—Wake County Public School System is the largest school district in North Carolina and sixteenth largest in the nation, with an enrollment of over 161,000 students across 203 schools. Its geography encompasses both rural and urban areas within the county, including the capital city of Raleigh, and it is one of the highest performing school districts in North Carolina.

Comparison District Enrollment

Many comparison districts were selected based on comparable enrollment or student demographics. Figure 1 summarizes total enrollment alongside key demographic indicators, including race/ethnicity, students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), English Learner (EL) status, and economically disadvantaged status. While districts use varying terminology and reporting conventions for these categories, data were standardized to align with DCSD definitions to support consistent comparison across districts.

Figure 1: Comparison-District Student Demographics, 2024–25

District	Total Enrollment	% Native/American Indian	%Asian/Pacific Islander	% Black or African American	% Hispanic /Latino	% Two or More Races	% White	% Economically Disadvantaged	% English Learners	% Students with an IEP
DCSD	**91,638**	**0.5%**	**6.8%**	**55.8%**	**23.2%**	**3.2%**	**10.5%**	**53.6%**	**24.6%**	**12.2%**
Baltimore	76,807	0.2%	1.1%	70.9%	20.1%	2.0%	7.0%	69.7%	15.2%	14.9%
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	141,480	0.1%	7.0%	33.9%	31.4%	3.8%	23.6%	45.3%	20.7%	12.3%
Cobb	105,213	0.2%	6.0%	30.3%	27.1%	5.6%	30.8%	32.6%	17.8%	14.4%
Dallas	139,776	0.6%	1.5%	19.0%	71.3%	1.5%	6.2%	89.3%	50.4%	12.1%
Denver	85,315	0.5%	3.2%	12.9%	52.4%	5%	24.9%	62.8%	36.4%	13.9%
Fulton	86,839	0.3%	13.3%	42.9%	16.4%	4.2%	22.9%	34.7%	13.0%	11.9%
Griffin-Spalding	9,175	0.3%	0.9%	53.6%	13.3%	5.7%	26.2%	69.7%	6.5%	15.1%
Gwinnett	182,688	0.2%	12.2%	32.0%	37.0%	4.3%	14.3%	39.6%	28.3%	14.7%
Muscogee	29,073	0.3%	2.9%	58.1%	13.6%	7.4%	17.8%	60.8%	6.3%	16.9%
Wake	161,027	0.2%	13.0%	21.0%	20.0%	4.2%	41.0%	35.0%	13.0%	11.5%

Source data for this figure can be found in Appendix D.

In addition to overall enrollment, average school size shapes central office staffing demands. School size determines how many separate campuses a district operates for a given student population, and each campus carries fixed administrative, facility, and support requirements. Figure 2 compares the number of K-12 schools, excluding centers and other non-traditional program sites, for Georga districts in the sample.

Figure 2: Average School Size by Georgia Comparison District, 2025-26

District	Enrollment	Number of Schools	Avg. Enrollment Per School
DCSD	91,638	129	710
Cobb	105,213	110	957
Fulton	86,839	106	819
Gwinnett	182,688	141	1,296
Muscogee	29,073	52	559
Griffin-Spalding	9,175	18	510

DCSD enrolls approximately 91,600 students, placing it between Fulton (86,839) and Cobb (105,213) in the sample. DCSD operates 129 schools and averages 710 students per school. Among the large metropolitan districts in the sample, this is the smallest average school size. Fulton averages 819 students per school, Cobb 957, and Gwinnett 1,296. The two smaller districts, Muscogee (559) and Griffin-Spalding (510), operate smaller schools than DCSD, consistent with their smaller total enrollment.

This pattern appears at the elementary and high school levels.[8] At the elementary level, DCSD averages 547 students per school, below Fulton (615), Cobb (691), and Gwinnett (960). At the high school level, where the gap is largest, DCSD averages 1,223 students per school, below Fulton (1,425), Cobb (2,199), and Gwinnett (2,472). At the middle school level, DCSD averages 930 students per school, comparable to Cobb (921) and Fulton (950).

For a district of DCSD's enrollment, this structure produces more schools per student than the large metropolitan districts closest to it in size. Each additional campus adds fixed administrative, facility, and support costs that do not scale down with school size. Distributing students, staff, and services across more sites increases the district's facility, administrative, and on-site support obligations.

School Finance Context

Alongside enrollment and demographic context, differences in district resources provide additional perspective on how systems are structured and operate. School funding levels and structures vary significantly across states, reflecting differences in policy, governance, and the balance of state and local revenue sources. To provide context for the comparison districts, Figure 3 includes a summary of total per-pupil funding by source (state, local, and federal) as well as overall per-pupil expenditure levels for each district. It is important to note that these figures are not directly comparable without considering differences in state funding models. In some states, a larger share of district funding is provided at the state level through standardized position allotments, resulting in comparatively lower reliance on local funding. In contrast, districts in other states often depend more heavily on local revenue sources, which can lead to greater variation in funding levels across districts.

As a result, this analysis is intended to provide context for understanding resource environments, rather than a direct comparison of funding adequacy or efficiency. Differences in funding levels and sources reflect broader state and local policy decisions and should be interpreted alongside the organizational and staffing patterns described throughout this report.

Figure 3: District General Fund Revenue by Source and Expenditures, 2024–25

District	Per-Pupil Revenue by Source					Per-Pupil Expenditures
	Federal	State	Local	Other	Total	
DCSD	**$2,732**	**$6,648**	**$10,425**	**$550**	**$20,356**	**$20,219**
Baltimore	$4,612	$16,612	$6,081	$246	$27,551	$25,871
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	$1,272	$7,612	$4,339	--	$13,224	$13,288
Cobb	$1,021	$7,323	$8,080	$951	$17,375	$17,675
Dallas	$2,039	$1,489	$9,466	$536	$13,530	$23,271
Denver	$2,174	$3,312	$15,574	--	$25,489	$25,526
Fulton	$1,400	$5,513	$9,930	$882	$17,725	$18,312
Griffin-Spalding	$2,454	$8,082	$5,536	$166	$16,238	$16,529
Gwinnett	$757	$8,010	$6,940	--	$15,707	$15,117
Muscogee	$807	$8,477	$5,026	$593	$14,903	$14,432
Wake	$750	$7,441	$4,296	--	$12,487	$12,529

Source data for this figure can be found in Appendix D.

On a per-pupil basis, DCSD's total general fund revenue of $20,356 ranks third among all comparison districts, behind Baltimore ($27,551) and Denver ($25,489), and highest among the Georgia districts in the comparison group. DCSD's per-pupil local revenue of $10,425 ranks second overall, behind only Denver ($15,574), and is also the highest among Georgia districts, ahead of Fulton ($9,930), Cobb ($8,080), Gwinnett ($6,490), Griffin-Spalding ($5,536), and Muscogee ($5,026). At $20,219, DCSD's per-pupil expenditure is the third highest in the comparison group, exceeded only by Baltimore ($25,871) and Denver ($25,526), and sits well above the per-pupil expenditures of similarly sized districts such as Cobb ($17,675), Fulton ($18,312), and Charlotte-Mecklenburg ($13,288).

Student Outcomes Comparison

To provide further context for the comparison districts, student outcome data were analyzed using a set of common indicators of academic performance and attainment. Figure 4 summarizes Georgia grade-level proficiency in Grades 3–8 in ELA and Math for the 2024–25 school year. These scores represent the percentage of students meeting grade-level proficiency expectations and offer a common statewide benchmark across the Georgia comparison districts. Because all districts are measured under the same accountability system, these results provide a more directly comparable view of academic outcomes than cross-state measures.

In 2024–25 Georgia Grade-Level Proficiency assessments, DCSD's ELA and Math proficiency rates rank the lowest among all comparison districts at nearly every grade level. Across both ELA and Math, Cobb and Fulton consistently post the highest proficiency rates among the comparison group, with Fulton reaching as high as 62.2 percent in Grade 4 Math compared to DCSD's 34.5 percent in the same grade.

Figure 4: Georgia Grade-Level Proficiency, 2024–25

District	Grade 3 ELA	Grade 4 ELA	Grade 5 ELA	Grade 6 ELA	Grade 7 ELA	Grade 8 ELA	Grade 3 Math	Grade 4 Math	Grade 5 Math	Grade 6 Math	Grade 7 Math	Grade 8 Math
DCSD	**29.5%**	**30.1%**	**35.2%**	**30.5%**	**29.6%**	**32.2%**	**34.4%**	**34.5%**	**31.9%**	**22.8%**	**26.0%**	**34.4%**
Cobb	43.2%	48.9%	49.0%	50.6%	50.7%	48.0%	50.2%	56.8%	48.7%	45.3%	49.8%	55.0%
Fulton	49.9%	54.0%	59.0%	54.4%	56.4%	52.7%	58.0%	62.2%	53.7%	47.0%	51.6%	55.0%
Griffin-Spalding	18.9%	20.2%	29.7%	23.5%	23.3%	25.0%	22.9%	30.1%	26.4%	21.3%	18.8%	35.3%
Gwinnett	38.8%	43.3%	48.9%	49.4%	48.7%	47.0%	49.3%	55.4%	49.5%	46.8%	49.5%	57.6%
Muscogee	25.0%	27.1%	32.4%	30.5%	29.7%	29.8%	27.3%	30.1%	26.3%	19.0%	22.4%	30.3%

Source data for this figure can be found in Appendix D.

Given the variation in state assessments, standards, and accountability systems, direct comparisons of proficiency or growth rates across states are not meaningful. Instead, measures like graduation rate and average composite ACT scores (Figure 5) can provide a more common benchmark against which to compare all eleven districts in this sample. It is important to note that while these are common figures, nuance still exists in how they are captured—graduation requirements may differ across states, and since the ACT is not a universal requirement, ACT participation can vary widely at the state and district levels.

Figure 5: National Student Outcomes Comparison, 2024–25

District	State	4-year Graduation Rate	Average ACT Composite Score
DCSD	**GA**	**81.6%**	**21**
Baltimore	MD	71.7%	--*
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	NC	84.6%	--*
Cobb	GA	89.2%	23
Dallas	TX	85.5%	23.9
Denver	CO	81.9%	--*
Fulton	GA	91.9%	24
Griffin-Spalding	GA	90.9%	18.3
Gwinnett	GA	85.4%	22.8
Muscogee	GA	96.1%	19.8
Wake	NC	90.7%	--*

Source data for this figure can be found in Appendix D.

** Colorado does not uniformly administer the ACT to all high school students; district-level ACT averages reflect self-selected, college-bound test takers rather than a universal testing population. Maryland does not administer the ACT as a state assessment and thus Baltimore is omitted from this figure. North Carolina administers the ACT to all 11th graders as a statewide assessment, but district-level results are reported as the percentage of students meeting the college readiness benchmark composite score of 17 or higher, not as average scores.*

In 2024–25, DCSD's 4-year graduation rate of 81.6 percent is the second lowest among all comparison districts, and lowest among Georgia districts. Similarly, DCSD's average ACT Composite Score of 21 is the third lowest among all comparison districts for which data are available, above only Muscogee (19.8) and Griffin-Spalding (18.3).

These data are intended to provide contextual information for organizational comparison, rather than a comprehensive evaluation of district effectiveness. Differences in student outcomes may reflect a wide range of factors beyond central office structure, including community context, funding levels, student needs, and state policy environments. As such, these data should be interpreted as one of several lenses used to understand similarities and differences across districts.

Analytical Framework and Organization of Findings

The sections that follow present findings from the comparative analysis across these districts, though the scope of available data varies by district and is noted where relevant. For each district, the study team collected and analyzed personnel file data, organizational charts, and publicly available documentation to enable consistent cross-district comparison. Positions were classified using a common framework anchored to the nature of the work rather than job title or organizational placement, and staffing levels are expressed in full-time equivalent units per 1,000 students to control for differences in district size.

The analysis is organized around four levels of examination: overall staffing size, distribution of staff across functional areas, cabinet and division structure, and department-level organization and role composition. Together, these levels provide a layered picture of how DCSD has organized its central office relative to comparable districts, including where its investments and organizational choices are consistent with peer practice, and where they differ in ways that are relevant to the study's focus questions.

The comparisons in this report depend on personnel data provided directly by each district, and no uniform standard governs how school systems categorize, title, or report central office positions. The RTI team applied a common coding framework to all 10 districts, drawing on position titles, department designations, and FTE counts, to make the data as comparable as possible across systems that organize similar work in meaningfully different ways. Where the data required interpretive judgment, the team defaulted to DCSD's organizational structure as the reference point, given that the study's primary purpose is to understand how DCSD's central office compares to peer practice. Several districts presented data gaps or structural anomalies that are noted where relevant throughout the analysis. The full methodology, including coding rules, classification decisions, and known data limitations by district, is documented in Appendix A.

Overall Central Office Staffing Size

Central office staffing levels vary considerably across the comparison districts in this study, reflecting differences in enrollment, local policy context, service delivery models, and organizational design. This section examines how DCSD's overall staffing footprint compares to peer districts and situates the district within the full range of the sample. It is intended as context for the more detailed comparisons that follow, not as a judgment about appropriate staffing levels. The factors that shape central office size are numerous and not fully captured in any staffing ratio, and differences between districts should be read as the beginning of an analytical conversation rather than the end of one.

How Staffing Levels Are Measured

Staffing levels throughout this report are expressed in FTE per 1,000 students. This metric converts part-time positions to a common scale and normalizes for district size, allowing comparison across districts that range from approximately 9,000 to nearly 183,000 students.

Districts vary in whether their personnel files include vacant positions. DCSD, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, and Griffin-Spalding are the only three districts in this sample that provided data that included vacancies. The remaining six districts provided data for filled positions only, which reflects how each district filtered its export rather than an absence of open positions. Because DCSD's file includes 361 vacant positions (approximately 14% of its total entries) direct comparisons of raw FTE counts will overstate DCSD's deployed capacity relative to peer districts. This report addresses that gap by presenting both DCSD's budgeted FTE (which includes vacancies) and its filled FTE where the distinction is material.

Where DCSD Stands

Figure 6 captures the overall staffing level of the districts in this study. Across the ten districts in this comparison, central office staffing ranges from 9.6 FTE per 1,000 students (Muscogee) to 31.6 per 1,000 students (Denver). The median for the sample is 19.2 per 1,000 students.

DCSD's budgeted central office staffing stands at 29.9 FTE per 1,000 students, the third highest in the sample behind Denver (31.6) and Dallas (30.0). On a filled-positions basis, which provides a more direct comparison to peer districts that did not include vacancies in their data, DCSD's figure decreases to 26.2 FTE per 1,000 students.

Figure 6: Central Office Staffing Levels

District	State	Total Enrollment (2024–25)	Reported Central Office FTE	FTE per 1,000 Students
Denver	CO	85,315	2,698	31.6
Dallas	TX	139,776	4,187.9	30.0
DCSD	**GA**	**91,638**	**2,742**	**29.9**
Muskogee	GA	29,073	767	26.4
Fulton	GA	86,839	1,945.5	22.4
Gwinnett	GA	182,688	3,655.4	20.0
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	NC	141,480	2,608.9	18.4
Wake	NC	161,027	2,718	16.9
Griffin-Spalding	GA	9,175	145.3	15.8
Baltimore	MD	76,807	1,052	13.7

The districts most comparable to DCSD by enrollment are Baltimore (76,807 students), Denver (85,315), and Fulton (86,839). Among that group, DCSD's budgeted staffing ratio and filled-positions ratios are the second highest after Denver. Fulton, which operates in the same metropolitan region, runs its central office at 22.4 FTE per 1,000 students, approximately 25 percent fewer staff per student than DCSD on a filled-positions basis.

What the Comparison Does and Does Not Show

A higher staffing ratio does not, on its own, indicate that a district is overstaffed or operating inefficiently. Districts that provide more services internally, including transportation, nutrition, therapeutic services, and safety, will carry higher central office counts than districts that contract those functions externally. Districts serving student populations with higher concentrations of students with disabilities, English learners, or students experiencing housing instability may require more central support capacity to meet compliance and service obligations. And districts operating under consent decrees, corrective action plans, or other external accountability requirements may carry additional administrative capacity that reflects legal obligations rather than organizational preference.

This analysis does not account for those contextual factors in a way that would allow a conclusion that DCSD is or is not appropriately staffed in aggregate. What the data do support is the observation that DCSD's overall central office footprint is larger than most peers in this sample, and that the size of that footprint warrants examination of how staff are distributed across functions and whether the organizational design supporting that investment is working as intended. Those questions are taken up in the sections that follow.

Distribution of Central Office Staff by Functional Area

While overall staffing levels provide a broad indicator of central office scale, understanding how staff are distributed across functions reveals how districts allocate their administrative capacity. To support that comparison, each position in this study was assigned to one of thirteen functional areas reflecting the major domains most commonly represented within superintendent leadership teams.

How Functional Areas were Defined

Functional area categories were constructed to accommodate the variation in how districts name and structure their work. No two districts in this sample use identical organizational structures or job title conventions, and functional area categories broad enough to hold that variation provide the most reliable unit of cross-district comparison. Individual positions were mapped to categories based on primary functional responsibility rather than title or native placement in the organizational chart. Where a position's home department and its actual function pointed in different directions, additional sources, including organizational charts, public district websites, and posted job descriptions, were used to resolve the placement.

These functional areas differ intentionally from DCSD's own cabinet structure. DCSD organizes its central office across 15 division chiefs. In some cases, those divisions align closely with how peer districts group related functions. For example, Nutrition Services sits under DCSD's Chief Financial Officer, which is consistent with how most peer districts organize and report that function.

Until recently, Safety and Security sat under DCSD's Chief of Staff, while in most peer districts it sits under an operations structure. As of May, Safety and Security in DCSD moved under the superintendent. Community engagement, communications, grants, and partnership functions are consolidated into a single DCSD cabinet division, but peer districts typically treat at least some of those as distinct organizational homes.

The functional area framework used here is designed to hold that variation, creating categories that are broad enough that each district's positions can be placed based on their actual work, independent of where it sits in any particular cabinet structure. This allows a comparison that asks not just how many staff DCSD dedicates to a given function, but whether how DCSD organizes that function is consistent with, or a departure from, how peer districts approach the same work. The 13 functional areas used throughout this analysis reflect common practice across the comparison group, shaped in part by DCSD's own organizational logic. These include Academic and Instructional Services; Access, Equity, and Opportunity; Administration; Communications; Community Engagement; Finance; Human Resources; Information Technology; Operations and Auxiliary Services; Safety and Security; School Leadership and Principal Supervision; Specialized Student Services; Strategy, Planning, and Accountability; and Wraparound and Student Support.

Functional Area Staffing Relative to District Size

Figure 7 presents Central Office FTE per 1,000 students for each functional area across all 10 comparison districts. This metric controls for district size and allows direct comparison of how much capacity each district devotes to each function, independent of overall enrollment differences.

Figure 7: Central Office Staffing Levels by Functional Area

District	Academic and Instructional Services	Access, Equity, and Opportunity	Administration	Communications	Community Engagement	Finance	Human Resources	Information Technology	Operations and Auxiliary Services	Safety and Security	School Leadership and Principal Supervision	Specialized Student Services	Strategy, Planning, and Accountability	Wrap Around and Student Support
DCSD	**1.15**	**0.97**	**0.47**	**0.15**	**0.26**	**1.31**	**1.06**	**2.27**	**14.33**	**1.32**	**1.93**	**2.70**	**0.84**	**1.17**
Baltimore	3.87	-	0.98	0.69	-	1.47	1.12	0.94	3.15	-	1.48	-	-	-
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	0.31	0.29	0.25	0.12	0.13	1.05	0.85	0.61	9.48	0.52	1.14	2.37	0.32	0.87
Dallas	0.92	0.69	0.47	0.31	0.21	2.21	1.12	1.49	12.61	2.69	1.22	3.37	0.61	2.04
Denver	2.96	1.26	0.50	0.25	0.72	2.60	1.15	1.88	7.75	1.50	0.74	6.02	0.60	3.69
Fulton	0.74	0.17	0.25	0.16	0.07	1.02	0.88	2.57	13.20	1.22	0.31	1.09	0.38	0.32
Griffin-Spalding	1.23	0.82	0.54	0.22	0.11	1.53	1.09	1.90	1.85	0.11	0.64	3.45	0.86	1.49
Gwinnett	0.63	0.07	0.10	0.08	0.04	1.03	0.57	1.72	12.03	0.80	0.29	1.70	0.29	0.65
Muskogee	0.57	0.14	0.45	0.09	-	1.12	1.14	2.37	12.74	1.51	0.34	3.71	0.45	1.74
Wake	0.42	0.29	0.13	0.09	0.27	0.83	0.68	0.83	7.33	0.07	0.73	3.92	0.24	1.06

Within the functional area data, **Operations and Auxiliary Services** dominates every district's count. DCSD's operations staffing is the highest in the sample at 14.33 FTE per 1,000 students. Fulton, which has a similar enrollment, operates at 13.2 per 1,000. Gwinnett, a district twice DCSD's size, operates at 12.03. Denver and Wake operate significantly lower at 7.8 and 7.3 FTE, respectively, although Denver's figure reflects a partially contracted transportation model rather than a fully in-sourced one. The variation in operations ratios across districts reflects differences in which services districts deliver directly versus contract externally, as well as differences in the physical footprint each central office must support. DCSD operates smaller schools across Elementary and High School grade bands. Smaller average school size means more campuses per student, which in turn drives increased transportation routes, more facilities to maintain, and higher staffing requirements across operations functions. DCSD's elevated operations ratio is in part a consequence of this more distributed school model rather than a reflection of operational inefficiency relative to peers.

School Leadership and Principal Supervision is the functional area where DCSD staffing is farthest above the sample. At 1.93 FTE per 1,000 students, the closest comparison district is Baltimore (1.48), whose figure reflects budget document data and should be interpreted cautiously. Among districts with full personnel file data, Dallas (1.22) and Charlotte-Mecklenburg (1.13) are the closest peers. Gwinnett (0.29) and Fulton (0.31) operate this function at roughly one-quarter of DCSD's per-student level, though their area superintendent models differ structurally from DCSD's in ways that affect how the comparison should be read. The composition of DCSD's school leadership staffing is examined in depth in the division-level analysis.

The **Access, Equity, and Opportunity** area includes 0.97 FTE per 1,000 students, placing DCSD second in sample behind Denver (1.26) and just ahead of Griffin-Spalding (0.82). This is well above the median figure of 0.29 staff per 1,000 students across the sample. The division's 89 FTE encompass several distinct functions: charter school oversight and governance (16 FTE), athletics administration (16 FTE), student assignment and enrollment (15 FTE), division administration (9 FTE), and a set of direct-service student-support roles. Peer districts carry similar functions but typically distribute them across student services or wraparound structures rather than consolidating them with charter governance, athletics, and enrollment under a single cabinet leader.

In **Information Technology** (IT) DCSD ranks third in the sample at 2.27 FTE per 1,000 students, behind Fulton (2.57) and Muscogee (2.37). The sample median is 1.72. IT is one of the few functional areas where DCSD's elevated position holds even after accounting for the vacancy adjustment, since the IT function carries a lower vacancy rate than several other divisions.

Safety and Security ranks fourth at 1.32 FTE per 1,000 students in DCSD, behind Dallas (2.69), Muscogee (1.51) and Denver (1.50). Six districts in the sample carry meaningful safety and security staffing; the remaining four carry little or none in central office counts, suggesting they deliver this function through a different organizational model.

Specialized Student Services ranks sixth at 2.70 FTE per 1,000 students, but even with the sample median. Several comparison districts invest considerably more in this function: Wake (3.92), Muscogee (3.71), Griffin-Spalding (3.45), and Dallas (3.37) all exceed DCSD substantially. Denver (6.03) is a significant outlier driven by a different service delivery model.

Strategy, Planning, and Accountability ranks second at 0.84 FTE per 1,000 students, above Dallas (0.61) and Denver (0.60). That position is driven almost entirely by the Federal Programs department, which carries 41 FTE, including Title I coordinators, parent center facilitators, specialists, and associated administrative and leadership staff. The remaining Strategy, Planning, and Accountability departments (Research, Data, and Evaluation, Assessment, and their administrative functions) total 28 FTE, which places DCSD below the sample median in those functions specifically. The functional area label in this case does not reflect where the majority of its FTE are concentrated, and the elevated ranking should not be read as an indicator of investment in research, accountability, or planning capacity.

How DCSD Prioritizes Across Functions Relative to Peers

The per-student ratios above describe the scale of each function in absolute terms. Understanding how DCSD distributes its non-operations central office capacity, and how that distribution compares to peer priorities, provides a second layer of analytical insight, one more directly relevant to the question of organizational orientation.

To examine this, the analysis below sets aside Operations and Auxiliary Services and Safety and Security, which span both orientations and are outliers across the functional areas, and examines how districts allocate the remainder of their central office capacity between school and student-support functions and internal and organizational support functions. In this case, school and student-support functions include Academic and Instructional Services; Access, Equity, and Opportunity; Community Engagement; School Leadership and Principal Supervision; Specialized Student Services; and Wrap Around and Student Support. Conversely, internal and organizational support functions include Finance; HR; IT; Administration; Strategy, Planning, and Accountability; and Communications (Figure 8).

This grouping is not a judgment about which functions matter more. HR, Finance, and IT are essential to a functioning district, and underinvestment in any of them creates its own organizational risk. The grouping is an analytical lens that provides an avenue to explore whether the balance of DCSD's central office investment is oriented toward the schools and students it exists to serve, and whether that orientation is consistent with, or a departure from, how peer districts allocate their capacity.

Figure 8: Student and School Support and Internal Support Comparison, 2025–26

District	School-Supporting FTE	School-Supporting FTE/1,000 Students	Internal-Supporting FTE	Internal-Supporting FTE/1,000 Students	Ratio	School-Supporting as % of Combined
DCSD	**749**	**8.17**	**559**	**6.10**	**1.34**	**57.3%**
Baltimore	411	5.35	399	5.19	1.03	50.7%
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	721.1	5.10	453	3.20	1.59	61.4%
Dallas	1,180.6	8.45	868	6.21	1.36	57.6%
Denver	1,314	15.40	594.5	6.97	2.21	68.8%
Fulton	235.5	2.71	457	5.26	0.52	34.0%
Griffin-Spalding	70.9	7.73	56.4	6.14	1.26	55.7%
Gwinnett	619.5	3.39	690.6	3.78	0.90	47.3%
Muskogee	189	6.5	163	5.61	1.16	53.7%
Wake	1,077	6.69	449	2.79	2.40	70.6%

Across the sample, the ratio of school- and student-supporting FTE to internal and organizational support FTE ranges from 0.52 (Fulton) to 2.4 (Wake). This pattern is not simply a function of district size, as large and small districts appear at both ends of the distribution. It reflects organizational design choices about where central office capacity is concentrated.

DCSD's ratio of 1.34 school-facing FTE per internal-facing FTE places it fifth in the sample, between Dallas (1.36) and Griffen Spalding (1.26). On a per-student basis, DCSD's school-facing investment of 8.17 FTE per 1,000 students is the third highest in the sample behind Denver (15.40) and Dallas (8.45), and its internal-facing investment of 6.1 per 1,000 students is the fourth highest behind Denver, Dallas, and Griffin-Spalding. The pattern suggests DCSD's central office capacity is weighted toward school and student-facing functions at roughly the same proportion as Dallas and above Baltimore, Fulton, and Gwinnett, though below Wake and Denver.

Cabinet Composition and Division Structure

The superintendent's cabinet is the senior leadership body through which a district's chief executive coordinates strategy, allocates resources, and drives organizational priorities. Cabinet members typically hold responsibility for major divisions of the central office and serve as the superintendent's primary advisors on both operational and strategic matters. How a superintendent structures cabinet—how many members it includes, which functions receive direct representation, and how related functions are grouped or separated—reflects organizational design choices with consequences for coordination, decision-making, and strategic coherence. As the Wallace Foundation has documented, central office structures are most effective when they follow strategy, reflecting deliberate choices about how a district intends to pursue its priorities rather than historical accumulation or convention. The comparisons in this section describe structural patterns across the sample. They do not explain why any district made the choices it did, and they are not intended as assessments of individual leader or leadership team effectiveness.

DCSD’s Cabinet

As of May 2026, DCSD's cabinet includes 15 division chiefs. These positions span academic leadership, school supervision, student support, operations, finance, technology, human resources, legal services, community engagement, accountability, and public safety.

Cabinet Size in Comparative Context

Across the 11 districts examined in this study's cabinet analysis, cabinet size ranges from six members (Fulton) to 15 (DCSD). Figure 9 presents cabinet membership counts alongside reported Central Office FTE for each district.

Figure 9: Cabinet Size Comparison, 2025–26

District	Cabinet Size	Reported Central Office FTE
DCSD	**15**	**2,742**
Baltimore	10	1,052
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	12	2,608.9
Cobb	7	--
Dallas	10	4,187.9
Denver	8	2,698
Fulton	6	1,945.5
Griffin-Spalding	7	145.3
Gwinnett	10	3,655.4
Muskogee	9	766.5
Wake	7	2,718

DCSD's 15 division chiefs is the largest in the sample. The districts with the next largest cabinets (Charlotte-Mecklenburg at 12, Baltimore at 10, Dallas at 10, and Gwinnett at 10) each serve more students than DCSD, with Dallas and Gwinnett serving populations roughly 50 percent and 100 percent larger, respectively. Among districts with enrollment comparable to DCSD, Fulton operates with six cabinet members over 1,946 total FTE, and Denver operates with eight cabinet members over 2,698 total FTE.

Within DCSD's cabinet, the distribution of organizational mass across divisions is uneven. The Chief Operating Officer's division accounts for 1,313 of DCSD's 2,742 total FTE. The remaining 14 chiefs collectively oversee 1,429 FTE, with individual division sizes ranging from 22 FTE (Chief Legal Officer) to 247 FTE (Interim Chief of Student Services). Eight of the 14 non-operations cabinet divisions carry fewer than 130 FTE each.

How Peer Districts Structure Their Cabinets

Cabinet size alone does not capture the more consequential structural question: how districts group related functions under senior leadership. Two broad patterns emerge from the comparison group, and DCSD's current structure differs from both of these patterns in notable ways.

The first pattern is consolidation through an integrating executive. Several districts in the sample place related functions under a deputy superintendent or equivalent senior leader who sits between the superintendent and individual chiefs. This creates a reporting layer that integrates functions the superintendent would otherwise coordinate directly.

- **Denver's** Deputy Superintendent oversees academics, school supervision, school transformation, and innovation. In DCSD, these functions sit under four separate cabinet members.
- **Charlotte-Mecklenburg's** Deputy Superintendent spans academic performance, school leadership and principal supervision, and student services. Similarly, these functions sit under four separate division chiefs in DCSD.

In each case, the cabinet structure places academic, school leadership, and student-support functions within a common reporting relationship below the superintendent. This consolidation is not unique to the Deputy Superintendent role. The second pattern is consolidation through fewer, broader cabinet portfolios.

- **Wake's** Chief Academic Advancement Officer holds academics, student-support services, and special education under a single executive, with assistant superintendents overseeing each area.
- **Gwinnett's** Interim Chief of Schools oversees cluster superintendents who supervise principals, as well as student-support services—a partial integration of supervision and student support at the chief level that is distinct from the fully separated structures most other districts maintain.
- **Fulton** operates with six cabinet members, each holding a wider span of responsibility than their DCSD counterparts. The Chief Academic Officer at Fulton holds curriculum, instruction, and school leadership. The Chief Operations Officer holds facilities, transportation, nutrition, and technology. The Chief Financial Officer holds finance and

HR. Notably, Fulton also lacks a Chief of Schools position, and the seven Zone Superintendents who supervise principals report directly to the Superintendent.

In DCSD's current structure, 15 division chiefs report directly to the superintendent, each holding a relatively narrow portfolio. In a cabinet that size, the superintendent serves as the primary coordination point across all divisions. Several functions that peer districts consolidate are separated in DCSD's cabinet: academics and school leadership report through different chiefs; wraparound support, student services, and access and opportunity each have their own cabinet leader despite serving overlapping student populations; and communications/community engagement and legal services each hold cabinet seats with division sizes of 38 and 22 FTE, respectively.

Division Structures

Beyond cabinet size, the composition and internal structure of each cabinet division offers additional context for understanding how DCSD organizes its central office relative to peers. DCSD has several functions that are structurally distinct from comparison districts.

Chief of Access and Opportunity Portfolio

The Chief of Access and Opportunity oversees a portfolio that includes charter school oversight and governance, student assignment and enrollment, athletics, and student mentorship. Across the comparison group, these functions do not share a common organizational home. Charter school oversight sits within academic or superintendent's office structures in the districts that carry it, with Denver placing it in the superintendent's office and Fulton housing under the Chief Academic Officer. Student assignment sits under operations in Denver, under academic services in Dallas, and within school performance structures in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Wake. Athletics sits under academic services in Dallas and Fulton, Operations in Griffin-Spalding, Chief of Schools in Gwinnett, and as a stand-alone function in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Mentorship and student engagement functions appear in only two other districts in the sample and in both cases sit within community engagement or engagement officer structures. No peer district consolidates this particular combination of functions under a single cabinet leader, and while Gwinnett has a director of Access and Opportunity, it is housed within its Chief of Staff division.

Chief of Staff Scope

Across the comparison group, Chief of Staff divisions consistently hold board relations, internal audit, and administrative coordination, in addition to some district specific responsibilities. Dallas adds communications. Denver adds accountability, assessment, and school support functions. Wake carries a notably broad Chief of Staff portfolio that includes accountability, assessment, grants, equity, professional development, and information security alongside the standard administrative functions.

Communications and Community Engagement Organization

Among the comparison districts, most organize communications and community engagement under a cabinet title that leads with communications. Baltimore, Denver, and Dallas each name their combined function around communications, with community engagement as a subordinate or parallel function within that division. Charlotte-Mecklenburg maintains communications as a stand-alone cabinet function and distributes community engagement across other divisions. Fulton similarly leads with a Chief Communications Officer title.

Two districts organize these functions differently. Gwinnett combines communications and community engagement under a Chief Engagement Officer, foregrounding engagement over communications in the cabinet title. DCSD combines the two under the Chief of Community Engagement and Innovative Partnerships, similarly placing communications as a subordinate function within a broader engagement and partnership portfolio. DCSD's division also carries a grants and partnerships function, including dedicated grants strategy staff. Wake is the only other district that carries a grants function within a structure adjacent to the Chief of Staff, though Wake places it there rather than within a communications or engagement division. No other district in the sample houses grants management as a component of a communications or community engagement cabinet division.

Student-Support Distribution

A distinction between specialized student services and wraparound student support exists in every district in this sample, and their separation within the organizational structure is not unique to DCSD. What varies is where each function reports. In six of the 10 peer districts with personnel file data, both specialized services and wraparound support report through the same cabinet leader despite their functional differences. In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, the two functions report through separate cabinet areas but both sit within the span of the Deputy Superintendent. In DCSD, specialized student services and wraparound support report through separate cabinet verticals with no integrating position between them and the superintendent. A third cabinet position also carries student-facing functions, bringing the total number of cabinet verticals with responsibility for student support to three.

Department Analysis

Principal Supervision and School Support

Over the last decade, many large school districts have restructured central office organizations to include and elevate the role of principal supervisors as a key lever for improving school leadership. Historically, these roles were often focused on administrative oversight and compliance; however, research—particularly from the Wallace Foundation Principal Supervisor Initiative—has documented a shift toward redefining principal supervisors as coaches and developers of principals' instructional leadership. As expectations for principals have expanded, districts have increasingly recognized that supporting principal effectiveness is critical to improving teaching and learning, leading to changes such as reduced supervisor spans of control, targeted training, and reallocation of central office responsibilities. This evolution reflects a broader trend in central office design toward more direct, school-facing support structures intended to strengthen leadership practice and, ultimately, student outcomes.

Districts face several choices when implementing principal supervision roles.

1. **Structure |** Principal supervision is most often organized in two ways: through feeder patterns in a geographic region, which can strengthen vertical alignment and coherence, or by grade level, which allows for more targeted coaching and collaboration.
2. **Caseload |** The caseload of a principal supervisor, or how many principals they oversee, is another important factor with direct implications for how much support any individual principal receives.
3. **Additional Support |** Districts often include additional FTE to support both principal supervisors as well as the principals they serve.

All three are important organizational choices with consequences for coordination, role clarity, and the consistency of support schools receive.

Principal Supervision Across the Comparison Group

Principal Supervision in DCSD is housed under the Schools and Leadership division and consists of seven Assistant Superintendents that oversee schools based on grade-level spans. In June 2026, these spans were updated to include four elementary areas, two secondary areas, and a specialty and theme schools area for the 2026–27 school year. Figure 10 presents the principal supervision structure across all eleven districts in this study's cabinet analysis.

Figure 10: Principal Supervision Comparison, 2025–26

District	Organization Model	Supervisor Title	Schools	Principal Supervisors	Schools per Supervisor	Reports to
DCSD	**Grade Level**	**Area Superintendent**	138	7	20	Chief of Schools
Baltimore	Grade Level	Instructional Leadership Executive Director	159	10	16	Chief of Schools
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Grade Level	Assistant Superintendent of School Performance	185	11	17	Chief Academic Performance Officer (reports to Deputy Superintendent.)
Cobb	Grade Level	Assistant Superintendent	112	7	16	Chief School Leadership Officer
Dallas	Feeder Pattern	Executive Director, Vertical	228	23	10	Regional Superintendent (reports to Chief Schools Officer)
Denver	Grade Level	Executive Director of Schools	198	13	15	Deputy Superintendent
Fulton	Feeder Pattern	Zone Superintendent	102	7	15	Superintendent (direct report)
Griffin-Spalding	Grade Level	Executive Officer of Schools	18	3	6	Superintendent (direct report)
Gwinnett	Feeder Pattern	Cluster Superintendent	142	10	14	Interim Chief of Schools
Muscogee	Feeder Pattern	Chief Regional Officer	56	3	19	Superintendent (direct report)
Wake	Feeder Pattern	Area Superintendent	203	9	23	Interim Chief of Schools

Across the sample, caseloads range from six schools per supervisor (Griffin-Spalding, a district of 18 schools) to 23 (Wake). Among the larger districts, caseloads typically cluster between 14 and 17 schools per supervisor. DCSD's ratio of 20 falls in the higher end of the distribution beyond Fulton (15), Denver (15), Baltimore (16), Cobb (16), and Charlotte-Mecklenburg (17). As Figure 9 illustrates, both feeder pattern and grade-level approaches to organizing principal supervision are represented across the comparison group, with no single model predominating.

The column showing to whom principal supervisors report reflects the cabinet structure discussion in the prior section. In Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Denver, supervisors report through a deputy superintendent who also holds academic and student services functions. In Gwinnett, they report through a chief who holds student support alongside supervision. In

DCSD, Baltimore, and Cobb, supervisors report through a stand-alone chief of schools whose division does not hold academic or student services functions. In Fulton, Muscogee, and Griffin-Spalding, zone or area superintendents report directly to the superintendent with no intermediate chief.

How DCSD Organizes Its Schools and Leadership Division

While DCSD's seven area superintendents oversee a larger number of schools, they do with a much larger support structure than principal supervisors in the comparison districts. Each of DCSD's seven area offices carries a set of embedded administrators, coordinators, and specialists organized around specific content domains and student-support functions. Figure 11 outlines this distribution reflective of the structure in place for the 2025–26 school year and reflects the staffing when the data were pulled for this report. **As of June 2026, areas have been slightly restructured to include four elementary areas, two secondary areas and a specialty and theme schools area ahead of the 2026–27 school year.** Across the seven areas, those positions total 108 FTE and break down as follows:

Figure 11: Embedded Staff by Area Superintendent Office, 2025–26

Role	Elem. Area 1	Elem. Area 2	Elem. Area 3	Middle Schools	High Schools	Specialty /Theme	Horizon Schools	Total
Area Superintendent	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Executive Administrator	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14
Culture & Climate Coordinator	2	2	2	3	3	2	3	17
ELA Coordinator	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	13
Math Coordinator	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	10
ELL Coordinator	2	1	1	1	1	—	1	7
Exceptional Ed. Coordinator	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	8
Mental Health Coordinator	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Exec. Admin. Assistant	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Postsecondary Transition Specialist	—	—	—	—	1	—	2	3
Teacher Quality Facilitator	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Facilities Maintenance Manager	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Regional Transportation Manager	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Total	**15**	**14**	**14**	**16**	**17**	**12**	**20**	**108**

Each area office therefore carries dedicated expertise in literacy, math, ELLs, special education, and behavioral and mental health support, alongside the supervisory function. Parallel expertise exists centrally as well. DCSD's Teaching and Learning division holds senior coordinators for Math, Science, ELA, Social Studies, Health/PE, and World Languages. Its Student Services division holds 20 FTE in English Learner services and 104 FTE in Special Education roles. Its Wraparound division holds counseling and mental health capacity. Each of these content and support domains is represented both in a central department and within each area office.

Among peer districts with embedded school support staff, the structure differs in important ways. Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Wake each carry meaningful school support FTE within their area structures, 109 and 82 respectively. In both cases those staff are organized primarily as instructional specialists or coordinating teachers, roles that are teacher-classified rather than coordinator-classified. That distinction affects accountability structure: teacher-classified roles carry different supervisory chains than coordinator-classified positions. Neither Charlotte-Mecklenburg nor Wake organizes its area-embedded staff around parallel domain-specific functions that mirror central department categories. Dallas carries 92 school support FTE organized as instructional facilitators within its feeder pattern structure, similarly without domain-specific coordinator designations that duplicate central functions.

DCSD's model is the only one in this sample where area-embedded staff are organized by content and support domain in a way that mirrors the structure of central departments. That design reflects a deliberate organizational orientation toward direct, domain-specific support for schools through the area office. It also means that for each domain—literacy, math, ELL, special education, mental health—there is both a central team and an area-based team whose work touches the same schools and principals. How the relationship between those two sets of staff is defined and coordinated is a question the qualitative section of this report examines directly.

Information Technology

DCSD's Information Technology division carries 208 FTE, placing it third in the sample on a per-student basis at 2.27 per 1,000 students, behind only Fulton County (2.57 per 1,000) and Muscogee (2.37 per 1,000). The sample median is 1.72 per 1,000 students. Among districts of comparable enrollment, Denver operates at 1.88 per 1,000 and Baltimore at 0.94.

The division’s largest department by far is the IT Support Services department, which provide first-level IT assistance for students, parents, and staff across the district and carries 123 FTE. This is the second largest IT Support department in the sample after Gwinnett (164 FTE), though Gwinnett serves twice DCSD's enrollment. Most of those positions are technicians responsible for device support and classroom technology at the school level. How districts staff this function varies considerably and is directly shaped by service delivery decisions. Districts that contract device refresh and end-user support externally will carry fewer technician positions internally, while districts that deliver those services through employed staff will show a higher count. Charlotte-Mecklenburg, for example, uses contracted lease agreements to refresh student devices rather than staffing that function internally, which is consistent with its significantly lower IT Services head count of 34 FTE.[9] Whether DCSD's technician staffing reflects a deliberate in-sourcing strategy, a difference in the scope of services provided, or some combination is a question the staffing data alone cannot answer.

Two structural features of DCSD's IT division are notable in comparison to peers. The first is a dedicated Project Management Office (PMO) carrying seven FTE. Only Fulton (7 FTE) and Gwinnett (3 FTE) similarly carry a named PMO within their IT structure. The remaining seven districts either embed project management within other IT departments or do not carry it as a distinct function.

The second is how DCSD organizes its network and infrastructure functions. Districts such as Dallas and Denver consolidate network engineering, systems engineering, telecommunications, and related roles under a named Infrastructure Services department (with 33 and 65 FTE, respectively). DCSD carries comparable roles (network engineers, systems engineers, and enterprise telecommunications staff) but distributes them across multiple senior manager branches within the division rather than under a unified infrastructure leadership structure. That is an organizational design choice rather than a gap in capacity, and it shapes how infrastructure work is coordinated and prioritized within the division.

Student Services

DCSD's Student Services division carries 247 FTE, placing it seventh in the sample at 2.70 per 1,000 students. The sample median is 3.37 per 1,000 students. Wake (3.92), Muscogee (3.71), Dallas (3.37), and Griffin-Spalding (3.45) all invest substantially more per student in this function.

Before drawing conclusions from those figures, a methodological point applies. Districts make different decisions about whether to classify itinerant and therapeutic service providers, including speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, school psychologists, and nurses, as central office staff or as school-based staff, and those decisions directly affect how a district's count compares to peers. Denver's position as the highest in the sample at 6.03 per 1,000 students is driven primarily by 176 school psychologists classified centrally. Wake's elevated ratio similarly reflects 160 centrally classified school psychologists. DCSD classifies 21 school psychologists, 14 speech-language pathologists, six occupational therapists, 4 physical therapists, and three nurses as central office staff—a deliberate organizational choice to fund and deploy those positions through the central office rather than at the school site level. That choice is visible in the staffing count and reflects a service delivery model rather than a judgment about investment level.

Within the division, the two departments with the most distinctive structural profiles relative to peers are Special Education and Translation and Interpretation.

Special Education is the largest department at 139 FTE. The variation in Special Education counts across the sample is substantial: Charlotte-Mecklenburg carries 277 FTE, Wake 283 FTE, and Dallas 326 FTE. This is explained primarily by how districts classify and deploy therapeutic service providers rather than by differences in administrative investment. Charlotte-Mecklenburg's 277 FTE includes 66 occupational therapists, 33 speech-language pathologists, 18 physical therapists, and 10 audiologists, all classified as central office staff alongside 70 coordinating teachers who support school-based exceptional children programs. Wake's count is similarly driven by 82 occupational therapists, 28 physical therapists, and 22 speech-language pathologists classified centrally. Dallas's elevated count reflects a different model, with 101 educational diagnosticians responsible for evaluation and eligibility determination sit within the central Special Education department. DCSD classifies 14 speech-language pathologists, 6 occupational therapists, and four physical therapists centrally, a smaller therapeutic footprint than Charlotte-Mecklenburg or Wake but consistent with a service delivery model that concentrates those roles differently across the district. The 139 FTE also includes 12 lead teachers (who carry coordination and program support responsibilities rather than direct student instruction), 21 coordinators and senior coordinators, nine liaisons, and four directors and an executive director, reflecting a central office structure that carries both administrative and direct-service functions within the same department.

Translation and Interpretation carries 43 FTE, consisting of 15 ten-month English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) interpreters, 25 twelve-month ESOL interpreters, and three interpreters for the deaf. Among large districts in the sample, DCSD's per-student investment in this function at 0.469 per 1,000 students is the highest. Dallas carries 27 FTE at 0.193 per 1,000 students and Denver carries 21 FTE at 0.246 per 1,000 students. The 10- and 12-month contract structure and school-based assignment of these staff is consistent with the methodology section's treatment of itinerant service providers. These are central-office–funded positions delivering direct services at the school level, and their inclusion reflects a service delivery model rather than an administrative function. The structural feature that distinguishes DCSD's approach from peers is departmental organization. Dallas organizes its translation and interpretation staff under a director, two coordinators, and three supervisors. Wake's 58 staff sit under a director and senior coordinator. Denver carries two supervisors and two coordinators above its interpreter-level positions. DCSD's 43 interpreters operate within a department that carries no named coordinator, supervisor, or director at the department level, with oversight provided through the Executive Director of English Language Learners in the division above.

Operations and Auxiliary Services

Operations and Auxiliary Services is the largest functional area in every district in this sample, and DCSD is no exception. DCSD's 1,313 Operations FTE represent 50 percent of its total central office count. At 14.33 FTE per 1,000 students, DCSD carries the highest operations ratio in the sample among districts with complete personnel data. The next closest are Fulton (13.20), Muscogee (12.74), and Gwinnett (12.03), two of which have comparable or substantially larger enrollment (Fulton and Gwinnett). However, DCSD's smaller average school size may explain these differences: serving a larger number of smaller buildings requires baseline staffing at each facility regardless of enrollment, which can produce higher per-student ratios even where per-building investment is comparable to peers.

The size of any district's operations function reflects service delivery decisions as much as organizational design. Districts that staff transportation, custodial services, and facilities maintenance internally will carry higher operations counts than districts that contract any of those functions externally. The variation across this sample, from Denver's 7.75 per 1,000 students to DCSD's 14.33, reflects differences in those choices rather than differences in operational philosophy alone. Denver's transportation ratio of 2.99 per 1,000 students, for example, is roughly one-third of DCSD's (10.62), reflecting a partially contracted transportation model rather than a fully in-sourced one.

DCSD's operations function is organized across four primary areas: Transportation, Facilities and Maintenance, Logistics and Warehousing, Capital Projects. The staffing profile of each differs meaningfully from peers.

Transportation is the largest department at 973 FTE and 10.62 per 1,000 students. Among districts that staff transportation internally, DCSD's ratio is consistent with Fulton County (10.78) and Gwinnett County (10.38), the two most comparable peers by enrollment and service model. Charlotte-Mecklenburg (7.49) and Dallas (8.24) operate at lower per-student ratios, which may reflect differences in route density, geographic service area, or staffing model. Transportation is the primary driver of DCSD's elevated overall operations count, and its staffing level relative to comparable peers does not represent a significant outlier.

Facilities and Maintenance carries 228 FTE at 2.49 per 1,000 students, the third highest in the sample behind Dallas (2.94) and Denver (2.78). On a per-school basis, DCSD carries 1.6 facilities staff per school—above Charlotte-Mecklenburg (1.0), Gwinnett (1.2), Fulton (1.3), and Wake (1.1), although below Dallas (1.8) and Denver (2.6). Several other factors shape facilities staffing levels, including building age, square footage per school, the extent to which major maintenance work is contracted, and whether deferred maintenance has increased the demands on internal staff.

Business Services carries 70 FTE at 0.764 per 1,000 students, the highest in the sample on a per-student basis. Dallas (0.608) is the next closest, followed by a significant drop to Fulton (0.138) and Charlotte-Mecklenburg (0.106). Business Services in DCSD encompasses warehouse operations, printing, supply chain, sustainability, and payroll support functions. The elevated ratio relative to peers is worth noting, though the range of functions included in this department varies across districts and direct comparison is limited by those differences.

Custodial Services carries 20 FTE at 0.218 per 1,000 students. This is one of the lowest ratios in the sample among districts that carry custodial staff centrally — Wake (0.484), Dallas (0.419), Gwinnett (0.268), and Charlotte-Mecklenburg (0.198) all carry comparable or higher counts. The low custodial count likely reflects a partial or full contracting model for school custodial services at DCSD, which would be consistent with several peer districts that similarly contract this function rather than staffing it internally.

Capital Projects carried 7 FTE at 0.076 per 1,000 students, the lowest in the sample. Wake (0.329), Denver (0.340), and Dallas (0.250) carry substantially more capacity in this function. Recently, a Chief of Capital Improvement position was added to the cabinet. DCSD outsources portions of planning and program management for the capital improvement program to a contracted partner.

Professional Development and Leadership Development

Districts typically organize professional learning across two related functions: ongoing professional development for teachers and instructional staff, and leadership development for aspiring and current administrators. How those functions are organized, including whether they sit together, where they report in the cabinet structure, and whether they connect to instructional strategy, reflects a district's stance on how it builds and sustains educator capacity over time.

Figure 12 presents each district's FTE investment in professional development and leadership development, excluding teacher pipeline and residency programs, which are addressed separately below.

Figure 12: Professional Development and Leadership Development by District

District	Professional Development FTE	FTE per 1,000 Students	Cabinet Home	Leadership Development FTE	FTE per 1,000 Students	Cabinet Home
DCSD	**39**	0.426	Chief of Schools and Leadership	10	0.109	Chief of Schools and Leadership
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	18	0.127	Chief Recruitment, Retention, and Talent Development Officer	9.8	0.069	Deputy Superintendent
Dallas	9	0.064	Chief of Academic Services	7	0.05	

District	Professional Development FTE	FTE per 1,000 Students	Cabinet Home	Leadership Development FTE	FTE per 1,000 Students	Cabinet Home
Denver	26	0.305	Chief of Talent	--*	--	--
Fulton	15	0.173	Human Resources	1	0.012	Human Resources
Griffin-Spalding	2	0.218	Human Resources			
Gwinnett	17	0.093	Chief Learning Officer	18.4	0.101	Chief Human Resources Officer
Muscogee	6	0.206	Chief Academic Officer	--	--	--
Wake	13	0.081	Chief of Staff and Strategic Planning	--*	--	--

**Denver and Wake do not carry a named Leadership Development department. Leadership development functions may be embedded within professional development or academic structures.*

Across the sample, combined investment in professional development and leadership development ranges from 0.081 FTE per 1,000 students (Wake) to 0.535 per 1,000 students (DCSD). DCSD's 49 FTE across Professional Development and Leadership Development, including 39 in Professional Development and 10 in Leadership Development (producing per-student ratios of 0.426 and 0.109 respectively) places it first in the sample, above Denver (0.305), the next closest district. The remaining districts cluster between 0.081 and 0.218 per 1,000 students.

The more meaningful comparison is organizational rather than quantitative. Most peer districts that carry both functions place them under a single cabinet leader. Denver and Fulton places professional development under the Chief of Academics, suggesting a view that professional learning should be driven by instructional priorities. Denver consolidates its professional development function within its Office of the Chief of Talent alongside recruitment, retention, and HR operations, treating professional learning as a talent management function rather than an academic one. Gwinnett and Dallas place professional development under academics, but include leadership development functions under HR, a split that assigns teacher learning to academic leadership and administrator development to talent management.

DCSD is unique in that maintains both professional development and leadership development within the Chief of Schools and Leaders Division. This suggests the view that professional learning is most impactful when connected to school practice, and the people closest to that are in the schools division. An important consideration of this placement is the coordination required between the Teaching and Learning Division, which holds instructional strategy and curriculum priorities. In the current structure, the people designing professional development experiences for teachers and the people setting the instructional agenda operate in separate cabinet verticals, suggesting limited shared accountability for alignment between them.

Wake's placement of professional development under the Chief of Staff and Strategic Planning is the most unusual in the sample and serves as a useful contrast. It frames professional learning as a districtwide strategic function rather than an academic or school-facing one. No other district in the sample takes that approach.

Early Learning and Pre-K

Despite being home to one of the largest pre-K programs in Georgia, DCSD carries just six FTE in Early Learning and Pre-K at 0.07 per 1,000 students, the second lowest in the sample (DeKalb County School District, 2025).[10] The more instructive comparison is not the raw count but what peer districts are doing with their early learning investment. Wake's 105 FTE in this function reflects a comprehensive system that includes 29 speech-language pathologists, 10 case managers, and 29 coordinating teachers all dedicated to the pre-K level. This model concentrates therapeutic and instructional support around early childhood as a distinct organizational priority. Gwinnett's 43 FTE similarly combines speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists, and social workers organized specifically around early learning and school readiness. Dallas's 51 FTE centers on home instruction and school readiness specialists, extending the district's early learning reach into the home environment. Denver's 30 FTE are oriented primarily around Head Start program management and compliance.

DCSD's six FTE consists of an Executive Director, a Budget Specialist, a Data Technician, and three Early Childhood Coordinators. This structure reflects central coordination and administrative function rather than a comprehensive early learning support model. The therapeutic services, instructional coaching, and family engagement functions that peer districts organize within their early learning departments are not a feature of DCSD's current central office structure in this area, though some of those functions may exist elsewhere in other divisions, particularly within Special Education and Wraparound Services, rather than being concentrated around early childhood as a distinct organizational unit.

Role Distribution and Management Structure

Understanding how central office positions are distributed across role types offers a lens into how districts organize decision-making authority and management capacity. For this analysis, each position was assigned one of three role classifications: Executive and Cabinet-Level Leadership, People Manager, or Individual Contributor.

Executive and Cabinet-Level Leadership includes superintendents, chiefs, deputy superintendents, and area or assistant superintendents. People Manager includes executive directors, directors, managers, supervisors, and senior-level positions where the role typically carries supervisory responsibility over other staff. Individual Contributor includes all other positions, such as coordinators, specialists, analysts, technicians, and administrative support staff. Buyers, recruiters, project managers, and hearing officers are classified as Individual Contributors regardless of title seniority.

Role classifications were applied consistently across all districts based on title and, where possible, verified against publicly posted job descriptions. Where the same title is used differently across districts, the classification reflects the supervisory responsibilities of that title in DCSD. This approach supports cross-district comparison of management structure while acknowledging that title conventions are not uniform. Some noise in the data is likely: districts vary in how they assign supervisory responsibilities within a title band, and positions classified as People Managers in one district may function as Individual Contributors in another. Findings in this section should be read as structural indicators rather than precise counts.

One functional area warrants a specific note before the district-level comparison. Safety and Security in DCSD carries a People Manager rate of 43 percent, driven by the rank structure of a sworn officer department in which sergeants, lieutenants, and a major are classified as managers. This reflects the command hierarchy of a public safety organization rather than a conventional management density finding, and should not be interpreted as evidence of administrative overhead within that function.

District-Level Role Distribution

Figure 13 presents role distribution across the nine districts included in this analysis. Baltimore City and Cobb County are excluded due to a lack of detail related to individual personnel titles.

Figure 13: Role Distribution by District

District	Executive %	People Manager %	Individual Contributor %
DCSD	**1.1%**	**12.1%**	**86.8%**
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	1.3%	14.3%	84.5%
Dallas	0.9%	12.3%	86.8%
Denver	0.4%	20.6%	78.9%
Fulton	1.5%	7.8%	90.7%
Griffin-Spalding	3.4%	18.4%	78.1%
Gwinnett	0.5%	7.1%	92.3%
Muscogee	1.7%	9.1%	89.2%
Wake	1.5%	19.0%	79.4%

Across the nine districts, the share of staff classified as People Managers ranges from 7.1 percent (Gwinnett) to 20.6 percent (Denver). The individual contributor-to-manager ratio spans from 3.83 in Denver to 12.96 in Gwinnett. This range reflects genuinely different organizational design philosophies rather than differences in efficiency—a district with broader management spans may concentrate decision-making authority differently than one with narrower spans, and neither approach is inherently preferable.

The sample divides into three rough groupings. Gwinnett (7.1%) and Fulton (7.8%) operate with notably lean management structures and high individual contributor-to-manager ratios above 11, suggesting broader spans of control and fewer management layers relative to their total headcount. Denver (20.6%) and Wake (19.0%) carry the most management-intensive structures in the sample with individual contributor-to-manager ratios below 4.5. The remaining five districts, Muscogee (9.1%), Dallas (12.3%), DCSD (12.1%), Charlotte-Mecklenburg (14.3%), and Griffin-Spalding (18.4%), cluster in the middle range.

DCSD's manager percentage of 12.1 percent and individual contributor-to-manager ratio of 7.14 place it near the center of the sample and are nearly identical to Dallas (12.3%, 7.06). At the aggregate level, DCSD's management structure does not represent an outlier in either direction relative to peer districts.

3. Staff Engagement

Understanding how a central office functions requires more than examining organizational charts, reporting relationships, and staffing allocations. It also requires understanding how the organization is experienced by the people who lead, work within, and are supported by it. For this reason, stakeholder engagement was a central component of the organizational assessment. While the themes that emerged from our staff engagement process do not map neatly onto the structural findings in a one-to-one way, they are not independent of them either. Both Section 2 (comparative analysis) and Section 3 (staff engagement) have to be taken together to guide planning.

RTI conducted a stakeholder engagement process to better understand how the current central office structure and operating practices support the district's strategic priorities and service to schools. Engagement activities were designed to capture perspectives from multiple levels of the organization, including executive leadership, central office staff, and principals. Collectively, these perspectives provided insight into organizational strengths, areas of alignment, operational challenges, and opportunities to improve how the central office is organized and delivers services.

The stakeholder engagement process was designed to complement the organizational and comparison district analyses by examining how the current structure functions in practice. Evidence gathered through interviews, focus groups, and the central office staff survey was synthesized to help answer the study's essential questions regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of the current organizational structure, potential areas of redundancy, and the extent to which central office structures and practices support high-quality service delivery to schools. The section reflects organizational themes that emerged consistently across multiple stakeholder groups and data sources.

Methodology

To capture perspectives from across the organization, RTI employed a multi-method stakeholder engagement approach that included executive interviews, central office division focus groups, principal focus groups, and a survey of central office staff. In collaboration with district leadership, the RTI project team identified participants representing key stakeholder groups. The district coordinated scheduling and distributed invitations directly to participants.

Whenever feasible, interviews and central office focus groups were conducted in person to encourage discussion and support deeper exploration of organizational experiences. Virtual formats were used for principal focus groups and for one central office focus group when scheduling constraints precluded an in-person session.

Executive Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with the chief officer representing each central office division or, when appropriate, the next senior leader within the division (typically a deputy chief) to ensure that each division's leadership perspective was represented. Interviews were conducted in person during the week of May 11–14, 2026, using a semi structured protocol that provided consistency across interviews while allowing participants to elaborate on issues specific to their divisions.

Interview questions explored each division's purpose and alignment to district priorities; organizational structure, roles, and responsibilities; cross-divisional coordination; decision-making authority and escalation processes; staffing capacity and workload; and perceived barriers, strengths, and opportunities to improve organizational effectiveness.

Central Office Division Focus Groups

Division-level focus groups were conducted with staff from eight central office divisions selected because of their direct connection to the study's essential questions and their role in supporting schools. Participating divisions included Teaching and Learning, Access and Opportunity, Student Services, Accountability and Research, Wraparound Services, Community Engagement and Innovative Partnerships, Finance, and Human Resources. Focus groups ranged in size from 8 to 12 participants and were scheduled for approximately 90 minutes, providing opportunities for staff to discuss both division-specific experiences and cross-divisional organizational issues. Focus groups were conducted in person during the week of May 11–14, 2026, with the exception of the Human Resources division, which participated virtually on May 27, 2026.

Discussion protocols explored participants' understanding of their division's purpose, role clarity, coordination across divisions, decision-making processes, operational challenges, staffing and workload, and recommendations for improving how the central office functions and supports schools. Conducting division-level focus groups allowed the RTI team to examine both division-specific experiences and cross-functional organizational issues in greater depth while capturing perspectives from the divisions most directly involved in supporting the district's instructional, operational, and organizational priorities.

Principal Groups

Virtual focus groups were conducted between April 16 and April 30, 2026, with principals representing a cross section of schools across the district. A total of five principal focus groups were held, each organized by school level or type: elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, Specialty schools, and Horizon schools.

Discussion protocols explored participants' experiences with central office services and supports, including organizational strengths, communication and coordination, responsiveness to school needs, implementation supports, and opportunities to strengthen the partnership between central office and schools.

Central Office Questionnaire

To broaden participation beyond the divisions represented in the focus groups, RTI administered an electronic questionnaire to all central office employees. The questionnaire was designed to ensure that staff from every central office division had the opportunity to contribute their perspectives to the organizational assessment, regardless of whether their division participated in a focus group. The questionnaire was distributed on April 28, 2026, and remained open through May 22, 2026, following an extension of the administration window to encourage additional participation. A total of 226 central office employees submitted complete responses, providing broad representation across the organization.

The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions aligned directly to the central office focus group protocol, allowing themes to be examined consistently across both engagement methods. Questions explored participants' perspectives on division purpose, role clarity, cross-divisional coordination, decision-making processes, operational challenges, workload and capacity, and opportunities to improve how the central office functions and supports schools. Respondents also identified their organizational role (Individual Contributor, People Manager, or

Executive/Cabinet Leadership), enabling the RTI team to examine how experiences and perceptions varied across levels of the organization.

The questionnaire served two complementary purposes within the study. First, it broadened participation by capturing perspectives from employees across all central office divisions. Second, it provided an additional source of qualitative evidence that was used to validate, refine, and strengthen themes emerging from the executive interviews and division-level focus groups while allowing the team to identify areas where perspectives differed across organizational roles.

Staff Engagement Themes

Across all stakeholder groups, participants consistently distinguished between the district's people and its organizational systems. While stakeholders identified several opportunities to strengthen the central office's organizational structure and operating practices, they also emphasized the expertise, commitment, and collaborative spirit of district staff. Participants frequently described colleagues as knowledgeable, responsive, and deeply committed to supporting schools, often noting that work continues because employees are willing to go beyond their formal responsibilities to solve problems and meet school needs.

This perspective emerged consistently across executive interviews, central office focus groups, the central office questionnaire, and principal focus groups. Participants regularly cited strong interpersonal relationships, a shared commitment to students, and a willingness to collaborate as important organizational strengths. Across stakeholder groups, participants consistently described strong relationships and individual commitment as enabling work to move forward despite organizational barriers. As one executive interview participant observed, "*We've got really talented people doing really good work*." A central office focus group participant similarly reflected, "*People always figure it out. We make it work*." A questionnaire participant noted, "*Everyone is committed to supporting schools. We just need clearer processes to help us do it more efficiently*."

These perspectives provide important context for the following organizational themes presented. Rather than identifying shortcomings in individual performance, the themes describe recurring organizational patterns that were consistently observed across stakeholder groups and data sources.

Theme 1: Organizational roles and responsibilities are generally understood within divisions but become less clear when work crosses divisional boundaries.

Across stakeholder groups, participants generally described a clear understanding of their division's purpose and their individual responsibilities in supporting district priorities. However, this understanding became less consistent when work required coordination across divisions. While this was the most consistent pattern across the data, it was not universal within divisions.

Some central office staff described inconsistent expectations for similar positions, responsibilities that had expanded beyond formal job descriptions, or variation in how comparable roles functioned across the organization.

The clearest evidence of this theme emerged from the central office focus groups. Across all eight focus groups, participants described uncertainty regarding which division owned particular work, where decision-making authority resided, and who was ultimately accountable when multiple divisions shared responsibility. As one central office focus group participant explained, "*Very clear within the scope of our office. It gets muddy the bigger the scope*." Another participant described the experience of navigating cross-divisional work by stating, "*You're kind of going around in circles trying to figure out, well, who does that?*"

Executive interviews reinforced this perspective. In 10 of 12 interviews, executive leaders acknowledged overlapping responsibilities, duplicated functions, and uncertainty regarding ownership across divisions. One executive interview participant observed, "*Across the organization, we've got redundancies ... multiple positions doing the same work*." Another emphasized the need to "*clarify ownership versus support roles and eliminate duplication*."

Questionnaire responses further reinforced this pattern. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (143 of 226; 63%) identified unclear cross-divisional roles and responsibilities as contributing to overlap, duplication, and inefficiencies. Many respondents distinguished between understanding their own responsibilities and understanding how work is connected across divisions. As one questionnaire participant noted, "*Roles are clear within our department, but ownership becomes unclear when projects involve multiple divisions*."

Principals experienced these organizational challenges from the perspective of service recipients. Across all five principal focus groups, participants consistently described uncertainty regarding whom to contact when issues involved multiple departments or operational functions. As one principal focus group participant stated, "*I have no idea who to call in operations*." Others suggested that clearer documentation of central office roles and responsibilities would make it easier to access timely support and navigate the organization.

One key illuminating activity was mentioned by many stakeholders. District leaders described an interim-superintendent-directed effort to examine the full scope of demands placed on schools, resulting in a comprehensive document approximately 88–91 pages in length with more than 150 requests. This activity was referenced by at least four division chiefs, underscoring its significance as a systemwide diagnostic.

Leaders emphasized that the exercise surfaced expectations that were previously invisible, with one division chief reflecting that the document only emerged because leadership intentionally asked to see the full scope of work being directed to principals. The superintendent is now using this analysis to push departments to reduce and better align their requests, signaling a shift from diagnosis to action. Taken together, these findings highlight a core system challenge:

central office divisions operate with relative autonomy in generating school-facing work, but without consistent coordination, resulting in layered and duplicative demands on principals that require more deliberate alignment and prioritization.

Collectively, stakeholder perspectives indicate that the primary challenge is less about understanding individual responsibilities than understanding how responsibilities connect across the organization. While participants generally understood their own roles and the purpose of their divisions, they consistently described uncertainty regarding ownership, decision-making authority, and accountability when work crossed divisional boundaries. These patterns suggest opportunities to strengthen organizational clarity by more clearly defining cross-divisional ownership, governance, and decision rights.

Theme 2: Cross-divisional collaboration relies more on informal relationships than on consistent organizational structures.

Across stakeholder groups, participants consistently described a strong willingness to collaborate in support of schools. However, collaboration was often described as depending more on personal relationships, individual initiative, and informal communication than on clearly established structures or processes. Participants frequently distinguished between the quality of working relationships, which were generally viewed as a strength, and the absence of formal mechanisms to consistently support cross-divisional coordination.

This theme emerged most clearly in the central office focus groups. Across all eight focus groups, participants described communication processes that created bottlenecks, slowed work, and required staff to rely on existing relationships to navigate organizational barriers. Participants also reflected on previous cross-functional work, where staff spent significant time working on a cross-functional project in a co-located space, that strengthened collaboration but noted that those collaborative practices were not sustained once staff returned to their respective divisions. As one central office focus group participant reflected, "*Once we got back ... those relationships just fell apart*." Another summarized the experience by stating, "*There was no more 'we' anymore*."

Executive interviews reinforced this pattern. Leaders consistently described collaboration as an organizational expectation, while acknowledging that divisions do not always coordinate effectively in practice. In several interviews, participants described work occurring in organizational silos, resulting in fragmented implementation, duplicated effort, and inconsistent communication to schools. One executive interview participant observed, "*Everybody works in their own little lane*." Another noted, "*When folks work in silos ... we're in a reactive position versus a proactive position*."

Questionnaire responses further validated this finding. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (168 of 226; 74%) identified inconsistent communication and cross-divisional collaboration as creating inefficiencies, making this the most frequently cited organizational theme in the questionnaire. Rather than requesting more communication, respondents consistently emphasized the need for earlier involvement of key stakeholders, intentional collaboration across divisions, and more structured opportunities to coordinate work before decisions were finalized. As one questionnaire participant stated, “*Work most often slows down or gets duplicated due to communication gaps … changes and additional events are not always communicated in a timely or consistent way*.” Another recommended, “*Include all stakeholders early on, before decisions are made, so there is alignment and fewer revisions later*.”

Principals experienced the downstream effects of these organizational challenges through fragmented and inconsistent communication from the central office. While some principals indicated that the proximity of Schools and Leaders staff made developing relationships easier and helped them know who to communicate with, across all five principal focus groups, participants also described receiving information through multiple channels, encountering conflicting guidance from different departments, and struggling to prioritize competing requests. As one principal focus group participant explained, "*We have a lot of communication; it's just all over the place*." Another described information from different departments as "*a little convoluted*." Principals consistently emphasized that the challenge was not the amount of communication, but the lack of coordination and coherence across divisions.

Collectively, stakeholder perspectives suggest that the district benefits from strong interpersonal relationships and a workforce committed to collaboration. However, those relationships often compensate for the absence of consistent organizational structures that support communication and coordination across divisions. As a result, collaboration depends heavily on knowing the right people rather than on predictable organizational processes. These patterns suggest opportunities to strengthen cross-divisional coordination by establishing more consistent structures, routines, and communication processes that enable collaboration regardless of individual relationships.

Theme 3: Decision-making and communication follow hierarchical pathways that slow coordination and implementation.

Across stakeholder groups, participants consistently described decision-making and communication as occurring through hierarchical pathways, with authority, information, and requests often expected to move through formal reporting structures or parallel organizational roles. While participants generally understood where major organizational decisions were made, they frequently described uncertainty regarding who had the authority to make operational decisions, how decisions should be implemented, and how information should flow across divisions. Collectively, these experiences contributed to the perception that work often moved more slowly than necessary and that communication became increasingly difficult as it crossed organizational boundaries.

This theme emerged most clearly in the central office focus groups. Across all eight focus groups, participants described decision-making processes that relied on multiple layers of approval and communication pathways that often required information to move through corresponding leadership levels rather than directly to the individual responsible for the work. Participants reported that this structure created delays, limited collaboration across divisions, and sometimes resulted in inconsistent implementation of decisions. As one central office focus group participant explained, "*It was a yes at the top ... once it got down lower, it was like, no*." Another participant described the communication process by noting that staff often had to communicate "*through like positions*" rather than directly with colleagues across divisions, even when doing so would have resolved issues more efficiently.

Executive interviews reinforced this perspective while providing additional context regarding organizational governance. In 10 of the 12 interviews, executive leaders acknowledged that decision-making processes and communication structures could create unnecessary delays in implementation, particularly when multiple divisions were involved. Several leaders emphasized that decisions often required numerous approvals or collaborative structures that, while intended to increase alignment, sometimes slowed action and reduced organizational agility. One executive interview participant noted, "*Everything goes to the quad ... it stalls*." Another observed that "*there's got to be a person who is responsible ... who is seeing it through*," emphasizing the importance of clear ownership throughout implementation. The quad referenced above is a structure introduced to strengthen communication and collaboration in which the Chief of Schools and Leadership, Chief Academic Officer, Chief of Accountability and Research and Chief of Student Services meet to align on the most important academic and student-support practices across the district.

Questionnaire responses further reinforced this finding. Almost two-thirds of respondents (142 of 226; 62.8%) described uncertainty regarding decision authority, ownership, or accountability and recommended clearer decision pathways across the organization. Many respondents also called for fewer approval layers, more timely communication, and greater empowerment of staff to make decisions within their areas of responsibility. As one questionnaire participant stated, "*Reduce unnecessary layers of approval*." Another recommended that the district "*trust the expertise of staff*" by allowing employees to make decisions appropriate to their roles.

Principals described these organizational dynamics most clearly through inconsistent implementation and communication across central office divisions. Across all five principal focus groups, participants reported receiving different guidance from multiple departments, along with delays in accessing critical information that affected their ability to act. As one principal noted, "*I think it's hit or miss. Some things are aligned really well and some things you can tell that the communication just was not there*." This inconsistency was compounded by delays in responsiveness, with another principal explaining, "*Sometimes getting a response from central office departments… that lags, and you're waiting on information that impacts your ability to* *move forward*." While principals generally accepted that decision-making authority resides centrally, they expressed a consistent need for clearer, more coordinated communication and more consistent implementation across departments to support timely and effective school-level work.

Collectively, stakeholder perspectives suggest that the district's governance structures are intended to promote coordination and consistency; however, participants frequently described communication and decision-making processes that become increasingly layered as work moves across divisions and organizational levels. These patterns suggest opportunities to clarify decision rights, streamline communication pathways, and establish more direct mechanisms for cross-divisional coordination while maintaining appropriate organizational oversight.

Theme 4: Operational systems, workflows, and approval processes create inefficiencies that slow work and reduce responsiveness.

Across stakeholder groups, participants consistently described operational systems and administrative processes as barriers to efficient work. Rather than identifying isolated issues with individual departments or technologies, participants described a broader pattern in which outdated systems, manual workflows, multiple approval layers, and inconsistent standard operating procedures created unnecessary complexity and delayed the district's ability to respond to schools. These operational challenges were frequently described as compounding one another, increasing workload while reducing organizational efficiency.

The central office focus groups provided the strongest evidence of this theme. Across all eight focus groups, participants described system limitations, inefficient workflows, and administrative processes that required unnecessary manual effort or repeated work across multiple platforms. Participants frequently cited finance, procurement, payroll, and enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems as examples where processes and approvals, many of which are required by policy, were cumbersome and time-consuming. One staff members described the duplication created by disconnected systems, stating, "*You have to enter something in one module ... then enter it again in another ... that's duplication of work*."

Executive interviews reinforced these concerns while placing them within a broader organizational context. In eight of the 12 interviews, executive leaders described administrative processes, system limitations, and workflow inefficiencies as barriers to timely implementation and service delivery. Several leaders noted that excessive approval requirements and inconsistent operating procedures slowed organizational responsiveness even when staff were prepared to act. As one executive interview participant observed, "*For me to do a simple purchase order takes 11 people*." Another emphasized the need to establish "*clear standard operating procedures across divisions*" to improve consistency and reduce unnecessary complexity.

Questionnaire responses reflected similar experiences. Nearly two-thirds respondents (63%) identified operational processes, approval requirements, or administrative workflows as significant barriers to completing work efficiently. Participants frequently recommended simplifying approval processes, streamlining hiring and procurement, modernizing systems, and reducing unnecessary administrative steps. As one questionnaire participant stated, "*Reduce unnecessary layers of approval*." Another recommended the district "*simplify district processes*."

While principals generally did not identify specific internal systems, they consistently experienced the downstream effects of these operational inefficiencies. Across all five principal focus groups, participants described delays in receiving information, inconsistent timelines, redundant requests from multiple departments, and administrative processes that reduced time available to focus on instructional leadership. Many principals emphasized the need for central office processes to be more coordinated, streamlined, and responsive to the operational realities of schools.

Collectively, stakeholder perspectives suggest that operational challenges are driven less by individual systems than by the interaction of systems, workflows, approval processes, and organizational routines. Participants consistently described staff developing workarounds to navigate these barriers, allowing work to continue despite inefficiencies. While these workarounds often reflect staff commitment and adaptability, they also indicate opportunities to modernize operational processes, simplify workflows, and establish more consistent procedures that enable staff to focus more directly on supporting schools.

Theme 5: Stakeholders described inconsistent access to central office expertise through the current school support model.

Across stakeholder groups, participants supported providing schools with coordinated, high-quality services but described inconsistent access to central office expertise under the current school support model. Although they valued the intent to coordinate support more effectively, many were unsure whom to contact, how communication should flow, and when functional divisions could work directly with school leaders. These uncertainties contributed to delayed communication, reduced access to specialized expertise, and uneven support across schools.

This theme emerged most strongly in the central office focus groups. Across all eight focus groups, participants described uncertainty regarding how functional divisions and Schools & Leadership should work together to support schools. Many participants expressed concern that requiring communication to flow through intermediary roles limited opportunities for direct collaboration between subject matter experts and school leaders. As one central office focus group participant explained, "*We've been discouraged from communicating with school leadership*." Another participant observed, "*The people doing the work aren't always the people talking to the schools*."

Executive interviews reflected greater variation in perspective. While several executive leaders acknowledged that the current model requires additional clarification regarding roles, communication pathways, and shared ownership, many also emphasized that the intent of the structure was to provide schools with more coordinated support and reduce competing requests from multiple divisions. The current design of the Schools and Leaders division is intended to streamline support to schools by dedicating staff to directly addressing student achievement and strengthening relationships with school-based staff and families. As a result, central office staff are in schools with more regularity than they were under previous structures. One executive interview participant described the model as an effort to "*create one point of coordination for schools*," while another acknowledged that "*we're still defining how those relationships should work*."

Principals generally supported having coordinated points of contact and described positive relationships with schools and leadership. Several participants emphasized that the current structure provides support tailored to the unique needs of their schools and grade levels. As one principal focus group participant noted, "*The support that we have is tailored to our needs ... very specific to the grade levels, to the teachers*." Another observed that "*the structure creates coherence ... it allows for better coherence and consistency with the individuals who support our schools.*" At the same time, principals consistently emphasized the importance of timely access to expertise and clear communication. Across all five principal focus groups, participants expressed a desire for more direct access to functional experts when addressing specialized instructional, operational, or student-support needs, noting that responsiveness was most effective when coordination did not delay access to the individual best positioned to provide assistance. As one principal explained, "*Departments work in silos ... that's how we end up getting redundancy or conflicting messages*." Another emphasized that "*there should be more coherence and alignment at central office prior to it coming down to the school level*." Together, these perspectives suggest that while the school-facing support model is highly valued, stronger integration and coordination across central office functions are necessary to provide schools with a more seamless and coherent experience.

Questionnaire responses similarly reflected mixed perspectives. Many respondents described uncertainty regarding communication expectations between functional divisions and schools, while others emphasized the importance of preserving direct access to specialized expertise. Respondents frequently recommended clearer guidance regarding communication protocols, responsibilities, and expectations for collaboration across divisions. As one questionnaire participant stated, "*Allow subject matter experts to communicate directly with schools when appropriate*." Another noted that "*we have a lot of communication, it's just all over the place*," while others emphasized that "*communication gaps often cause delays, repeated work, or incomplete information*," underscoring the need for clearer communication protocols and expectations across divisions.

Collectively, stakeholder perspectives suggest broad agreement regarding the importance of coordinated support for schools, but less consistency regarding how the current operating model should function in practice. Participants frequently described uncertainty about communication pathways, shared responsibilities, and the balance between centralized coordination and direct access to expertise. These patterns suggest opportunities to further clarify the roles, responsibilities, and operating expectations that define how central office divisions collectively support schools.

4. Considerations

The findings in this report, drawn from comparative staffing data, organizational chart analysis, and qualitative focus groups, surface a set of structural, procedural, and cultural questions that DCSD may wish to examine as it considers how to organize its central office for greater effectiveness and coherence. The considerations below are not recommendations are an evidence-based framing of the organizational design choices available to the district, with options identified where the data and peer district models suggest meaningful alternatives. Each consideration names a pattern the analysis identified, describes what the evidence shows, and presents options for how the district might respond.

Consideration 1: Cabinet Structure and the Coordination of Related Functions (Structure)

What the evidence shows

DCSD's cabinet of 15 division chiefs is the largest in the comparison group. Among districts of comparable enrollment, Fulton County operates with six cabinet members, Denver with eight, and Baltimore with 10. More significantly, the distribution of organizational mass across DCSD's 15 divisions is uneven: the Chief Operating Officer's division accounts for 1,313 of DCSD's 2,742 total FTE. The remaining 14 cabinet positions collectively oversee 1,429 FTE, with eight of those divisions carrying fewer than 130 FTE each.

The size of the cabinet creates a coordination challenge that is structural rather than personal. With 15 divisions reporting directly to the superintendent, the superintendent serves as the primary integration point across all functions. Related functions, like academics and school leadership, student-support services, professional learning, sit in separate cabinet verticals with no common reporting structure below the superintendent level.

Peer districts address this in two ways. Several use an integrating executive, most often a deputy superintendent, who holds related functions within a common reporting structure below the superintendent. Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Deputy Superintendent spans academic performance, school leadership and principal supervision, and student services. Denver's Deputy Superintendent spans academics, school supervision, and school transformation. Others use broader cabinet portfolios. Fulton's six cabinet members each hold wider spans of responsibility, reducing the number of coordination dependencies the superintendent must manage directly, a critical design choice with the district's seven Zone superintendents also reporting directly to the Superintendent.

Options for the district's consideration

- **Create an integrating executive position**, such as a Deputy Superintendent or Chief Academic and School Excellence Officer, to hold academics, school leadership, and student support under a common reporting structure. This position would create the coordination layer that currently does not exist between those functions and the superintendent. Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Denver, and Gwinnett each demonstrate a version of this model at comparable or larger scale.

  - At a minimum, this integration would span the current teaching and learning, schools and leaders, and student support divisions, including student services and wraparound services. In the new orientation, each area would be led by an associate superintendent (or similar role) that reports directly to the integrating executive. At full scope, it could also include Professional Development and Leadership Development, creating stronger coherence across academics, school support, and talent development.
  - This approach requires a leader with the breadth, credibility, and relationships to hold these functions together. The Wallace Foundation's research on central office transformation consistently notes that an integrating position is only as effective as the person who occupies it and the authority that accompanies the role.

- **Consolidate cabinet portfolios** rather than adding an integrating layer. This would reduce the number of cabinet seats by broadening the reporting span of remaining chiefs: fewer cabinet members, each holding more responsibility. This approach reduces the number of coordination dependencies at the superintendent level without adding a new executive position but requires each remaining cabinet member to lead across a wider set of functions. Potential consolidation opportunities are outlined in Consideration 2.
- **Maintain the current cabinet size but formalize cross-cabinet coordination structures**. This can include cabinet-level working groups, shared accountability mechanisms, and defined protocols for how related divisions coordinate on shared priorities. This is the least structurally disruptive option but also the most dependent on sustained leadership attention to make it work without structural reinforcement.

Consideration 2: Division and Department Alignment (Structure)

What the evidence shows

Several of DCSD's current cabinet divisions hold portfolios that are structurally distinct from how peer districts organize comparable functions, in ways that have implications for coordination, accountability, and service delivery.

The most significant is the distribution of student-support functions across three separate cabinet verticals. The Interim Chief of Student Services (247 FTE) and the Chief of Wraparound Support and Intervention (107 FTE) hold the district's primary specialized and wraparound student-support functions. The Chief of Access and Opportunity (89 FTE) leads a broader portfolio that includes school choice and enrollment, charter governance, and athletics alongside direct-service student-support staff—a combined 443 FTE across the three verticals, with no integrating position between them and the superintendent. Among the comparison districts, six of nine consolidate specialized student services and wraparound support under a single cabinet leader. Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Dallas, and Wake each consolidate comparable functions under one or two leaders within a common reporting structure.

The Chief of Access and Opportunity's portfolio spans athletics, charter school oversight, student assignment and enrollment, and student mentorship, a grouping that is not mirrored in any peer district's organizational structure and that participants in this study's focus groups described as lacking a clear unifying theme. That said, the original intention of Access and Opportunity—to ensure that all students, no matter their background, have the supports they need to achieve at high levels—continues to be front and center in the district’s strategic plan. Access and opportunity appear to be a districtwide strategic priority, intended as a shared focus across all divisions.

Options for the district's consideration

- **Consolidate student support under a single cabinet leader.** Combining the Interim Chief of Student Services and Chief of Wraparound Support and Intervention under one cabinet member would bring 251 FTE of directly student-facing support services under a coherent leadership structure. This would eliminate one cabinet seat and create a single point of accountability for the coordination between specialized services and wraparound support that currently requires cross-cabinet negotiation.

- **Disburse the Access and Opportunity portfolio** to more logically aligned divisions, rather than maintaining it as a stand-alone cabinet area. Each function currently in the division has a more natural organizational home:

    - Athletics under the Chief Operating Officer or a consolidated student services structure.

    - Charter School Oversight and Governance under the Chief Legal Officer or the Chief of Staff as a regulatory and accountability function.

    - Student Assignment and Enrollment under the Chief Operating Officer if oriented around enrollment and assignment as a facilities related function, or under Academics if its intent is to align assignment with a student programs and placement purpose.

    - Student Mentorship and Partnerships under a consolidated student-support function alongside wraparound services.

Importantly, the core function of focusing on Access and Opportunity for DCSD, can continue to be a focus and roles currently dedicated for that purpose might logically be housed in academics or chief-of-staff areas, for example, and—in order to align with the strategic plan—could be a lens through which all work in DCSD is viewed and executed.

- **Focus on the communication function in the Community Engagement and Innovative Partnerships portfolio** by separating communications from community engagement and grants functions. Among peer districts, six of nine lead this function with a communications-forward title and structure. DCSD's arrangement, where a Deputy Chief Communications Officer leads communications within a broader engagement and partnerships division, places communications in a subordinate organizational position relative to how peer districts structure it. Prioritizing communication functions may be especially important given the imperative to build trust across the community.

- **Consider consolidating potentially similar roles.** In coordination with potential reorganization and in light of growing financial pressures faced by DCSD and other school districts across the state and country, DCSD might consider consolidating similar roles. As noted throughout this document, individual performance is not assessed in this report; the roles below are highlighted because they serve important functions within the district *and* they have commonalities in their function. Consolidation of role may lead to great efficiency and clarification of responsibility. This consideration suggest a close look in these areas for potential consolidation by district leadership. Areas for consideration include the following:

    - **Coordinators.** The Division of Teaching and Learning has central senior coordinators for K–12 ELA, math, science, social studies, and other content areas. Each area office in Schools and Leadership also has its own ELA, math, exceptional education, ELL, climate and culture, and mental health coordinators, and Student Services has its own EL and exceptional education staff.

    - **Nonacademic student supports broadly.** Wraparound Services contains counseling, social work, PBIS, and student health. Student Services contains psychologists, additional social workers, GNETS and a PBIS coach. Attendance lives with the Title IV attendance specialists and prevention liaisons inside Wrap Around Services, while behavior and climate support is also held by the Culture and Climate Coordinators and Mental Health Coordinators embedded in each Schools and Leadership area office. Family support is dispersed as well and cannot be easily separated from student support as a function. FACE advocates and student-mentorship staff sit under Access and Opportunity, Family Engagement Liaisons and a Senior Coordinator for Family and Community Engagement sit under Community Engagement and Innovative Partnerships, Parent Center Facilitators sit under Federal Programs, and Student Services adds its own Parent Mentors and Parent Transition Liaisons.

- **Area superintendents and executive administrator.** In some other systems, these roles are not separated out, especially in districts wherein the reporting line is smaller than that of the current reporting line of Schools and Leaders.
- **School and Central Office roles.** As it was designed, schools and leadership support is intended to provide intensive support within schools. While this proximity to schools can provide opportunities for deeply context-informed support, it also may cloud roles and responsibilities between school responsibilities and district responsibilities. As an example, exploring the role of climate and culture coordinators with the day-to-day, school-based climate and culture work of principals, APs, deans, counselors and other staff.
- **District and community roles.** Finally, the district can look outside its organizational structure to determine whether internal roles and the roles of other county and community agencies present opportunities for better alignment or duplicative responsibility while ensuring that DCSD has important staffing to manage coordination, especially in the broad categories of health care, mental health, housing and other agency provided supports for students and families.

Consideration 3: Coordination Between Area Offices and Central Departments in Schools and Leadership (Structure + Process)

What the evidence shows

DCSD's Division of Schools and Leadership deploys nine area superintendents across seven area offices, each carrying embedded coordinator staff organized around specific content and support domains: ELA, math, ELL, special education, mental health, and culture and climate. Across the seven areas, 63 FTE of embedded coordinators provide domain-specific support to schools through the area office structure.

Parallel expertise exists centrally in Teaching and Learning, Student Services, and Wraparound, each of which holds staff with the same content or support domain focus as the area-embedded coordinators. For every domain in which an embedded coordinator works, there is a central department with equivalent expertise reporting through a different cabinet vertical.

No peer district in this sample structures its area offices in this way. Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Wake carry embedded school support staff, but those positions are teacher-classified instructional specialists rather than coordinator-classified domain experts, and they do not create a parallel expertise structure that mirrors central department categories. The DCSD model reflects a deliberate organizational choice to provide maximum direct, domain-specific support to schools through the area office. Focus group participants from multiple stakeholder groups identified the resulting coordination challenge, including tension over role clarity, inconsistent support experiences across areas, and competition for principal attention, as a significant operational concern.

The current structure creates solid lines where dotted lines may be more appropriate, and dotted lines where solid lines may produce better outcomes. Area superintendents currently supervise embedded coordinators directly, creating a management relationship that competes with the content accountability those coordinators should have to their central department counterparts. The relationship between embedded coordinators and central department staff who set curriculum, instructional, and student-support priorities districtwide is informal and depends on voluntary coordination rather than structural accountability.

Options for the district's consideration

- **Shift reporting lines for embedded coordinators from area offices to central departments,** with area superintendents retaining a collaborative rather than supervisory relationship with those staff.
    - Under this model, ELA coordinators would report to Teaching and Learning, ELL coordinators to the ELL Director, SPED coordinators to the Special Education structure, and mental health coordinators to the Wraparound division. Area superintendents would work with those coordinators as partners rather than supervisors, ensuring school-specific context informs the work without creating a parallel management hierarchy. This potential change would not preclude the current practice under Schools and Leaders of assigning coordinators to a portfolio of schools (a case management structure as outlined in the literature review) and could potentially preserve the intention of giving school leaders a clear point of contact in focus areas while allowing stronger coherence for ELA, Math, Special Education, EL and other supports by organizing them under one subject specific structure.
    - This would require a redesign of how coordinators are accountable to both the area they serve and the central department that sets their professional direction. A defined liaison structure, including regular touchpoints between area superintendents and central department directors, would need to accompany the reporting line change to ensure area-specific needs remain visible to central leadership. Were the district to make this shift, it might potentially put at risk the accountability to the Area Superintendent that comes with having coordinators in their reporting structure. The underlying logic being that the area superintendent is deeply accountable for school results and therefore should have the ability to guide responsive support decisions for schools. For that reason, the district may want to consider keeping some coordinators in the area superintendent reporting structure and moving some back to a central reporting structure (for instance,

Exceptional Education coordinators given the complexity of special education policy and practice). In either case, the need for attending to cross-functional teaming will continue to be deeply important to aligned, coherent support.

- **Refine districtwide coordination structures** for each domain where embedded coordinators, central department staff, and area superintendents meet regularly within a structured accountability framework. Examples could include a Math Council, an ELL Leadership Team, or a Behavioral Health Community of Practice. This option preserves the current reporting relationships while creating the coordination mechanisms that are currently absent. It is the least structurally disruptive option but requires the most sustained leadership attention to maintain.

- **Standardize area office structures and expectations** regardless of which coordination model is adopted. Focus group findings indicate that each area superintendent currently runs their office differently, producing inconsistent experiences for principals, teachers, and families across the district. Establishing common expectations for how area offices operate, from what services they provide, to how they communicate with schools, and how they coordinate with central departments, would reduce inconsistency independent of any structural change.

Consideration 4: Professional Learning and Talent Development as a Coherent District Strategy (Structure)

What the evidence shows

DCSD's investment in professional learning and talent development is distributed across three cabinet areas without a defined integrating strategy. The IGNITE DeKalb Teacher Residency program (6 FTE) sits under the Chief Human Resources Officer. Professional Development (10 FTE) and Leadership Development (8 FTE) sit under the Chief of Schools and Leadership. Instructional strategy, which should inform what professional learning prioritizes, sits under the Chief Academic Officer.

IGNITE mirrors comparable programs in Charlotte-Mecklenburg (4 FTE) and Gwinnett (8 FTE), reflecting a commitment to home-grown teacher development. What is less visible in the current structure is how IGNITE connects to the functions that determine its impact: the instructional priorities set by Teaching and Learning, the school placement and support structures owned by Schools and Leadership, and the professional development and mentoring support that new teachers need in their first years of practice.

Among peer districts that carry meaningful investment across the professional learning continuum, the most common approach is to consolidate these functions under a single cabinet leader, whether an academic officer, a chief learning officer, or a talent officer, so that teacher preparation, professional development, and leadership development operate within a shared strategic framework. Gwinnett's Chief Learning Officer holds both its comparable teacher pipeline program (Teach Gwinnett) and professional development functions. Dallas's academic leadership holds professional development. Denver's Chief of Academics holds professional development and connects it directly to instructional priorities.

Options for the district's consideration

- **Establish a unified talent-development strategy** that explicitly connects IGNITE, Professional Development, Leadership Development, and new teacher induction into a coherent continuum, regardless of where each function organizationally sits. This would require a designated owner for the strategy—a person or structure accountable for ensuring the pieces connect—and defined coordination protocols between HR, Schools and Leadership, and Academic Leadership.

- **Consolidate the professional learning continuum under a single cabinet area.** Two options exist depending on where the district believes professional learning most naturally belongs:

    - Under the Chief Academic Officer, aligning professional learning with instructional strategy. This is the most common model among peer districts and ensures that what teachers learn is driven by what students need academically. IGNITE would move from HR to Academics, with HR retaining responsibility for recruitment, hiring, and benefits administration of residents.

    - Under the Chief of Schools and Leadership, connecting professional learning to school practice. Professional Development and Leadership Development already sit here. Adding IGNITE would complete the continuum under the division closest to principals and schools. The risk is that instructional alignment requires sustained coordination with Academics that is not currently structured.

Consideration 5: Clarity in Cross-Divisional Roles, Ownership, and Accountability (Process)

What the evidence shows

Across all stakeholder groups, participants described a clear understanding of their own responsibilities and their division's purpose, but that clarity diminished consistently when work crossed divisional boundaries. This was the single most consistent pattern in the data: across all eight central office focus groups, participants described uncertainty about which division owned particular work, where decision-making authority resided, and who was ultimately accountable when responsibilities were shared. Executive interviews reinforced this, with leaders in 10 of 12 interviews acknowledging overlapping responsibilities, duplicated functions, and unclear ownership, and nearly two-thirds of questionnaire respondents (143 of 226; 63%) identifying unclear cross-divisional roles as a source of overlap and inefficiency. Principals experienced the same pattern as service recipients, frequently describing uncertainty about whom to contact when an issue spanned multiple departments. Collectively, the evidence suggests the core challenge is less about understanding individual roles than about understanding how responsibilities connect across the organization.

Options for the district's consideration

- **Map ownership and decision rights for recurring cross-divisional work.** The district may wish to document, for its most common cross-cutting processes, who owns the work, who plays a supporting role, and who holds final accountability. A simple, shared decision rights framework would give staff a consistent reference point when work spans divisions and would reduce the time spent determining "who does that."
- **Develop a central office navigation resource for schools.** Create and maintain a user-friendly resource that clearly identifies the appropriate point of contact, functional responsibilities, and ownership for common areas of district support. This recommendation directly responds to concerns raised by principals and central office staff regarding uncertainty about whom to contact when work spans multiple divisions. A centralized resource would improve organizational transparency, reduce reliance on informal relationships or institutional knowledge, and make it easier for schools to access timely and appropriate support.
- **Define ownership at the outset of cross-divisional initiatives.** For any project involving multiple divisions, the district could adopt a practice of naming the owner, supporting roles, and decision-maker before work begins. Establishing this clarity up front would reduce ambiguity about accountability as the work progresses.

Consideration 6: Durable Structures for Cross-Divisional Collaboration (Culture + Process)

What the evidence shows

Participants across every stakeholder group described a strong willingness to collaborate, but they consistently characterized collaboration as depending on personal relationships, individual initiative, and informal communication rather than on established structures. This was the most frequently cited theme in the questionnaire: nearly three-quarters of respondents (168 of 226; 74%) identified inconsistent communication and cross-divisional collaboration as a source of inefficiency. Staff described how cross-functional efforts that strengthened collaboration were not sustained once participants returned to their divisions, with one participant noting that the sense of "we" did not persist. Executives reinforced this pattern, describing work occurring in silos and a resulting tendency toward reactive rather than proactive coordination, while principals described receiving fragmented and sometimes conflicting communication from different departments. The evidence suggests that strong relationships are currently compensating for the absence of consistent structures, leaving collaboration dependent on knowing the right people.

Options for the district's consideration

- **Create standing cross-divisional structures for recurring work.** Rather than convening collaboration on an ad hoc basis, the district could establish durable teams or routines tied to the work that regularly crosses divisions. Structures that persist regardless of individual participants would help ensure collaboration does not dissolve when staff return to their respective divisions.
- **Adopt early-involvement protocols for shared decisions.** Respondents repeatedly emphasized the value of involving relevant divisions before decisions are finalized. A practice of bringing key stakeholders in early would promote alignment and reduce the revisions and rework that follow when divisions are engaged too late.
- **Refine the district's coordinated communication model for schools.** Build on the existing centralized communication process by establishing clearer governance for how information is prioritized, reviewed, and communicated to schools. This recommendation directly responds to concerns raised by both principals and central office staff regarding inconsistent communication, uncertainty about what information is most critical, and limitations within the current process. Strengthening the implementation of the existing model would promote more coherent, transparent, and actionable communication while preserving the benefits of coordinated messaging.
- **Sustain collaborative practices beyond temporary initiatives.** Given that prior cross-functional efforts faded once they ended, the district could build mechanisms to retain effective collaborative practices over time. Capturing and institutionalizing what worked would help preserve gains rather than rebuilding relationships with each new effort.

Consideration 7: Streamlined Decision-Making and Reduced Unnecessary Approval Layers (Process + Culture)

What the evidence shows

Stakeholders consistently described decision-making and communication as moving through hierarchical pathways, with authority, information, and requests expected to travel through formal reporting structures or parallel roles. Across all eight central office focus groups, participants described decisions requiring multiple layers of approval and communication that had to move through corresponding leadership levels rather than directly to the responsible individual, contributing to delays and inconsistent implementation. Executives echoed this in 10 of 12 interviews, noting that approval-heavy or highly collaborative structures, while intended to build alignment, sometimes slowed action and reduced agility. Nearly two-thirds of questionnaire respondents (142 of 226; 62.8%) described uncertainty about decision authority and called for clearer pathways, fewer approval layers, and greater empowerment of staff. Principals described the downstream effect as inconsistent implementation and delayed responsiveness that affected their ability to act.

Options for the district's consideration

- **Clarify decision tiers and delegation of authority.** The district could define which types of decisions can be made at which organizational levels, with an emphasis on enabling operational decisions to be made closer to the work. Clear delegation would reduce the uncertainty staff described about who is authorized to act.
- **Reduce approval steps for routine transactions.** Reviewing high-frequency processes to identify and remove low-value approval layers could meaningfully improve responsiveness. Aligning the number of approvals to the actual risk or significance of a decision would allow routine work to move more quickly.
- **Enable more direct communication across levels and divisions.** Staff described having to route communication through parallel positions even when speaking directly to a colleague would resolve an issue faster. Permitting direct communication with the responsible individual, where appropriate, could reduce delays without sacrificing oversight.
- **Assign a single accountable owner for implementation.** Executives emphasized the importance of having one person responsible for seeing work through. Designating a clear implementation owner for significant decisions would help ensure that approvals translate into consistent follow-through.

Consideration 8: Operational Systems and Workflows (Process)

What the evidence shows

Participants consistently described operational systems and administrative processes as barriers to efficient work, pointing not to isolated problems but to a compounding pattern of manual workflows, multiple approval layers, inconsistent procedures, and systems that require significant staff effort to complete routine tasks. The central office focus groups provided the strongest evidence, with participants citing finance, procurement, payroll, and ERP processes as time consuming and often requiring duplicate data entry across modules or workarounds to move work forward. Executives reinforced these concerns in eight of 12 interviews and emphasized the importance of clear, consistent standard operating procedures.

At the same time, many of these processes reflect district policies, state procurement requirements, and transparency measures that appropriately govern financial stewardship and public accountability. The findings suggest that opportunities for improvement lie not in reducing necessary controls, but in modernizing tools, streamlining workflows, eliminating unnecessary manual effort, and ensuring that administrative processes are designed to support both efficiency and accountability.

Options for the district's consideration

- **Map and streamline high-burden workflows.** The district could prioritize process mapping for frequently cited processes such as procurement, hiring, and payroll to identify redundant steps, manual workarounds, and opportunities to simplify internal procedures. Divisions should be encouraged to periodically review and refine workflows within their areas of responsibility while maintaining consistency for processes that span multiple departments.
- **Modernize tools and reduce duplicate data entry across systems.** Because staff described entering the same information across multiple systems or modules, the district could examine opportunities for greater system integration, automation, or reconfiguration that reduce manual effort while preserving required controls and reporting requirements. Reducing repetitive data entry would improve efficiency, decrease the likelihood of errors, and allow staff to focus more time on higher-value work.
- **Establish consistent standard operating procedures.** Both staff and executives identified inconsistent procedures as a source of complexity. Developing and maintaining shared standard operating procedures for common administrative processes would reduce variation, clarify expectations, and ensure that cross-divisional work is executed consistently regardless of where responsibilities reside.
- **Align approval requirements to risk and value.** The district could review approval pathways to ensure that routine, low-risk actions are governed by the least restrictive processes necessary to satisfy district policy, state law, and transparency requirements. Proportioning approvals to the significance and risk of a decision would preserve appropriate oversight while reducing unnecessary administrative burden and improving responsiveness.

Consideration 9: School Support Model and Access to Expertise (Process + Culture)

What the evidence shows

Stakeholders broadly supported the goal of providing schools with coordinated, high-quality services, but they described inconsistent access to central office expertise under the current support model. Across all eight central office focus groups, participants expressed uncertainty about how functional divisions and Schools & Leadership should work together, with some describing being discouraged from communicating directly with school leaders and others noting that the staff doing the work were not always the ones communicating with schools. Executive perspectives varied: several described the model's intent as creating a single point of coordination to reduce competing requests, while acknowledging that roles and communication pathways still required definition. Questionnaire responses were similarly mixed, balancing support for coordination against a desire to preserve direct access to specialized expertise. Principals valued their relationships with Schools & Leadership but consistently emphasized the importance of timely, direct access to functional experts for specialized needs. The evidence suggests broad agreement on the goal of coordinated support, but less consistency about how the model should function in practice.

Options for the district's consideration

- **Clarify communication protocols within the support model.** The district could define when coordination should flow through Schools & Leadership and when functional experts may engage schools directly. Clear protocols would reduce the uncertainty staff described while preserving the model's coordinating intent.
- **Preserve direct access to specialized expertise.** Given that both staff and principals valued direct access to subject matter experts, the district could ensure the model allows experts to work directly with schools for specialized instructional, operational, or student-support needs. Maintaining this access while coordinating overall support would help balance responsiveness with coherence.
- **Define shared roles between functional divisions and Schools & Leadership.** Because participants described uncertainty about ownership and handoffs, the district could more clearly articulate the respective responsibilities of functional divisions and Schools & Leadership. Defining how these roles intersect would clarify expectations for collaboration and reduce confusion about who engages schools and when.
- **Establish a feedback loop with principals on responsiveness.** Since principals are best positioned to judge whether the model delivers timely support, the district could gather their input regularly to refine how it operates. A consistent feedback mechanism would allow the model to be adjusted based on whether schools are actually receiving timely access to expertise.

End Notes

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Appendix A: Coding and Analysis Methodology

The following outlines the RTI team's approach to collecting, organizing, and analyzing central office staffing data. The goal is to provide enough transparency for readers to understand the basis for the comparisons in this report, while recognizing that no two districts organize or report their data in identical ways.

Data Collection

Each comparison district was asked to provide a current personnel file for all central office employees, including position title, department, and full-time-equivalent units (FTE). Most districts provided this as an exported spreadsheet from their human resources or payroll system. Where FTE values were not included, they were derived from available data such as scheduled work hours or contract days or assigned a default value of 1.0 for full-time positions and 0.5 for part-time positions.

Two districts presented distinct data challenges. Baltimore City Public Schools did not provide a personnel file and instead directed the study team to their adopted budget document, which reports staffing levels by office rather than by individual position. Baltimore is therefore included in functional area comparisons but excluded from department-level and role-level analysis. Cobb County School District provided division descriptions in lieu of personnel data and was unable to provide data in a format suitable for staffing comparison. Cobb is included in the cabinet structure analysis where organizational chart data were available but is excluded from all staffing comparisons.

Coding Approach

To enable comparison across districts that use different organizational structures and job title conventions, each position was classified using a common framework anchored to DeKalb County School District's (DCSD) organizational structure. Because this study is designed to inform DCSD's decisions, functional categories reflect how DCSD organizes its central office, and positions in other districts are mapped to the equivalent DCSD category based on their function rather than their native title or placement.

Coding decisions relied on the native department assignment and the position title together. The department established the functional context for each position, and the title was used to validate that placement, resolve ambiguity where one department contained multiple functional types, and identify cases where a role's actual function differed from where it sat in the organizational chart. When those two sources pointed in different directions, the analysis drew on additional sources in the following order: the district's organizational chart, the district's public website, and publicly posted job descriptions.

Because districts organize themselves differently, not every comparison reflects a direct equivalence. Where structural differences are meaningful for the analysis, they are noted in the relevant sections of this report rather than resolved through coding.

School-Based Positions

Positions were classified as school-based and excluded from central office counts when their primary function involves direct-service delivery to students in a school setting. The determining factor was the nature of the work, not the administrative arrangement. Under this standard, classroom teachers, homebound teachers, paraprofessionals, school counselors assigned to a specific building, and principals were excluded from central office counts regardless of how they appear in a district's personnel file.

Itinerant therapeutic service providers, including occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and school psychologists, are retained in the central office count even when they travel between schools. These roles represent an active organizational decision about whether to staff specialized services internally or contract them externally, and including them allows for a meaningful comparison of how districts approach that decision.

Transportation, nutrition, and custodial staff are also retained, consistent with how most comparison districts report these positions as part of their central office operations. They are identifiable in the underlying data and can be filtered for analyses focused on more narrowly defined administrative functions.

Full-Time Equivalent

Staffing levels are reported in FTE units rather than simple headcount. FTE converts part-time and full-time roles to a common scale, providing a more accurate picture of staffing capacity than a raw count of positions. Vacant positions are counted at 1.0 FTE to reflect budgeted capacity. Compensation supplements, stipends, and extended employment entries that represent additional pay rather than distinct positions were identified and excluded from all counts.

Personnel files varied considerably across districts in structure and completeness, and no universal standard exists for how districts record or export staffing data. FTE figures in this report should be understood as well-grounded estimates that allow for meaningful comparison rather than precise equivalents. Where a district's data required particular assumptions or presented notable limitations, those are noted in context.

Vacant Positions

Districts varied in whether their personnel files included vacant positions. Three of the nine districts that provided personnel files included vacancies: DCSD, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, and

Griffin-Spalding. The remaining six districts provided data for filled positions only, which likely reflects how each district filtered its export rather than an absence of open positions.

Where vacancies were included, they are retained in the analysis and counted at 1.0 FTE to reflect budgeted staffing capacity. This approach treats a vacant position as a deliberate organizational commitment, since the district has chosen to fund the role even if it is not currently filled. DCSD's file included 339 vacant positions, representing approximately 12 percent of its total entries and spanning all major functional areas. Charlotte-Mecklenburg included 37 vacancies, and Griffin-Spalding included one.

Because most districts did not include vacancies, comparisons of total FTE between DCSD and peer districts will reflect this difference. DCSD, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, and Griffin-Spalding's counts include their full budgeted capacity (as indicated by their position files); other peer district counts reflect filled positions only. This should be kept in mind when interpreting differences in staffing levels, particularly in functional areas where DCSD shows a notably higher count than peers.

Distribution of Central Office Staff by Functional Area

While overall staffing levels provide a broad indicator of central office scale, understanding how staff are distributed across functional areas reveals how districts allocate their administrative capacity. Central office functions in large school districts typically span instructional support, student services, operational management, financial administration, human resources, technology, and strategic leadership. Examining this distribution allows for comparison of organizational priorities across districts, independent of differences in size or naming conventions.

For the purposes of this analysis, central office positions were grouped into thirteen functional areas reflecting the major domains most commonly represented within superintendent leadership teams. These categories are broad enough to accommodate variation in how districts name and structure their departments, making them the most reliable unit of cross-district comparison in this study. Individual positions were mapped to these categories based on their primary functional responsibilities rather than their exact title or native placement within the organizational chart.

Functional area comparisons should be interpreted as structural indicators rather than performance measures. Differences in staffing levels may reflect variations in district responsibilities, organizational design, service delivery models, or strategic priorities rather than differences in efficiency or effectiveness.

Department-Level Organization and Staffing

While functional area comparisons provide a consistent framework for examining how districts allocate resources across major domains, department-level analysis offers a closer look at how districts operationalize those priorities. Departments are the subunits within each functional area, and examining them reveals differences in how districts structure specific functions, what roles they include, and how much granularity they bring to particular areas of work.

Department-level comparisons require more interpretive care than functional area comparisons. Districts vary considerably in how specifically they name and organize their departments. Some districts maintain distinct departments for each content area in curriculum and instruction, for example, while others consolidate all curriculum staff under a single teaching and learning umbrella. These structural differences do not necessarily reflect differences in capacity or investment; they often reflect organizational design choices. Where those differences are analytically significant, they are noted in the discussion rather than normalized through coding.

Where peer district personnel files included native department designations, such as a position listed under "Transportation" or "Federal Programs" in the district's own system, the RTI team used those designations as the primary basis for department assignment, adjusted where necessary to align with the common department taxonomy applied across all districts. Where native department information was absent, ambiguous, or inconsistent with the position's apparent function, the RTI team assigned departments based on the best available inference from position title, reporting structure, and functional area placement. In cases where a position title suggested one department but the native department designation suggested another, the RTI team defaulted to the native designation unless the title provided clear evidence of a different function. Positions whose department could not be determined with reasonable confidence were flagged for review rather than assigned silently. The department taxonomy used throughout this analysis was developed iteratively, with DCSD's organizational structure serving as the baseline framework and peer district equivalents mapped to it. In some instances, peer district functions with no direct DCSD counterpart were assigned to the closest equivalent department with a notation in the data file.

For example, personnel data from one peer district included a central administrative building housing staff from Human Resources, Finance, Nutrition Services, Health Services, and several other functions under a single location code with no native department field. In that case, the study team used the district's general ledger key description—a budget account code that identified the functional cost center for each position—as the primary basis for department assignment, cross-referencing position titles where the account code alone was insufficient to distinguish between closely related functions.

Role Distribution and Management Structure

Beyond how staff are distributed across functions and departments, understanding how roles are structured within the central office provides insight into how districts organize decision-making authority and management capacity. For this analysis, each position was assigned one of three role classifications: Executive and Cabinet-Level Leadership, People Manager, or Individual Contributor.

Executive and Cabinet-Level Leadership includes superintendents, chiefs, deputy superintendents, and area or assistant superintendents. People Manager includes executive directors, directors, managers, supervisors, and senior-level positions where the role could plausibly carry supervisory responsibility over other staff. Where a title band regularly includes individuals who manage others, all positions in that band are classified as People Manager to avoid undercounting management capacity. Individual Contributor includes all other positions, including coordinators, specialists, analysts, technicians, and administrative support staff. Buyers, recruiters, project managers, and hearing officers are classified as Individual Contributors regardless of title seniority, as these roles do not typically carry supervisory responsibility over other staff.

Role classifications were applied consistently across all districts based on title. Where the same title is used differently across districts, the classification reflects the most common functional interpretation of that title. This approach supports cross-district comparison of management structure while acknowledging that title conventions are not uniform.

Appendix B: Sample Organizational Charts for Consideration

Exhibit 1: Illustrative Organization of Academics, School Leadership, and Student Services

The design intent of this organizational structure is to align academic, school leadership, and student-support functions through a unified leadership model that promotes coherence, continuity, and comprehensive support for schools. While specific titles of roles may change, the organizing principle is the intentional alignment of school-facing functions to strengthen coordination, clarify decision rights, reduce duplication, and ensure consistent implementation of district priorities.

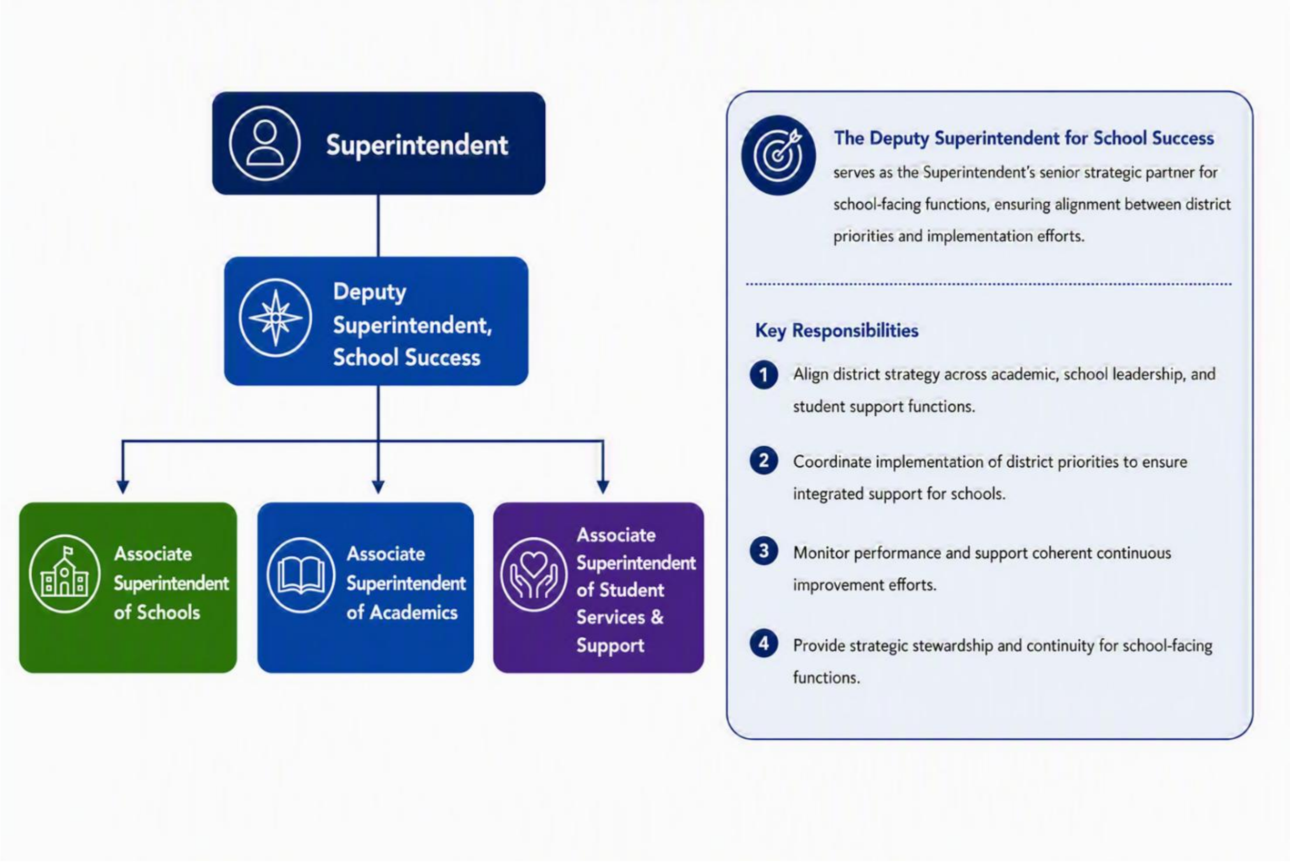
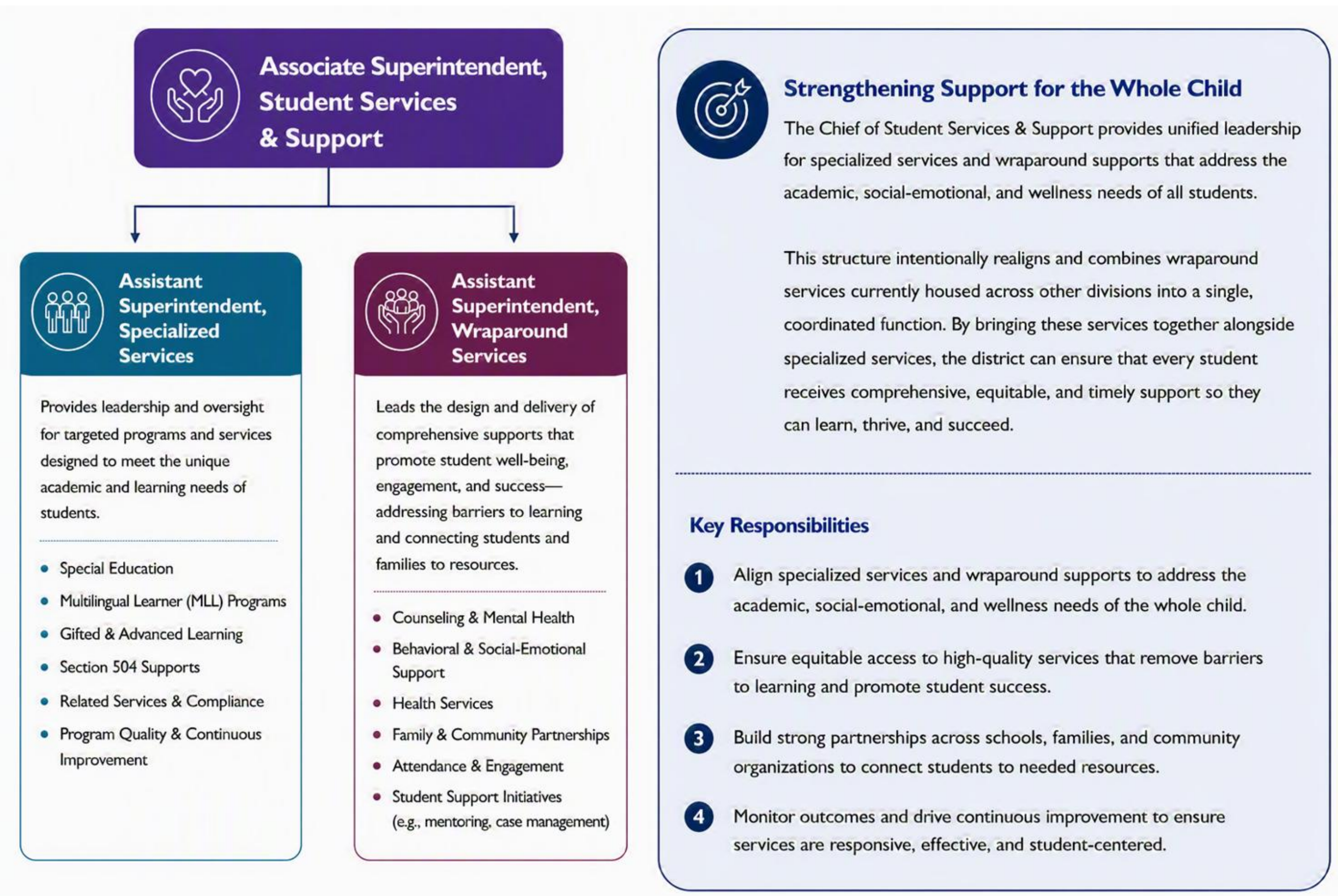


Exhibit 2: Illustrative Organization of Student Services & Support

This organizational model demonstrates how specialized services and wraparound supports could be intentionally aligned under a single leadership function to promote comprehensive, student-centered support. The model brings together services that may currently reside across multiple divisions, creating clearer ownership, stronger coordination, and more seamless access to the academic, behavioral, health, and community resources students need to thrive. The specific titles of the roles may change, but the organizing principle is the intentional alignment of specialized services and wraparound services under a single leader to ensure comprehensive and coherent supports for students and schools.



Appendix C: Select Recommendation Analysis of Advantages and Risks

The report identifies a number of considerations drawn from the data gathered this spring. The tables below outline the advantages and risks of selected options for the district's consideration. They are offered to help the district weigh trade-offs as it thinks through future central office structures and strategy in service of students.

Options for the District's Consideration	Potential Advantages	Potential Risks
From Consideration 1: Create an integrating executive position, such as a Deputy Superintendent or Chief Academic and School Excellence Officer, to hold academics, school leadership, and student support under a common reporting structure.	• Creates a coordination layer that does not currently exist between the superintendent and related functions, reducing the number of divisions (currently 15) the superintendent must integrate directly. • Establishes a single point of accountability for alignment across academics, school leadership, and student support, which now sit in separate cabinet verticals. • Follows a model used at comparable or larger scale by Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Denver, and Gwinnett. • Can be scoped narrowly or expanded to include Professional Development and Leadership Development for a unified academic and talent portfolio.	• Effectiveness depends heavily on the individual's breadth, credibility, and authority; research notes an integrating role is only as strong as the person and the authority attached to it. • Inserts an additional reporting layer that, if decision rights are unclear, could slow rather than speed coordination. • May be perceived as reducing the standing or autonomy of chiefs who would report through the new role.

Options for the District's Consideration	Potential Advantages	Potential Risks
From Consideration 1: Consolidate cabinet portfolios rather than adding an integrating layer.	• Reduces the number of direct reports to the superintendent without adding a new executive position, avoiding new cost and potentially reducing it. • Lowers the number of coordination dependencies the superintendent manages directly. • Gives each remaining chief a broader, more strategic span; Fulton operates with six cabinet members at comparable enrollment. • Can be paired with the specific consolidation opportunities identified in Consideration 2.	• Requires chiefs able to lead a wider set of functions; broader spans can stretch leadership capacity. • Merging or eliminating cabinet seats is disruptive and may be especially sensitive given changes already happening in DeKalb. • Concentrates more responsibility in fewer leaders, increasing key-person risk. • Does not by itself create academic and school leadership integration unless portfolios are drawn deliberately and cross-functional collaboration is strengthened.
From Consideration 2: Consolidate student support under a single cabinet leader.	• Brings specialized and wraparound student support under one accountable leader. • Aligns with the majority of peers; six of nine comparison districts consolidate these functions under a single leader. • Eliminates one cabinet seat, supporting the broader effort to reduce cabinet size. • Creates a clearer, single point of contact for schools navigating student support.	• Produces a large, complex division and a wider span of control for the single leader. • Specialized services (often compliance heavy, such as special education) and wraparound support have distinct demands; consolidation must preserve specialized expertise and legal compliance. • Transition could disrupt established routines and relationships. • Does not, on its own, resolve where the student-facing roles in Access and Opportunity belong.

Options for the District's Consideration	Potential Advantages	Potential Risks
From Consideration 2: Disburse the Access and Opportunity.	• Moves each function to a more natural home (e.g., athletics to Operations or student services; charter oversight to Legal or Chief of Staff; student assignment to Operations or Academics; mentorship to a consolidated student-support function), improving role clarity that focus groups described as currently lacking a unifying theme. • Brings DCSD closer to common practice, as no peer district mirrors the current combination of functions. • Allows access and opportunity to operate as a districtwide lens and strategic priority rather than a single division, consistent with the strategic plan.	• Without deliberate design, dispersing functions risks losing a single, visible champion for access and opportunity. • May be read as deprioritizing access work if not carefully communicated, with implications for community trust. • Receiving divisions need the capacity to absorb new functions without becoming overloaded.
From Consideration 2: Consider consolidating potentially similar roles.	• May produce efficiency and clearer accountability amid budget pressure by reducing duplication across central and area-based coordinators and dispersed student- and family-support roles. • Directly addresses the redundancy and unclear-ownership patterns staff and executives raised, including parallel central and area coordinators for the same domains. • Offers a chance to clarify the boundary between school-based and district	• Consolidation could reduce the direct, domain-specific support to schools that the area-embedded model was designed to provide. • Without care, the exercise may be perceived as, or drift into, individual performance or staffing decisions, which is outside this report's scope and could harm trust. • Some apparent overlaps reflect legitimate specialization or compliance needs (e.g., exceptional education), so consolidation requires verifying

Options for the District's Consideration	Potential Advantages	Potential Risks
	responsibilities (for example, climate and culture coordinators relative to school staff). • Looking outward to county and community agencies may reveal alignment opportunities and reduce duplicative external-facing roles.	actual job functions rather than titles. • Reducing coordination roles in health, mental health, or family support could create service gaps if external agencies do not fill them.
From Consideration 3: Shift reporting lines for embedded coordinators from area offices to central departments, with area superintendents retaining a collaborative rather than supervisory relationship with those staff.	• Aligns each coordinator with the central department that sets curriculum, instructional, and student-support priorities, strengthening districtwide coherence within each domain (ELA, math, ELL, special education, mental health). • Resolves the competing-accountability problem the analysis identified, in which area superintendents supervise coordinators whose content direction could come from central departments. • Can preserve a clear school-facing point of contact by keeping the practice of assigning coordinators to a portfolio of schools (a case management structure). • Reduces the parallel central and area expertise structure that no peer district maintains, addressing the redundancy and role-clarity concerns raised in focus groups.	• Weakens the area superintendent's direct authority over staff supporting the schools they are held accountable for, potentially reducing responsiveness to school-specific needs. • Requires a redesigned dual accountability and liaison structure (regular area superintendent and central director touchpoints); without it, area-specific needs may become less visible to central leadership. • A uniform shift may not fit every domain equally; some coordinators (e.g., exceptional education, given compliance complexity) may be better kept in, or split between, area and central structures. • Moving reporting lines alone does not guarantee aligned, coherent support; sustained cross-functional teaming remains essential or the change may trade one coordination challenge for another.

Appendix D: Data Sources by Figure

The following table documents the data sources underlying each figure and table in this report. Where multiple sources informed a single table, sources are listed by district or data element. Personnel file dates reflect the fiscal or academic year indicated by each district at the time of data collection.

Figure	District(s)	Source
1	DCSD	Governor's Office of Student Achievement. "Georgia School Grades Report: DeKalb County." Accessed 2026.
1	Baltimore	Maryland State Department of Education. "Maryland School Report Card: Enrollment Demographics." Accessed 2026.
1	Cobb	Governor's Office of Student Achievement. "Georgia School Grades Report: Cobb County." Accessed 2026.
1	Charlotte-Mecklenburg; Wake	North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. "Statistical Profile: Table 10 — Pupils in Membership by Race and Sex, School Year 2024–25." Accessed 2026. North Carolina State Board of Education. "Headcount of English Learners: Report to the North Carolina General Assembly." Accessed 2026. North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. "Economically Disadvantaged." Accessed 2026. North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. "Statistical Profile: Table 9 — Pupils in Membership Being Served by Exceptional Children Programs." Accessed 2026. https://apps.schools.nc.gov/public/f?p=145:1.
1	Dallas	Texas Education Agency. "Texas School Report Card: District Overview." Accessed 2026.
1	Denver	Colorado Department of Education. "District and School Dashboard." Accessed 2026.
1	Fulton	Governor's Office of Student Achievement. "Georgia School Grades Report: Fulton County." Accessed 2026.
1	Griffin-Spalding	Governor's Office of Student Achievement. "Georgia School Grades Report: Griffin-Spalding County." Accessed 2026.
1	Gwinnett	Governor's Office of Student Achievement. "Georgia School Grades Report: Gwinnett County." Accessed 2026.
1	Muscogee	Governor's Office of Student Achievement. "Georgia School Grades Report: Muscogee County." Accessed 2026.
3	DCSD, Cobb, Fulton, Griffin-Spalding, Gwinnett, Muscogee	Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts. "School System Financial Dashboard." Accessed 2026.
3	Baltimore	Baltimore City Public School System. *Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2025*. Accessed 2026.
3	Charlotte-Mecklenburg; Wake	North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. "Statistical Profile Data Tables: Table A7 — Current Expenditures by Source of Funds, School Year 2024–25." Accessed 2026.
3	Dallas	Texas Education Agency. "PEIMS District Financial Actual Report: Dallas ISD." Accessed 2026.

Figure	District(s)	Source
3	Denver	Denver Public Schools. *Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2025.* Denver: Denver Public Schools, Accessed 2026.
4	DCSD, Cobb, Fulton, Griffin-Spalding, Gwinnett, Muscogee	Governor's Office of Student Achievement. "Georgia Milestones End of Grade Proficiency Data, 2024–25." Downloadable Data Repository, Accessed 2026.
5	DCSD, Cobb, Fulton, Griffin-Spalding, Gwinnett, Muscogee	Georgia Department of Education. "College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) Reports." Accessed 2026.
5	Baltimore	Maryland State Department of Education. "Maryland Report Card: Graduation Rate." Accessed 2026.
5	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. "North Carolina School Report Cards: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Wake County Public School System." Accessed 2026.
5	Dallas	Texas Education Agency. "Texas School Report Card: Dallas ISD Performance and Achievement." Accessed 2026.
5	Denver	Colorado Department of Education. "District and School Dashboard: Denver Public Schools." Accessed 2026.
5	Wake	North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. "North Carolina School Report Card: Wake County Public School System." Accessed 2026.