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Subject **Engagement Plans - Update at tomorrow's Declining Enrollment Steering Committee**
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Good afternoon everyone!

I will be updating the team on our plans for the regional engagement sessions tomorrow during our steering committee meeting and want to provide folks with some information beforehand to help fuel our conversation.

Attached is a document that our partners at Planfully put together to help flesh out the different options, well as some strategies for handling energy from the public during the sessions.

As I'll share in more depth tomorrow, I am heavily leaning towards an Approach B, but am open to additional thoughts, questions and feedback, as we finalize plans, in preparation for the sessions following Spring Break.

See you tomorrow!

Randy

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Attachments:

- Spring 2026 Community Engagement Design Approaches (1).pdf

planfully. Think bold. Plan fully.

# Spring 2026 Community Engagement Design Approaches

Prepared February 2026

## Purpose

This proposal outlines a structured approach to community engagement as the district enters a challenging but important period of planning for the future of the Boulder Valley School District—including consolidation, closure, or programmatic changes at the elementary level. The goal is to engage the community transparently and honestly and to seek input on values, priorities, and tradeoffs that will inform options and Board decision-making.

This document is designed to gain leadership alignment on an approach to community engagement before moving into detailed planning.

## Goals

### Community Engagement Goals for Resilient Schools

**Goal 1: People Feel Heard, Respected, and Cared For**

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This process will be attentive. We will show up prepared, we will listen carefully, and we will communicate clearly. Even when outcomes are difficult, people should experience the district as steady, respectful, and grounded in care for students and families. The way we engage matters just as much as the decisions we ultimately make.

### Goal 2: Strengthen BVSD for the Future

This work is about positioning BVSD to be strong, stable, and able to deliver the depth of opportunity our students deserve—not just this year, but far into the future. Engagement will help our community understand the full picture and the tradeoffs required to align enrollment, programming, and resources so that every school can thrive. The focus is the health of the whole system and the long-term success of students.

### Goal 3: Show Our Students How to Have Hard Conversations

We will model the kind of dialogue we want our students to emulate—listening before reacting, disagreeing without attacking, and staying focused on what's best for kids. In a moment that could divide, we will demonstrate that a community can face difficult realities with respect, courage, and a shared belief that we will be better on the other side of this work.

## Engagement Intent and Boundaries

In order to design and facilitate community engagement sessions that meet the stated goals, BVSD is anchored on a clear message about what community engagement sessions are designed to do, and what they are not. This clarity creates the foundation for design, messaging, and facilitation.

### What This Engagement Is Designed to Do

- Build understanding of the problem
- Gather input on values, priorities, and tradeoffs

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- Inform development of school adjustment options and Board of Education decision making

**What This Engagement Is Not Designed to Do**

- Guarantee preservation of specific schools
- Delay action
- Transfer decision-making authority away from the Board of Education

## Engagement Design Principles

**For Participants: Be heard. Learn something. Think bigger than one school.**

1. Every Voice Has Space — No Voice Takes the Room. All participants will have structured opportunities to contribute. No single individual dominates. Small group design, clear facilitation, and timed protocols ensure balanced participation.
2. Time is Well Used. Engagement will feel meaningful and productive. Conversations are focused, purposeful, and connected to real decisions. Participants will understand how their input will be used.
3. Leave Knowing More Than You Knew. Participants walk away with a clearer understanding of the enrollment realities, the tradeoffs involved, and what is possible even if the path forward is hard.
4. Focus on All Students. Participants continually return to the question: What best serves all students across BVSD? While we acknowledge and honor individual stories, we continue to expand our perspective to consider the entire system.
5. Center Community-Mindedness, Even in Disagreement. The experience should reinforce that this is a shared challenge. Participants may not agree but they leave understanding that we are solving something together, not battling each other (us versus the district).

**For the District: Gather insight. Strengthen the why. Move Steadily Toward Action.**

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1. Input That Sharpens Decisions. Engagement must generate insights that meaningfully inform scenario development — especially around values, tradeoffs, transition concerns, and community priorities.
2. A Community-Informed Vision. The district listens for language, stories, and themes that help articulate the vision for resilient schools. The community helps shape the narrative that explains why action is necessary.
3. Signals About Readiness and Risk. Engagement provides early indicators of where misunderstanding, misinformation, or escalation may occur, allowing the district to adjust messaging, sequencing, or support.
4. Clarity About What Matters Most. When tradeoffs are surfaced, the district learns what the community prioritizes — programming depth, staffing stability, proximity, transitions, fiscal sustainability, etc. This helps frame viable options.
5. Momentum Toward Action. Engagement builds understanding and steadiness, not delay. The process must move the district toward a responsible Board decision in fall 2026.

## Engagement Content

- Superintendent framing: Where we are, how we got here, where we're going
- Regional analysis presentation
- A *Day in the Life* experience
- A *Values-Based Configuration Optimization* (enrollment hold-em) simulation
- An anchor discussion or exercise that collects input and fuels the community-informed vision

## Engagement Approach Options

Regardless of the approach chosen, we recommend the following to position the engagement for success:

1. Clearly communicate "what you can expect" to participants in advance.
2. Advertise an early "Office Hours" segment where participants who desire a 1:1 conversation to answer questions can come speak with district leaders and staff. Hold this in the library for one hour in advance of the official meeting time.

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3. Publicly synthesize themes and outline next steps.

### Approach A: "Auditorium" Session with Breakout Simulations

- **Overview:** Participants begin with a whole-group presentation, then move into facilitated breakout groups.
- **How it works**
  - Participants begin in an auditorium, library, or gym in whole-group
  - Superintendent welcomes and sets the foundation and explains the run of show
  - Principals and ERS facilitators bring participants into separate breakout room spaces to facilitate simulations and small-group discussions
- **Strengths**
  - Shared grounding in a familiar format
  - Opportunity for breakout conversations for deeper engagement
- **Risks**
  - Higher escalation risk during whole-group moments
  - Potential for participants to choose to stay in the auditorium to ask questions rather than go to breakout rooms
  - Less opportunity for leadership to listen in real time
  - Greater variability in participant experience
- **Escalation Scenarios and Response Strategies**
  - Potential Scenario: Many or most participants refuse to move into breakout rooms
    - Response Strategy: Assign one to three senior district leaders to be designated de-escalators. When any participant begins raising their voice, the de-escalator immediately holds a 1:1 conversation, offering to hear feedback and engage in dialogue directly off to the side of the room. All other facilitators should stick with the facilitation plan and share a common message.
    - *Only if escalation continues and spreads past a point where the plan can continue:* Revert to "Fallback Option"

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    - Potential scenario: Participants do not show up at a similar time and “trickle” in over the course of the evening
        - Response strategy: Assign one to two facilitators to welcome incoming participants and bring them up to speed in cohorts

### Approach B: Facilitated Roundtables with Principals as Table Leads (Planfully Recommended)

- **Overview:** Participants meet in a single large room at facilitated roundtables. Each table is led by a principal or trained district leader, supported by a content lead.
- **How It Works**
    - Superintendent provides a brief, tightly framed opening
    - Participants are already in small groups and move quickly into facilitated work
    - Tables engage in structured simulations and guided discussion
    - Facilitators synthesize discussion
    - District leadership closes by synthesizing themes and outlining next steps
- **Strengths**
    - Everyone hears the same message at the same time (high structure and message discipline)
    - Leverage your most effective presenters to deliver content; all others facilitate
    - Clear and transparent feedback capture
    - Straightforward logistics planning
- **Risks**
    - Depending on group size, could feel impersonal / lose the relational element
    - Group think and mob mentality could force a change in format
    - Could be difficult to keep people focused and on-task
- **Escalation Scenarios and Response Strategies**
    - Potential scenario: Too many participants show up

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        - Response strategy: Have back-up classrooms identified as overflow spaces for additional small groups; welcome participants directly into those rooms. Spread facilitators out to increase coverage across tables
    - Potential scenario: Participants refuse to participate in small-group discussions and express a desire for a large-group conversation
        - Response strategy: Assign one to three senior district leaders to be designated de-escalators. When any participant begins raising their voice, the de-escalator immediately holds a 1:1 conversation, offering to hear feedback and engage in dialogue directly off to the side of the room. All other facilitators should stick with the facilitation plan and share a common message.
        - *Only if escalation continues and spreads past a point where the plan can continue:* Revert to "Fallback Option"
    - Potential scenario: Participants do not show up at a similar time and "trickle" in over the course of the evening
        - Response strategy: Assign one to two facilitators to welcome incoming participants and bring them up to speed in cohorts

### Approach C: Enrollment Lab Open House (Station-Based, Self-Paced)

- **Overview**: Participants move through interactive learning stations at their own pace within a defined window.
- **How it works**
    - Create multiple learning and engagement "stations," each with a specific learning or feedback objective. Stations with core content (cited above in *Engagement Content Section*, including ERS simulations) and additional content which may include:
        - An enrollment and capacity data station focused on trends and system constraints (led by LRAC member)
        - Leader conversation tables staffed by principals and district leaders
        - A feedback station with structured survey tools for capturing priorities and tradeoffs

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        - Additional interactive activities or informational tables as needed
- **Strengths**
    - Open house experience means staggered arrival of participants
    - High flexibility and accessibility
    - Reduced risk of large-group escalation
    - Multiple entry points for engagement
- **Risks**
    - Less shared experience across participants
    - Harder to ensure depth of understanding
    - More complex staffing and logistics
- **Escalation Scenarios and Response Strategies**
    - Potential scenario: Participants arrive and are aggravated by the format; they want the “mic.”
        - Response strategy: Assign one to three senior district leaders to be designated de-escalators. When any participant begins raising their voice, the de-escalator immediately holds a 1:1 conversation, offering to hear feedback and engage in dialogue directly off to the side of the room. All other facilitators should stick with the facilitation plan and share a common message.
        - *Only if escalation continues and spreads: Have a room set up where a group conversation can occur with administrators who are prepared to listen, take notes, and respond.*
    - Potential scenario: Too many participants show up at once and overload station capacity
        - Response Strategy: Use digital tools to ensure participants can engage in at least one activity without being facilitated at a station. Also have dedicated “Lab Concierge” staff on hand who can direct traffic and keep participants moving through stations

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### Fallback Option:

Across all scenarios, proactive measures (office hours), advance communications sets concrete expectations about what the events will and will not provide, and response strategies engage escalated participants immediately, calmly, and responsively are likely to support overall event success.

In the event that too many participants intentionally disrupt the facilitation plan, the district may need a fallback option to respond to the needs of the moment while ensuring a manageable process and orderly meeting.

- **Overview:** Systematically gather questions from all participants via notecards, and leverage district leaders to answer questions.
- **How it Works**
    - A facilitator acknowledges the needs in the room and shares that we will shift our approach in response — but that it is critical for us to hear from all voices in the room, and we can only do that through a fair process.
    - Participants write down their questions on notecards, which are gathered by facilitators.
    - District staff sort the comments into stacks of common themes (e.g., questions about job security; questions about student transportation).
    - District leaders and staff with relevant knowledge and experience answer one stack of questions at a time.
    - The facilitator continually reinforces the intent of the process — to ensure that everyone in the room has the opportunity to ask the question and that district staff hear every question, sharing what they can answer and acknowledging what they cannot.
    - Notecards are kept by district staff to be reviewed for common themes and questions.
- **Strengths**
    - Responsive to the realities and needs in the room without ceding control of facilitation and process or defaulting to a two-mic Q&A system
    - Enables every voice to be heard and every question to be put in the room

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    - Creates the opportunity for one consistent message that all participants in the room hear during a moment of tension
- **Risks**
    - Intended input (tradeoffs, feedback) is replaced with question and concern themes
    - Some participants may still choose to disregard the process — de-escalators should still be ready to engage
    - Potential lack of closure — facilitators should be ready to make a clear closing statement

| Dimension | Approach A: Auditorium + Breakouts | Approach B: Facilitated Roundtables | Approach C: Enrollment Lab (Stations) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Core Format | Auditorium opening, then breakouts | Single room with facilitated roundtables | Open room with self-paced stations, staffed by district leaders and principals |
| Learning & Sense-Making | Moderate; depends on breakout quality | High; guided simulations and discussion | Moderate; learning varies by station |
| Facilitation & Control | Moderate; breakout facilitators | High; table-level facilitators | Moderate; staff circulate |
| Escalation Risk | Moderate-to-high | Moderate-to-high | Low |
| Staffing & Complexity | Moderate | Low | High |
| Primary Tradeoff | Strong control and depth; higher facilitation burden | Familiar format; higher risk of escalation | Flexible and accessible; less shared experience |

## Key Questions to Resolve Next

### Strategic Direction

- Which engagement approach best aligns with the district's objectives?
- What characterizes "usable" input — what would the district like to be able to report to the Board in June?
- With the "end" in mind —what is the engagement approach designed to help the district achieve?

### Facilitation and Staffing

- What is the superintendent's specific role? What roles do other cabinet leaders play?
- Who will serve as facilitators, and how will their role as system leaders (not school advocates) be reinforced?
- What level of training and real-time support is required to ensure consistent facilitation quality?

### Message and Communications

- What is the exact framing for the opening and closing of each session?
- How will language used in invitations, the website, and newsletters reinforce engagement boundaries?

### Escalation Management

- What thresholds will trigger intervention during sessions?
- Who has decision authority in the moment if conversations escalate or go off-track?

### Equity and Access

- How many and where will the engagement sessions take place?

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- How will the district ensure participation from families and community members who are less likely to attend traditional meetings?
- What language access and accommodation supports are required across approaches?
- Will high school students/leaders be intentionally recruited to participate?

**Feedback Use and Follow-Through**

- What specific feedback will the ERS tools collect?
- How will feedback be synthesized and shared back with the community?
- How will conflicting input be represented honestly without undermining future decision-making?

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