

DCSD Board Meeting
Date: March 20, 2025

Meeting Overview

On March 20, 2025, the Douglas County School District Board held their regular meeting. The Board meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Charlie Wagstaff, daughter of Board President Wagstaff and a member of the performing choir.

The board approved a flexible agenda unanimously.

Principal Mike Rechs and his administrative team from Douglas High School offered a report on academic, extracurricular, and cultural developments at the high school, with an emphasis on measurable performance outcomes and targeted improvement strategies.

Rechs underscored the school-wide theme of connection—ensuring each student is connected to at least one adult, club, or academic pursuit. Enrollment is projected to decline only slightly, down approximately 15 to 20 students next year. Current attendance stands at 93.37%. Rechs noted the district-wide trend of declining enrollment begins primarily at the K-2 level, which will impact high school enrollment in future years.

Douglas High is currently rated as a four-star school under the Nevada School Performance Framework, showing a 0.5-point improvement from the prior year. With a current graduation rate of 92.48%, the administration has set a goal to reach five-star status by addressing deficiencies in absenteeism and specific academic categories.

The Advanced Placement (AP) program boasts a pass rate of 87% across 601 exams administered - national outlier in performance. Additionally, 11 graduating seniors earned both a high school diploma and an associate degree through the Jump Start dual credit program. Of the 350 graduating seniors, 88 earned a GPA above 4.0, with five achieving a GPA exceeding 5.0. One such student is currently attending Yale University.

Rechs highlighted a significant rise in National Merit recognition, with Fiona Divsov named a 2025 National Merit Finalist. This marks the second consecutive year a Douglas student has earned such distinction.

The school maintains an overall course failure rate below 6%. Algebra I remains the most failed course, consistent with national data. Administrators have initiated targeted cohort tracking, disaggregating failure data by demographics, special education status, and socioeconomic indicators to refine interventions. Rechs emphasized that 9th grade credit sufficiency and Algebra I success are pivotal to long-term graduation outcomes. Douglas High has implemented Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to evaluate performance data during their 90-minute sessions and refine instructional strategies accordingly.

Chronic absenteeism sits at 17.9%, with a targeted reduction to below 15%. Dedicated attendance secretaries have implemented proactive outreach practices, contacting families on every unverified

absence. Rechs acknowledged their impact, citing them as instrumental in student retention and performance.

In terms of accreditation, the school scored in the highest of Cognia's three performance tiers. However, meaningful feedback from the accreditation team identified interim ACT preparation and data tracking gaps. In response, Douglas staff used district-provided intervention funds to create ACT-aligned assessments across all core content areas. These were distributed to sophomores and juniors ahead of the state-mandated ACT exam, which remains scheduled shortly after the February break, reducing student readiness.

Douglas High offers a wide range of Career and Technical Education (CTE) and elective programs, including culinary, welding, auto (dual credit through WNC), business, engineering, JROTC, computer science, sports medicine, and an education-focused pathway aimed at addressing the national teacher shortage. Of special note is the partnership with Barton Health for real-world athletic training experiences in the sports medicine program.

Student engagement is robust, with nearly 40 active clubs. Participation in events such as senior sunrise, senior breakfast, and homecoming has increased notably. At the fall homecoming dance, over half the student body was in attendance.

Douglas High fields a competitive and academically distinguished athletic department. Fall sports had 336 participants. Key accolades include: Cheer team: Fall 2024 Academic State Champions across all divisions. Girls cross country: 2nd at regionals, 4th at state. Girls golf: 2nd in state; individual golf – Giana Zinke and Madi Frisby had 2nd and 6th place finishes over all. Winter sports had 205 student athletes. Achievements include: Boys basketball: 2025 4A Academic State Champions. Ski team: 2nd place in GS and overall at state. Wrestling: Ella Cavanaugh became the school's first female state champion since 2011. Spring sports are underway. Highlights include: Softball: 4-1 start, 2-0 in league. Baseball: 3-2 start. Boys golf: Won first tournament of the season.

Rechs concluded with recognition of community partners who funded professional-grade scoreboards in the gymnasium and upgraded softball/baseball facilities. Local businesses including Carson Valley Health, CVI, Simple Pump, and Nevada Trailers were commended.

Ashley Mitchell, Accountability and Grants Coordinator, provided an annual update on adjusted cohort graduation rates for DCSD. In 2024, DCSD graduated 403 students with an overall district-wide graduation rate of 88.18%. Of those: 198 earned standard diplomas 98 earned advanced diplomas 107 earned career and college ready diplomas

34 students were classified as dropouts. The district also had 10 completers (alternative diploma or high school equivalency) and 10 fifth-year seniors, the latter being considered a positive outcome under the district's credit recovery emphasis.

Subpopulation data showed: Low-income student grad rate: 60% (up from prior year) EL student grad rate: 73% (up from 59%) SPED student grad rate: 51.9% (slightly down) CTE student grad rate: increased SIT (homeless) student grad rate: 43% (up from 39%)

School-specific rates included: Douglas High: 92.48%, George Whittell High School: 75%, Aspire Academy: 55%, Jacobsen High School and other alternative programs: Variable due to small sample sizes and student mobility.

The Board welcomed the choirs from Carson Valley Middle School (CVMS) and Pau-Wa-Lu Middle School (PWLMS) for a special performance. The students presented themselves with poise and professionalism, dressed sharply and representing Douglas County with distinction.

The Board held the public comment period.

Residents addressed the board in support of Principal Rechs' earlier remarks regarding the ACT. As a parent of a current test-taker, she voiced concern over the weight placed on a single standardized test to measure both student and district success. Concern was given regarding the intense time constraints of the ACT—75 English questions in 45 minutes, 60 math questions in 60 minutes, and 40 questions each for reading and science in just 35 minutes per section. Emphasis that the ACT does not holistically reflect the capabilities of students or the quality of Douglas County's educational programs, urging the board to recognize the limitations of using this test as a singular academic benchmark.

Board approved the consent items with the removal of the minutes from DCSD's February regular meeting.

Haley Sabahar, Director of Marketing and Communication for DCSD, presented a new initiative aimed at generating district revenue by allowing local businesses to advertise on school buses. The program has launched and is currently accepting applications through the district website.

The district operates 35 buses during morning and afternoon routes and an additional eight buses for midday transportation. In coordination with Transportation Director Blair Hines, advertising locations have been identified on both sides and now the backs of buses. All ads will be printed on magnetic material to allow for repositioning as needed when buses are pulled for maintenance or rerouted. This flexibility helps ensure uninterrupted visibility for advertisers.

Businesses are responsible for designing and printing their own ads, which must be approved by the district to ensure alignment with board policies and community standards. Initial quotes for printing include \$64 for small ads and \$150 for larger ads, with pricing secured through Neil Hill at the district's sign shop. Sabahar noted that all buses are confirmed to be magnetic-compatible.

The proposed pricing structure for ad placements is as follows:

- \$300 per month for a single bus
- \$250 per month per bus for 5 to 10 buses
- \$200 per month per bus for more than 10 buses

Revenue generated through this initiative will be directed primarily toward offsetting fuel costs for the transportation department. Any potential surplus may be allocated for fleet maintenance, though fuel expenses are projected to exceed revenue from advertising in the immediate term.

Board members inquired about the flexibility and discretion involved in approving advertisements. Legal counsel confirmed that the district retains full discretion over ad approval, including considerations regarding licensure or liability issues for certain businesses such as construction firms. The district may deny applications that are deemed inconsistent with its mission, inappropriate, or potentially problematic from a legal standpoint.

The district also confirmed that advertisers may request preferred routes or regions—such as valley or lake routes—with assignments granted on a first-come, first-served basis. Sabahar plans to conduct outreach by distributing printed flyers to school sites and making presentations to both valley and lake Chamber of Commerce branches. She also maintains a list of local businesses she will be contacting directly.

The Board read statements and recognitions submitted by students, parents, and colleagues through the district's online shoutout platform. Themes of gratitude centered on exceptional teaching, mentorship, and student engagement. Teachers were praised for fostering academic growth, supporting students with IEPs, and creating environments that inspire confidence and joy in learning. Staff members like Rose Singer and Christine Insight were recognized for academic excellence and dedication, while educators such as Angela Goff were commended for building strong, inspiring programs in the arts. Several students were also acknowledged for their kindness, leadership, and school spirit.

Director of Facilities Bill Demas and County Project Manager Scott McCullough presented the proposed contract for the district-wide boiler replacement project. The recommendation was to award the contract to ACCO Engineered Systems Inc. for a not-to-exceed amount of \$1,441,000. The project includes full boiler replacements across multiple DCSD facilities and is slated for completion by August 15, 2025—prior to the return of students in the fall.

McCullough clarified that the selected bid was significantly lower than competing bids, in part because ACCO will be performing much of the plumbing work in-house, thus reducing subcontractor costs. Emphasis was placed on the importance of timely completion to avoid heating issues during the school year. Staff confirmed that a completion clause is built into the contract to ensure accountability for the August deadline.

The Board unanimously approved the motion to award the contract to ACCO Engineered Systems Inc.

The most highly contested item of the evening involved a proposal by Verizon Wireless to install a cell tower on Douglas High School property, specifically using the stadium light pole as the base for the structure. Chris Hatch from Epic Wireless introduced the project on Verizon's behalf, outlining the proposal as a potential alternative to an ongoing project at Fire Station 14. The objective of the tower is to enhance wireless coverage across East Minden, Highway 88 and 395 corridors, and surrounding public infrastructure, including the high school.

A visual simulation of the proposed installation was shown, demonstrating how an 80-foot tower would replace the current stadium lighting pole. The tower would be located roughly four feet from the existing light pole or up to 55 feet away if a more optimal location could be identified on campus. Hatch emphasized the project's flexibility in placement to accommodate school needs.



David Wachowski, CEO of Oku Solutions and a senior member of the IEEE's International Committee on Electromagnetic Safety, presented on radiofrequency (RF) safety standards during the board meeting. He outlined the difference between ionizing and non-ionizing radiation, clarifying that emissions from cellular technology—including 5G—fall into the non-ionizing category. According to Wachowski, RF energy at the levels generated by macro cell towers cannot cause cellular or DNA damage and diminishes rapidly with distance due to free space path loss.

While no formal design had been submitted by Verizon for the proposed tower at Douglas High School, Wachowski used a similar configuration from another site to conduct a preliminary RF safety analysis. Even under worst-case conditions—assuming all equipment operating at full power—his predictive model showed no areas of overexposure. He added that actual field measurements are typically five to ten times lower than predictive outputs. He also emphasized that the proposed tower would not use high-frequency millimeter-wave 5G, which is often cited in public health concerns, but would operate in the sub-6 GHz spectrum already used by existing Verizon infrastructure.

Wachowski explained that the technical distinctions between 3G, 4G, and 5G in these bands are minimal from a biological standpoint. On a spectrum analyzer, the emissions appear nearly identical, as the primary difference lies in software modulation and semiconductor efficiency. He reiterated that the projected RF emissions fall well below FCC limits and would pose no safety risk, even to individuals on nearby rooftops or bleachers.

During public comment, community members voiced skepticism over the impartiality of industry-aligned experts and cited long-term health concerns, particularly for children. Residents questioned whether the cumulative exposure from colocation with other carriers—such as AT&T and T-Mobile—had been adequately accounted for. Wachowski responded by referencing the IEEE's continuously updated standards, as well as recent work by the World Health Organization

and the 2024 Berzozek Study, which found no conclusive harm to flora or fauna from RF exposure. However, critics pointed out that such studies often ignore long-term, low-level exposure in children and that real-world data from schools with existing towers is lacking.

Tension grew as questions arose about the close relationship between federal regulatory bodies—especially the FCC—and the telecommunications industry. The court case *Environmental Health Trust v. FCC* was repeatedly cited, where the Commission was admonished for failing to provide sufficient justification for its continued reliance on outdated safety limits.

Concerns were also raised about the site selection itself. Trustees and residents questioned why Verizon was determined to place the tower on school property, when alternative sites might suffice. Epic Wireless, representing Verizon, argued that the area surrounding Douglas High School suffers from persistent coverage issues due to local topography, structural interference, and the surrounding mountain landscape. This particular location, they claimed, addresses both public safety and commercial service obligations, including support for FirstNet—a federal program used by emergency responders such as fire departments.

Trustees questioned potential liability if future health consequences emerged. There were calls for an independent, third-party evaluation—completely unaffiliated with the telecommunications industry—and for data collection from existing school sites. Epic Wireless replied that if post-installation safety analyses ever exceeded FCC-mandated thresholds, the tower would not be activated. They also emphasized that each carrier would be required to conduct their own RF exposure assessments if they were to collocate on the structure.

Aesthetics and functional concerns were also discussed. The proposed compound would take up approximately 15x20 feet near the school stadium and include three refrigerator-sized cabinets and a backup generator. While the structure would match nearby architecture, some trustees worried about its visibility and interference with crowd flow during athletic events. Presenters responded that they were open to modifying placement in collaboration with the school.

On the question of permanence, Epic Wireless noted that tower contracts are typically for 30 years, with lease renewals every five years. While the infrastructure can be removed, such actions are rare. They offered to conduct post-installation electromagnetic energy (EME) testing and provide reports but acknowledged that continuous monitoring was not feasible for a public school environment.

Despite assurances from the presenters, many trustees remained deeply concerned. Some cited the irreversible nature of the decision, especially without long-term safety data or overwhelming community support. Others highlighted the need for improved cellular coverage in emergencies, especially during power outages, where parents, students, and staff are often left disconnected.

Trustee positions became clear as the board deliberated. Trustee Dave Burns made a motion to deny the request for Verizon to begin formal negotiations with the district. Trustee Susan Jansen seconded the motion. Trustees Catherine Dickerson and Sandy Knighting also voted in favor. Burns, Jansen, Dickerson, and Knighting cited the irreversibility of the decision, their duty to protect students, and the enduring legacy of their vote. Trustees Erin Miller, Marcus Zinke, and Yvonne Wagstaff all abstained, citing a need for more data and public input before making a decision.

Wagstaff and Miller in particular emphasized the importance of reliable cell coverage. The motion passed with four votes in favor and three abstentions to deny Verizon the ability to move forward with negotiations for the proposed tower location

During the student representative report, Olive Hamner-Jilson, a senior at Douglas High School, shared updates from around the school district. She began by expressing her excitement to serve on the board and reiterated her goal of fostering a unified and thriving school environment across both the lake and valley schools. She provided updates from Whittell High School, noting that both the track and boys' golf teams have begun training indoors due to cold weather. Additionally, students at Zephyr Cove and Whittell Middle School recently enjoyed a skiing trip, and Whittell's culinary program is preparing for its upcoming themed dinner night, which will feature an E.T.-inspired menu.

At Douglas High School, Olive highlighted that spring sports are underway, a play titled *The Women* is approaching, and prom is scheduled for April 12th. She also shared her ongoing efforts to engage with students across the district, gathering their ideas and feedback to bring to the board. In addition to student input, Olive has begun conversations with teachers about sustainability efforts. She expressed enthusiasm for expanding the composting program currently in place at Zephyr Cove Elementary to Whittell and potentially all schools in the district. Her report concluded with appreciation from the board for her efforts and contributions.

The board then moved on to discuss the proposed curriculum adoption of *My.Perspectives* instructional material for grades 6–12 English Language Arts in the Douglas County School District. Leslie Peters, Assistant Director of Education Services, appeared to present the proposal. The presentation was deliberately cut short by the President of the School Board, Yvonne Wagstaff who was also part of the adoption team for this proposed curriculum.

The proposed curriculum, *My.Perspectives*, was presented as a comprehensive, standards-aligned program designed to support middle and high school students in developing reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Peters explained the process used to evaluate the material, which included teacher input, pilot testing, and a review of how the program aligns with Nevada Academic Content Standards. The curriculum includes diverse texts, integrates digital resources, and encourages student voice and choice in the learning process.

The meaning of the phrase “negotiating the identity of a student,” a concept presented in the proposed curriculum materials, was questioned. What drew particular attention was Assistant Director Peters' response—she stated that she did not know what the phrase meant. This is likely to be viewed as a serious oversight, as the concept of student identity is a central theme of the curriculum, *My.Perspectives*.

NOTE: The *My.Perspectives* English Language Arts curriculum includes content related to gender identity as part of its educational framework. Specifically, it features assignments such as "analyze how characters' gender identities influence their actions and relationships in the story" and "analyze how the protagonist's journey of self-discovery challenges traditional gender norms," drawing from texts like Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. These activities engage students with concepts of gender fluidity and non-traditional roles through literary analysis. The curriculum

presents these topics as factual components of its approach to fostering critical thinking and exploring complex themes.

Board members asked questions regarding the content selection process, the diversity of texts and authors included in the curriculum, and how the program accommodates various learning styles and student needs. Concerns were raised about ensuring parental transparency and options for opting out of particular texts if needed. Peters assured the board that the program includes a variety of supplemental materials and is adaptable to different classroom needs. She also confirmed that parent access to materials and opt-out procedures were in place and consistent with district policy.

My.Perspectives curriculum was approved for adoption unanimously. The board's decision to move forward without demanding transparent definitions or examples from the curriculum on this subject should raise alarms. It is imperative that this issue be revisited with public input and a clear-eyed evaluation of whether this curriculum aligns with the values of the families this board was elected to represent.

Board Policy 518 – Graduation Requirements was presented without changes since its initial reading. Mr. Alvarado confirmed that the language remained the same. No public comment was received, either in person or online. Trustee Knighting made the motion to approve the policy, which was seconded by Trustee Burns, and the motion passed unanimously. This policy outlines the credit and course completion requirements needed for students to graduate, aligning with state and district academic expectations.

Board Policy 815 – Public Records Requests also returned for a second reading with no modifications. Mr. Alvarado emphasized that the fee structure—\$0.10 per page for either printed or digital documents—remains unchanged. He also noted the availability of an online form on the district website, intended to make submitting public records requests more accessible and efficient. Again, no public comment was received. Trustee Miller motioned to approve the policy, with Trustee Jansen seconding. The motion passed unanimously.

Board Policy 904 – Complaint Policy was the final policy discussed. It also remained unchanged from its previous presentation. This policy outlines the procedures for filing and resolving complaints brought forth by students, staff, parents, or community members and aims to ensure the process is transparent, timely, and fair. With no public comment on the item, Trustee Zinke moved to approve the policy, seconded by Trustee Miller, and the motion was carried unanimously.

During the Board Reports, trustees shared brief updates on their recent activities. Many members, including Knighting, Dickerson, Jansen, and Wagstaff, attended the two-day NASB training and Legislative Day at the Nevada State Capitol, where they met with lawmakers including Assemblyman Ken Gray and staff from Senator Robin Titus' office. Trustees also visited several school sites, including Scarselli, Pau-Wa-Lu, and Minden Elementary, noting enthusiastic student performances such as the MES production of Pinocchio and positive campus tours. Wagstaff gave a report about her participation in a Dr. Seuss-themed breakfast at Zephyr Cove Elementary, where green eggs and ham were served in collaboration with local firefighters and Rotary members. She also presented at the district's Learning Forum on a pilot compost program that began in 2022, which may expand across the district.

Zinke updated the board on developments from the Chamber of Commerce and Parks & Recreation, mentioning commercial projects near the high school and proposed infrastructure improvements like restrooms for soaring operations at the airport. He also attended the “Mr. DHS” event, describing it as hilariously entertaining and a great community showcase of student spirit. Miller also shared her enthusiasm for the school visits and Learning Forum and reported attending recent Douglas County Commissioner meetings virtually.

Superintendent Frankie Alvarado focused on several districtwide initiatives. He detailed his recent attendance at the National School Superintendents Conference in New Orleans and his participation in the National School Public Relations Association’s professional development modules. Alvarado emphasized the district’s work on the next Strategic Plan, including a gallery walk and prioritization exercise with over 70 district stakeholders. A student voice day is planned to collect feedback directly from students, which will then inform the strategic planning process. He also began hosting informal “Chat with the Superintendent” lunches with staff at Douglas High School, where he received valuable feedback for cabinet-level discussion.

Mr. Alvarado recognized the district’s IT team, specifically Jesse Abell and the support staff, for their behind-the-scenes work in ensuring technology and communications run smoothly across all district events. He praised the March 13 Learning Forum for staff as a success, noting the wide array of professional learning sessions and vendor engagement. He also celebrated Vivian Michalik, who was named Northern Nevada’s STEM Teacher of the Year by the George Gillemot Foundation and also received the Outstanding Citizen of the Year Award.

Mr. Alvarado acknowledged generous contributions from Carson Valley Inn, which donated \$2,500 to C.C. Meneley Elementary School, and two vehicle donations to the DHS auto program—a 2006 Honda Odyssey from Dolly Caldwell and a 2006 Chrysler PT Cruiser from Rose Wadkowski.

The meeting concluded with a brief update on student enrollment, showing a drop of seven students since the previous month. Alvarado also reported on a facilities walk at Gardnerville Elementary School regarding potential impacts from a nearby 29-townhome development. He indicated that the district would likely allow for a secondary emergency access gate and proposed installing a crosswalk light on Giles Street to improve student safety during school hours.

The final agenda item was tabled at the advice of legal counsel, and the meeting was officially adjourned.