



CHANGE IS COMING

Story/ L.Thomas
Illustration/ L.Thomas

The Des Moines Public Schools Community School
Coordinator positions will look **different** next year





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For the upcoming school year; 2024-2025, Des Moines Public Schools is re-organizing the Community School Coordinator positions for all schools. Some schools will have CSCs, some will not, some will have one part time or share theirs with another building. This change will have an impact on students, teachers, and staff.

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DMPS is creating a new position for CSCs that required them to re-apply for their jobs. If they choose to re-apply, it could lead to a 24 percent pay cut and the possibility of them being placed at another school. There is so much uncertainty in the whole situation and it’s causing a lot of stress for the Community Schools Coordinators, administration in schools, students, and families.

According to an open letter created by the DMPS Community School Coordinators, “On Jan. 29, 2024, current CSCs were informed that we would be laid off and invited to re-apply for a reduced number of positions- from 42 full-time positions at the start of the 2023-2024 school year, to 24 full-time allocations for the 2024-2025 school year.”

Since the original decision made by DMPS to cut down to 24 full-time allocations, it has now increased to 28 full-time positions.

“There are financial reasons associated to the allocation of staffing. Community schools was expanded dramatically with the use of one-time funds, ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund). This expansion is not sustainable since the funds used are coming to an end on June 30, 2024. The district has looked for other funding sources to sustain staffing and has been able to secure just over \$2.1 million. Based on the cost of each employee, the district estimated it could afford 28 full-time employees serving as community school coordinators,” Troja said.

There are CSCs that will be left with no jobs because there will be only half of the current positions available.

According to the letter, “On Jan. 30, 2024, CSCs and principals were informed that 12 schools will receive no district funding for this position and the remaining schools, except four high schools, will receive funding for only a half-time position.”

All high schools, except Hoover, are expecting to maintain a full time CSC, but elementary schools will be sharing CSC between buildings.

The letter also states that, “The changes include switching the role from specialist to paraprofessional and an hourly rather than salaried position. This new position is also an average 24 percent pay reduction (approximately \$15,000 less) for all current coordinators. The new position has largely the same responsibilities as the current position, with coordinators asked to support more schools, for less pay and benefits.”

One of the main changes is the role is being switched from a specialist to a paraprofessional.

“Based on the updated job description submitted, the business and finance team has classified the position as non-exempt (hourly based), which would label it as paraprofessional. If the position was evaluated as exempt (salary based), it would likely be classified as a specialist,” Troja said.

Although these positions will still exist in some capacity within the district, the changes are concerning for current CSCs as their role is vital for schools and the community.

“Community schools coordinators are the primary connection to the community for students and families. We serve as point people in the buildings in order to help parents, students and community partners navigate the school system and access resources quickly. Coordinators at all levels help with integrated student supports that enhance students’ experiences at school both in the classroom and outside the classroom through leadership development groups, after school clubs and programs, family events and much more. We also manage all of the basic need resources like homeless support, food insecurity (pantries), and other social systems (housing, juvenile courts, domestic violence etc.)” East Community School Coordinator Madeline Cano



East is one of the many schools that has a fully stocked pantry that can be utilized by students and families, one of the many jobs CSCs do is manage these pantries.

According to the CSCs, during the 2023 calendar year, there were 26,774 pantry visits at schools and 45,590 basic need items distributed to students.

The CSCs also work to ensure that students feel comfortable and supported when having to transition to new buildings. Usually, this may come with out of school preparation, for instance, here at East High there is the Scarlet Squad which is coordinated by Cano. These groups spend time outside of the school day and the academic calendar year preparing and offering support with events like open house and ninth grade orientation. 26.6 percent of K-fifth, 50.9 percent of sixth-eighth, 52.8 percent of ninth- twelfth graders engaged in out of school time programming in 2023.

Just in the 2023 calendar year, the CSCs acquired \$1,266,637 in donations and 18,914 total volunteer hours were coordinated that supported DMPS.

This has left students and teachers wondering why the only solution is to reduce CSC staffing and remove the CSCs from their current communities and schools.

“This makes me feel upset because I have seen the amazing leadership role that our CSC Maddie Cano at East has taken here. She took on so many things above her job description that us at East recognize. She helped us feel like a family,” senior Juliette Bernal said.

CSCs roles go beyond the job description, forming and supporting strong relationships. They inspire many students and encourage them to branch out. CSCs can also provide several opportunities for students as well.

“I would consider Maddie a strong mentor in my life. She has really pushed me to be the best I can in leadership spaces and has connected me to many aspects of my life. I wouldn't be who I am today if it wasn't for my positive relationship with Maddie. Maddie has given me many leadership opportunities such as through Scarlet Squad and student government. In addition, her and I work to distribute menstrual products to the bathrooms, so students have free access, and she hosts so many events that have given me opportunities for networking and connection within my community. She has always been helpful, insightful, and transparent with me which is exactly what I have needed during my time here at East,” senior Raegan Park said.

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