



**2390 Main Ave  
Durango, CO 81301  
(970) 259-1630  
[dhs.durangoschools.org](http://dhs.durangoschools.org)**

Dear Families:

For the last four years, including this school year, Durango High School has organized freshman and sophomore students into three Small Learning Communities: Atlas, Basecamp, and DAVINCI. Students have been offered choice as to which SLC they want to be a part of and teachers have been engaged in high quality professional development. Our data shows that students are making growth academically and that students feel connected to their classmates and their teachers. This has been especially important for our freshman students as they transition from 8th to 9th grade. We have also seen great success with elements from each of our three SLCs. CREW, Foundations, Student-led conferences, interdisciplinary projects, student expeditions and field work, Showcase, and service projects are a sampling of the great work our students and staff have engaged in.

We also know that our SLCs have presented challenges and barriers for some students. CREW, Foundations, and Atlas electives have limited choice for students in 9th and 10th grade, and many of the great opportunities available in one SLC have not been afforded to all students at a particular grade level.

It has also been a challenge to realize the distinct differences in methodology in our core classes across SLCs. With changes to graduation requirements on the horizon and continued budgetary challenges, Durango High School will need flexibility in programming for students, which I'm not sure our current SLC model can provide.

As a result of these reflections and conversations with staff, students, and parents, Durango High School will be shifting away from Atlas, Basecamp, and DAVINCI beginning next school year. Instead, students will be a part of a grade level team that will embrace a common instructional methodology for all students. That common instructional methodology will be grounded in the quality professional development our staff has engaged in over the last four years.

Beginning this month and continuing into the fall of next year, I will be engaging students, parents, and staff in open conversations on what that common instructional methodology should look like. What elements within our SLCs should be maintained for all students? Should 9th graders have something required that other grade levels do not? Should our teams be a single grade level or broken in to smaller teams within a grade level, all using the same methodology? These are but a few of the questions I hope we can all answer as a school community.

So how can you get involved? I encourage you to come to my regular principal meetings held the first Wednesday of every month from 8:30-9:30. This month's meeting happened already, but I am adding a second meeting this month to answer your questions and hear your suggestions. Please plan on joining me in the Durango High School Library on January 20th at 5:30. If you'd prefer to email me questions or suggestions, that is fine too. Please also encourage your students to attend my Pizza with the Principal sessions organized by Student Council. Their input is hugely valuable in developing programming that will meet their needs. Pizza with the Principal dates will be shared during our morning announcements, fliers in the hallway, and this newsletter.

I look forward to meeting with you and hearing your ideas.

Sincerely,  
*Leanne Garcia*