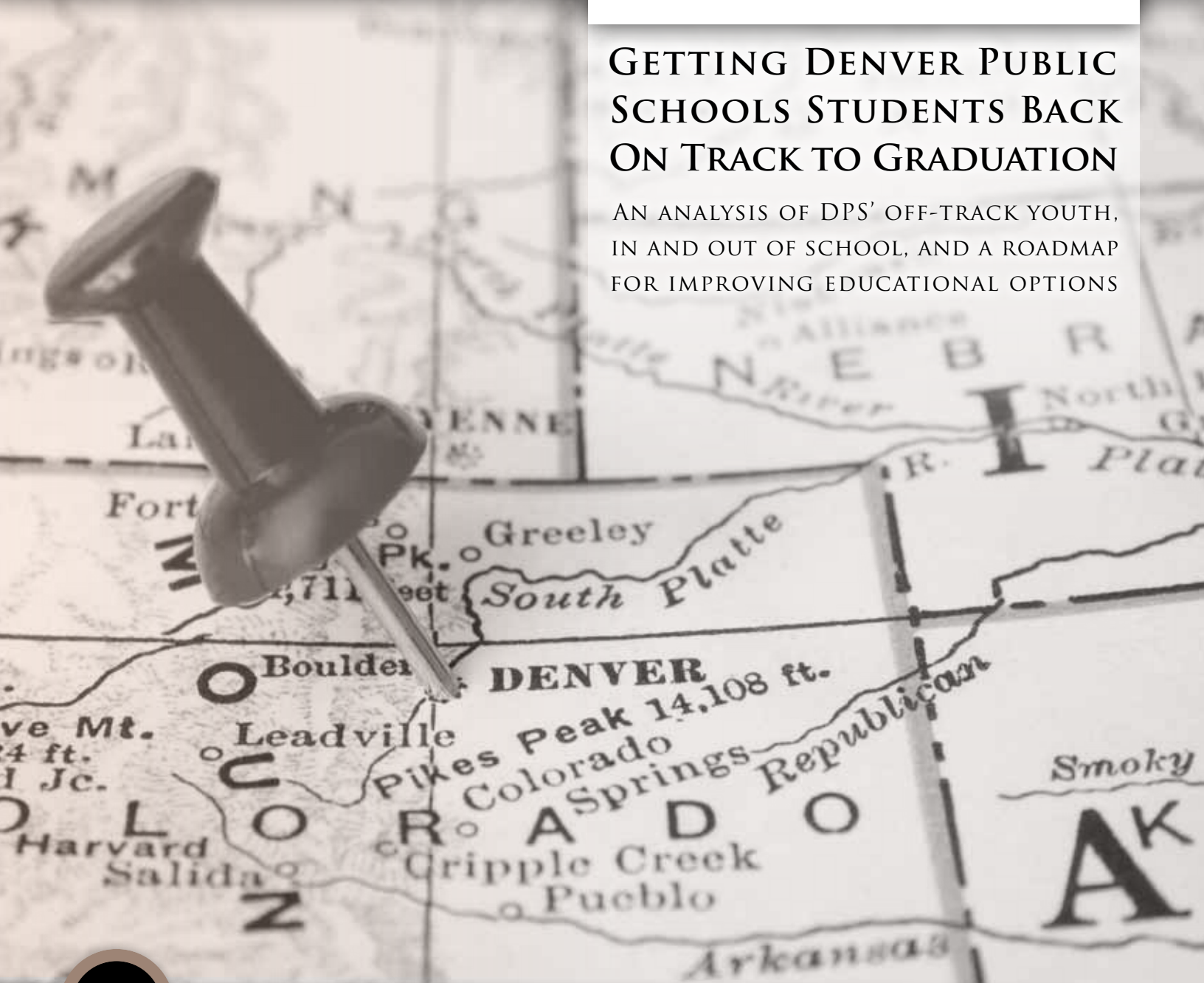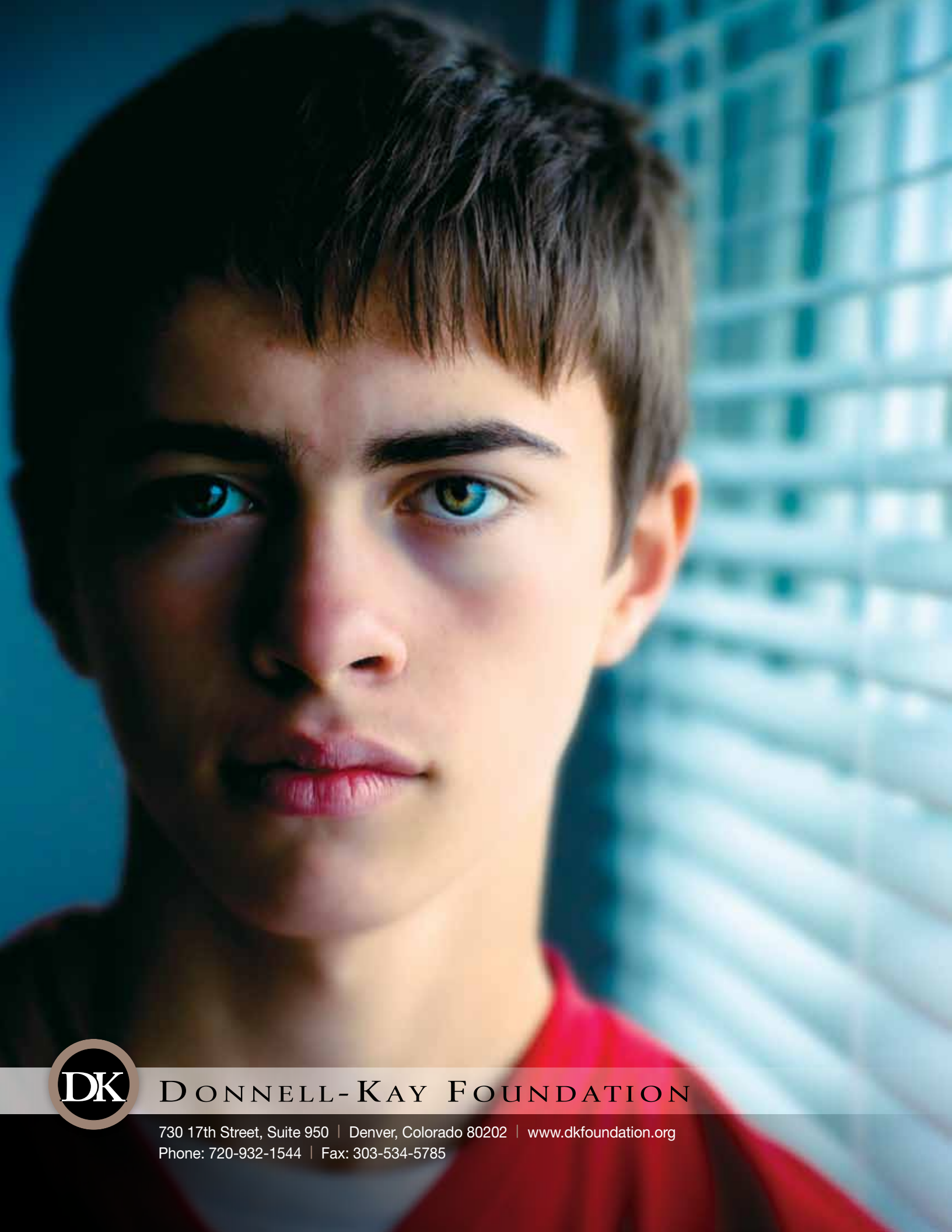# A Call to Action:

Getting Denver Public Schools Students Back On Track to Graduation

An analysis of DPS' off-track youth, in and out of school, and a roadmap for improving educational options

DK Donnell-Kay Foundation

By **Kim Knous Dolan**, Associate Director, Donnell-Kay Foundation and

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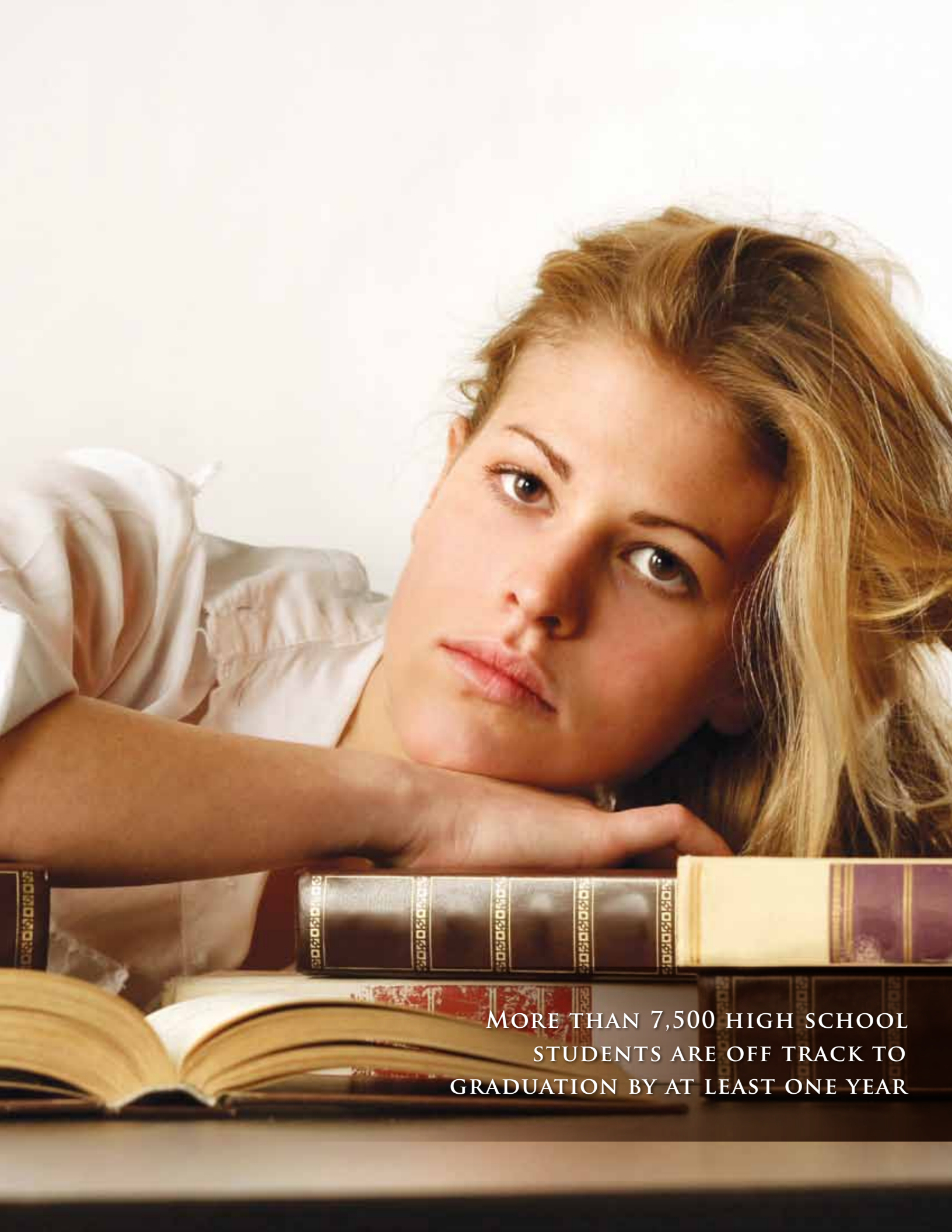With Significant Contributions by **Christine Sturgis**, Principal, MetisNet

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More than 7,500 high school students are off track to graduation by at least one year

I. Executive Summary

Keeping students in high school and graduating them is a continuous national challenge. In most city school districts, roughly half of the students who begin ninth grade do not finish high school in four years. Denver is no exception.

This paper is a call to action. Denver Public Schools (DPS) must take the lead in tackling the graduation crisis, and because this issue is so complex, the city of Denver, nonprofits, foundations, businesses, and governmental agencies will need to closely partner with the district to make a significant difference.

To prepare Denver's youth for academic and life success, students must stay in school. When students fail to graduate from high school, their economic life is essentially over. Statistic after statistic points to the negative outcomes for dropouts personally, including low wages and a life of poverty, as well as for society as a whole.[1]

To successfully tackle the graduation crisis, DPS must not only recover those students who have left school but also support those students who are at risk of leaving school. With few exceptions, the vast majority of high school dropouts were, at one time, off track to graduation. The focus must therefore center on off-track students, in school and out of school.

This report conservatively estimates there are *at least* 6,000 out-of-school students living in the Denver area still eligible to receive a high school diploma. Furthermore, nearly 3,000 ninth grade students[2] in Denver Public Schools are off track to graduation based on number of failed semester courses, and more than 7,500 9-12 grade students *in school* are off track by at least one year based on the number of credits they have accumulated relative to their age.[3]

The significant number of students, in school and out of school, who are off track to graduation – more than 40 percent of the high school student population – demonstrates that existing schools have not met these students' educational needs. Based on interviews with national experts as well as local leaders familiar with dropout recovery in Denver, preliminary analysis reveals:

1) Scale and Access: There are an inadequate number of alternative schools designed to help students complete their diploma.

2) Quality: The quality of existing alternative schools is of such concern that Denver is at risk of offering a second-class system to those students most in need.

3) Location and Mix: Students are not well served by the mix and location of schools currently offered by DPS.

A diversity of student needs requires a variety of options for students to choose from, but the current options in DPS are insufficient to meet the needs of all students.

The good news is better data on students is now available, providing key information to develop effective prevention and recuperation strategies. Data analysis by Johns Hopkins University as well as Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC) suggests we can now identify as early as middle school which students are falling off track to graduation. Systemically capturing and acting on such data can help stem the tide of eventual dropouts.

More research, however, is needed to analyze the patterns of off-track youth in DPS, particularly overaged and undercredited 17-21 year old students who represent 31 percent of all students in school and 47 percent of the out-of-school population. Solid data is needed to inform effective strategies for meeting the needs of this sizable group.

A few steps are being taken by DPS leadership to

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1   The Colorado Children's Campaign (2005). *The High Cost of Not Graduating High School*. Retrieved September 7th, 2009 from www.dkfoundation.org.

2   MacIver, Balfanz, and Byrnes (April 2009). *Dropouts in the Denver Public Schools: Early Warning Signals and Possibilities for Prevention and Recovery*. Baltimore, Maryland: (CSOS) Johns Hopkins University.

3   See Appendix B.

More than half of all Denver Public Schools students who start ninth grade do not graduate within four years

strengthen prevention and recuperation in the middle school and early high school years, and to create a portfolio of new school options while establishing a stronger accountability system. These efforts, however, will be incomplete and inadequate until the district fully understands the trends and needs of its off-track students, in school and out of school, and creates a strategy to attract and create specific, quality alternative schooling options for those students.

In order to adequately address the dropout problem, key actions DPS must take include:

1) Thoroughly Assess Demand: Analyze and understand the dynamics of the Denver graduation crisis by conducting research and a complete analysis of data on the off-track student population

2) Increase Responsiveness:

• *Prevention*: Increase the number of students on track to graduation through implementing an early warning data system and comprehensive interventions starting as early as sixth grade

• *Recuperation*: Assess and improve the capacity of the district to get minimally off-track students back on track to graduation, including supports such as credit recovery, summer school, and effective alternative programs

• *Recovery*: Conduct aggressive outreach to re-engage out-of-school youth; assess and improve options for re-enrollment (including one-stop enrollment centers); and create a streamlined and supportive process to develop new, high quality alternative schools

3) Implement a 100 Percent Graduation Policy: Align district and school policies and practices to ensure a 100 percent graduation rate

4) Learn From Others: Look to other districts who are successfully addressing the graduation crisis – particularly New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Portland – for effective strategies, best practices, and successful school models

DPS must act now. If it fully commits to the steps outlined above, DPS can make serious strides in the next two years to reduce the number of students falling off track, to increase the number of high school graduates, and to set a solid foundation to strive toward a 100 percent graduation rate.

The district cannot do this work alone. Collaboration with nonprofits, foundations, government agencies, businesses, and communities, is critical to helping DPS better understand the educational needs of students, evaluating the district's own capacity to serve these students, and aligning both policies and practices to ensure all students receive a high quality education and reach the graduation goal line.

II. OVERVIEW

More than half of all Denver Public Schools (DPS) students who start in the ninth grade do not graduate within four years.[4] If DPS is to significantly impact this graduation crisis, it must prioritize the implementation of systemic and research-based strategies around prevention, recuperation, and recovery of off-track students. With a 100 percent graduation goal in mind, policies need to be established with appropriate incentives for districts, schools, parents and students to keep youth in school through graduation.

If we do nothing, our four year graduation rates will continue to hover around 50 percent, impacting our economy, the strength of our communities, and the early-learning and overall health of the next generation. While there are many advantages to obtaining a high school diploma, a recent study entitled "Cities In Crisis"[5] asserts that when a Denver resident earns a high school diploma, it cuts that person's chances of experiencing poverty in half. Furthermore, if young parents of children can earn a diploma and decrease their chances of living in poverty, this will have a profound impact on improving the early learning conditions of their children. Thus, investments in our students that are off track to graduation also lift up the next generation of learners.

To dramatically increase the number of graduates, it is imperative to design strategies focused on:

- **Prevention** of dropouts by implementing an early warning data system and comprehensive interventions starting as early as sixth grade;

- **Recuperation** to get off-track students back on track to graduation, including supports such as credit recovery, summer school, and effective alternative programs; and

- **Recovery** to re-engage out-of-school youth including conducting aggressive outreach; assessing and improving options for re-enrollment (including one-stop enrollment centers); and creating a streamlined and supportive process to develop new, high quality alternative schools.

Each of these strategies is critical and all must work simultaneously to impact this complex problem. The district has expressed a commitment to create an early warning system that monitors on-track indicators to graduation – such as attendance, behavior, and course failures. Such an increase in responsiveness to students showing signs of disengagement would significantly improve current efforts at *prevention* and DPS should design and implement such an early warning system immediately.

This report, however, largely concentrates on the need for a more strategic approach to *recuperation and recovery*. It goes a step beyond and focuses on the district taking a comprehensive, research-based approach to respond to the variety of needs of all off-track youth, including overaged and undercredited students. These are students for whom many prevention and modest credit recovery options will not be sufficient – students who have fallen off track enough to need an entirely different schooling option. The district will need to examine its off-track population as a whole to determine the optimal portfolio of schools to reach a 100 percent graduation goal.

Following is an overview of the current alternative education landscape in DPS, including a review of the demand for non-traditional schooling options and the supply of alternative programs. Based on this information, this report presents recommendations to the district on ways to more effectively meet the needs of Denver's off-track youth, in school and out of school.

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4   MacIver, Balfanz, and Byrnes (April 2009). *Dropouts in the Denver Public Schools: Early Warning Signals and Possibilities for Prevention and Recovery*. Baltimore, Maryland: CSOS Johns Hopkins University.

5   Swanson, Christopher, Ph D. (April 2009). *Cities in Crisis: Closing the Graduation Gap*. Prepared with support from the America's Promise Alliance and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

31 PERCENT OF ALL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE OVER THE AGE OF 17 AND SEVERAL YEARS BEHIND IN CREDITS

III. Denver Context

DPS leadership is taking preliminary steps to address the graduation crisis. As part of its new schools process, DPS has placed a priority on seeking alternative-school providers designed for off-track students. Additionally, it is revamping its accountability standards to more accurately reflect the effectiveness of alternative schools. Furthermore, DPS is seeking to improve its existing high schools by developing prevention strategies to intervene with frequently absent students, offering more credit-recovery programs and evening courses, and creating re-engagement centers that help connect students to educational options.

Although DPS is making important improvements, it lacks a clear and comprehensive strategy around how best to serve the needs of off-track youth. The Board recently expressed concern that it has not received sufficient response from quality providers to its request for proposal for new alternative options.[6]

Furthermore, DPS does not yet have policies or data systems in place to determine which students are considered off track to graduation or to monitor the on-track rate. From the data that is available, however, it is clear that a significant number of students are off track to graduation:

- 2006-2007 DPS data shows that over 7,500 students in school (approximately 42 percent of the high school student population) were off track to graduate by at least one year based on age and number of credits accumulated. An additional 2,400 out-of-school students were off track.[7]

Of the 7,500 students in school and off track to graduation, more than 5,000 (31 percent of total high school population) were over the age of 17, many of them several years behind in credits. Additionally, overaged and undercredited youth comprise 47 percent of the out-of-school student population. Prevention strategies and credit recovery programs will not be enough to address the needs of this population. Quality alternative schools are necessary.

DPS must create a data-driven strategy that is based on a thorough understanding of student needs and that calls for specific models to fill gaps. For example, in Philadelphia, the district evaluated its data and found it did not have appropriate schooling options for overaged and undercredited students. It thus invested in "accelerated schools" based on the successful Fairhill Community High School pilot model, which allows students to earn a diploma within 30 months, based on how many credits they have when they enter the school.[8]

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6   Mitchell, N. (2009). *DPS Tackling High School Reform*. Retrieved August 11, 2009, from: http://ednewscolorado.org/page10405947.aspx.

7   See Chart 1 in Box 1.

8   *Closing the Graduation Gap: A Superintendents' Guide for Planning Multiple Pathways to Graduation* (October 2008). Retrieved on June 7th, 2009 from: Youth Transition Funders Group, www.ytfg.org.

Understanding The Scale & Nature Of Our Challenge

In order to fully address its graduation crisis, it is absolutely essential DPS understand its off-track student population and its needs. There is limited data currently available to thoroughly determine the number and needs of students off track to graduation. Recent work by Johns Hopkins University, however, provides information on students in the sixth through ninth grade and is helpful in creating appropriate prevention systems.
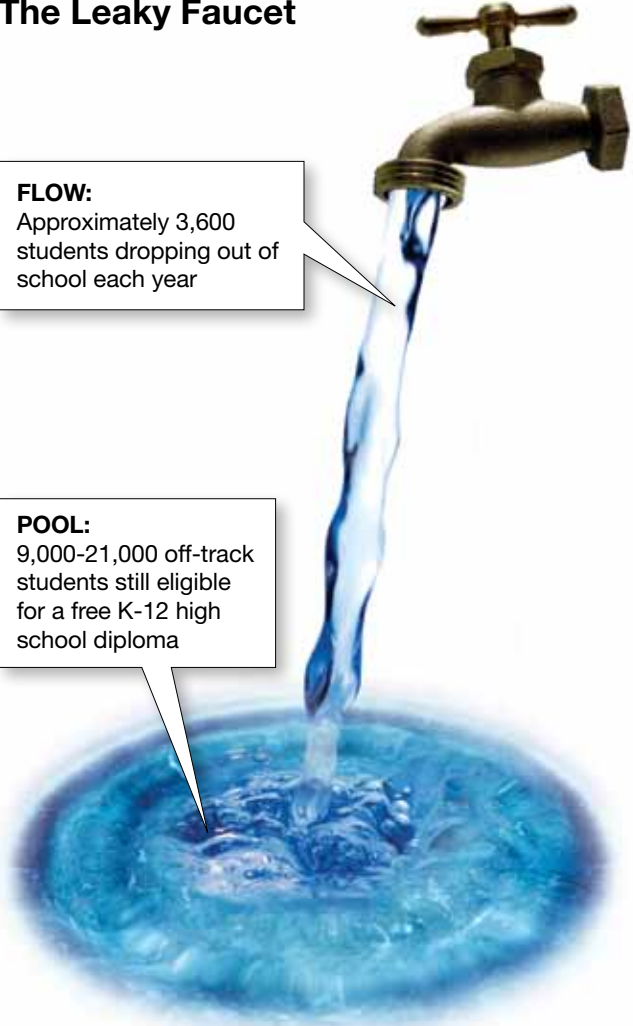
Below is the best approximation of students off track to graduation, in school and out of school, based on the limited data available at present. The district will need to conduct an in-depth analysis to determine the exact nature of its off-track student population.

Demand: Analysis of Students Off Track to Graduation

There are two different ways to understand the demand for alternative options. First, there is the *flow* of students leaving high school each year without a diploma. The second is the *pool* of students in school but off track to graduation, as well as those students out of school who remain eligible, by age, to receive a high school diploma.[9] The flow contributes directly to the overall pool of students off track to graduation, but stemming the flow will not dry the massive pool that already exists.

FLOW: The number of students leaving DPS schools each year is approximately 10 percent (or 3,657 students in grades 7-12).[10] Some of the students who do not return to school for a diploma may take advantage of GED programs, but there is little evidence that this is better preparing them to pursue post-secondary education or careers.[11] It is critical to stem this outflow of students.

The Leaky Faucet

FLOW:
Approximately 3,600 students dropping out of school each year

POOL:
9,000-21,000 off-track students still eligible for a free K-12 high school diploma

DPS must not only stem the flow of students falling off track, but also tend to the pool of students already off track.

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9   It is possible to argue that the problem is larger than what is being described if we include students who are unprepared for a post-secondary option. It is critical to focus on getting students a diploma while simultaneously increasing alignment between high school and college/career readiness.

10   MacIver, Balfanz, and Byrnes (April 2009). *Dropouts in the Denver Public Schools: Early Warning Signals and Possibilities for Prevention and Recovery*. Baltimore, Maryland: CSOS Johns Hopkins University. Of note, this is the annual rate of dropouts, different from the four-year cohort dropout rate of roughly 50 percent in DPS, which represents students who started in ninth grade and should have graduated within four years.

11   Urban Education (2008). *Do GED Recipients Differ from Graduates and School Dropouts? Findings from an Inner City Cohort*. Retrieved on August 6th, 2009 from: http://uex.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/43/1/83.

POOL: There are two populations of students to consider when analyzing the pool of students in need of recuperation and recovery options: 1) students in school who have fallen off track to graduation and 2) students out of school who have not yet aged out of the K-12 system and thus remain eligible to receive a free opportunity to obtain a high school diploma.

In School - First, there is the pool of students that are in school but have fallen off track to graduation. There are several ways to determine the off-track rate. Directly below we base our estimate on Johns Hopkins University data, which relies on course failures. In Box 1, however, the number of off-track students is based on age and number of credits accumulated toward earning a diploma. Ultimately, DPS will need to set its own policies to determine which students are "off track" to graduation.

Johns Hopkins University's research points to approximately 3,000 students who failed three or more semester courses in the ninth grade. These students are off track to graduation and are in need of recuperative strategies as well as alternative settings. Data on the number of students failing courses in grades 10-12 does not exist. Johns Hopkins' work in Baltimore, however, found that there are at least as many or more students failing in grades 10-12 as in grade 9. Therefore, our approximation of the pool of students in school and off track (3,000 ninth graders) is a significant underestimate.

Out Of School - The other population to examine is students out of school but who have not yet aged out of the K-12 system. Department of Labor data helps provide an estimate of this number, but it is based on 16-24 year olds, and schools in Colorado are only eligible to receive funding for students until they are age 21.[12] There are over 70,000 16-24 year olds living in Denver and an analysis from a recent report suggests that in major cities roughly 16 percent of this population does not have a high school diploma.[13] This would mean more than 11,000 dropouts ages 16-24 are likely living in Denver. Taking a proportion of these students results in a rough approximation of 6,000 students ages 16-20 who are still eligible to receive a free high school diploma.

It is important to note that many working with this population in the Denver area, including policy experts, believe the number of out-of-school students is actually much higher and better reflected by an estimate from a Youth Connections in Large Cities Report, which suggests there are nearly 18,000 out-of-school youth without a high school diploma living in the Denver area.[14]

If the pool of an estimated 3,000 off-track ninth graders[15] is added to either the 6,000 eligible students under 21 who could return to school (based on Census Data) or to the 18,000 students indicated as being out of school and living in Denver by Youth Connections, this results in a total of *9,000-21,000* youth that could benefit from recuperative and recovery strategies. Plus, thousands of additional youth will need access to educational and employment services to help them re-connect with quality GED options, training and work because they have likely aged out of the K-12 system.[16]

Box 1:

DETERMINING DEMAND FOR ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS BY AGE AND CREDITS

Another way to determine the demand for alternative options, or the number of seats needed in alternative education schools, is to examine the number of students off track to graduation based on age and credits.

Each district defines off track differently. Usually a student is considered off track if he/she is one or two years behind, based on expected age and credit accumulation, in completing graduation requirements. New York City determines a student to be off track when he/she is two years behind, while a student in Chicago is considered off track when he/she is one year behind. For the purposes of this paper, off track is defined as being *one year* behind. If a student has failed enough courses to be behind by one grade level, clearly traditional schooling may not be effective and a student will require significant additional support or a new schooling option.

A student's proximity to graduation can be estimated by the amount of credits he/she has obtained as compared to his/her peers of the same age. To simplify, students are placed into four categories:

- On-track
- Young and off-track
- Old and off-track
- Old and significantly off-track

"Young" includes students ages 14, 15, and 16. "Old" includes students ages 17, 18, 19, and 20. Students that are on track to graduation have obtained credits similar to the typical age range of their peers. Students off track to graduation are behind approximately one grade level or more (based on the number of credits obtained) as compared to the typical age range of their peers. Those students qualifying as "old and significantly off-track" are likely too far behind to obtain a traditional diploma before aging out of the system at 21.

For the 2006-2007 school year, Denver Public Schools collected data on the number of students off track to graduation who were still in school and Colorado Youth for a Change collected data on students off track to graduation who had already dropped out (**see Appendix B and Appendix C**). This data includes details about students' ages and the number of credits obtained. In 2006-2007, a Denver Public Schools student needed 220 credits to graduate. The

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12   An exception to this is certain special education students who may receive state education funding until they are 24 years old.

13   Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University (2009). *Left Behind in America: The Nation's Dropout Crisis*. Retrieved on June 7th, 2009 from: http://www.clms.neu.edu/publication/documents/CLMS_2009_Dropout_Report.pdf.

14   Fogg, Harrington, and McCabe (June 2005). *Youth Connection in Large Cities (Prepared for US Conference of Mayors)*. Boston, MA: Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University.

typical age range and credits for students at each grade level was thus as follows:

Grade	Credits	Typical Age Range
Freshman	5-54	14-15
Sophomore	55-109	15-16
Junior	110-164	16-17
Senior	165-220	17-18
Senior and Above	220+	17-20

Using this data and the typical credits and age range for each grade, the following charts provide a rough estimation of the approximate number of students, in school and out of school, that need alternative options in order to graduate.[17]

As **Chart 1** depicts, in 2006-2007 there were 11,274 students on track to graduation, both in school and out of school. There were 10,005 students off track to graduation, both in school and out of school. Those students on track to graduation and in school typically will not require an alternative option and will likely stay in a traditional school to receive a regular high school diploma. It is important, however, to note the 879 students who are out of school yet are classified as being on-track based on the number of credits they have obtained. While they would qualify to return to
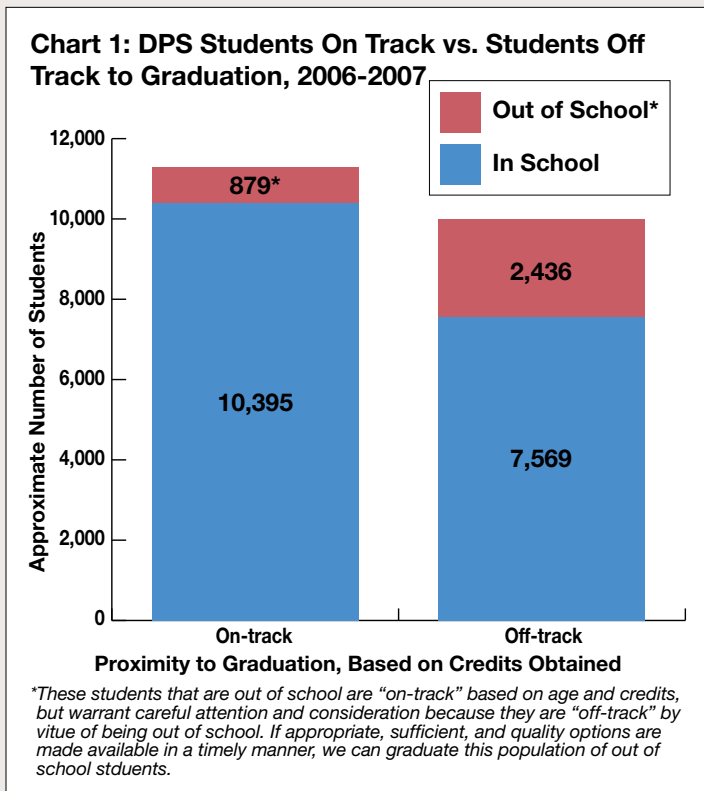
a traditional school, they may need an alternative option, as they have shown by virtue of being out of school that the traditional system has not worked for them. Those students off track to graduation, in school and out of school, will need options within the existing system to get back on track, as well as alternative options. The district needs to build capacity to serve these students in existing schools and in new high quality schools.
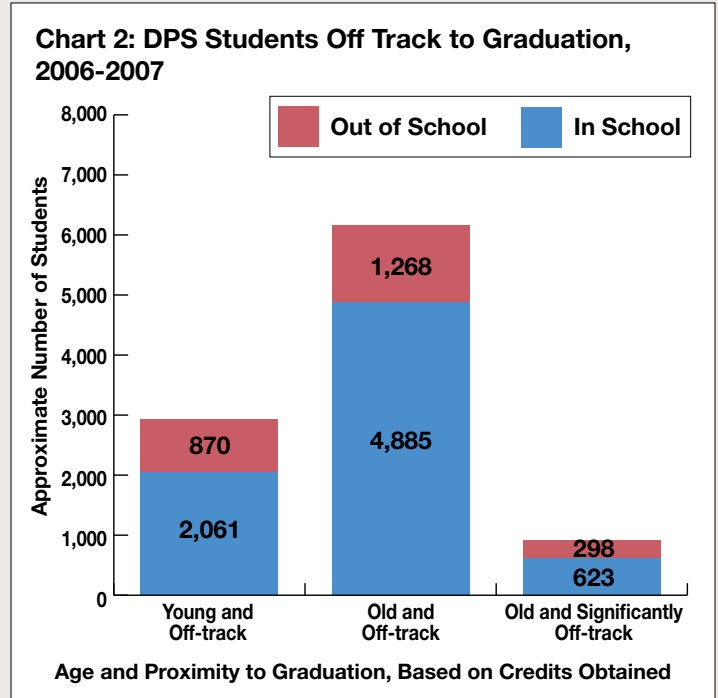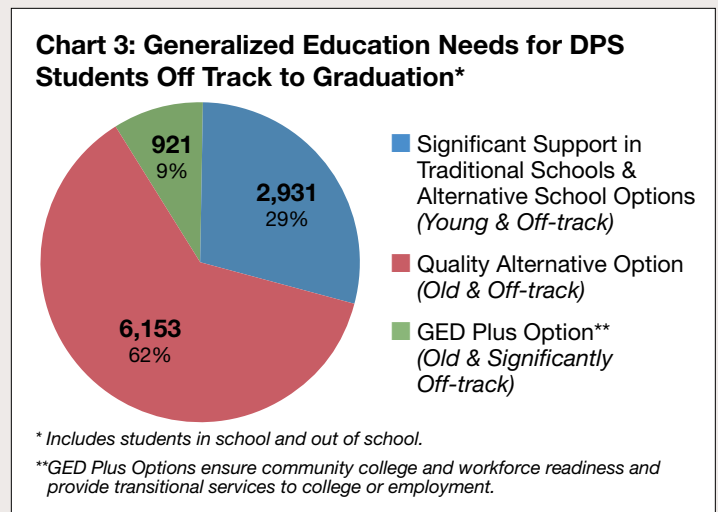
Chart 2: DPS Students Off Track to Graduation, 2006-2007

Legend: Out of School, In School

Young and Off-track: 870 (Out of School), 2,061 (In School)
Old and Off-track: 1,268 (Out of School), 4,885 (In School)
Old and Significantly Off-track: 298 (Out of School), 623 (In School)

X-axis: Age and Proximity to Graduation, Based on Credits Obtained
Y-axis: Approximate Number of Students

Chart 2 illustrates the number of students off track to graduation based on their age, and Chart 3 shows the different types of options these students need. Please see **Appendix D** for a sample of models that could be created to support each category of students.

Chart 1: DPS Students On Track vs. Students Off Track to Graduation, 2006-2007

Legend: Out of School*, In School

On-track: 879* (Out of School), 10,395 (In School)
Off-track: 2,436 (Out of School), 7,569 (In School)

X-axis: Proximity to Graduation, Based on Credits Obtained
Y-axis: Approximate Number of Students

*These students that are out of school are "on-track" based on age and credits, but warrant careful attention and consideration because they are "off-track" by vitue of being out of school. If appropriate, sufficient, and quality options are made available in a timely manner, we can graduate this population of out of school stduents.

Chart 3: Generalized Education Needs for DPS Students Off Track to Graduation*

2,931 (29%) — Significant Support in Traditional Schools & Alternative School Options (Young & Off-track)
6,153 (62%) — Quality Alternative Option (Old & Off-track)
921 (9%) — GED Plus Option** (Old & Significantly Off-track)

* Includes students in school and out of school.

**GED Plus Options ensure community college and workforce readiness and provide transitional services to college or employment.

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15   Again, this pool is a significant underestimation, as it does not include the number of students failing courses in grades 10 – 12.

16   If five and six year graduation rates existed for students in Colorado this would provide a more comprehensive picture of who has and has not graduated; however, that data is not available at this time.

17   This is one way to categorize these students and this information. There are many ways to disaggregate this data and DPS will need to determine what is best to serve the needs of its student population.

Supply: Background on Current DPS Offerings

In order to fully address the graduation crisis, it will be imperative that DPS provide appropriate access to high quality alternative options. Based on interviews with national experts as well as local leaders familiar with dropout recovery in Denver, preliminary analysis reveals:

1) Scale and Access: There are an inadequate number of alternative schools designed to help students complete their diploma.

2) Quality: The quality of existing alternative schools is of such concern that Denver is at risk of offering a second-class system to those students most in need.

3) Location and Mix: Students are not well served by the mix and location of schools currently offered by DPS.

DPS currently has eleven alternative schools (both charters and non-charters), four behavioral schools,[18] and two online programs. This paper defines DPS alternative schools as schools serving young people who were not succeeding in the traditional public school environment. This review therefore includes all schools designated as alternative education campuses (AEC's) by the state and schools designated as alternative schools by DPS. It also includes four additional schools at which Colorado Youth for a Change places many recovered out-of-school students.

The alternative schools we identified serve approximately 2,700 students, the behavioral schools serve approximately 600 students and the two online programs serve roughly 500 students.[19] An overview of Denver's current alternative offerings can be found in **APPENDIX E.**

Among the alternative schools, five night school and flexible scheduling options exist. One school specifically serves pregnant and parenting teens (Florence Crittenton) and one is tailored toward educating second language learners (Escuela Tlatelolco). There are few options with enough quality capacity to serve students with special education needs.

Scale and Access

Both anecdotally and through our preliminary analysis, there is a lack of available seats at alternative schools. A transitory population and varying school enrollment periods make actual capacity difficult to determine. There are relatively few alternative options, however, that do not have waiting lists or requirements (such as agency referrals), which can be barriers to student enrollment.

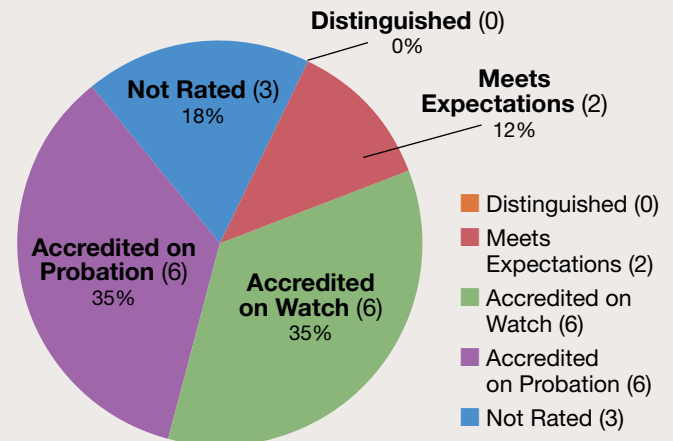Looking at the numbers of off-track students in school and out of school, clearly there is a great demand for expanded quality alternative options to meet these students' specific educational needs. For instance, while our estimates suggest alternative schools in DPS currently serve approximately 2,700 students, there are more than 10,000 off-track students in school and out of school, as determined by our analysis of off-track students in Box 1, who likely need alternative schooling options.

Quality

An initial review of DPS performance data suggests the quality of seats currently available at alternative schools is questionable. Existing alternative schools must be improved to avoid having a second class, second chance educational system. Most alternative schools do not receive a state rating because they are designated Alternative Education Campuses.[20] DPS, however, rates its alternative schools as Distinguished, Meets Expectations, Accredited on Watch, or Accredited on Probation. The 2008 DPS School Performance Framework (SPF) ratings determined the following:[21]

- No alternative school is rated as Distinguished.

- Two schools Meet Expectations (Emily Griffith Opportunity School and Denver Online High School).

- Six are Accredited on Watch and six are Accredited on Probation, which, aside from not being accredited, are the two lowest possible ratings.

- Three of the behavioral schools were not rated by the district including Gilliam, PREP, and Ridgeview.

Chart 4: School Performance Framework Ratings, 2008 DPS Non-Traditional Schools*

Distinguished (0) 0%
Meets Expectations (2) 12%
Not Rated (3) 18%
Accredited on Probation (6) 35%
Accredited on Watch (6) 35%

Legend:
- Distinguished (0)
- Meets Expectations (2)
- Accredited on Watch (6)
- Accredited on Probation (6)
- Not Rated (3)

Includes alternative, behavioral, and online schools.

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18 Behavioral schools are in a distinct category as they have a specific design and purpose focused on helping students address underlying social-emotional issues so that they can return to a traditional or alternative school.

19 Calculating alternative capacity rates is challenging because of the transitory nature of the student population. In the April 13, 2009 DPS Facility Supply/Demand Disposition Analysis, DPS estimated that 3,600 students were enrolled in Alternative Schools; in a June 2009 presentation to the Board, DPS estimated there are fewer than 2,000 alternative seats; and in a phone survey we conducted in May 2009, we estimated closer to 3,800 students being served by the alternative, behavioral, or online options – a higher number because we categorized more schools as "alternative."

20 Colorado has 47 schools that are designated as Alternative Education Campuses because they serve 95 percent or more students considered to be at high-risk of academic failure (see SB 04-083 for a full description of "high-risk").

21 DPS is in the process of refining the School Performance Framework (SPF) for its alternative schools.

It is challenging to design a quality rating system to judge alternative schools, largely because the populations served are so mobile. Looking at students' academic growth would appear to be the best indicator of an alternative school's performance. For instance, the Colorado growth model shows that the Contemporary Learning Academy and the Denver Online High School have demonstrated double-digit gains in two or more subjects in the CSAP from 2006 – 2009.[22] However, mobility makes determining the effectiveness of a particular education setting a challenge. Thoughtfulness and creativity must be used to design the best system by which to hold these schools accountable for success. The state is in the process of trying to create such a system that is both meaningful and fair.

Further, delivering a high quality alternative education that provides engaging, relevant instruction in a personalized way may be more expensive. For instance, as New York City embarked on its path to better serve its off-track population, it found that its transfer schools – schools that help off-track students complete their diploma – were more costly. Data analysis, however, indicated these schools had a high success rate with off-track students – three times that of comprehensive high schools. Because of this success, the district decided to expand its number of transfer schools.[23] Denver, and Colorado as a whole, needs to engage in the conversation about how to better drive resources (in exchange for academic results) to schools serving high need populations.

Location and Mix

The location of alternative schools as well as the mix of schools serving off-track students is insufficient and ineffective. Initial evidence suggests that DPS needs to take a more strategic and aggressive approach to creating and managing a portfolio of alternative schools to serve all students well.

Based on the current geographical mix of alternative schools (**See Appendix F**), six of the alternative schools are located in the northwest quadrant of Denver, two are central, four are located in the northeast area and two in the southwest area. Ridgeview is in Watkins, outside of Denver. This distribution of alternative options is in direct opposition to dropout student data: nearly a third of all 2006-2007 high school dropouts live in southwest Denver. One school in southwest Denver, Florence Crittenton, solely serves pregnant and parenting teen mothers and often has a waitlist of approximately 100 students. The other, Southwest Early College, consistently has a waiting list.

In addition, there is a need to focus on language and literacy. Considering the mix of programming needed, it will be important to ensure that enough alternative schools, as well as all secondary schools, are equipped with intensive reading support services for students reading below a sixth grade level. 2007 8th grade DPS reading CSAP results reveals that 23 percent of students scored unsatisfactory – indicating these students were likely reading at a sixth grade level or lower.[24] Data recently released by the district indicates that most alternative education students test at a third to fifth-grade level in reading and math.[25]

In addition to off-track students, approximately 2,000 current 9-12 grade DPS students are English language learners (ELL) and more than 500 are likely to have immigrated to the United States in the past four years.[26] This population needs second language options and additional support to integrate into a new culture. Further analysis is needed to determine precisely how many ELL students are off track to graduation, in school and out of school. A similar analysis needs to be done for off-track students with learning disabilities.

22   Mitchell, N. (2009). "DPS: Progress, but historic gains slow." Retrieved August 11, 2009, from: http://ednewscolorado.org/page1040910.aspx

23   Closing the Graduation Gap: A Superintendents' Guide for Planning Multiple Pathways to Graduation (October 2008). Retrieved on June 7th, 2009 from: Youth Transition Funders Group www.ytfg.org.

24   Colorado Department of Education: www.cde.state.co.us.

25   Mitchell, N. (2009) "DPS Tackling High School Reform." Retrieved June 29, 2009, from: http://ednewscolorado.org/page10405947.aspx.

26   This estimate does not include out of school youth that may also have significant second language needs.
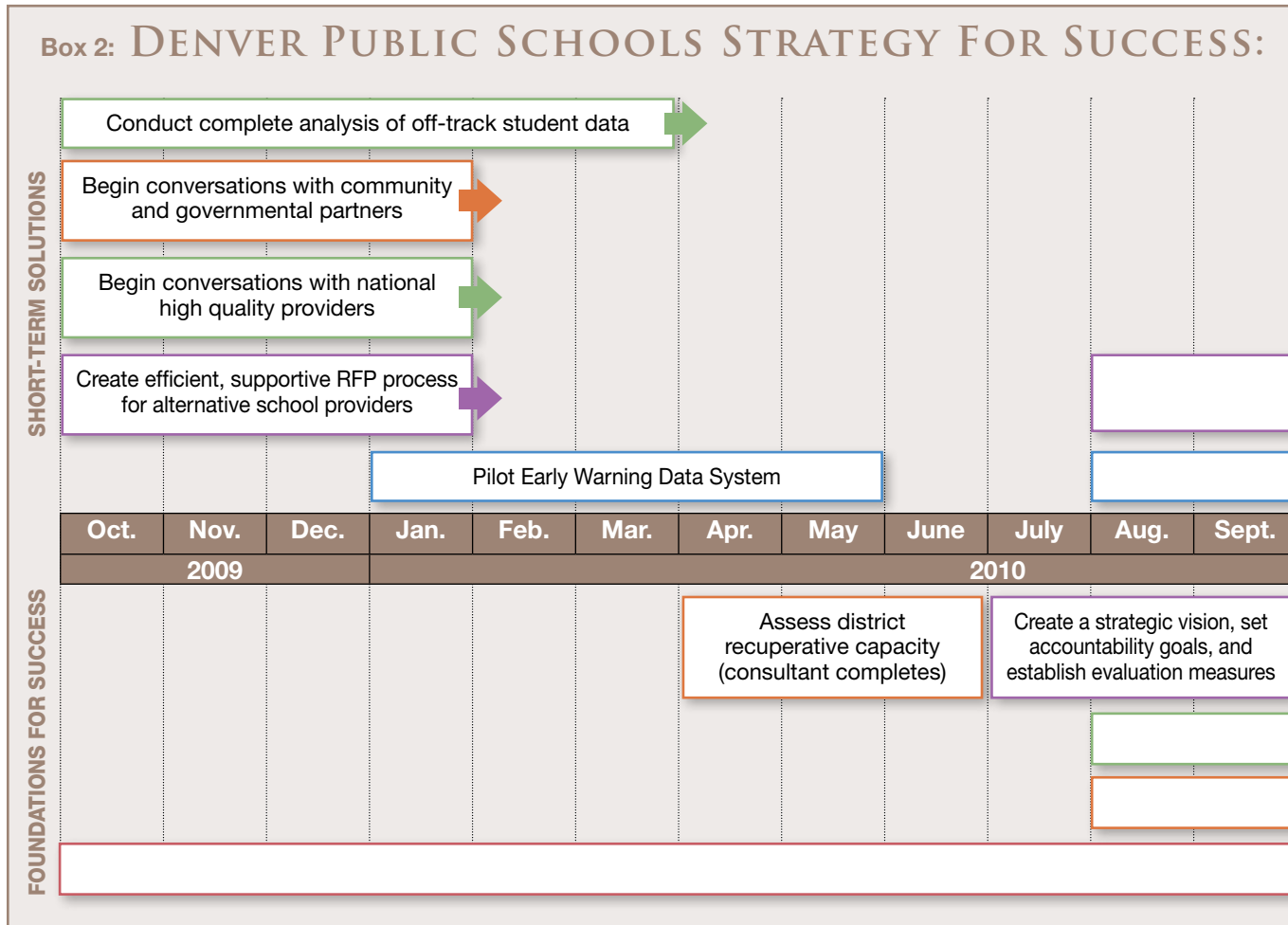
RECOMMENDATIONS: A ROADMAP TO GRADUATION

Given the high number of off-track students in school and out of school, and given the inadequate supply of quality schools and programs to meet students' needs, this must be a top district priority. DPS is starting to push forward strategies such as developing an early warning prevention system, increasing the availability of credit recovery options, and creating pathways for new school development.

District strategies around this work will only be effective, however, if they are comprehensive and meet the needs of *all* off-track youth, including overaged and undercredited students. Conducting a thorough analysis of the dynamics of the off-track population, assessing staff capacity, analyzing district functions and services, and measuring quality metrics are critical. Without this type of planning and reorganizing, Denver youth will continue to fall – and remain – off track to graduation.

Box 2: DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS:

SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS

Conduct complete analysis of off-track student data

Begin conversations with community and governmental partners

Begin conversations with national high quality providers

Create efficient, supportive RFP process for alternative school providers

Pilot Early Warning Data System

Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.
2009			2010								

FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESS

Assess district recuperative capacity (consultant completes)

Create a strategic vision, set accountability goals, and establish evaluation measures

A helpful guide is *Closing the Graduation Gap: A Superintendent's Guide for Planning Multiple Pathways to Graduation*.[27] This document provides a roadmap to engage districts in visioning and strategic planning, including: reframing the dropout conversation and building the right team to do this work; analyzing the local dynamics of the graduation crisis; increasing responsiveness by re-designing school and district operations; and strategically managing a portfolio of schools.

DPS must act now. As the suggested action timeline in Box 2 demonstrates, DPS can make significant strides in the next two years. Its short-term, or "quick-win," strategy should include building local partnerships, developing relationships with national providers, creating a supportive and effective request for proposal (RFP) process, implementing an early warning system, and expanding successful local alternative education options to the particularly needy Southwest and Northeast quadrants.
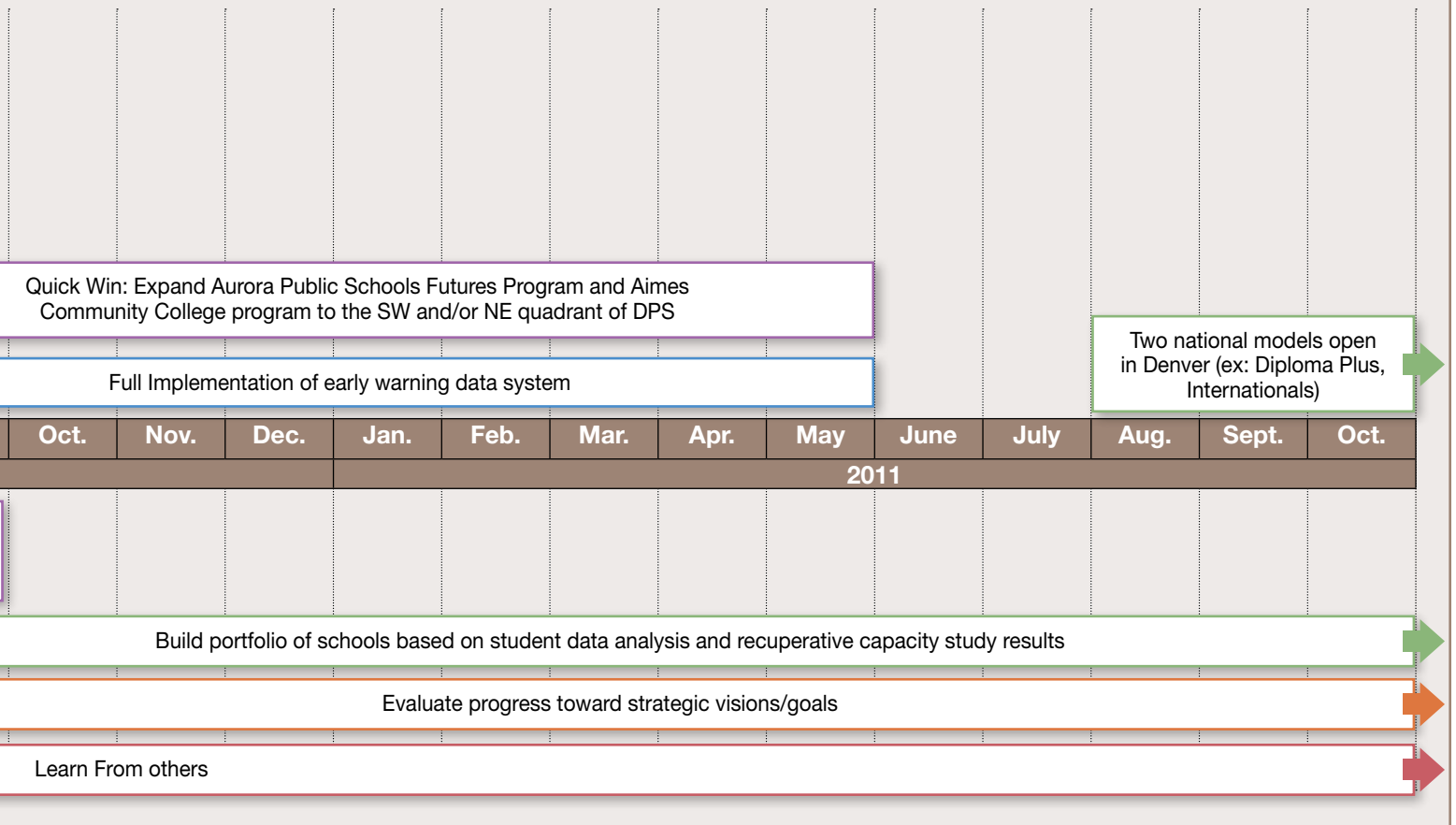
At the same time, DPS must build a solid foundation for long-term systemic improvements. We urge DPS to aggressively pursue the steps outlined in detail below so that, by 2011, its long-term vision is solidified and well in motion.

Closing the Graduation Gap provides detailed steps to increase a district's graduation rate, invaluable information for any district addressing the graduation crisis. To overcome the particular issues facing DPS, below we highlight specific recommendations:

1) **Thoroughly Assess Demand**: Analyze and understand the dynamics of the Denver graduation crisis by conducting research and a complete analysis of data on the off-track student population

2) **Increase Responsiveness**:

- *Prevention*: Increase the number of students on track to graduation through implementing an early warning data system and comprehensive interventions starting as early as sixth grade

- *Recuperation*: Assess and improve the capacity of the district to get off-track students back on track to graduation, including supports such as credit recovery, summer school, and effective alternative programs

- *Recovery*: Conduct aggressive outreach to re-engage out-of-school youth; assess and improve options for re-enrollment (including one-stop enrollment centers); and create a streamlined and supportive process to develop new, high quality alternative schools

3) **Implement a 100 Percent Graduation Policy**: Align district and school policies and practices to ensure a 100 percent graduation rate

A TWO YEAR TIMELINE

Quick Win: Expand Aurora Public Schools Futures Program and Aimes Community College program to the SW and/or NE quadrant of DPS

Full Implementation of early warning data system

Two national models open in Denver (ex: Diploma Plus, Internationals)

| Oct. | Nov. | Dec. | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | June | July | Aug. | Sept. | Oct. |

2011

Build portfolio of schools based on student data analysis and recuperative capacity study results

Evaluate progress toward strategic visions/goals

Learn From others

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27   Closing the Graduation Gap: A Superintendents' Guide for Planning Multiple Pathways to Graduation. Retrieved on June 7th, 2009 from: Youth Transition Funders Group, www.ytfg.org.

4) Learn From Others: Look to other districts who are successfully addressing the graduation crisis – particularly New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Portland – for effective strategies, best practices, and successful school models

ASSESS DEMAND: UNDERSTAND THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS OFF TRACK TO GRADUATION

As a starting point in its long-term planning, DPS must build upon existing data and conduct a complete student segmentation analysis to better understand the academic needs of students. Once complete, there will be more clarity and direction for meeting student needs. Districts across the nation have found varying patterns in their off-track population, requiring different responses.

Existing information highlighted in this report already suggests a need for the following:

- More academically rigorous options for target students across Denver, particularly in the Southwest and far Northeast areas of the city.

- Additional quality options to serve younger students, particularly those that are young and off track.

- Additional quality options for the high numbers of overaged and undercredited students.

- Year round quality credit recovery options and flexible schooling options for students minimally off track.

- Capacity to effectively serve the needs of specialized populations, such as second language learners (including recent immigrants), students with special education needs, and low-level readers.

INCREASE RESPONSIVENESS: PREVENTION, RECUPERATION, AND RECOVERY

Based on the indicators and patterns of off-track youth that the student segmentation analysis will reveal, DPS can increase its responsiveness by filling the gaps in its preventative, recuperative, and recovery strategies.

Prevention

To stem the flow of off-track students, the district will need to create preventative strategies to keep students on track, particularly in the first transition to high school. The creation of early warning data tracking systems to monitor on-track indicators – such as attendance, behavior (e.g. suspensions), and course failures – and increased responsiveness of schools to students showing signs of disengagement should be an immediate priority. Denver Public Schools has expressed a commitment to bolstering prevention efforts, and we recommend turning to *Dropouts in Denver Public Schools: Early Warning Signals and Possibilities for Prevention and Recovery*[28] for further guidance.

Recuperation

While effective prevention strategies will help keep students from falling off track, DPS must create a robust recuperative strategy that provides minimally off-track youth the ability to get back on track. This begins with assessing DPS' current capacity to meet student needs. Key questions include:

- For minimally off-track students (two or fewer F's in a given semester)[29], what credit recovery options, different instructional methods, responsive scheduling, and targeted summer school options exist to get these students back on track? Do these options sufficiently meet students' needs?

- How well are the current alternative schools meeting the needs of off-track and out-of-school youth?

We have provided a preliminary overview of DPS' current alternative education landscape, and while an in-depth analysis is necessary, it is clear that the district's recuperative

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28   MacIver, Balfanz, and Byrnes (April 2009). *Dropouts in the Denver Public Schools: Early Warning Signals and Possibilities for Prevention and Recovery*. Baltimore, Maryland: (CSOS) Johns Hopkins University.

29   This is an example of a threshold DPS may use to help determine its recuperative capacity.

capacity at present is limited. To increase its recuperative capacity, the district must develop a variety of options for students to accelerate their learning and expand its portfolio of schools to meet diverse student needs. While traditional schools can house some recuperative options, schools designed specifically to help off-track youth make multiple credit gains quickly are necessary.

Recovery

As part of its recuperative efforts, DPS must improve its recovery strategy to get off-track, out-of-school youth back in school and working toward a diploma. Part of this strategy is to increase collaboration with the community, including organizations such as Colorado Youth for a Change, to develop effective and aggressive outreach strategies that locate and connect with out-of-school students. Another aspect is to improve access to rapid, one-stop re-enrollment centers that provide information and allow flexibility for students to immediately begin working towards a diploma.

Equally important to a successful recovery strategy is ensuring high quality school options are available to students. These schools should meet students' academic needs and provide access to wraparound supports. An additional necessity is to ensure parents and students can make informed choices about which school will best meet their needs. Alternative schools' performance data, educational models, and service offerings must be made readily available and easily understandable.

Manage an Optimal Portfolio of Schools

As efforts to keep students on track to graduation take hold, the demand for alternative schools will taper, but will never disappear, as students will always require a variety of school environments. DPS needs to plan for and manage the right mix of alternative schools so that our young people get the help they need with the best use of resources. It is crucial that alternative schools "be fully integrated into the portfolio of schools with appropriate funding and oversight."[30]

The district could never create too many high quality alternative schools, as these schools could be converted easily to small schools serving a wider range of students if necessary.[31]

To attain a robust portfolio of options, it is important to create a streamlined and supportive RFP process that attracts the right alternative school providers. In 2008-2009 the district did not approve any new alternative schools, but it did approve one new alternative program.[32] It is critical to balance quality proposals with the urgency of needs, but there was not a strong process in place to work with qualified applicants wishing to serve this population in DPS. This needs to be rectified before the next RFP is released. It is vital to develop a streamlined, quality, and effective outreach and authorizing process to

recruit quality alternative providers and support them in an ongoing way.

Several national education models exist that could help DPS meet the diverse needs of its off-track and out-of-school student population. The Donnell-Kay Foundation, Colorado Youth for a Change, and others have been engaged in conversations with several of these successful national models, and many have indicated a strong interest in replicating in Denver.[33] A few successful local models have also expressed interest in replication.

Furthermore, it is essential the district create fair measures to evaluate alternative school quality. There is plenty to be learned from other school districts and alternative education networks about how to fairly assess quality and monitor performance. After evaluation, the lowest performing schools should be closed and resources re-deployed to expanding or replicating the most effective models.

EFFECTIVE SUPPORTS THROUGH COLLABORATION AND CREATIVITY

Particularly for out-of-school youth, but for all youth at risk of not graduating, it is important to maximize interagency partnerships to more effectively reach and serve these students. For example, the Philadelphia Youth Network represents over 50 different youth oriented organizations. This group collaborated to create a sophisticated and effective data network – Kids Integrated Data System (KIDS) – that weaves together information from schools, child welfare, juvenile justice, and other sources to allow for an in-depth analysis of trends, warning signs, and issues facing the youth in the city. It has been particularly effective in the early identification of kids who need support to succeed in school. New York City is another example, where most new small schools partner with strong intermediary organizations such as universities, youth development agencies, and educational organizations. These groups can provide valuable support to schools educating hard-to-serve populations. In Chicago, the Youth Connection Charter School (YCCS), which houses a network of 21 alternative schools, creates partnerships to bring in valuable additional resources. According to lead YCCS staff, Chicago Public Schools provides approximately $7,400 in per pupil funding, and YCCS leverages an additional average of $2,360 per pupil mostly by accessing and combining federal funding streams such as: Workforce Investment, Children and Family Services, Criminal Justice, Truancy Prevention, and community college funding. Collaboration and creativity can bring additional and much needed resources to this high-needs student population.

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30 Closing the Graduation Gap: A Superintendents' Guide for Planning Multiple Pathways to Graduation. Retrieved on June 7th, 2009 from: Youth Transition Funders Group, www.ytfg.org.

31 Please see Appendix D for suggested school models for off-track youth, based on age and credits.

32 The AIMES program is operating out of PREP and will serve "old and off-track" students.

33 See Appendix G for a review of national alternative education models with potential to replicate in Denver.

Implement a 100 Percent Graduation Policy

The heart of DPS' work to meet the needs of *all* students is the creation and implementation of a comprehensive graduation policy. If it is ever to achieve a 100 percent graduation rate, DPS must explicitly make that its goal. Along with such a commitment must come the alignment of operations and policies to ensure 100 percent of students graduate. It is critical to design certain incentive structures to keep students connected, thereby increasing the responsiveness of schools. DPS additionally should balance the goal of keeping students in school with efforts to increase academic achievement.

Examples of policies that help a district move in this direction include:

- Provide schools incentives for retaining and re-enrolling students.
- Ensure students have adequate support to prevent course failures.
- Move beyond required time in the classroom and provide competency-based and flexible scheduling options for students who need different and sufficient pathways to graduation.
- Implement an aggregate dropout recovery data system that measures how well the district is graduating and reconnecting off-track students, both in- and out-of-school, which will help the district determine effective strategies, make adjustments over time, and stay accountable to a 100 percent graduation goal.
- Publish on-track data and four, five, and six year graduation rates to ensure accountability and to encourage schools to help students graduate.
- Track students' post-secondary paths (employment, higher education, military, etc.).

Some key questions to consider when developing these policies:

- What changes need to be made in the core business practices (budgeting, planning, facility management, human resources) of the district and schools to drive towards a 100 percent graduation policy?

- How can DPS expand pathways to graduation while improving traditional high schools to ensure students have multiple options while pursuing their high school diploma?
- What policies currently inhibit schools and school leaders from working towards the goal of having all students graduate? What incentives are needed?
- What are the costs and potential funding opportunities to increase the cost-effectiveness of the high school system to ensure that all students are able to get a high school diploma?
- How can enough public will be generated to align resources and sustain the efforts during times of leadership and personnel changes?

Learn From Efforts Around The Country

This crisis is too complex to create everything from scratch. Denver can learn from the cities and districts that have made advancements in reducing the number of off-track students and in providing off-track students with sufficient opportunities to earn their high school diploma.

Portland, Chicago and Philadelphia can help inform Denver about how to run district-led efforts in early intervention. New York City and Philadelphia can guide the thinking about how to expand Denver's portfolio of schools to be able to respond to the needs of all youth.

There are a number of alternative school models that have demonstrated their ability to replicate. Learning from these efforts will ensure Denver meets the diverse needs of its students. Some of the high quality models that would likely be a good fit for Denver include Diploma Plus, Gateway to College, Youth Build, and the Internationals Network for Public Schools **(SEE APPENDIX G).**

VI. Conclusion

Thousands of Denver's youth are at risk of not graduating or have already left school. While this crisis is large and complex, DPS' can overcome it. Other cities are aggressively addressing this issue and DPS can make great strides by researching and following their best practices. We cannot wait any longer to address the educational needs of this target population - there is enough evidence to show this work can and must be done.

To date, Denver Public Schools has not provided the sufficient access, quality, or mix of schools to help meet off-track students' needs. DPS can and must create a portfolio of high quality options and robust policies to ensure the success of all secondary students.

It is encouraging that the district leadership and Board welcome the opportunity to create new quality alternative schools, but it must become a top priority as part of a comprehensive district strategy to address the graduation crisis. Further, this issue is too large for the district to take on alone. Because of the magnitude of this problem, it requires the commitment, resources, and perseverance of the greater Denver community.

Acting in partnership with nonprofits, foundations, government agencies, businesses, and communities, DPS can better understand the educational needs of students, evaluate its own capacity to serve these students, and align both policies and practices to ensure all students receive a high quality education and reach the graduation goal line. Through such partnerships and a district commitment to prioritize this work, DPS can finally ensure all students are provided with the continuous, quality educational options they need to graduate, setting the foundation for success in college, work, and life.

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Alternative education – Schools or programs that are set up by states, school districts, or other entities to serve young people who are not succeeding in a traditional public school environment. Alternative education programs offer students an opportunity to achieve in a different setting and use different and innovative learning methods. While there are various alternative schools and programs, they are often characterized by their flexible schedules, personalized learning environments, and modified curricula[1].

Behavioral school – Public schools, often designed as part of a district's disciplinary policy, which help students address social and emotional issues so that they are better equipped to participate and succeed in a mainstream or alternative high school and in the community. These schools have the specific goal of successfully transitioning students back into a regular school.

Credit recovery – Opportunity for a student to receive credit for a course in which he/she was previously unsuccessful in earning academic credit so that he/she may graduate on time; distinct from alternative options for students who need to be in a setting other than traditional education for the majority of their school career[2]. Credit recovery options may include summer school, after school, weekend, and online courses, to name a few.

Disconnected youth– Young people typically characterized as: high school dropouts or students at risk of dropping out; adolescents in the juvenile or criminal justice systems; adolescents in the child welfare system; and unmarried mothers. Without intervention, disconnected youth often reach age 25 without having successfully transitioned to independent adulthood; they will lack social support systems and will likely be in poverty, unemployed, or marginally employed[3].

Early Intervention – A strategy used by a district and schools to monitor and address early warning signals of student dropouts, including problems with attendance, behavior, and course failure; most effective in middle school through 9th grade.

GED Plus option – GED (Graduate Equivalency Degree) is the process of earning the equivalent of a high school diploma, which is called a GED certificate or credential[4]; GED Plus curriculum extends beyond typical GED instruction to include skills beyond the minimum set required to pass the GED, ensuring community college and workforce readiness[5]. GED Plus options also provide transitional services to college or employment.

Off-track youth – Can be defined many ways. In this report, we define it a few different ways: 1) young people who, based on the number of credits obtained, are behind approximately one grade level or more as compared to the typical age range of their peers and have thus not attained the amount of credits required for graduation in four years; 2) youth in school who have failed three or more core courses and 3) out-of-school youth.

On-track youth - Young people who have attained the amount of credits needed to graduate in four years, relative to their age.

Portfolio of schools – An intentional and wide range of public school options made available by a school district that may include charter schools, alternative schools, magnet schools, behavioral schools, and contract schools that meet the diverse array of student needs.

Quality schools – High-performing schools that graduate students from high school and prepare them, at a minimum, for community college without the need for remediation.

Recovery – A strategy by a district or a school to re-engage a student who has dropped out of school so as to help the student obtain a high school diploma.

Recuperative capacity – The ability of a district to effectively meet the needs of its off-track student population; includes having a diverse and adequate supply of credit recovery and alternative school options.

School Performance Framework (SPF) – Rating system used by Denver Public Schools to evaluate school performance in terms of student achievement and overall organizational strength using a variety of longitudinal measures; also used to determine a school's accreditation rating for reporting purposes to the Colorado Department of Education, as well as to provide information for teacher and principal compensation systems[6].

Wraparound support services – A system of support implemented by a school or district designed to keep students in school; a philosophy of care that includes a planning process involving the student and family that results in a unique set of customized services and supports individualized for that student and family to achieve a positive set of outcomes[7].

1   Aron, L. (2006). *An overview of alternative education*. Retrieved July 27, 2009, from: http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=411283

2   Blackboard K-12. (2009). *Credit recovery: Exploring answers to a national priority*. Retrieved July 27, 2009, from: http://www.blackboard.com/resources/k12/Bb_K12_WP_CreditRecovery.pdf

3   Martinez, T., & Wald, M. (2008). *Connected by 25: Improving the life chances of the country's most vulnerable 14-24 year olds*. Retrieved July 27, 2009, from: http://www.ytfg.org/documents/connectedby25_OOS.pdf

4   *What is the definition of GED?* Retrieved July 27, 2009, from: http://adulted.about.com/od/glossary/g/GED.htm

5   Minnesota Adult Basic Education. *Higher education and training initiative.* Retrieved July 27, 2009, from: http://mnabe.themlc.org/sites/4067033a-d03f-4965-945a-c684933b56c4/uploads/ABE_Transition_Initiative_Presentation.ppt

6   Denver Public Schools. *School Performance Framework*. Retrieved July 27, 2009, from: http://communications.dpsk12.org/initiatives/school-performance-framework/

7   Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice. *Volume IV: Promising practices in wraparound for children with serious emotional disturbance and their families*. Retrieved July 29, 2009 from: http://cecp.air.org/promisingpractices/1998monographs/execsumvol4.htm

Appendix B: Analysis of Denver Public Schools Dropouts, 2006 - 2007 Data
By Colorado Youth for a Change

AGE	Students with Zero Credits	Freshman Level Credits (5 - 54)	Sophomore Level Credits (55 - 109)	Junior Level Credits (110 - 164)	Senior Level Credits (165 - 220)	Senior Level Credits and Above (220 +)	Total No. of Students
14	309	31	11				351
15	308	121	54	7		1	491
16	212	229	137	55	8	2	643
17	149	196	207	122	44	4	722
18	111	139	150	133	79	15	627
19	47	38	69	85	66	24	329
20	38	16	24	35	31	8	152
Grand Total	1,174	770	652	437	228	54	3315
Percent	35%	23%	20%	13%	7%	2%	

Educational Program to Create	No. of Students	% of Students
On-Track - Return to traditional school for regular diploma	879	27%
Young and Off-Track (14-16) - Traditional school with credit recovery, opportunity to repeat 9th grade	870	26%
Old and Off-Track (17-20) - Alternative option	1,268	38%
Old and Significantly Off-Track (17-20) - GED Plus option	298	9%

Categories and color coding by the Donnell-Kay Foundation

Appendix C: Analysis of Denver Public Schools Students in School (Excludes Dropouts), 2006-2007 Data By Denver Public Schools Staff

Age	Students (N)	ALL CREDITS EARNED BY END OF 2006-2007 SCHOOL YEAR					
		0 to 30.5: Not enough credits to become a sophomore	31 to 54.5: Not enough credits to become a sophomore	55 to 109.5: Sophomore	110 to 164.5: Junior	165 to 219.5: Senior	220 and above: adequate credits to graduate before fall 2008
14	25	3	5	17			
15	2,696	485	440	1,751	20		
16	4,366	634	502	1,737	1,459	33	1
17	4,524	410	299	916	1,397	1,339	163
18	3,907	222	140	457	618	891	1,579
19	1,883	78	52	179	282	280	1,012
20	563	28	18	62	98	108	249
TOTALS	**17,964**	**1,860**	**1,456**	**5,119**	**3,874**	**2,651**	**3,004**
% of TOTAL		**10%**	**8%**	**28%**	**22%**	**15%**	**17%**

Educational Program to Create	No. of Students	% of Students
On-Track - Return to traditional school for regular diploma	10,395	58%
Young and Off-Track (14-16) - Significant support in traditional schools & alternative school options	2,061	11%
Old and Off-Track (17-20) - Alternative option	4,885	27%
Old and Significantly Off-Track (17-20) - GED Plus option	623	4%

*Categories and color coding by the Donnell-Kay Foundation

Appendix D: Sample Portfolio of Options for Specific Populations

For students in need of alternative options, the district must be sure to provide a quality array of choices. In general, quality alternative programs should include:

- Rigorous academic standards

- Personalized learning environment

- Student-centered pedagogy

- Wraparound services to meet instructional/developmental goals

- Clear pathways to college

Below are specifics on the type of educational options the district could provide for off-track students, based on age and proximity to graduation. DPS is providing some options in these areas, but as our review of DPS options demonstrates, they are lacking in quality, access, and mix. This chart was adapted from "Bringing Off-track Youth into the Center of High School Reform: Lessons and Tools from Leading Communities," based on work in several cities, including New York City, Boston, the Parthenon Group, and the Youth Development Institute.

SAMPLE PORTFOLIO OF OPTIONS FOR SPECIFIC POPULATIONS		
	Population	**Model**
Young and Off-track	Off-track students, ages 14, 15, and 16, with fewer credits as compared to similarly aged peers	Personalized, academically rigorous diploma-granting high schools (traditional and alternative) with acceleration strategies for academic catch-up; wraparound support services
Old and Off-track	Off-track students, ages 17, 18, 19, and 20, with fewer credits as compared to similarly aged peers	Personalized, diploma-granting high schools (alternative) with flexible programming to allow students to make up credits quickly while gaining skills for the transition to postsecondary learning, interdisciplinary curricula that meet multiple credit requirements, self-paced academic work in needed credit areas, and focus on connections to college
Old and Significantly Off-track	Off-track students, typically ages 19 and 20, with too few credits to obtain a traditional diploma before aging out of the system at 21, and with an 8th grade reading level	GED-granting programs with clear pathways/interim benchmarks through community college, featuring intensive literacy across the curriculum, clear systems for ongoing assessment, pathways to postsecondary training/learning, and in-depth, sector-specific career exploration
	Off-track students, typically ages 19 and 20, with too few credits to obtain a traditional diploma before aging out of the system at 21, and with below an 8th grade reading level	Pre-GED program with wraparound supports and clear pathways/interim benchmarks toward GED program entry, featuring intensive focus on literacy, clear systems for ongoing assessment, employment-readiness programming, and in-depth, sector-specific career exploration
Other	Over-age English Language Learners who enter the school system during high school	Personalized, academically rigorous diploma-granting high schools (traditional and/or alternative) with intensive remediation and language-acquisition help, extended day and calendar, and connection to internships and college-readiness opportunities

Appendix E: Denver Public Schools Alternative School Options, 2008-2009 School Year

	ADMISSION CRITERIA	SCHOOL OVERVIEW	INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL
ALTERNATIVE			
Academy of Urban Learning Charter School (9-12)	Serve at-risk youth ages 16-20, not in their first year of high school, including homeless youth	Founded by Jared Polis Foundation and Urban Peak; three trimesters	competency-based model
ACE Community Challenge School (8-10)	Unknown	Consists of three trimesters	non-traditional academic vocational & career-oriented educational programs
Colorado High School Charter (10-12)	Must be 16 yrs. old	Small classes, night program	6 six-week blocks
Contemporary Learning Academy High School (9-12)	Referral (from home school) only	Flexible scheduling; also offer night program so student can be dual-enrolled in home high school; also offer night school GED program	DPS curriculum; credit recovery system with defined process to transition students back to "home high school"
Emily Griffith High School (17-21 yrs)	High school dropout for at least 2 months; ages 17-21; pass 7th grade reading test; applications accepted year-round	Self-paced, individualized instruction & small classes; flexible scheduling - day, evening & summer classes; earn diploma or GED	On-site college, career & technical classes
Escuela Tlatelolco (7-12)	Application / interview	Dual language and cultural competency	Experimental learning with thematic units
Florence Crittenton (6-12)	Pregnant or parenting teen mom; enrolls students every quarter	Partnership between DPS and Parent Pathways, Inc. (PPI)	DPS curriculum
Life Skills Center of Denver (9-12)	Drop-out or extremely at risk; ages 16 - 21	Flexible scheduling with day and night sessions available	Instruction primarily computer-based with teachers as facilitators
P.S. 1 Charter (6-12)	Enrollment forms online	Classes available 8:30 am - 8:00 pm	Experiential learning
Skyland Community High School (9-12)	Application; school/student/ parent contract	Big Picture alternative education model; founded Jan 2002 by Colorado Small School Initiative, the Piton Foundation, the Stapleton Foundation, and the Sturm Foundation	Experiential learning based on 5A's -Assessment, Authenticity, Adult Relationships, Active Learning and Academic Rigor
Southwest Early College (9-12)	Application	Small; early college model	College-level coursework leading to both a high school diploma and an associates degree
BEHAVIORAL			
Emerson Street School (7-12)	Referred by Denver probation; DPS expulsion or DHHS	Behavioral improvement as well as academics	DPS curriculum
Gilliam School (K-12)	Department of Youth Corrections referral	Basic courses	DPS curriculum
P.R.E.P. Center (6-12)	6th - 10th grade students; 9th and 10th grade students must have fewer than 80 credits; 3 schools in one building (MS, HS, and Title I intervention)	Academic 2nd chance for middle / high school students; focus on student behavior, character and social skills; small classes	Intense focus on math, science, and literacy; Agression Replacement Training
Ridge View Academy (9-12)	Application; referral through juvenile courts; child welfare; private referrals; accept referrals year-round	Personalized; male focus; mentoring and tracking; shelter program; group homes; academy model programs; detention/secure programs; transition and independent living	opportunity to work, learn, and change behavior within an academic environment
ONLINE			
Connections Academy (K-12)	Enrollment forms online	Online; part of national Connections Academy network	High school students spend about 50% of their time working on computer
Denver Online High School (9-12)	Application / interview	Online programs that focus on personalization; accessibility; and uniqueness	Online - DPS core academic classes; business and vocational classes; career development; SPED

*State-designated Alternative Education Campuses do not receive academic performance or academic growth ratings

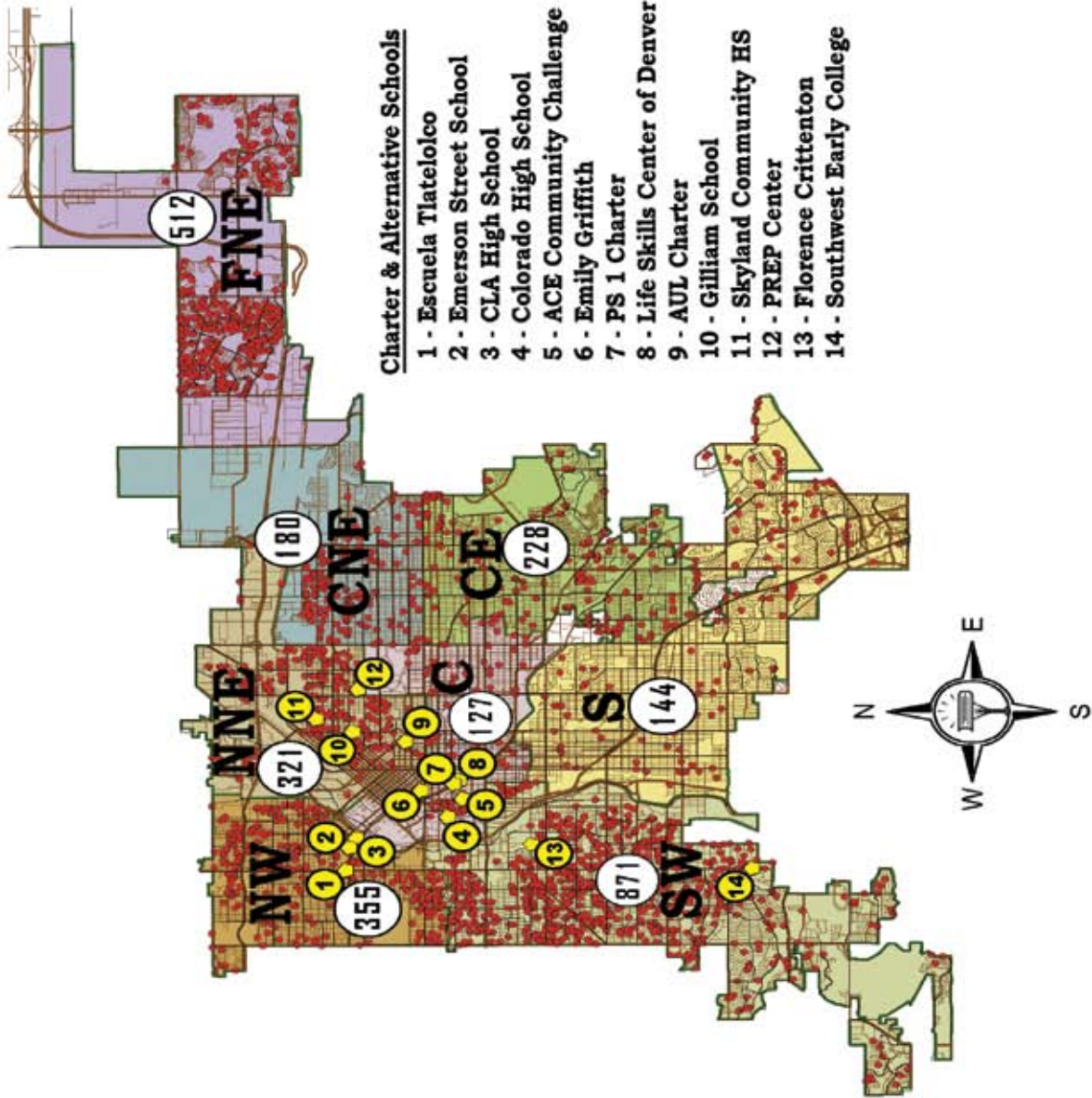| ENROLL-MENT	BUILDING CAPACITY	LOCATION (SW, NW, SE, NE)	FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH POPULATION (2007 - 2008)	OVERALL ACADEMIC PERFORMACE (2007 - 2008)*	ACADEMIC GROWTH (2007 - 2008)	DPS SCHOOL PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK (SPF) RATING	SPECIAL SERVICES / SUPPORT PROVIDED
73	98.60%	NW	65.20%	Alternative Education Campus	Alternative Education Campus	Accredited on Probation	Extensive wraparound services and welcome homeless youth; case managers; individualized learning plans; flexible scheduling; work with advisors on post-secondary plans
191	n/a	NW	96.30%	Alternative Education Campus	Alternative Education Campus	Accredited on Watch	Strong human services component
178	161.80%	NW	79.20%	Alternative Education Campus	Alternative Education Campus	Accredited on Probation	Small classes, College Summit
251	59.20%	NW	64.90%	Alternative Education Campus	Alternative Education Campus	Accredited on Probation	Advisement sessions each day with assigned advisor; service-learning
543	n/a	NW	20.80%	Alternative Education Campus	Alternative Education Campus	Meets Expectations	Individualized instruction; self-paced, open exit classes; three graduations per year
79	n/a	NW	70.90%	Low	Typical	Accredited on Watch	All parents/families of Escuela donate 10 hours of volunteer time each month
174	102.40%	SW	92.50%	Alternative Education Campus	Alternative Education Campus	Accredited on Watch	Qualistar-rated early learning center on-site for student's children birth to age three; wrap-around mental/physical health supports; parenting education; life skills development
214	99.50%	NW	58.90%	Alternative Education Campus	Alternative Education Campus	Accredited on Probation	Work closely with community agencies, interventions ; individual academic plans
280	93.30%	NW	63.20%	Low	Typical	Accredited on Watch	Small classes; each student has advisor; learn by doing; local, national, and international trips; Seniors develop and implement project of choice; personalized learning plans
140	n/a	NE	62.90%	Low	Low	Accredited on Probation	100% graduates accepted into college; internships in career of interest; small classes, small school; personalized learning plans with family involvement
400	100%	SW	64.80%	Low	Typical	Accredited on Watch	Students may earn up to 60 college credits
42	18.80%	NW	97.60%	Alternative Education Campus	Alternative Education Campus	Accredited on Probation	Focus on behavioral training - Aggression Replacement Training program
73	Nearly at capacity	NE		None	None	None	Students are there for an average of 10 days (required to attend school while there)
60 high school, 60 middle school	n/a	NE	90.90%	Alternative Education Campus	Alternative Education Campus	N/A	Mild to moderate special ed needs accepted. Partnerships are with Girls Inc, Family Directions, GRASP, Social Services, Rainbow Bridge, Denver Public Libraries, and service learning organizations
441	88.20%	SE	93.40%	Alternative Education Campus	Alternative Education Campus	N/A	Individual learning plans
370	n/a	SE	43%	Average	Typical	Accredited on Watch	Provides online resources (movies and encyclopedias), teacher support, textbooks, loaned computer & printer, subsidy for internet service
126	n/a	NE	26.20%	Average	No Rating	Meets Expectations	Goals to provide interventions and address academic needs on individualized basis; each student has instructor that provides specialized assistance

NOTE: Quadrant locations were selected by Donnell-Kay staff and capacity information was obtained at www.getsmartschools.org

Appendix G: National Alternative Education Models with Potential to Replicate in Denver

Model	Overview	Target Population - Students Best Fit for Model	Performance
Gateway to College	Earn college credits (through college partner) while receiving wraparound services	Youth 16 to 20 who meet entry requirements; youth with an 8th grade reading level and above, motivated to complete college level courses	70% of graduates continue college education
EdVisions	Small schools with high-tech, personalized, project-based learning; teacher-leader governance system	Half of population served is low-income, 40% minority; good with special education needs	82% go on to postsecondary and average ACT score is 22.3
Youth Build	Gain skills while building low-income housing; work toward diploma or GED by spending alternate weeks in school and a construction site	Youth 16 to 24	Average 55% high school graduation rate
Diploma Plus	Competency-based promotion; opportunities for internships and college credits	Focus on at-risk, overaged, and undercredited students; focus on kids who may be off track as early as 8th grade; students at 6th grade reading level and above	Across East coast sites, 90% graduation rate
Communities in Schools (CIS) - Performance Learning Centers (PLC)	CIS connects community resources with schools; CIS establishes a state office with local affiliates; PLC's are a later extension; PLC's are small schools, individualized learning, flexible schedule, opportunity for college credits	PLC's focus on at-risk, overaged, and undercredited students; students at 6th grade reading level and above	80% improved academic performance
Open Meadow	Small, relationship-based programs that emphasize personal responsibility, academics, and service to the community; provide variety of wraparound services	At-risk population, including over 90% under-credited students	Average of over two grade level gains in tests
One Bright Ray	Based out of Philadelphia with a new school in Baltimore; strong wraparound services, 11 month schedule, daycare and parenting classes available	Serve highly at-risk, overaged, and undercredited populations	Fairhill High School "poster child" for Philadelphia alternative education schools
Internationals Network for Public Schools	Small school; all curriculum presented in English, students learn through experiential learning and from one another; students develop English and native language	Late-entry immigrant English language learners; 86% from low-income families; various degrees of previous education, from being at grade level to having little to no schooling	Over 90% of graduates continue to college after high school
Generation Schools	30% more learning time (without increasing the work year for any teachers); experiential learning; small classes; training and support for teachers	Low-income, low-skill students who need support and a personalized learning enviroment	90% attendance - only in 2nd year so scores coming out soon

Charter, Contract, Public School, Stand-alone Program, Variety?	Location in CO?	Replication Interests	Funding & Support for Replication
Contract with district(s) and partner with community colleges/universities	Adams 12 & 50 with Front Range Community College; Pueblo 60 with Pueblo Community College	Actively replicating; Aurora interested	3-year start-up grants available through Gateway ($325K) - then sustainable on per pupil revenue
Stand-alone schools (mostly charters)	Interested in expanding to Colorado	45 locations nationwide; actively replicating	Interested partners would need $150K to participate in network; provide technical assistance program
Diploma-granting schools (charter and district schools) and GED programs	Mile High Youth Corps is a GED program; could evolve to be a diploma granting program	225 programs nationwide; 55-60 are schools; would like more in the National Schools Initiative	Funding through Gates; request for proposal (RFP) coming out this summer/fall for more sites
Variety: Self-contained school (traditional district schools and traditional alternative education schools, charters) or an affiliated program within a school	Interested in expanding to Colorado	Actively replicating	Unknown
CIS: program within a school; PLC's stand-alone schools (both charter and district)	No	Strategic planning now: seeking communities with local political support and local resources	$180K-$350K depending on scope of start-up
Non-tuition private school or an affiliated program within a school	No - schools in Portland	Not likely	Unknown
Stand-alone schools (charter and contract)	Withdrew application to Denver Public Schools	Actively replicating	Unknown
Traditional public schools (intermediary organization that provides professional development, curriculum - operations left up to district)	No - eight public high schools in New York	In strategic planning process	Provides extensive start-up support
District school - has side-contract with union; supports also working with existing schools and transforming them	No - based in New York	Yes, would like to create a network of similar schools that are "lab" schools with this model	Unknown

High School Dropouts Registered in Denver Public Schools Residing in the City and County of Denver 2006-2007
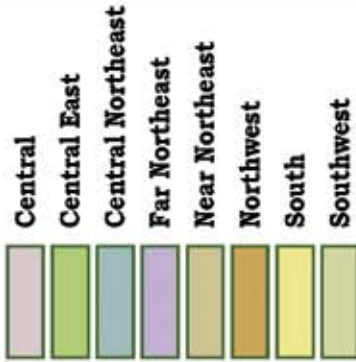
Denver Dropouts

XXX # of Dropouts in Region

DPS Regions
- Central
- Central East
- Central Northeast
- Far Northeast
- Near Northeast
- Northwest
- South
- Southwest

Charter & Alternative Schools
1 - Escuela Tlatelolco
2 - Emerson Street School
3 - CLA High School
4 - Colorado High School
5 - ACE Community Challenge
6 - Emily Griffith
7 - PS 1 Charter
8 - Life Skills Center of Denver
9 - AUL Charter
10 - Gilliam School
11 - Skyland Community HS
12 - PREP Center
13 - Florence Crittenton
14 - Southwest Early College

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