Denver’s Youth Agenda
Advancing the Mayor’s Action Challenge

“Creating a coordinated plan for youth is not the culmination of the work, but the starting point of Denver’s unified efforts to improve the health, education, and safety of our youth.”

— Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper

January 2010
In December 2008, Mayor Hickenlooper convened a group of stakeholders to begin a conversation around creating a citywide agenda for youth. The intent was to effectively coordinate opportunities, supports, and services in order to better meet the needs of Denver’s youth, families, and communities. These stakeholders represented:

- City agencies
- Elected officials
- Community-based organizations
- Education
- Juvenile justice
- Health/Mental health

The stakeholders became a steering committee that met monthly throughout 2009 to create this document outlining the city’s coordinated agenda for youth in their adolescent years. (See Appendix I for a list of committee members)

The work of this group was based, in part, on Denver’s Child and Youth Friendly City Initiative, an 18-month effort to engage more than 6,000 youth and adults in a conversation about what would make Denver a great place for children and youth. The initiative, launched by the Mayor’s Office for Education and Children, Assets for Colorado Youth, and the University of Colorado’s Children, Youth and Environments Center, gathered “voices” from youth and adults to inform the work of more than 100 participating groups.

Aligning around a shared vision – Youth engaged in life, thriving in community

Several large systemwide initiatives are underway to address specific youth-related issues, including crime prevention, school-community coordination, early childhood education and healthy lifestyles. The steering committee identified 18 separate initiatives and their various partners. (See Appendix II) Committee members recognized the considerable potential in connecting the various efforts and partners to a broader vision. A citywide agenda for youth will strengthen the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders across the systems and within the community. It will create a focus on concrete, actionable objectives, and build public consensus for supporting and engaging youth in ways that allow them to thrive.

Formulating guiding principles

The Mayor’s appointees from the Office for Education and Children and the Office for Economic Development facilitated the steering committee meetings throughout 2009. Discussions followed a framework provided by the National League of Cities’ (NLC) Institute for Youth, Education and Families. The group developed guiding principles for each component of the NLC framework:

- **Vision statement:** Youth engaged in life, thriving in community
- **Engaging Stakeholders:** Stakeholders understand the relevance and urgency of the agenda and will work together to move the agenda forward
- **Developing Strategies:** Build cross-systems capacity and utilize existing data in order to identify need, ensure access to services, and foster principles of youth development to achieve systemic outcomes
- **Coordinating Infrastructure:** Align initiatives and clarify roles around defined outcomes, and coordinate systems through a collaborative effort
- **Sharing Accountability:** Agree on common data points and form working agreements on shared responsibilities for advancing the youth agenda

Formulating a data-driven agenda

The steering committee immersed itself in the research demonstrating youth risk-taking behaviors and, by general consensus, determined three overarching and interconnected focus areas around which organizations and systems could align:

- Health
- Education
- Safety

Subcommittees then formed around each focus area to identify and review specific bodies of
research. The steering committee invited input from additional stakeholders through interviews and guest presentations.

Utilizing the available research, the subcommittees each identified two measurable outcomes in their focus areas around which stakeholders and community members could collaboratively affect change. They created work plans for moving their outcomes forward with respect to the components in the NLC framework — engaging stakeholders, developing strategies, coordinating infrastructure, and sharing accountability.

**A youth agenda emerges**

Several months into the process, the health, education, and safety subcommittees proposed their two outcomes, and their underlying rationale, to the larger steering committee. These emerged as:

**Health**

*Outcome #1: An increased percentage of youth will participate in physical activity at least 60 minutes per day.*

We know that regular physical activity not only promotes overall health and reduces incidents of obesity, but also improves a young person’s self-esteem. Studies have also shown that regular physical activity enhances academic performance by increasing students’ concentration levels. Yet, the Surgeon General’s Report states that nearly half of adolescents do not participate regularly in vigorous physical activity. Further, the prevalence of obesity in our nation’s young people has more than doubled in the past 20 years, and more than tripled among adolescents.

To promote the health of Denver’s youth, an increased percentage of Denver youth will participate in physical activity at least 60 minutes per day, as recommended by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. By working together to support recess in schools, increase participation in youth sports programs, and ensure access to recreation centers and other facilities, we can all do our part to improve healthy outcomes for youth.

*Outcome #2: Youth will have increased access to comprehensive health education.*

Giving youth the necessary resources they need to make responsible health decisions for themselves is essential to their overall well-being. Age-appropriate health education can give young people the important information they need to avoid tobacco use, sedentary lifestyles, poor dietary patterns, behaviors that lead to injuries, and sexual behaviors that result in sexually transmitted diseases or unintended pregnancies. It can also motivate them to maintain or improve their health through prevention and intervention strategies.

With the passage of Colorado H.B. 1292 (Standards of Sex Education), health advocates and educators are coming together to formulate guidelines for implementing comprehensive health education programs in schools. According to the 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 26 percent of 9th graders and 62 percent of 11th graders in Denver Public Schools reported they had engaged in sexual intercourse. Denver Public Schools does not currently offer comprehensive health education districtwide.

By increasing access to developmentally appropriate comprehensive health education for Denver’s youth, our young people will be motivated to improve their health and to avoid health-related risk behaviors.

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### “The steps we take to strengthen families and improve outcomes for youth are among the most important investments we make in the health and vitality of our city.”

— Cec Ortiz, Deputy Director

*Mayor’s Office for Economic Development*

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**Education**

*Outcome #1: By the end of 9th grade, all youth are at or above grade level and have the support they need to graduate.*

Completing 9th grade at grade level is a strong indicator for high school completion. Among 35,000 Denver Public Schools (DPS) students in 7th–12th grade who dropped out of school during the 2006–2007 school year, 9th graders made up
As educators implement the Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids in an attempt to raise the state’s ranking of residents who earn college degrees (45th), others in the community also have a role to play. In particular, out-of-school factors beyond the control of school systems that influence academic performance must be addressed—including low birth weight, inadequate health care, food insecurity, environmental pollutants, family relations/family stress, and neighborhood characteristics.

By providing quality early childhood education, after-school programs, mentoring/tutoring, parental involvement activities, and other supportive programs to help mitigate out-of-school factors, youth will have expanded opportunities for achieving the skills essential for future success—including problem solving/critical thinking, information management, self-direction, and the ability to collaborate, be innovative, and achieve a sense of self-worth.

Safety

**Outcome #1: An increased percentage of youth will avoid criminal activity.**

Teaching and modeling respect and nonviolent conflict resolution helps to ensure young people become upstanding and law-abiding adults. Studies have shown that children who enter the juvenile justice system are three times as likely to reenter the adult criminal justice system. A 2003 report by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention indicated that youth referred to juvenile court before the age of 13 are far more likely to become chronic juvenile offenders than youth whose initial contact occurs at a later age. In Denver, the average age of a youth’s first arrest is 14; the average age of juveniles admitted to detention and commitment is 15. Frequent or repeat delinquent behavior is a factor in Denver’s youth population: Of the 31,651 school-based incidents during the 2005-2006 school year, almost half of students charged with unlawful behavior in school were repeat offenders.

Substance abuse is a contributor and by-product of youth delinquency. In Colorado, 1,297 young people under the age of 20 were admitted to an emergency room for an alcohol-related episode in 2007. Nationally, a 2000 survey of juvenile detainees found that 56 percent of boys and
40 percent of girls tested positive for drug use at the time of their arrest.

A 1996 national report tied together findings that delinquency is most often related to risk factors that stem from deficiencies in five major domains of a child’s life: community, family, school, peers, and individual characteristics. Comprehensive and coordinated screening and assessment will identify areas of concern for youth and help direct resources to persons and communities most impacted. Data and system coordination will be critical to ensuring youth receive targeted services that provide primary and secondary prevention and early intervention services — including strength-based services for the youth and family, and alternative solutions to referrals to court.

Outcome #2: An increased percentage of youth will not experience juvenile victimization.

We know that young people cannot learn and grow unless they feel safe and are protected in their schools and neighborhoods. Research has demonstrated a clear relationship between youth victimization and mental health and delinquent behavior, including gang involvement. We must do more to safeguard our young people from violence. A 2008 national study revealed that youth 12-15 had the highest rates of victimization among all age groups surveyed. In 2009, the National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence reported that more than 60 percent of the nation’s youth had been exposed to violence within the past year. Nearly 1 in 2 were physically assaulted at least once in the past year, with more than 1 in 10 injured in an assault.

At a local level, an analysis of reported offenses from January - November 2007 for Denver youth, ages 11-24, revealed more than 6,300 cases of victimization. The 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey showed that 8 percent of students surveyed reported being threatened with a weapon within the last year, and 4 percent did not attend school at least once in the last 30 days due to feeling unsafe either at or on the way to school.

Through a coordinated approach that will include primary and secondary prevention and support services, we can improve the outlook for young people who have been victimized and reduce rates of youth victimization.

“Education, health, and safety are important issues to us. Everyday, we face peers struggling with drinking, using drugs, joining gangs, and dropping out of school. A citywide youth agenda that focuses on these issues would help programs work together and help generations to come.”

— Mayor’s Youth Commission

Bridging efforts

Upon review of the subcommittee’s recommended outcomes, the steering committee immediately recognized the interconnectedness of the three focus areas. Education, for example, can impact a youth’s health and safety. Because the three areas are interwoven, the outcomes of one focus area affect the outcomes of the others. This realization reinforced the need for coordination and shared efforts across Denver’s systems and services in affecting the youth agenda outcomes.

Interconnection of Denver Youth Agenda’s Focus Areas

Furthermore, the intersections inherent among these three areas of adolescent well-being expand the way in which everyone in the community takes action in support of young people. From the individual level to the organization and systems levels, everyone has a role.
to play — and several ways of contributing — toward affecting young people’s success. For example:

- Parents can walk rather than drive their children to school
- Seniors can volunteer to mentor a young person
- Youth-serving organizations can broaden their network of partners

The youth agenda is a catalyst for creating a focus and moving youth advocates to contribute their efforts toward achieving its broad outcomes.”

— María Guajardo, Executive Director
Mayor’s Office for Education and Children

Advancing the youth agenda

The steering committee developed the Denver’s Youth Agenda Framework to guide youth-related strategies. This overarching framework integrates the identified outcomes with guiding principles for moving the agenda forward. The goal is that stakeholders and community members will see their role in contributing to the youth agenda, and align their efforts to move

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<th>Components</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
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| **Engaging Stakeholders** | **Health #1:**
Criteria for stakeholder participation is understanding the relevance and urgency of the plan and joining efforts to move the Youth Agenda outcomes forward | An increased percentage of Denver youth will participate in physical activity at least 60 minutes per day. |
| **Developing Strategies** | **Health #2:**
- Convene and communicate to build cross-systems capacity | Denver youth will have increased access to comprehensive health education. |
- Utilize existing data sources | **Education #1:**
- Identify populations and areas of need | By the end of 9th grade, all youth will be at or above grade level and have the support they need to graduate. |
- Ensure access to needed services for youth and families | **Education #2:**
- Support programs that foster positive youth development | Youth will have increased access to positive, out-of-school-time activities and supports to build the skills and competencies needed to meet the growing demands of a global economy. |
| **Coordinating Infrastructure** | **Sharing Accountability** | **Safety #1:**
- Align and strengthen initiatives to clarify roles and responsibilities in achieving a blended infrastructure | An increased percentage of youth will avoid criminal activity. |
- Systems work together to move the Youth Agenda outcomes forward | **Safety #2:**
- Form working agreements on shared responsibilities and commitments | An increased percentage of youth will not experience juvenile victimization. |
the outcomes forward. In this way, the agenda will encourage policy commitments and programmatic environments that lead to action around shared goals for youth.

**Presenting a roadmap for change**

Denver’s youth agenda frames a “Bill of Rights” for our young people — the right to a quality education, a safe environment, and a healthy lifestyle. The agenda both heightens awareness and increases commitment to a new way of working together. Individuals and organizations can use the framework to better understand their roles in achieving specific outcomes that influence the overall well-being of youth.

The steering committee captured the spirit with which stakeholders will work together to promote the City’s youth agenda and the shared values that will guide this work. These values include:

- Youth development principles guide actions
- Young people and those who support them have equitable access to services and opportunities
- Coordinated resources and efforts lead to efficiencies and systemic changes in health, education, and safety

By taking shared responsibility in moving Denver’s Youth Agenda forward, stakeholders will focus on youth development principles, equitable access, and coordinated efforts to create the necessary changes needed to ensure youth are engaged and thriving in their communities.

“**The next step is to rally the community to embrace an agenda that puts kids first. By focusing the energy of nonprofits, the business community, the faith community, parents, and the youth themselves, we can make a real difference in the health, education, and safety of our young people.**”

— Doug Linkhart, City Councilman At-Large and Steering Committee member

With the work completed to date, emphasis in the coming year will be on:

- Identifying a governance body to guide the youth agenda forward
- Connecting multiple stakeholders and community members to the agenda
- Naming and tracking the indicators that will lead to the agenda’s outcomes
- Determining multiple strategies for moving the outcomes forward

The shift to coordinating services, supports, and opportunities for youth around the agenda’s three broad, yet interrelated focus areas — health, education, and safety — will demand innovation in service delivery and funding, but will ensure a purposeful and sustainable way of working together on behalf of Denver’s youth.
I. Steering Committee – Denver’s Youth Agenda

**Mayor’s Office for Education and Children**
Dr. María Guajardo, Executive Director
Nancy Gilder, Director, Positive Youth Development
Maxine Quintana, Director, Student Programs

**Mayor’s Office of Economic Development**
Cec Ortiz, Deputy Director
Lori Mack, Director, Youth Services Division

**City Council**
Doug Linkhart, City Councilman At-Large
Ursla Null, Aide to Councilman Linkhart

**Denver Collaborative Partnership**
Sara Boylan, Director

**Denver Department of Human Services**
Allen Pollack, Deputy of Family Services
Dace West, Co-Director, Youth Strategic Partnerships

**Denver Health and Hospital Authority**
Dr. Christopher Urbina, Executive Director, Denver Public Health
Dr. Paul Melinkovich, Director, Community Health Services
Dr. Simon Hambridge, Director, Pediatrics and Adolescent Services
Audrey Hoener, Operations Manager, School-Based Health Centers

**Denver Housing Authority**
Ismael Guerrero, Executive Director
Stella Madrid, Community Affairs Officer
Lynne Picard, Program Manager

**Denver Parks and Recreation**
Dolores Moreno, Director of Recreation

**Denver Public Library**
Shirley Amore, City Librarian
Carol Edwards, Cluster Manager
Lisa Champion, Librarian

**Denver Public Schools**
Happy Haynes, Chief Community Engagement Officer

**Department of Safety**
Al LaCabe, Manager of Safety
Charlotte Stephens, Director, Safe City Office
Pat Hedrick, Safe City Diversion Supervisor

**Juvenile Justice**
Regina Huerter, Executive Director, Crime Prevention Control Commission
Mitch Morrissey, District Attorney

**Mental Health Center of Denver**
Lynn Garst, Associate Director, Child and Family Services

**Community Partners**
Kippi Clausen, Director, Population-Based Strategies, Mile High United Way
Art Rimando, Senior Director, Mile High United Way
Stephanie Hoy, Executive Director, Assets for Colorado Youth
Katherine Plog-Martinez, Director of Training, Assets for Colorado Youth
## II. Youth Initiatives in Denver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Partners</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Outcomes/Key Issue Areas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bridging the Gap at Mile High United Way</strong></td>
<td>DDHS, Community-based organizations, Family to Family, Business partners</td>
<td>To increase outcomes and opportunities for youth in or aging out of foster care</td>
<td>Priority areas of housing, education, employment, physical/mental health, and permanency</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>City/DPS Collaborative Partnership</strong></td>
<td>City and County of Denver, DPS, many community partners already linked to 8 schools – Smith, Stedman, Place, Cole, Trevista, North, West, East – with added support from AmeriCorp to provide 30-40 additional schools with resources and services</td>
<td>To improve coordination of services</td>
<td>Increased parent and family engagement; strengthened neighborhoods; increased student engagement; increased skill development; increased school attendance; increased parent volunteers in school communities (specific measurable outcomes in each of these areas)</td>
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<td><strong>Community Schools Planning Group</strong></td>
<td>MOEC, DPS, Community-based organizations</td>
<td>Serves as a work group to think strategically about building a citywide community school model and coordinate related initiatives to ensure resources are leveraged and initiatives are strengthened</td>
<td>Create and submit to appropriate stakeholders a plan to bring the community school model to scale in Denver; coordinate and align similar Denver initiatives</td>
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<td><strong>Creative Options</strong></td>
<td>DDHS, DPS, Juvenile Probation, City Attorney, Juvenile Courts, MOEC, Safe City, DCP</td>
<td>A systems collaboration around creative solutions to truancy</td>
<td>Increase school attendance, reduce truancy rates</td>
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<td><strong>Crime Prevention and Control Commission Youth Prevention Committee (CPCC)</strong></td>
<td>Juvenile Probation, Denver Juvenile Courts, DPS, Safe City, DA, Community-based organizations, Office of Drug Strategy, MOEC, DCP</td>
<td>To prevent and reduce juvenile crime and increase school engagement</td>
<td>Studies youth system; provides some intervention support; creates system change</td>
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<td><strong>Denver Collaborative Partnership (DCP) HB 1451</strong></td>
<td>DDHS, DPS, DYC/SB94, DHHA, Juvenile Probation, MHCD, Juvenile Courts, Family to Family, Signal, Domestic Violence Coordinating Council/Safehouse, ABC/Access Behavioral Care</td>
<td>To identify interventions around delinquency and truancy for youth in multiple systems; streamline services; focus on community-based resources</td>
<td>Reduce out-of-home placement in child welfare and DYC; reduce unsuccessful termination from probation; increase school engagement for truant youth; reduce substance use</td>
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<td><strong>Denver Public Library Summer of Reading</strong></td>
<td>Colorado Rockies, Elitch Gardens, Parks &amp; Rec, Denver Zoo, Radio Disney, Helen K. &amp; Arthur E. Johnson Foundation, Denver Post, Rocky Mountain PBS, Colorado Parents</td>
<td>Maintain and improve literacy skills during summer vacation from school</td>
<td>Literacy, school readiness, school engagement</td>
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<td><strong>Denver Quality Afterschool Connection (DQUAC)</strong></td>
<td>DPS, Youth service providers, MOEC, Denver Parks &amp; Rec.</td>
<td>A coalition of youth service providers working together to advance afterschool programs</td>
<td>Increased student engagement; increased quality of afterschool programs; better coordination of programs</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Denver Youth Development Initiative (DYDI)</strong></td>
<td>Office of Economic Development/Division of Workforce Development, DPS, Community-based organizations</td>
<td>To organize community partners connected with schools into a more systemic effort (now a Theme Team of the City/DPS Partnership)</td>
<td>Mentoring, parent engagement, career readiness</td>
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<td>Denver's Child and Youth Friendly City Initiative (CYFC)</td>
<td>MOEC, ACY, University of Colorado Children, Youth &amp; Environments Center for Research and Design Institute</td>
<td>To facilitate a communitywide conversation about what would make Denver a great city for children and youth</td>
<td>Increased youth voice in matters that affect them; increased public will for a comprehensive youth agenda; improved service delivery based on CYFC data</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family to Family Denver</td>
<td>DDHS, Westside Family Networks, Denver Children's Home, Fresh Start, Epworth United Methodist Church, YMCA of Metro Denver, Lowry Family Center. Each Family to Family Denver neighborhood help site has multiple community partners</td>
<td>Community-based services that support families involved with Denver Human Services. Primary services offered include team decision making, supervised visitation, and recruitment and support of foster and kinship families.</td>
<td>Community-based support to create a network of care that is neighborhood-based and culturally appropriate for families affected by child abuse and neglect.</td>
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<td>Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver (GRID)</td>
<td>DPD, DPS, Denver District Adult and Juvenile Probation, DYC, Department of Corrections, Boys and Girls Club, Parks and Rec, OED, Mile High United Way, DA, DHHA, DDHS, CPCC, Safe City, U.S. Attorney’s Office</td>
<td>To implement a comprehensive gang model to reduce gang activity</td>
<td>Reduce recidivism rates for target population, increase capacity of community to address gang activity, reduce violent gang crime</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graffiti Oversight Committee</td>
<td>Councilman Lopez, Councilwoman Montero, DPD, Sheriff’s Department, Public Works, City Attorney, Mayor’s Office, Parks and Recreation, Safe City, Athmar Neighborhood Association, Neighborhood Inspection Services, Denver Office of Cultural Affairs, CPCC</td>
<td>Ensure ongoing comprehensive coordinated and accountable approach to anti-graffiti efforts through a formalized body and dedicated resources, utilizing abatement, enforcement, and prevention</td>
<td>Sheriff’s Department operated abatement program for prior offenders; Graffiti Hurts is an anti-graffiti curriculum for under age 12; Urban Legacy is for ages 13-19; provides diversionary Arts programs; works on a unified message citywide</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lights on Afterschool</td>
<td>MOEC, Mile High United Way, Denver Public Schools Foundation, DPS.</td>
<td>Leverage resources to provide support for quality school-based afterschool programs.</td>
<td>School engagement, better day-school attendance, better grades, lower drop-out rates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P-20 Council</td>
<td>Governor’s Office</td>
<td>Ensuring a seamless education system from pre-school to grad school in preparing young people for the 21st Century</td>
<td>Early childhood, data and accountability, great teachers and leaders; preparations and transitions</td>
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<td>Senate Bill 91-94</td>
<td>Presiding Juvenile Judge Ashby, DPS, DPD and Sheriffs Department, DA, Municipal Government, Public Defender, DYC, Community Mental Health, Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse; OED/DWD, Faith-based community, DCP</td>
<td>Responsible for developing yearly plan to prevent youth from entering detention; reduce length of stay in detention; help prevent out-of-home placement and commitment of adjudicated youth</td>
<td>Managing the detention beds to the cap of 73 for the Second Judicial District/Denver by providing programs to prevent youth from entering or reducing their stay</td>
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<td>Teen Pregnancy Prevention Partnership</td>
<td>Denver Office of Strategic Partnerships, Community-based organizations</td>
<td>To decrease the number of teen births in the City of Denver, with a particular focus on the Latina population</td>
<td>Delay onset of sexual activity: increase use of condoms/contraception for sexually active students; increase parent-child communication about abstinence and contraception; link youth to clinical resources around sexual health</td>
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<td><strong>Youth Mentoring Collaborative</strong></td>
<td>Denver Office of Strategic Partnerships, Mile High United Way, Community-based organizations</td>
<td>To increase communication, cooperation, and resource acquisition among the organizations providing volunteer mentors to Denver area youth</td>
<td>Mentoring, graduation rates, academic achievement</td>
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**KEY**
- ACY – Assets for Colorado Youth
- CBOs – Community-Based Organizations
- CPCC – Crime Prevention and Control Commission
- DA – Denver District Attorney
- DCP – Denver Collaborative Partnership
- DDHS – Denver Department of Human Services
- DHHA – Denver Health and Hospital Authority
- DPD – Denver Police Department
- DPS – Denver Public Schools
- DYC – Division of Youth Corrections
- MHCD – Mental Health Center of Denver
- MOEC – Mayor’s Office for Education and Children
- OED/DWD – Office of Economic Development/Division of Workforce Development

**III. Resources**

**Health:**
- Surgeon General’s Report, retrieved from mchb.hrsa.gov/mchirc/dataspeak/events/apr_02/.../spear-ohds.ppt

**Education:**
- Johns Hopkins University, April 2009. “Dropouts in the Denver Public Schools.”

**Safety:**