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A Letter from Mayor Michael B. Hancock

As Mayor of this great city, I want to ensure that all children and youth have the opportunity to succeed. To assist them with achieving better outcomes my administration continues to work to align youth programs, services and financial investments to provide access to quality experiences in every neighborhood.

The Status of Denver’s Children: A Community Resource document provides a road map to help city agencies and community partners understand the current opportunities and challenges facing young people and their families in Denver. I invite you to utilize this resource to make data driven decisions to improve outcomes and systems, as well as remove barriers so that all children and youth in our city have the chance to thrive.

I believe that economic vitality and quality of life in Denver depend significantly on our ability to level the playing field so that all children and youth – regardless of race, ethnicity, income or disability – have the resources and support they need to graduate high school prepared for success in college, their career and beyond. To achieve this vision, we must be equipped with data that allows for us to make intentional decisions as we work together to create a city where young people have the opportunities and experiences to compete and succeed in a 21st century global economy.

The Status of Denver’s Children: A Community Resource document is intended to inform programs, services and investments in children and youth that guide us to move towards collective action to support Denver’s children, our most valuable asset.

Michael B. Hancock
Mayor
Data

The most complete census of the United States population is conducted once every 10 years. The data collected from Census 2010 provides the best count of the population currently available for the country, states, and counties. The American Community Survey provides estimates of yearly population changes along with additional social, demographic, and economic data. These data sets, however, are estimates based on a sample of the population and are not as robust as the basic population data collected during the decennial census.

Census tracts are statistical areas defined by the U.S. Census Bureau and generally have a population between 1,200 and 8,000 people with the optimal size of 4,000 people. They are continuous areas that vary in size based on population density. Census tracts are frequently used throughout this document as the statistical unit from which demographic data are aggregated and displayed within Denver neighborhoods. Census tract data are only available in five-year estimates from the U.S. Census and are significantly less accurate than estimates for larger population areas.

Neighborhood data (aggregated from census tracts) are available using five-year averages of the data and contain errors. Caution should be used when interpreting the results in any detail. The data and maps provided in this document are intended to give a general impression of variation by neighborhood and not exact counts of people.

The data used in this report are the most current from the best available sources and include the U.S. Census Bureau, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, and other reliable publications and resources. Data describing the same phenomena may differ due to the source, method of collection, time period, aggregations, or margin of error. All sources used in the document are clearly cited.
Introduction

The Office of Children’s Affairs uses data to help understand who Denver’s children are and where they live. These data help policy makers, advocates, and community partners form a common understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by Denver’s children and youth. To improve outcomes for all our children, it is necessary to appreciate the environmental contexts that shape how they experience the world.

Many factors influence a child’s chances for success. Differences in school quality, the presence of positive adult role models, neighborhood safety, access to healthy foods, health insurance, a medical home, and quality early care and education experiences all have varying impacts on child outcomes. It is easier for some children to overcome obstacles throughout their development when those obstacles are not cumulative and persistent. Children who live in low-income or chronically disadvantaged neighborhoods often experience significantly lower outcomes in health, early childhood education, K-12 education, and post-secondary success than their more affluent peers. To mitigate the impact of disadvantage on children, the City of Denver has established five goals to ensure all Denver’s children are prepared to succeed. These include:

- Increasing the number of children who have access to high quality early childhood experiences
- Increasing the number of Denver third grade students who can read at grade level
- Decreasing the number of disconnected youth
- Increasing the number of students who have access to and complete a post-secondary pathway and obtain a job
- Increasing the percentage of children who are at a healthy weight

Together, these goals address important childhood issues throughout all stages of a child’s development. To understand the complexity and distribution of factors related to the outcome of these goals, a foundational set of data indicators at the neighborhood level are provided in this document. The Status of Denver’s Children 2017: A Community Resource provides in-depth information on how Denver kids and their families are faring using a variety of indicators – looking at the actual numbers as well as the places with high or low concentrations of factors. This resource is intended to be used to inform programs, services, and investments in children and youth as they relate to the city’s five goals for children.

Due to the size constraints of the document, neighborhood and street labels are not included on all the maps.

The map in Figure 1 is to be used as a neighborhood reference map to supplement the maps throughout the document.
Figure 1: Denver Neighborhood Reference Map
2017 Child Well-Being Index

Using the poverty measure alone to determine advantage and disadvantage by place is inadequate. Rather, it is the culmination of factors together that present significant challenges to children and families. The child with fewer obstacles to overcome in everyday experiences is likely to have more opportunities for both academic and life success.

Consistent patterns of advantage and disadvantage are apparent in the maps provided throughout the 2017 Status of Denver’s Children: A Community Resource document. It is possible to statistically aggregate key indicators to highlight areas of cumulative disadvantage. These areas can then be used to identify and focus on societal and systemic problems that limit opportunity for children in Denver. Unpacking the complex barriers that our children face will ultimately lead to solutions for meaningful change to improve outcomes for all Denver’s children.

Eleven indicators that measure differences in education, health, and community opportunities were statistically aggregated to provide a snapshot of opportunity for Denver children by neighborhood (Figure 2). Each of these indicators and maps are discussed fully and cited in the 2017 Status of Denver’s Children: A Community Resource document. These indicators include:

**Births to Women without a High School Diploma**
Low educational attainment of parents is associated with a number of risk factors that impact child well-being including a higher risk for living in poverty.
Discussion on page 61.

**Teen Births**
Teen pregnancy can compromise the well-being of both teen mothers and their children. Teen mothers are less likely than older mothers to receive adequate, timely prenatal care, putting them at risk for pregnancy complications. Children born to teen mothers are more likely to drop out of school, become teen parents themselves, or be incarcerated as an adult.
Discussion on page 59.

**Overweight or Obese Children**
A child’s health is a key determinant to success in most other aspects of their lives. One of the challenges currently facing Denver is the number of children who are at an unhealthy weight. Childhood obesity is less about how much a child weighs and more about the long-term impact of obesity on a child’s overall health in addition to its social impact on the broader community.
Discussion on page 48.
Kindergarteners NOT Reading at Grade Level
To ensure that all Denver children will be successful in school and life, they must develop the skills necessary at each stage in the life-cycle. Children need to enter school ready to learn. There is a clear geographic distribution by Denver neighborhood of children not prepared for reading success by the end of Kindergarten. Discussion on page 104.

Third Graders NOT Reading at Grade Level
The ability to read at grade level by the end of third grade is an important benchmark for future academic success. Research shows that third grade students who are not reading at grade level may struggle throughout their academic careers and are at risk for dropping out or graduating high school not college or career ready. Discussion on page 96.

Ninth Graders Chronically Absent
No matter the grade or school, students must participate regularly to benefit. The more school time that is missed by children, the harder it is to keep up with the coursework. According to the report by Attendance Works, students’ test scores on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) who missed more school than their peers who attended regularly were consistently lower. This is true for every age and every racial or ethnic category analyzed. Discussion on page 126.

Adults without a High School Diploma
Adults with a high school diploma generally report better life outcomes for themselves and their children. In addition to earning more money, high school graduates tend to live longer and are less likely to fall into poverty and rely on public assistance. Positive role models and a strong network of caring, informed adults are important assets in a community. Discussion on page 41.
Children in Single-Parent Families

Single-parent families often struggle to provide basic needs for their families with only one income. The number of children living in single-parent homes in Denver has decreased ten percent since 2013. Some neighborhoods have higher proportions of children living in vulnerable single-parent families than other neighborhoods.

Discussion on page 37.

Child Poverty

Children living in poverty often experience the negative conditions of substandard housing, homelessness, inadequate nutrition, food insecurity, inadequate child care, lack of access to health care, unsafe neighborhoods, and under-resourced schools. They are also at-risk for negative outcomes such as low academic achievement, dropping out of high school, abuse and neglect, behavioral and physical health problems, and developmental delays.

Discussion on page 31.

Violent Crime

Children who are living in high-crime neighborhoods and exposed to violence have the potential to suffer lasting physical, mental and emotional harm. They are also at risk for juvenile delinquency, further victimization, and involvement with the child welfare system.

Discussion on page 44.

Unemployment

In many ways, the labor market and job stability determine the resources that parents have available to spend on care for their children. In addition, job related stress, job loss, and financial insecurity can negatively impact the entire household. These external factors related to the labor force may affect children's development.

Discussion on page 29.
Figure 2: 2017 Denver Child Well-Being Summary

2017 Child Well-Being Index

Index Based on 11 Indicators:
- Births to Women Without a High School Diploma
- Teen Births
- Overweight or Obese Children
- Kindergarteners Below Grade Level for Reading
- 3rd Graders Not Proficient in Reading
- 9th Graders Chronically Absent
- Adults With Less Than a High School Diploma
- Child Poverty
- Children in Single-Parent Families
- Unemployment Rate
- Violent Crime Rate
Setting the Community Context
City and County of Denver Programs that Support Children and Families Within the Area of Basic Needs

Adaptive Recreation
After School Meals
AIM
Arts and Culture
Bank on Denver
Colorado Child Care Assistance Program
Child Care Inspections
Child Support Services
Child Welfare
Colorado Works
Community Events
Community Recreation
Crosswalk and Sign Maintenance
CW OOH
CW Sub-Adopt
Denver Street Outreach Collaborative
Disaster Ready Camp
Diversion Services
Education Materials
Employment First
Family Unification
Fire Station Tours
Fishing
Food Program
GREAT
Healthy Homes
Intervention Program
Juvenile Work Program
Medicaid Eligibility
MY Denver
Nurse Family Partnership
One on One Financial Coaching
Outdoor Recreation
Positive Youth Contacts
Prevention Coordinators
Safety Trailer
School Based Health Centers
School Crossing Guards
School Oral Health
School Resource Officers
SNAP Benefits
SNAP Eligibility
Social Enrichment
Summer Food
Training for Teens
Urban Arts Fund
Urban Peak
Urban Peak-Winter Shelter
VFC
YFS-Prevention Program DPS
To formulate solutions to some of the complex challenges facing Denver’s children and understand where opportunity is in Denver, it’s necessary to supply basic demographic information on children and their families. Data in this section include total population statistics, data on family economics, educational attainment of the adults, and crime as well as the distribution of people by race and ethnicity. Considering the context of the communities in which children live goes a long way to establishing effective and efficient policies and recommendations to ensure that every Denver child has the best opportunity to succeed.
Total Population

Denver is experiencing significant population growth. From 2010 to 2015, the number of people living in Denver has increased by 78,000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹ The demographic composition of the people moving into Denver will dramatically impact the income distribution, the housing market, and the ethnic and racial composition and characteristics of Denver neighborhoods. These demographic changes necessitate thoughtful changes to the policies, programs, and services the city controls for all Denver residents to have the best opportunity to thrive.

Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau data show that the United States is undergoing a dramatic shift in the racial and ethnic composition of the population. There has been rapid growth of new minority groups composed of Hispanics, Asians, and multiracial populations. William Frey, a demographer with the Brookings Institution, states that over the next 40 years each of these minority groups is expected to double in size.²

Table 1: Population Characteristics for Denver, Colorado and the United States, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Denver</th>
<th>Colorado</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>682,545</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>5,456,574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>207,847</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>1,164,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White</td>
<td>365,869</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>3,737,243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Black</td>
<td>62,563</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>213,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic American Indian</td>
<td>3,522</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>26,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Asian</td>
<td>22,997</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>158,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Pacific Islander</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>8,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Other Race</td>
<td>2,120</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>13,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Two or More Races</td>
<td>17,264</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>134,442</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Denver’s population mirrors these national trends. In 2015, the total population of Denver County was estimated at 682,545 people (Figure 3). Hispanics, representing the largest ethnic group in Colorado, comprised 31 percent of the total county population (Table 1).³

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Denver’s Asian Population

Nationwide, the largest growth in the Asian population took place after 1965 and was primarily due to changes in U.S. immigration policies. As of 2010, eighty-five percent of U.S. Asians were first- or second-generation Americans. In Denver, the Asian population has grown 48 percent since 2005 (Figure 4).

The maps in Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of the Asian population by census tract and Denver neighborhood over time.

Figure 4: Denver’s Asian Population over Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>15,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>19,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>23,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Map of Denver’s Asian Population

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010 and 2015 Five-Year Estimates

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Denver’s Black Population

For most of U.S. history, blacks represented the largest minority group in the nation. However, as of the 2000 Census, Hispanics represented the largest minority.\(^7\) In 2015, the U.S. Census estimated nine percent of Denver’s population to be black. This is lower than 12 percent nationally (Table 1).\(^8\)

In Denver, the black population grew 17 percent since 2005 (Figure 6).\(^9\)

The maps in Figure 7 illustrate the distribution of the black population by census tract and Denver neighborhood over two time periods.\(^10\)


Denver’s Hispanic Population

Waves of immigrants arriving in the 1970’s to 1990’s added to the long-standing population of Hispanic people in the U.S. and more than tripled their numbers nationwide. The most recent population growth, however, is due to natural increase rather than immigration.\(^\text{11}\) Denver’s Hispanic population has grown nine percent since 2005 (Figure 8).\(^\text{12}\)

The maps in Figure 9 illustrate the distribution of the Hispanic population by census tract and Denver neighborhood over time.\(^\text{13}\)

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Denver’s Non-Hispanic White Population

Nationwide, the white population is the largest racial group. However, white growth has slowed due to low immigration and fertility rates. The white population is moving within the country from large metropolitan coastal areas into areas in the South and West. By 2010, 64 percent of the U.S. population was white. By 2040, whites will become a minority of the total population.\(^\text{14}\) Denver’s Non-Hispanic white population has grown 35 percent since 2005 (Figure 10).\(^\text{15}\)

The maps in Figure 11 illustrate the distribution of the non-Hispanic white population by census tract and Denver neighborhood over time.\(^\text{16}\)

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Child Population

The number of children under age 18 living in Denver increased four percent since 2005. After a significant drop in 2010, the number of children in Denver is again increasing (Figure 12). In 2015, approximately 140,700 children were estimated to be living in Denver.\(^\text{17}\)

Figure 12: Denver Children under Age 18 Trends

Figure 13: Map of Denver Children under Age 18

Five-year estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau provide the data for census tract and neighborhood-level analysis (Figure 13).\(^\text{18}\)


Children under Age Five


Maps comparing the percentage of children under age five in Denver over time are illustrated in Figure 15.\footnote{U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2006-2010 and 2011-2015 Five-Year Estimates. Race, Table DP05. Retrieved from American Fact Finder January, 2016: \url{http://factfinder.census.gov}.}
Child Population by Race/Ethnicity

Denver’s population is diverse. Thirty-three percent of children under age 18 were categorized as non-Hispanic white in 2015. The largest ethnic group in Denver is Hispanic with 48 percent of children reported to be of Hispanic origin of any race.21

Including the Hispanic ethnicity in any racial category, white children make up 71 percent of Denver’s child population, followed by 11 percent of black children. Asian children make up three percent, and American Indian, one percent (Figure 16).22

Figure 16: Denver’s Child Population by Race 2015

Children of Color

Denver is made up of a majority of children who reported to be of a race/ethnicity other than non-Hispanic white. In other words, children of color, mixed race/ethnicity, and others made up 67 percent (93,700) of the total child population in Denver in 2015. Not unlike other urban centers, Denver has a higher proportion of children of color than Colorado and the United States (Figure 17). The maps highlight the areas in Denver neighborhoods where children of color make up more than half of the child population over two time periods (Figure 18).

Figure 17: Proportion of Children of Color in Denver over Time

Figure 18: Areas in Denver with less than 50 percent Non-Hispanic White Children over Time

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Children in Immigrant Families

Children in immigrant families are defined as children under age 18 who are either foreign-born or who have at least one foreign-born parent, regardless of citizenship status or year of arrival in the United States. In 2015, 38 percent (54,000) of Denver’s children were living in immigrant families (Figure 19).  

Seventy-eight percent of the children in immigrant families in Denver originate from Latin America. The majority, or 90 percent, of children in immigrant families are U.S. citizens. Three percent of their parents have been in the country less than five years.

The distribution of children in immigrant families varies across Denver neighborhoods. The maps in Figure 20 illustrate the proportion of children in immigrant families over two time periods.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010 and 2015 Five-Year Estimates

Language

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 40,000 children, or 42 percent, under the age of 18 spoke a language other than English at home in 2015 (Figure 21). The variation of people over the age of five who speak a language other than English at home over time is illustrated in the maps in Figure 22.

Figure 21: Children Who Speak a Language Other Than English at Home

Figure 22: People Who Speak a Language Other Than English at Home


Youth in Foster Care

The children that are in foster care represent a high-risk population whose negative life circumstances necessitated their placement into the child welfare system. Some of the challenges they face that may impact their chances for success in school include:

- Low birth weight;
- Abusive homes;
- Increased hunger and poor nutrition;
- Frequently changing schools;
- Exposure to environmental hazards such as drugs, alcohol, and violence;
- Lack of home support in reading and language development;
- Single-parent homes; and
- Less involved home-school connections.\textsuperscript{32}

Consequently, children and youth in foster care are more likely than their peers to have lower test scores, repeat grades, require special education services, exhibit behavior problems, have lower attendance, and drop out of school.

The number of out-of-home placements (foster care, kinship/relative care, congregate care) by month for children birth through age 18 is illustrated in Figure 23.\textsuperscript{33}

The average number of Denver children placed in 2016 was 934.


\textsuperscript{33} Denver Department of Human Services. (2017, January 27). Number of Youth in Foster Care by Month.
Family Economics

Income

In 2015, the median family (with child) income in Denver was $63,869, which is $2,932 higher than in 2014. Denver’s median family income is approaching the national figure but still below the state median income of $76,594 (Figure 24).\(^{34}\)

Unemployment

In many ways, the labor market and job stability determine the resources that parents have available to spend on care for their children. In addition, job related stress, job loss, and financial insecurity can negatively impact the entire household. These external factors related to the labor force may affect children’s development.\(^{35}\) In Denver the unemployment rate has dropped significantly since 2010.

The unemployment rate was 3.3 percent in February 2017, with approximately 12,700 people estimated to be unemployed (Figure 25).\(^{36}\)

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation uses the percentage of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment as one measure of family economic security. Many families piece together part-time employment to make ends meet. Furthermore, without a good education and relevant job skills, it is difficult for parents to earn a living wage to support their families.

In 2015, 33 percent (46,000) of Denver children lived in families where no parent had full-time, year around employment (Figure 26).

Five-year estimates of unemployment rates illustrate the variation in employment by neighborhood (Figure 27).

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Poverty

Children living in poverty often experience the negative conditions of substandard housing, homelessness, inadequate nutrition, food insecurity, inadequate child care, lack of access to health care, unsafe neighborhoods, and under-resourced schools. Consequently, they are at-risk for negative outcomes such as low academic achievement, dropping out of high school, abuse and neglect, behavioral and physical health problems, and developmental delays.  

Poverty is defined by the federal government as $24,600 annual income for a family of four and does not consider variations in the cost of living by place or necessary expenses such as housing, health care, child care, or transportation. The federal poverty measure underestimates what it costs to support a family.

According to the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado 2015 by the Colorado Center on Law and Policy, it costs approximately $73,749 to meet the basic needs of a family of four in Denver (two adults, an infant and preschooler). In other words, the cost to meet basic needs for a family of this type in Denver is approximately three times the federal poverty level.

After the significant drop in children under age 18 in poverty from 2013 to 2014, rates have risen in 2015. Child poverty increased from 22 percent to 24 percent. Approximately 33,000 children were living in poverty in 2015 (Figure 28).
Poverty is not equally distributed throughout Denver’s neighborhoods, as illustrated in Figure 29.\textsuperscript{44}

Figure 29: Children in poverty in Denver

**Ratio of Poverty to Income Trends**

Many working families in Denver struggle to make ends meet. An estimated 61,500 children, or 45 percent, of Denver’s children live in families with incomes below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), or less than $48,600 annual income for a family of four. The percentage of children living in families above 200 percent of poverty has grown to 55 percent in 2015 (Figure 30).

**Child Poverty by Race/Ethnicity**

Over time in Denver, the proportion of children in poverty has gone down from 29 percent to 26 percent for all children from the 2006-2010 time period to the 2011-2015 time period. Children of color, however, are more often in poverty than non-Hispanic white children according to the U.S. Census Bureau, five-year estimates. (Figure 31).

---


Young Children in Poverty in Denver

Children are most sensitive to the negative impacts of living in poverty when they are young and their brains are developing. Research shows that when young children are raised in poverty the negative impact can extend well into adulthood.47

According to latest U.S. Census Bureau estimates, approximately 9,500, or 21 percent, of Denver children under age five were living in poverty in 2015. The poverty rate for Denver children under the age of five is higher than the state average of 17 percent (Figure 32).48

Figure 32: Children under age Five in Poverty

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Areas of Concentrated Poverty

All children need strong families and supportive communities to realize their full potential. Unfortunately, too many Denver children are living in high-poverty areas that have the potential to negatively impact their chances for success. Approximately 18 percent of Denver’s children live in areas of concentrated poverty, defined as census tracts with a poverty rate of 30 percent and higher. Critical resources for their family’s healthy growth and development are often out of reach.

Children living in areas of concentrated poverty are more likely to experience stress, have unmet basic needs, lower test scores, be exposed to violence, struggle with a lack of positive role models, and are more likely to drop out of school. The impacts may be greatest for younger children.49

The growth of children living in areas of concentrated poverty since 2000 is dramatic and consistent across all people, children and racial and ethnic groups in Denver. The highest proportion of people living in areas of concentrated poverty occurred during the period of the Great Recession (December 2007- June 2009).50 In the five-year period following, 12 percent of all Denver people lived in these high poverty areas. Children are more likely to live in areas of concentrated poverty than poor adults. People of color live in these areas more often than non-Hispanic white people. Concentration of poverty is highest for Hispanics, with one-quarter living in high-poverty areas (Figure 33).51

More neighborhoods experienced concentrated poverty during the Great Recession. During the 2006-2010 period, one-quarter of Denver’s children lived in areas of concentrated poverty. In the 2011-2015 period, fewer children were living in these high-risk areas. In Denver, approximately 18 percent, or 25,000 children under age 18 lived in areas of concentrated poverty in 2011-2015 (Figure 34).52

Figure 34: Areas of Concentrated Poverty

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010 and 2015 Five-Year Estimates
Single-Parent Families

Single-parent families often struggle to provide basic needs for their families with only one income. In 2015, 53,000 children, or 39 percent of children under age 18, lived in single-parent households in Denver (Figure 35).53 The distributions of children living in single-parent families from 2006-2010 and 2011-2015 are illustrated on the maps in Figure 36.54

Figure 36: Maps of Children in Single-Parent Households

![Maps of Children in Single-Parent Households](image)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010 and 2015 Five-Year Estimates


Public Assistance

The number of children under age 18 living in families receiving public benefits in the form of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), cash public assistance income, or Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, has declined in Denver since 2013. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that approximately 49,500 Denver children, or 28 percent, were living in families receiving public assistance benefits in 2015. This is higher than the Colorado rate of 19 percent (Figure 37).\(^55\)

Figure 38: Map of Children in Households Receiving Public Benefits

The comparison of children in households receiving benefits from 2006-2010 and 2011-2015 is illustrated in Figure 38.\(^56\)


Children Enrolled in WIC

Federal grants are available to States for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). These funds can be used for food, health care referrals and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who may be at nutritional risk.57

In Denver, approximately 15,600 children under age five were enrolled in WIC. This is a 15 percent decrease in the number of children participating in WIC since 2011 (Figure 39).58

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Students in Homeless Families

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education program objectives are to increase access to education and provide stability and opportunity for educational success for children and youth experiencing homelessness. The overall intent of the program is to remove all educational barriers facing homeless children and youth with emphasis on educational enrollment, attendance, and success.

In Denver, the number of homeless students decreased 21 percent from the 2014-2015 school year to the 2015-2016 school year most likely due to the improving economy after the end of the Great Recession (Figure 40).

---

**Figure 40: Homeless School-Aged Children in Denver**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Hotels/Motels</th>
<th>Unsheltered</th>
<th>Doubled-up</th>
<th>Shelters, transitional housing, awaiting foster care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>1,071</td>
<td>1,302</td>
<td>1,567</td>
<td>1,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>1,302</td>
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<td>2012-2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
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<td>2,519</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
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<td>2,519</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>2,519</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Educational Attainment of Adults

Research shows that educational attainment is the most important social characteristic for predicting earnings. Figure 41 illustrates the breakdown of educational attainment by degree for Denver adults over time. The median earnings for adults over the age of 25 increased substantially with higher levels of educational attainment. The lowest earnings are $23,524 for adults without a high school diploma. The greatest earnings are reported for adults with the highest levels of education. Over time, the increase in wages was 13 percent for adults with no high school diploma compared to a 26 percent increase since 2005 for those with graduate degrees (Figure 42).

Figure 41: Educational Attainment of Denver Adults

Figure 42: Median Income for Denver Adults by Educational Attainment

---


Adults with a high school diploma generally report better life outcomes for themselves and their children. In addition to earning more money, high school graduates tend to live longer and are less likely to fall into poverty and rely on public assistance. Positive role models and a strong network of caring, informed adults are important assets in a community. There is evidence that the educational outcomes of children are impacted by the absence of educated, affluent adults in their communities. The maps in Figure 43 illustrate where in our city there are higher percentages of adults in the community without a high school diploma over two time periods.

Figure 43: Map of Adults in the Community without a High School Diploma

![Map of Adults in the Community without a High School Diploma](image)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010 and 2015 Five-Year Estimates

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Crime

High-crime neighborhoods may expose children to violence which can cause several problems. According to the National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence, children who are living in high-crime neighborhoods and exposed to violence have the potential to suffer lasting physical, mental and emotional harm. They are also at risk for juvenile delinquency, further victimization, and involvement with the child welfare system.66

In a nation-wide study of 300 metropolitan areas, data show that higher income neighborhoods have lower violent crime rates than do high-poverty areas. One theory of why crime is higher in low-income areas compared to high-income areas is that people choose to participate in criminal activities when the expected return of the crime outweighs the risk of arrest. In neighborhoods where the residents are more likely to intervene to stop crime, participate in neighborhood associations, and pick up trash and clean graffiti, the perceived risk of being caught is higher and therefore the crime rates are lower.67

Several factors contributing to poor student achievement in schools in high crime neighborhoods have been identified and include:

- Higher mobility rate of low-income children and families;
- Disruptive behavior of classmates; and
- Increased absenteeism in schools.68

For children exposed to high rates of crime, mitigating the impact is important to future success in school and life. Overall crime consists of serious offenses that are reported to the police and include homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, auto theft and arson. The highest rates of overall crime in Denver generally include areas in and around the central business district and the airport (Figure 44).69

69 Denver Police Department. 2016 Neighborhood Crime rates per 1,000 people by Denver neighborhood.
Violent crimes are offenses to a person which involve force or the threat of force and includes homicide, rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Research shows that violent crime in the community around elementary and middle schools is a barrier to overall child well-being. Exposure to violent crime doubles the likelihood that a child will perpetuate violence. Additionally, children exposed to violent crime can suffer post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression. The mental health consequences of exposure to violent crime can hinder cognitive development and educational attainment. The rates of violent crime by neighborhood are illustrated in the map in Figure 45.

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Figure 45: Violent Crime Rate

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71 Denver Police Department. 2016 Neighborhood Crime rates per 1,000 people by Denver neighborhood.
Not only are children at risk for witnessing violent crime in their neighborhood, but many experience violence in their own homes. Violence between parents, intimate partners, or other family members is a significant problem nationwide. Researchers have found that exposure to domestic violence can impact the development of children in numerous ways. Children exposed to physical abuse in the home are more likely to be at increased risk for physical abuse themselves and can exhibit aggression towards others. Long term adverse effects can carry on into adulthood.\(^72\) Children from homes with domestic violence are also reported to display behavioral and emotional problems and are more likely to have issues with substance abuse, violent crime, and adult criminality.\(^73\)

Domestic violence are crimes where the victim’s relationship to the suspect includes spouse, common-law spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, same sex relationship and ex-spouse. Domestic Violence rates by neighborhood are illustrated in Figure 46.\(^74\)

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\(^74\) Denver Police Department. 2016 Neighborhood Crime rates per 1,000 people by Denver neighborhood.
GOAL 1

Increase the Percentage of Children and Youth in Denver Who Are at a Healthy Weight
City and County of Denver Programs that Contribute to Increasing the Percentage of Children Who are at a Healthy Weight

Adaptive Recreation
After School Meals
Aquatics
Chance to Dance
Community Recreation
Employment First
Fishing
Fitness
Food Program
Healthy Eating Active Living
Junior Golf
Medicaid Eligibility
MY Denver
Positive Youth Contacts
Safe Routes to School
School Based Health Centers
SNAP Benefits
SNAP Eligibility
Social Enrichment
Summer Food
WIC
Youth Sports
A child’s health is a key determinant to success in most other aspects of their lives. One of the challenges currently facing Denver is the number of children who are overweight or obese. Childhood obesity is less about how much a child weighs and more about the long-term impact of obesity on a child’s overall health in addition to its social impact on the broader community.

Childhood obesity is the result of consuming too many calories and not getting enough physical activity. Overweight children are those whose body mass index (BMI) falls between the 85th - 94th percentile of normal weight for height. Obese children are those whose BMI is at or above the 95th percentile of normal weight for height or higher. These children are at risk for developing serious, long-term health problems such as diabetes and heart disease. Denver Public Schools together with Denver Health collects BMI data for Denver Public School students between the ages of three and 18. According to this source, 31 percent of Denver children were measured as overweight or obese (16 percent obese and 15 percent overweight).75

The graph in Figure 47 describes overweight and obese students for each school year. The percentage of students at an unhealthy weight status remained flat for the last six school years. However, due to the annual growth of Denver Public School enrollment, the number of children at an unhealthy weight is most likely increasing.

Figure 47: DPS Students Who Are Overweight or Obese by School Year

Typically, Colorado communities with high rates of obesity face limited access to healthy and affordable foods, recreational facilities, safe neighborhoods, and preventive health care. Children living in poverty or in low-income families are more likely to be overweight or obese than their more affluent peers.\(^{76}\)

Mirroring national trends, the number of students in Denver Public Schools with an excessive weight varies by race/ethnicity. Among black and Hispanic students, the percentage of students overweight or obese was higher than their white peers. Older children are more often overweight or obese than younger children. Thirty-two percent of male students were overweight or obese compared to 29 percent of female students (Figure 48).\(^{77}\)

Maternal poverty, consumption of sugar, and stress were identified as prenatal risk-factors leading to higher rates of obesity in Hispanic children in a study published in the Journal of Community Health.\(^{78}\)

Figure 48: DPS Students Overweight or Obese by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Age, 2014-2015 School Year

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A map illustrating the percentage of children ages two through 17 who are overweight or obese is provided in Figure 49.79

Figure 49: Children at an Excessive Weight

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Early Prenatal Care

Prenatal care is the first step to keeping women and their newborns healthy. Babies of mothers who do not get prenatal care are three times more likely to have a low birth weight and five times more likely to die than those born to mothers who do get care.80 Early prenatal care can lead to the diagnosis of many health problems that occur during pregnancy and may result in successful treatment. During these visits, doctors can also educate mothers on what they can do to ensure that their baby has a healthy start to life. Exposure to maternal stress and toxic substances such as tobacco, drugs, and alcohol can affect development before a child is born, impacting the child’s academic, social, and physical outcomes throughout their life.81 Free and low-cost clinics are in Denver for those who need it (Figure 67).

The percentage of women receiving early prenatal care in Denver has improved to 81 percent and, as of 2015, is higher than the state percentage of 80 percent of women receiving early care during pregnancy (Figure 50).82 Disparities exist, however, between women of different race and ethnicity. Women of color (black, Hispanic, and American Indian), had lower rates of early prenatal care than white and Asian women (Figure 51).83

Figure 51: Births to Denver Women with Early Prenatal Care by Race/Ethnicity

---

83 8bid.
There is variation by neighborhood. Women living in high-income neighborhoods received early prenatal care more often than women living in low-income neighborhoods (Figure 52).\textsuperscript{84}
Women Who Smoked During Pregnancy

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention research has shown that smoking during pregnancy causes health problems for both mothers and babies. Problems can arise as complications during pregnancy, premature births, low-birth-weight infants, stillbirths, or Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). In addition to reducing the babies’ lung functions, nicotine may reduce the amount of blood in the fetal cardiovascular system and is further transferred to nursing infants through the smoking mother’s breast milk.\(^{85}\)

In 2015 in Denver, four percent of new mothers reported smoking during pregnancy. This rate is significantly lower than the state rate of seven percent.\(^{86}\) Despite the lower rate in Denver, there is dramatic variation by race/ethnicity and neighborhood (Figures 53 and 54).\(^{87}\) The highest rates are generally in high poverty, low-opportunity neighborhoods, further contributing to the health risks of children living in them.

Figure 53: Map of Women Who Smoked While Pregnant

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Figure 54: Map of Denver Women Who Smoked During Pregnancy

Births to Women Who Smoked While Pregnant

- 1% - 2%
- 3% - 4%
- 5% - 6%
- 7% - 8%
- 9% - 14%

Denver Neighborhoods
Data not Included

Source: Health Statistics Section, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Five-Year Averages 2011-2015
Births

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment reported 9,361 births to Denver women in 2015 (Figure 55). The number of births has declined two percent since 2010.88

Births by Race/Ethnicity

Birth data from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment describe the diversity in Denver’s child population. Trends show that the proportion of births in Denver to non-Hispanic white women has increased to 49 percent in 2015. The number of births to Hispanic women has decreased to 28 percent and births to black women down to ten percent (Figure 56).89

89 Ibid.
The Hispanic birth rate is declining dramatically. The rate per 1,000 Hispanic women dropped from 74 in 2013 to 60 in 2015 (Figure 57).\(^9\)

The number of births in 2015 by neighborhood is illustrated in the map in Figure 58.\(^9\)

---

\(^9\) Ibid.
Low Birth Weight Births

Babies born at a low birth weight have a high probability of experiencing developmental problems. Poverty, poor prenatal nutrition, smoking, stress, infections and violence can increase the risk of a baby being born with low birth weight. The number of children born at low birth weight in Denver has remained around nine percent over the last five years. Variation exists by race/ethnicity and neighborhood (Figures 59 and 60).\textsuperscript{92}
Three Risk-Factor Births

Babies born to young women under age 25 who are unmarried and without a high school diploma are often at risk for poor education, social, and economic outcomes throughout their lives. In Denver, three risk-factor births have declined 45 percent since 2010 with 309, or three percent, births to women in this risk category in 2015 (Figure 61).\footnote{Colorado Department of Public Health and Envrionment. (2011-2015). \textit{Live births to unmarried women less than 25 with less than a high school diploma/GED by neighborhood of residence: Denver County residents, 2011-2015.} Denver: Health Statistics Section.}

Some neighborhoods have a higher proportion of three risk-factor births (Figure 62).\footnote{Colorado Department of Public Health and Envrionment. (2011-2015 Five-year averages). \textit{Live births to unmarried women less than 25 with less than a high school diploma/GED by neighborhood of residence: Denver County residents, 2011-2015.} Denver: Health Statistics Section.}

Figure 61: Three Risk-Factor Births

Figure 62: Map of Three Risk-Factor Births
Teen Births

Teen pregnancy can compromise the well-being of both teen mothers and their children. Teen mothers are less likely than older mothers to receive adequate, timely prenatal care, putting them at risk for pregnancy complications. Children born to teen mothers are more likely to drop out of school, become teen parents themselves or be incarcerated as an adult. The teen birth rate in Denver has been on the decline over the last two decades. In 2015, the Denver rate of births to women between the ages of 15 and 19 was 26 per 1,000.95

In Denver, approximately four percent of all births are to teens between the ages of 15 and 19. The proportion of these teen births varies by race and ethnicity. According to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, 62 percent of all teen births in Denver are to Hispanic women. Trends of teen births by race and ethnicity are illustrated in Figure 63.96 Teen births by Denver neighborhood are illustrated in Figure 64.97

Figure 63: Teen Birth Rate Trends by Race/Ethnicity

---

Figure 64: Map of Teen Births by Denver Neighborhood

Teen Births
- 0% - 2%
- 3% - 4%
- 5% - 7%
- 8% - 9%
- 10% - 14%
- Denver Neighborhoods
- Data not Included

Source: Health Statistics Section, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Five-Year Averages 2011-2015
Births to Women Without a High School Diploma

Low educational attainment of parents is associated with several risk factors that impact child well-being including a higher risk for living in poverty. In Denver, 15 percent of births were to women with less than a high school diploma or GED in 2015.

Although this rate is decreasing in Denver, there is significant variation by race/ethnicity. The highest rate by race/ethnicity is among Hispanic women, with 33 percent of births to women without a high school diploma (Figure 66). There is also significant variation by geography (Figure 65).99

---


Access to a primary care in a nearby clinic is essential for all families to maintain healthy living. Providers can monitor health, manage chronic conditions and assist patients with diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions. These services are available to all Denver residents through the network of family health centers across Denver. These centers are conveniently located in neighborhoods of highest need (see child well-being index on page 9) where access might otherwise be difficult due to transportation or cost.

School-Based Health Centers in Denver Public Schools provide a convenient option for care for Denver students. Services available include primary care, mental health, reproductive health education and insurance enrollment assistance (Figure 67).¹⁰⁰

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Health Insurance

Uninsured Children

The ability for all children to see a health care provider for routine exams, screenings, immunizations, and care when sick is essential for healthy growth and development. Unfortunately, too many children live in families without health insurance due to high costs, limited access to providers, or enrollment barriers.

Figure 68: Uninsured Children

The U.S. Census Bureau reports approximately four percent of children in Colorado and Denver were without health insurance in 2015 (Figure 68).\textsuperscript{101} Estimates for the uninsured population are available from the U.S. Census Bureau at the census tract level and differences between places within Denver are apparent (Figure 69).\textsuperscript{102}

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**Medicaid**

Medical Assistance, or Medicaid, is a public health insurance program available for children age 18 and younger in families earning 142 percent of the federal poverty level or less. The number of children receiving medical assistance in Denver has increased to 76,132 by January 2017 (Figure 70).\(^{103}\)

![Figure 70: Denver Children Under 19 Receiving Medicaid](image)

**Child Health Plan Plus**

The Child Health Plan Plus (CHP+) is a low-cost, public health insurance program for children age 18 and younger in families earning between 142 percent and 260 percent of the federal poverty level. As of December 2016, 7,550 Denver children received CHP+ benefits (Figure 71).\(^{104}\)

![Figure 71: Denver Children Age 18 and Younger Receiving CHP+ Benefits](image)

---


Eligible But Not Enrolled in Public Health Insurance

Many children live in families whose annual incomes qualify them to participate in publicly financed health insurance programs such as CHP+ or Medicaid. Despite meeting eligibility requirements, many children are not enrolled. The Colorado Health Institute calculates the number of children eligible for these valuable health insurance programs but not enrolled (EBNE). In Colorado, the rate of EBNE children dropped statewide to six percent.

Denver has also done a great job of enrolling eligible children in health insurance with a decrease from 33 percent eligible but not enrolled children in 2008 to six percent in 2016 (Figure 72).\textsuperscript{105}

Figure 72: Children Eligible but not enrolled in CHP+ or Medicaid

Immunizations

Vaccines protect children from potentially deadly diseases. Due to the high number of children vaccinated, many diseases, such as polio, measles, rubella, mumps, and pertussis, which were once a widespread threat, are now rare in the United States. Failure to vaccinate children results in the risk of contracting and spreading preventable diseases. The Center for Disease Control lists three important reasons to vaccinate children:

1. Weaker child immune systems may not be strong enough to fight the disease resulting in severe illness at times resulting in death.
2. Children under age one are vulnerable to disease when their prenatal protection from their mother expires.
3. Immunizing children helps to protect the health of the broader community by protecting others that cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons.\(^{106}\)

Colorado law requires that any child attending a child care center or school to be up to date with required vaccines. In addition to required immunization, optional vaccines such as the influenza and pertussis (DTaP) vaccine help prevent illness that often can be transmitted in child care settings where children engage in close contact with other children and staff.

Under current Colorado law, parents can sign an exempt form opting out of the required vaccines for religious or personal beliefs or medical reasons. Because of this option, some schools in Denver have a high proportion of students without up-to-date immunizations. Schools with a high percentage of exemptions are more likely to experience an outbreak of a vaccine prevented disease, such as measles. Depending on the disease, the immunization rate necessary to protect the public varies. Generally, research shows that a minimum of 90 percent of the population needs to be vaccinated to have a lower risk for outbreak. Because of the highly infectious nature of pertussis and measles, 94 percent of the population should be vaccinated to protect the community.\(^{107}\)

School exemption rates are mapped over the 2017 Child Opportunity Index in Figure 73.

---

Children with Disabilities

Under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) school-aged children and youth ages three through 21 are provided special education and related services through the school system. To qualify for these services, an evaluation is performed to see if the child has a disability defined in the IDEA legislation and to identify what special education and related services the child needs. IDEA lists categories under which children may be eligible for services. These categories include:

- Autism;
- Deaf-blindness;
- Deafness;
- Hearing impairment;
- Intellectual disability;
- Multiple disabilities;
- Orthopedic impairment;
- Specific learning disability;
- Speech or language impairment;
- Traumatic brain injury; or
- Visual impairment.  

Special Education in Denver Public Schools

In Denver, approximately 9,700 (11 percent) students were enrolled in special education classes in Denver Public Schools in 2016. Special education programs are designed for children with disabilities and special needs and support services are offered through the public school system at no cost to families.

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**Food Insecurity**

Children in food-insecure households, or households that struggle to afford food for their families, are at an increased risk for numerous health problems and added emotional and physical stress that may affect a child’s ability to succeed in school. Feeding America reports that the national average for a meal costs $2.89. Due to the higher costs of living in Denver, an average meal costs $3.11.¹¹⁰ For a household struggling to afford housing, utilities, child care, and other necessary expenses, the additional burden of expensive food can have a significant impact on a family’s budget.

Although food-insecurity is linked to poverty, measuring need from poverty alone is insufficient. Many food-insecure children live in households with incomes above the federal poverty level and above the eligibility for federal nutrition programs such as SNAP and the Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program. In Denver, approximately 73 percent of food insecure children are likely income-eligible for federal nutrition assistance (185 percent of the federal poverty line), leaving 27 percent of food insecure children likely not eligible for federal assistance.¹¹¹

To improve the estimate of food-insecure children, Feeding America has published a model estimate of food-insecurity for children. The following indicators were used to calculate estimates of child food-insecurity at the county, congressional district and state levels:

- Unemployment rates;
- Child-poverty rates;
- Median income for families with children;
- Homeownership rates for families with children;
- African American children; and
- Hispanic children."}

In 2014, approximately 26,000 children were counted as food-insecure in Denver. The number of food-insecure children has decreased 27 percent from 2009 to 2014 (Figure 74). In Colorado, the number decreased seventeen percent.¹¹²

The City and County of Denver offered summer and snacks and supper meal programs that fed children nearly 163,000 meals in 2016.¹¹³ This program, along with other community partner programs, including Food Bank of the Rockies and Denver Public Schools, help ensure that no child need suffer hunger in Denver.

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¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

MEALS SERVED TO AT-RISK CHILDREN IN DENVER 2015

Many factors and obstacles can influence a child’s chances for success, including food insecurity. For children living in households that struggle to afford food for their families, there is an increased risk for numerous health problems and added emotional and physical stress, all of which can affect their potential for academic achievement.

It is easier for some children to overcome obstacles throughout their development when those obstacles are not cumulative and persistent. Children in low-opportunity, or disadvantaged, neighborhoods often experience significantly lower outcomes than their more affluent peers in the areas of health, early childhood education, K-12 education, and post-secondary success.

The availability of healthy, affordable foods in low-opportunity areas is often an issue for many children. To reduce the impact of food insecurity on our children, the City and County of Denver continues to work closely with community partners to provide free healthy meals in neighborhoods that need them most. In 2015, we provided 1.7 million meals to at-risk youth in Denver.
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Federal Food Stamp Program, helps mitigate the negative impacts of food insecurity on children and adults. This federally funded program provides eligible households with coupons or cards that can be used to purchase food at participating local grocery stores or markets. In Denver, the program is administered by Denver Human Services.

According to data from the Denver Department of Human Services, the number of children receiving SNAP benefits over time show a steep increase during the recession and slow decline since 2012. As of February 2017, nearly 38,000 children under the age of 19 were receiving SNAP benefits in Denver (Figure 75).115

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau illustrate the percentage of children by census tract receiving SNAP benefits and the change over time (Figure 76).116

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Food Deserts

Increases in diet-related diseases and obesity are major public health problems in cities across America. Limited access to supermarkets, grocery stores, and other sources of healthy and affordable food may make it harder for some Denver residents to eat a balanced diet.

A definition of a food desert is provided in the 2008 Farm Bill as an “area in the United States with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly such an area composed of predominately lower-income neighborhoods and communities.” In other words, food deserts are geographic areas where access to affordable, healthy food options are limited. In addition, food deserts often contain a higher proportion of fast-food restaurants and convenience stores with an insufficient selection of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Cities across the nation, including Denver, are combating food deserts through community planning projects such as farmer’s markets, community gardens, local food promotion, youth agriculture, culinary training programs and improved nutritional guidelines in schools.

The Denver Office of Economic Development created a map of Denver areas where low to moderate income families with no vehicle live more than 1/2 miles from a full-service grocery store. These underserved grocery areas are highlighted in green in the map in Figure 77.

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Mental Health

For children to have the best chance for success in life and school, they need to be healthy. Mental health is an important component of overall health. Children who are mentally healthy have “a positive quality of life and can function well at home, in school, and in their communities.” Children’s mental disorders can affect children of all ages, gender, and ethnic and racial backgrounds. Mental health disorders in children include:

- Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD);
- Behavior disorders;
- Mood and anxiety disorders;
- Substance abuse disorders; and
- Tourette syndrome.121

Several factors can contribute to the development of mental disorders in children including family history, biological factors, toxic stress, and adverse childhood experiences, such as exposure to violence or substance abuse.122

The results of the Colorado Child Health Survey show that the prevalence of ADD/ADHD, anxiety, behavioral, and depression disorders has risen for children four through 14 in Colorado since 2012.

Anxiety is the most prevalent mental disorder with eight percent of children in this age group suffering in 2015 (Figure 78).123

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121 Ibid.


Drug and Alcohol Abuse

The use of drugs and alcohol by youth have serious consequences to their growth and development and lead to increased risk of addiction, involvement with the criminal justice system, poor school performance, and dropping out of school. A total number of 250 incidents involving alcohol and 269 incidents involving drugs were reported by Denver Public Schools during the 2014-2015 school year.\textsuperscript{124}

Table 2: Trends in Drug and Alcohol Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Denver High School Students who…</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>Trend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have smoked a cigarette</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used chewing tobacco, snuff, or dip in the past 30 days</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drank alcohol in the past 30 days</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binge drank in the past 30 days</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used marijuana</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used cocaine</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used heroine</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used methamphetamines</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used ecstasy</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used prescription drugs without a doctor’s prescription</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marijuana

Research shows that marijuana use by youth negatively impacts their brain development which impacts their performance in school. According to a report by the Colorado Department of Education, long-term use of marijuana before age 18 can cause permanent damage to the brain’s structure and functioning. And for youth, marijuana use can impact decision making and affect school performance which can lead to a higher risk of dropping out of school. The report also states that marijuana use is rising, the perception of marijuana’s harmfulness is decreasing, fewer students disapprove of marijuana use, and marijuana is easier to get.\(^\text{126}\)

In addition to the impact on the health of youth, involvement in the criminal justice system is another risk for Denver’s children involved with marijuana. The Denver Police Department reported an increase in marijuana arrests for 10- through 17-year-old youth in Denver last year. In 2016, there were 433 marijuana related juvenile arrests (Figure 80).\(^\text{127}\)

The Denver neighborhoods with the greatest number of juvenile arrests for marijuana violations include the central business district, Montbello, Highland, Harvey Park, and Bear Valley (Figure 79).\(^\text{128}\)


\(^{127}\) Denver Police Department. Data Analysis Unit. 2016 Marijuana Juvenile Arrests in Denver.

\(^{128}\) Ibid.
Child Abuse and Neglect

Safe, stable and nurturing relationships and environments are best for children to grow and develop to their full potential. Unfortunately, some children suffer physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect. Child abuse and neglect can have severe effects on children’s cognitive, social-emotional, language, mental health, and behavioral development that can last well into adulthood. Adults who were neglected or abused as children are at greater risk for substance abuse, eating disorders, mental health issues and chronic disease.\(^{129}\)

Young children under the age of four are at greatest risk for the most severe consequences of abuse and neglect. These negative outcomes include disrupted brain development, improper development of the nervous system, serious physical injury or death.\(^{130}\)

Individual, family, and community factors contribute to the risk of child abuse and neglect. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists these risk factors by group.

Individual Risk Factors include:

- Parents’ history of child maltreatment;
- Substance abuse or mental health issues;
- Young age of parents, low educational attainment, single-parenthood, low-income; and
- Non-biological, transient caregivers in the home.

Family Risk Factors include:

- Social isolation;
- Family disorganization, dissolution, and violence; and
- Parenting stress, poor parent-child relationships, and negative interactions.

Community Risk Factors include:

- Community violence; and
- Concentrated neighborhood disadvantage and poor social connections.\(^{131}\)

Data available from the Division of Child Welfare Services with the Colorado Department of Human Services tracks the rate of substantiated incidences of maltreatment per 1,000 children for Denver and Colorado over time (Figure 81).\(^{132}\)

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\(^{130}\) Ibid.


GOAL 2

Increase Access to High Quality Early Childhood Education
City and County of Denver Programs that Contribute to Increasing Access to High Quality Early Childhood Education

5 By 5
Adult and Family Programming
Arts and Culture
Countdown to Kindergarten
CCCAP
Child Care Center
Child Care Inspections
Child Support Services
Children's Library
Colorado Works
Computers and Technology
Cultural Field Trips
Cultural Partner Program
Denver Preschool Program
Early Literacy
Fishing
Five Points Jazz Festival
Head Start
Read Aloud Programs
Special Programs
Summer of Reading
Teacher Scholarships
Youth One Book One Denver
Research shows that the most critical period in a child’s development occurs within the first five years of life. The quality of learning experiences at home and school during this period often has a life-long impact on later school success, behavior, and health. Data show that children in high-quality early learning programs demonstrate higher cognitive outcomes as well as non-cognitive skills that are critical for future school success. These benefits of high-quality early learning programs are evident in children from all socio-economic backgrounds but are particularly strong for children in low-income families. 

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates 65 percent of Denver children age five and younger had all available parents in the labor force in 2015. This means that approximately 34,000 young children in Denver needed care during the day while their parents work. There are approximately 23,500 licensed child care slots in day care centers, day care homes, and preschools in Denver. Using a very rough estimate comparing the number of children under age six needing care during the day to licensed child care slots results in 69 percent of the need fulfilled with licensed care in Denver.

Ensuring that quality child care and preschool is affordable and accessible for all families and children who need it is essential to preparing Denver children for kindergarten and future success.

Licensed Child Care in Denver

According to the Colorado State Office of Early Childhood licensed facilities list, there were 569 licensed child care facilities in the City and County of Denver as of January 30, 2017. These facilities include day care centers, homes, preschools, neighborhood youth organizations, and school-aged child care (Table 3).

Table 3: Licensed Child Care Slots by Facility Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Child Care Facility</th>
<th>Number of Facilities in Denver</th>
<th>Total Number of Children Each Provider Type is Licensed to Serve</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day Care Center</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>21,578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Care Home</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Youth Organization</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-Age Child Care</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>11,033</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quality Child Care**

In general, the higher the quality rating, the more the program is committed to providing a high quality early learning experience for children. This effort may include:

- Highly trained and educated teaching staff;
- Strong and knowledgeable leadership;
- Strong foundational business administration practices;
- Highly interactive and valued partnerships with families;
- Quality learning environment for children that incorporates curriculum, informed instruction, lower teacher/child ratios, and consistent health and safety practices; and
- Incorporation of resources and opportunities for collaboration related to child health.\(^{136}\)

The levels of quality represent the following characteristics:

- **Level 1**: providers follow licensing standards
- **Level 2**: providers show they have completed quality activities to promote positive experiences for children
- **Levels 3, 4, and 5**: providers have demonstrated various quality investments and have earned cumulative points \(^{137}\)

All licensed child care centers, homes, and preschools in Colorado, are rated for quality according to the Colorado Office of Early Childhood. In Denver, of 298 day care centers and preschools, 37 percent were rated a Level 4 or 5, the highest levels of quality (Figure 82).

Compared to Colorado, Denver has a higher percent of day care centers and preschools rated at high levels. Only 21 percent were rated a Level 4 or 5 in all of Colorado as of January 31, 2017.

Day care center and preschool locations and their quality ratings are mapped over the Child Well-Being Index (described on page 9) in Figures 83 and 84.\(^{138}\)

A Level 1 rating is assigned to licensed child care centers and preschools that have not been rated.

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Figure 83: Day Care Centers and Preschool Locations with Quality Ratings Levels 1 and 2
Figure 84: Licensed Child Care Centers and Preschool Locations with Quality Ratings Levels 3-5
Family, Friend, and Neighbor Child Care

Informal child care in the home of trusted family or community members is called family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) child care and is the most common form of non-parental child care in the United States. Because this type of care is not monitored or licensed, the quality of care children are receiving is unknown. It is estimated that half of all young children under age six spend time in family, friend, and neighbor care nationally.\textsuperscript{139}

These early learning years are critical to preparing children to enter school ready to learn. The need to support FFN providers to improve child outcomes is a recognized strategy both nationally and locally. However, identifying FFN providers that need or want support is difficult.

Drawing from current research around FFN care in the United States, several indicators were identified as key to understanding which factors often characterize FFN providers and which factors measure a child’s readiness for school.\textsuperscript{140} Indicators can be combined to highlight geographic areas in Denver where FFN providers are likely prevalent and may need additional support to improve outcomes for the children for whom they care (Figure 85).

The key indicators include:

- Children with all available parents in the labor force;
- People in poverty;
- Three- and four-year-old children not in preschool;
- Adults without a high school diploma;
- Hispanic or Latino origin;
- Kindergarteners not ready for reading; and
- Children living in immigrant families.


Figure 85: Family, Friend, and Neighbor Child Care Analysis

Areas in Denver Where Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care Providers May Need Additional Support to Improve Child Outcomes

Analysis Based on Seven Indicators:
- Children with all available parents in the labor force
- People in poverty
- Three- and four-year-old children not in preschool
- Adults without a high school diploma
- Hispanic or Latino origin
- Kindergarteners below grade level in reading
- Children living in immigrant families

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2015 Five-Year Estimates
Denver Public Schools, Department of Planning and Analysis
Preschool

Children enrolled in quality preschool programs are less likely to repeat grades, need special education, engage with law enforcement, and are more likely to graduate from high school, earn more money, and own homes as adults.\textsuperscript{141} Quality in programs, however, is an essential factor necessary to achieve the desired outcomes that matter for lasting impacts.

After a significant increase in 2014, the percentage of three- and four-year-old children enrolled in preschool in Denver in 2015 has declined to 60 percent in 2015 (Figure 86). Sixty-nine percent of those in publicly funded preschool programs and 31 percent are in privately funded (family-pay) programs.\textsuperscript{142}

Research shows that high quality early learning programs benefit all children and better prepare at-risk children for kindergarten. Unfortunately, 65 percent of children in low-income families attend preschool compared to 90 percent of children in more educated, wealthier families across the nation.\textsuperscript{143}

Mirroring these trends, a higher percent of three-and four-year-old children living in higher-income neighborhoods in Denver participated in preschool programs more often than their peers in low-income neighborhoods (Figure 87).\textsuperscript{144}


Figure 87: Denver Three- and Four-Year-Old Children in Preschool

2006-2010 Five-Year Estimates

2011-2015 Five-Year Estimates

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010 and 2015 Five-Year Estimates
Denver Preschool Program

The Denver Preschool Program (DPP) provides Denver families with tuition support to help pay for high quality preschool for their four-year-old to attend preschool the year before kindergarten. According to DPP, 5,070 children received tuition support from the program during the 2015-2016 school year. Since 2007, Denver Preschool Program has distributed $80 million in tuition credits to 41,258 children. There are more than 250 preschools that participate in the program with 77 percent earning a high-quality level in Colorado Shines during the 2015-2016 school year; 88 percent of DPP children were enrolled in these top-rated schools.145

Colorado Preschool Program

The state funded Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) provides high-quality early childhood education programs to at-risk three- and four-year-old children across Colorado. The at-risk factors include poverty as measured by free or reduced-price meal eligibility, parents without a high school degree, teen parents, homelessness, parental substance abuse, and abusive home environments. Poverty is the most prevalent risk factor accounting for more than 63 percent of CPP enrolled children statewide.146

Eighty-one percent of CPP funded children are served in public school settings statewide. Head Start centers serve about eight percent of CPP funded children and 11 percent are served in community programs. Hispanic children make up the largest racial/ethnic group of children funded through CPP with 54 percent. Non-Hispanic white children make up 32 percent.

Denver Public Schools received funding for 4,024 preschool slots for the 2016-2017 school year.147 The average funding statewide per slot was $3,748 in 2015-2016. This is lower than the national average of state preschool spending per slot of $4,521.148

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Colorado Child Care Assistance Program

The Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) provides child care support to eligible parents with newborns to children through age 12 and youth with special needs up to age 18. Denver CCAP is administered by the Denver Department of Human Services and is funded by a mix of federal, state, and county dollars.

The income eligibility for Denver’s CCAP program is currently 225 percent of the federal poverty level. The amount CCAP pays towards care is set up on a sliding scale based on a family’s size and monthly income. Participating families are responsible for a portion of the cost. Denver CCAP currently serves parents in income eligible families who are:

- Employed or self-employed and earn at least minimum wage;
- Attending high school or working towards a GED or participating in ESL, college for a first bachelor’s degree or a vocational program; and/or
- Currently searching for a job.

Denver reimburses participating local child care providers according to a tiered reimbursement structure. The program is also supported with funding through the passage of Measure 2A. Denver Human Services, in partnership with the Denver Early Childhood Council, is wrapping up the second year of the Denver Quality Care Initiative Program (DQCIP) grant. The grant, which focuses on child care quality improvement, has provided DHS with very useful feedback from the community through a variety of focus groups, interviews and site visits. DHS is putting the information collected to use in a variety of improvement efforts for families and child care providers.149

Denver Public Schools Early Childhood Education

The number of children participating in early childhood education programs through Denver Public Schools (DPS) has more than doubled since 2000 (Figure 88). In the 2016-2017 school year, 6,161 Denver three- and four-year-old children participated in DPS early education programs.150

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149 Denver Department of Human Services.
Head Start

In Denver, there are three Early Head Start grantees that serve children birth through age two and two Head Start grantees, the Rocky Mountain Service Employment and Redevelopment (RMSER) and Denver Great Kids Head Start (DGKHS) that serve children ages three through five. During the 2015-2016 school year, 2,229 children were served across all Early Head Start and Head Start programs in Denver with combined enrollment totals for Early Head Start (392 children), DGKHS (1,153 children), and RMSER (684 children). RMSER serves 15 neighborhoods in Denver’s northwest region, while DGKHS serves the 63 remaining neighborhoods. The five Early Head Start and Head Start grantees collectively served 23 percent of the eligible population in 2015 (Figure 89).151 The need for service is far greater than Head Start resources alone can meet. Other programs that help serve these and other eligible children include the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program, the Colorado Preschool Program, the Denver Preschool Program, and Denver Public Schools early childhood programs.

![Figure 89: Early Head Start and Head Start Program Enrollment vs. Estimated Need in Denver](https://example.com/figure89.png)

DENVER GREAT KIDS HEAD START PROGRAM
PER-PUPIL FUNDING BY NEIGHBORHOOD | FALL 2015-2016 SCHOOL YEAR

Denver Great Kids Head Start (DGKHS) is a federally funded program that serves 1,153 preschool children and their families. The mission of DGKHS is to prepare children to enter kindergarten with the social, physical, emotional and cognitive skills necessary for school success.

DGKHS partners with six agencies, including Catholic Charities, Clayton Early Learning, Denver Public Schools, Family Star Montessori, Mile High Montessori Early Learning Centers, and Volunteers of America. DGKHS also provides supplemental health, dental, vision and nutrition services to students enrolled in the program.

The total amount of per-pupil funding is mapped to illustrate the city’s investment in children by neighborhood. The location of students for the 2015-2016 school year is plotted over the total investment by the neighborhood in which they live. DGKHS partner agencies (illustrated by the yellow stars) and total dollars by neighborhood are serving children primarily in areas of highest need.
Achievement gaps begin long before they are measured by standardized tests in the third grade. Disparities in academic skills are apparent in preschool and kindergarten, but begin even earlier in a child’s life. Studies show that these disparities are associated with family income, parental education, family structure, neighborhood conditions and exposure to language and other educational experiences. Factors including a child’s health, nutrition, and exposure to emotional stress and violence are also known to impact a child’s early cognitive and social development.\(^{152}\)

Head Start programs primarily serve the most vulnerable children in Denver. When the children enter the program, they are given an assessment that measures their competency in several important domains. These assessments are used to measure progress towards school readiness throughout the academic year and show that Head Start program participation clearly begins to close the achievement gaps for these disadvantaged children.

*Teaching Strategies GOLD*\(^{\circ}\) is an assessment system for children from birth through kindergarten and measures the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that are most predictive of school success. *Teaching Strategies GOLD*\(^{\circ}\) (TS Gold) blends ongoing, authentic, observational assessment across all areas of development and learning with intentional, focused, performance-assessment tasks for selected literacy and numeracy objectives.

Head Start program administrators can use TS Gold reports to:

- Collect and gather child outcome data as one part of a larger accountability system;
- Guide program planning and professional development opportunities; and
- Inform strategic investments to close learning gaps.

Head Start preschool providers can use the TS Gold reports to:

- Observe and document children’s development and learning over time;
- Plan instruction to support children’s needs;
- Identify children who might benefit from additional support, screening, or further evaluation; and
- Report and communicate progress with family members and others.

The following graphs illustrate the percentage of three-, four-, and five-year-old children in Denver Great Kids Head Start (DGKHS) programs who meet or exceed social, physical, and academic expectations for their age as defined by TS Gold’s “Widely Held Expectations.” Overall, those students who participated in the DGKHS program for a full program year demonstrated significant growth across all domains in all categories of students analyzed from fall 2015 through spring 2016 (Figure 90).\(^{153}\)

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Children with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) consistently exhibit remarkable growth in all domains from fall to spring. Although fewer students with an IEP are meeting or exceeding Widely Held Expectations than their peers without an IEP, their growth dramatically reduces the significant gaps apparent at the start of the program year (Figure 91).

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Based on the TS Gold Assessment results, we know that children make gains in all educational domains after participating in DGKHS programs. The gaps in literacy and mathematics, however, are wide between students of Hispanic origin compared to students who are not when they are measured in the fall. Graphs comparing the number of students meeting or exceeding expectations in these domains from fall to spring illustrated that the gaps close at the completion of the program (Figures 92 and 93).

Figure 92: Number of DGKHS Students Meeting or Exceeding Expectations in Literacy by Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2015</th>
<th>Spring 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 93: Number of DGKHS Students Meeting or Exceeding Expectations in Mathematics by Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2015</th>
<th>Spring 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

84%
GOAL 3

Increase the Number of Students who can Read at Grade Level by the end of Their Third Grade Year
City and County of Denver Programs that Contribute to Increasing the Number of Students Who Can Read at Grade Level

- Adult and Family Programming
- Art C Plaza
- Bookmobile
- Colorado Child Care Assistance Program
- Children’s Collection
- Children's Library
- Community Recreation
- Computers and Technology
- Cultural Field Trips
- Early Learning
- Five Points Jazz Festival
- Junior Golf
- Make Your Mark
- Mile High Scholars
- MY Denver
- Out of School Learning
- Positive Youth Contacts
- Summer of Reading
- Teacher Scholarships
- Youth One Book One Denver
Examining a variety of education indicators provides a holistic view of achievement in Denver. Student population data, languages spoken in schools, English language learners, full-day kindergarten enrollment and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch are included in this section. Student achievement data as measured by proficiency on the state standardized tests by income, race/ethnicity, and subject, illustrate persistent gaps in achievement resulting from opportunity gaps impacting the success of students at various points in their development. Utilizing all of these important indicators to craft effective policies, programs, services, and interventions are necessary to reduce achievement gaps and ensure opportunity for all of Denver’s children.

To ensure that all Denver children have what they need to be successful in school and life, they need the tools that will enable success at each stage in their development. It is essential that children enter school ready to learn and the ability to read at grade level by the end of third grade is an important marker for future academic success. Beginning in fourth grade, children transition from learning how to read to reading to learn. Unfortunately, 68 percent, or nearly 4,000 Denver Public School third graders were not meeting expectations on the English Language Arts (ELA) PARCC assessment in the spring of 2016. In five Denver neighborhoods, 90 percent or more of students were not meeting expectations on the ELA (Figure 94).

In five Denver neighborhoods, 90 percent or more of students were not meeting expectations on the ELA (Figure 94).

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156 Denver Public Schools. Department of Planning and Analysis. 2015-2016 School Year.
Increasing access and participation in quality out-of-school time programs is a priority for the Office of Children’s Affairs (OCA). Out-of-school time programs are defined as programs that provide direct services to school-age youth beyond the traditional school day, including before and after school, on weekends and school breaks, and during the summer months.

The OCA provides funding support to these programs because they boost achievement, and develop strong social and emotional skills for youth. Funding support is intended to target out-of-school time programs located in low-income or chronically disadvantaged neighborhoods across the City and County of Denver. In 2015, more than $1,000,000 was awarded to out-of-school time programs.

These safe and structured programs are helping close the opportunity gap by serving youth who can benefit from them the most. Investing in out-of-school time programs is investing in the success of Denver kids and the strength of our city.
Denver Public Schools

Student Population
In the 2016-2017 school year, 92,331 students were enrolled in 199 Denver Public Schools consisting of three Early Childhood Education schools, 93 elementary, 18 ECE-8, four ECE-12, 28 middle, 14 grades 6-12, and 39 high schools (Figure 95).\textsuperscript{157}

The largest proportion, or 56 percent, of Denver Public School students was Hispanic or Latino compared to 23 percent classified as non-Hispanic white in the 2016-2017 school year. Black students made up 13 percent of the school population (Table 4).\textsuperscript{158}

Table 4: DPS Student Population by Race/ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DPS Student Profile</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2,980</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>12,376</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>51,219</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (Not Hispanic)</td>
<td>21,442</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More</td>
<td>3,469</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>92,331</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


English Language Learners

Over 120 languages are spoken in Denver Public Schools. The languages, other than English, spoken by the most students in DPS include Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, Somali, Amharic, French, Nepali, and Russian.\(^{159}\)

In the 2016-2017 school year, approximately 30,650 (34 percent) Denver Public School students, including early childhood children, were English Language Learners.\(^{160}\)

The map in Figure 96 illustrates the percentage of English Language Learners by school location.\(^{161}\)

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Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligibility

The Colorado Department of Education provides annual district-level data on those children eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Free lunch eligibility is set at 130 percent of the federal poverty level (approximately $32,000 for a family of four) and reduced-price lunch eligibility is at 185 percent of the federal poverty level (approximately $45,500 for a family of four).  

In Denver, 68 percent of public school students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch in the 2016-2017 school year (Figure 97).  

The proportion of free or reduced-price lunch students by Denver neighborhood is illustrated in Figure 98.  

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164 Denver Public Schools. Department of Planning and Analysis. 2015-2016 School Year.
Student Mobility

Families move for many reasons, including job change, housing type, affordability and size, eviction, domestic problems, neighborhood characteristics, or school choice. No matter the cause, changing schools can have an impact on student success, often negatively impacting student achievement. Students who change schools frequently often face challenges including:

- Lower academic achievement;
- Behavior problems;
- Difficulty making friends; and
- Dropping out.\(^{165}\)

High incidence of student mobility not only impacts the mobile students, but the entire school community. Research shows that in schools and classrooms with high student mobility, teachers often must review materials and spend time on remedial education instead of progressing to new content to catch new students up with the work. In Florida, researchers found that instruction and content was one year behind in highly mobile schools compared to students in more stable schools.\(^{166}\)

Students who change schools during the school year for a reason other than normal grade progression are considered mobile and at risk for negative consequences. The stability rate, however, calculated by the Colorado Department of Education represents the percent of students who remain at a school without interruption throughout the school year. During the 2015-2016 school year, the student stability rate for Denver Public School students was 82 percent. Hispanic students remained in the same school the entire school year more often than any other racial/ethnic group in Denver in 2015-2016. American Indian, black, and Pacific Islander children had significantly lower than average stability rates (Figure 99).\(^{167}\) The stability rate by school is mapped in Figure 100.

![Stability Rate Over Time](image-url)

Figure 99: Stability Rate Over Time


Figure 100: Stability Rate by School
Full-Day Kindergarten

The skills learned in quality full-day kindergarten programs provide children the time and support they need to master the academic and social skills necessary for future achievement and life success.

Full-day kindergarten programs benefit children in the following ways:

- Contributes to increased school readiness;
- Leads to higher academic achievement;
- Improves student attendance;
- Supports literacy and language development;
- Benefits children socially and emotionally; and
- Decreases costs by reducing retention and remediation rates.\(^{168}\)

As the benefits of participation in full-day kindergarten programs were more recognized, the number of children attending full-day kindergarten in Colorado and in Denver has increased. Denver’s participation rate has consistently been higher than the participation rate for Colorado over time. (Figure 101).\(^{169}\)

Denver Public Schools offers full-day kindergarten programs to children and their families. The half-day kindergarten program is free to all families and the full-day option is free to those eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. For families earning more than 185 percent of the federal poverty level, tuition payments are determined based on a sliding scale.

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169 Colorado Department of Education. (2016). *Pupil Membership-District Data; Pupil Membership by District and Grade Level.* Retrieved October 2016, from Colorado Department of Education: [http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/pupilcurrentdistrict](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/pupilcurrentdistrict).
Student Assessment Results

Children Not Reading at Grade Level in Kindergarten

To focus attention and resources on the importance of development of early literacy skills, the Colorado Legislature passed the Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act (the READ Act) in 2012. The READ Act assesses the literacy development for students in kindergarten through third grade by measuring phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency and reading comprehension.

The map in Figure 102 illustrates the variability of kindergarten students who are not proficient on this assessment in kindergarten by the neighborhoods in which they live.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Denver Public Schools. (2016). Percent of DPS kindergarteners who were not reading at grade level in kindergarten in 2015-2016.
PARCC Assessments

In the 2014-2015 school year, Colorado transitioned to a new state-wide assessment for public school students. The Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) PARCC assessments were administered to Colorado students and are intended to measure the level at which Colorado students meet the Colorado Academic Standards and the Common Core State Standards. The new CMAS PARCC assessments are not comparable to prior TCAP or CSAP assessments.

Denver Public School students meet or exceed expectations on the English Language Arts assessment (ELA) less often than students overall in Colorado in all grades assessed (Figure 103)\(^{171}\).

The percentage of Denver Public School students meeting or exceeding expectations has improved slightly since 2015 on the ELA (Figure 104)\(^{172}\).


\(^{172}\) Ibid.
Denver Public School students meet or exceed expectations on the Math assessment less often than students overall in Colorado in most subjects assessed (Figure 105).\textsuperscript{173}

The percentage of Denver Public School students meeting or exceeding expectations has improved slightly since 2015 on the PARCC Math Assessment except in 6\textsuperscript{th} grade (Figure 106).\textsuperscript{174}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure105.png}
\caption{2015-2016 Colorado and DPS Students Meeting Expectations on the PARCC Math Assessment}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure106.png}
\caption{DPS Students Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on the PARCC Math Assessment}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{173} Colorado Department of Education. (2015-2016). \textit{CMAS - English Language Arts and Math Data and Results}. Retrieved from Colorado Department of Education Assessment Unit: \url{http://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment}.

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
GOAL 4

Increase the Number of Students who have Access to and Complete a Post-Secondary Pathway
City and County of Denver Programs that Contribute to Increasing the Number of Students who have Access to and Complete a Post-Secondary Pathway

- Adult and Family Programming
- After School is Cool
- After School is Cool + AIM
- Career Awareness Events
- Career Online High School
- Colorado Child Care Assistance Program
- Chance to Dance
- Children’s Collection
- Computers and Technology
- CU Contract
- Cultural Field Trips
- DEAN
- Denver Afterschool Alliance
- Denver Street Outreach Collaborative
- Diversion Services
- Fishing
- Five Points Jazz Festival
- Girls Mentoring Program
- Homework Help
- Interns-Public Works
- Junior Golf
- Make Your Mark
- Mayors Youth Award
- Medical Career Collaborative
- Mile High Scholars
- My Brother’s Keeper
- MY Denver
- Neighborhoods-OED
- Out of School Time Programs
- Out of School Learning
- School Resource Officers
- Social Enrichment
- Special Programs
- Summer Jobs and Beyond
- Summer of Reading
- Talent Acquisition
- Teacher Scholarships
- Urban Arts Fund
- Urban Peak
- Youth Employment
- Youth Employment Academy
- Youth Interns-Parks and Recreation
- Youth One Book One Denver
Graduation Rates

At the end of the 2015-2016 school year, 67 percent (3,633) of Denver Public School students graduated from high school on time, or in four years. Although the on-time graduation rate for DPS is significantly lower than the state average, graduation rates are steadily increasing from 52 percent for the 2009-2010 school year (Figure 107).

Graduation rates vary widely based on factors like race, ethnicity, and gender. Overall, female students graduate more frequently than male students (Figure 108). Students of color graduate less often than their non-Hispanic white and Asian peers (Figure 109).

In Denver, 61 percent of students with limited English proficiency graduated and 41 percent of students with disabilities graduated on time.\(^\text{175}\)

Figure 109: DPS Graduation Rates over time by Race/Ethnicity
Dropdown Rates

One of the most urgent problems facing the nation is the high number of students dropping out of school before they earn a high school diploma. The decision to dropout of high school has lifelong personal and societal impacts. A national report highlights the consequences including:

- The unemployment rate for people without a high school diploma is nearly twice that of the general population;
- Over a lifetime, a high school dropout will earn $200,000 less than a high school graduate and almost $1 million less than a college graduate;
- Dropouts are more likely to commit crimes, abuse drugs and alcohol, become teenage parents, live in poverty, and commit suicide; and
- Dropouts cost federal and state governments hundreds of billions of dollars in lost earnings, welfare and medical costs, and billions more for dropouts who end up in prison.176

In Denver, four percent of students dropped out of high school before earning a diploma. This is higher than the state rate of 2.3 percent but improving each year since the 2010-2011 school year (Figure 110).

The percentage of students dropping out of high school varies by race/ethnicity and gender with children of color dropping out more frequently than Asian and white children (figure 111).

Post-Secondary Education

College Readiness

Research shows that the more prepared for college students are, the better their chances for completing a college degree. Adequate college preparation reduces gaps in persistence and degree completion among low-income and students of color. The ACT college readiness assessment is given to every Colorado 11th grade public school student in the state. The test measures what students have learned throughout high school and identifies gaps in skills necessary to be successful in college. The ACT is accepted by all four-year colleges and universities in the United States and provides higher education institutions with standardized scores from which to compare, recruit and enroll future students. ACT overall tests are reported on a scale from 1 to 36. ACT College Readiness Benchmarks and Denver Public School District averages for each overall test are as listed in Table 5.

Table 5: ACT Benchmarks with DPS District ACT Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall ACT Test</th>
<th>ACT College Readiness Benchmark</th>
<th>2016 Denver Public Schools ACT District Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although there are differences between the reports that provide the comparison in ACT success in Figure 112, it is apparent that Denver Public School students consistently score below the state average with a composite score of 18.6 in 2016.

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177 ACT Research and Policy. (February 2013). Readiness Matters: The Impact of College Readiness on College Persistence and Degree Completion. www.act.org/research: ACT.
179 The Colorado ACT Profile Report reflects the results of a school’s spring state testing population. Per State Statute Colorado is required to test every 11th grade public school student in the state. In contrast, the Graduating Class Report reflects the results of only the most recent test date for each member of the most recent graduating class who listed a Colorado high school (both private and public) at the time of testing. http://www.cde.state.co.us/sites/default/files/documents/assessment/documents/coact/data/difcoactprofilereport_gradclassreport.pdf.
College Readiness by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Instructional Type

According to reports by ACT, students who meet the recommended ACT benchmarks by subject area (English composition, mathematics, reading, and science) have a much better chance of obtaining a grade “C” or higher in freshman level college courses.\(^{181}\) Figure 113 illustrates the ACT composite scores by DPS student group compared to Colorado as a whole.\(^{182}\) The data show that non-Hispanic white, English speaking students from higher income families are most prepared for college according to these measures. The disparities apparent here help explain the limited college enrollment and degree attainment rate for our low-income students and students of color in Denver.

In addition, factors other than academic success can impede progress towards college enrollment and degree completion. These factors include the ever-increasing cost of attending college, family support and encouragement, and the need to work while in college or care for dependents.

Figure 113: ACT Composite Scores for DPS Students by Race/Ethnicity, Gender and Instructional Type for 2016

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\(^{181}\) ACT Research and Policy. (February 2013). Readiness Matters: The Impact of College Readiness on College Persistence and Degree Completion. www.act.org/research: ACT.

College Enrollment

According to the 2015 Health Kids Colorado Survey, 92 percent of Denver high school students thought it was important to go to college.\textsuperscript{183} However, only 1,908 Denver high school graduates (48 percent) enrolled in a post-secondary institution in fall after graduating in 2015. This rate is lower than the state rate of 57 percent of graduates going to college (Figure 114).\textsuperscript{184}

Of those students who graduate, the percentage enrolling in college by race/ethnicity is indicated in the graph in Figure 115. A higher percentage of Asian and white students enroll in college after high school than American Indian, black, and Hispanic students.\textsuperscript{185}

The National Student Clearinghouse reports that 26 percent of DPS students who entered a college program in 2009 completed a degree within six years.\textsuperscript{186}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{college_enrollment.png}
\caption{College Enrollment by Race Ethnicity}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{184} Colorado Department of Higher Education. District at a Glance: Denver County 1. \url{http://highered.colorado.gov/data/districtsummary.aspx}.

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.

Remediation Rates

One of the reasons many students do not successfully complete a post-secondary program and earn a degree is because they are not academically prepared for college and require remedial coursework to catch up.\(^\text{187}\)

Of Colorado students who graduated high school in 2015 and enrolled in a state public college or university, approximately 36 percent needed remediation, or additional non-credit bearing courses offering basic skills necessary to succeed in college-level work. Of Denver Public School students, 45 percent needed to attend remedial classes (Figure 116).

Students of color require remediation more often than non-Hispanic white students. For the 2015 graduating class in Colorado, 60 percent of black students, 51 percent of Hispanic students, and 49 percent Native American students required remediation (Figure 117).\(^\text{188}\)

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\(^\text{187}\) ACT Research and Policy. (February 2013). Readiness Matters: The Impact of College Readiness on College Persistence and Degree Completion. www.act.org/research: ACT.

GOAL 5

Decrease the Number of Disconnected Youth
City and County of Denver Programs that Contribute to Decreasing the Number of Disconnected Youth

Adaptive Recreation  
AIM  
Arts and Culture  
Career Awareness Events  
Child Welfare  
Community Recreation  
Cultural Field Trips  
CW Sub-Adopt  
Denver Afterschool Alliance  
Denver Street Outreach Collaborative  
Diversion Services  
Fishing  
Five Points Jazz Festival  
GRID Intervention Support Team  
Interns-Public Works  
Intervention Programs  
Junior Golf  
Juvenile Courtroom 4F  
Juvenile Intake  
Kids and Cops  
Make Your Mark  
Mayors Youth Award  
Mile High Scholars  
My Brother’s Keeper  
MY Denver  
Nurse Family Partnership  
Out of School Time Programs  
Outdoor Recreation  
Positive Youth Contacts  
Public Health Internship  
Social Enrichment  
Special Programs  
Summer Jobs and Beyond  
Summer Youth Employment  
TANF  
Urban Arts Fund  
Urban Peak  
WIOA Youth Services  
Youth Commission  
Youth Employment  
Youth Employment Academy  
Youth Specific Outreach  
Youth Sports
The economic health and quality of life in Denver depend on educated and engaged community members. The transition of youth, particularly as they move into adulthood, can be challenging for any young person, but is even more challenging for disconnected youth. Disconnected youth are young people who are not in school and who do not have a job. As the label implies, disconnected youth are cut off from the systems and institutions that support young adults’ transition into adulthood. Essential skills and experiences that enable growth and knowledge required to live as productive adults are often inaccessible.

Nationally, young adults of color are significantly more likely to be disconnected with 28 percent of Native American, 22 percent black, and 16 percent Hispanic or Latino young adults not in school and not working (Figure 118).\footnote{Opportunity Nation. (June 2015). Zeroing In on Place and Race: Youth Disconnection in America’s Cities. Measure of America.} Disconnected youth have measurable social, economic, and personal costs. According to The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth, disconnected youth ages 16 through 24 cost taxpayers $93 billion annually in lost revenue and increased social services.\footnote{Belfield, C. R., Levin, H. M., & Rosen, R. (January 2012). The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth. Retrieved from Opportunity Nation: The Shared Plan to Restore Opportunity.}

Subgroups of disconnected youth include:
- Young unmarried parents
- Immigrant youth
- Homeless youth
- Incarcerated youth
- Foster youth/youth transitioning out of public systems
- Youth with a disability or special needs
- High school drop outs

According to estimates from Opportunity Nation, approximately 13 percent, or 9,000 Denver young adults ages 16 through 24 were not attending school and not working (Figure 119).\footnote{Opportunity Nation. (2017. Opportunity Index 2016: Summary of Findings for States and Counties. Measure of America. www.OpportunityIndex.org.}

The areas in Denver where the characteristics associated with youth disconnection are greatest are indicated on the map in Figure 120.\footnote{U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2011-2015 Five-Year Estimates. Retrieved from American Fact Finder, February 2017: http://factfinder.census.gov.}
Figure 120: Key Indicators for Youth Disconnection

*Areas in Denver At-Risk for Youth Disconnection*

Key Indicators for Youth Disconnection:
- Unemployment
- Adults with less than a Bachelor’s Degree
- Poverty Rate
- Youth Unemployment (16-24)
- Not Enrolled in School (15-24)

Based on the key well-being indicators used in the Have the Gap by 2030: Youth Disconnection in America’s Cities by Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council, 2013.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2015 Five-Year Estimates
Chronic Absenteeism

One well-supported strategy to improve outcomes for children and contribute to the overall well-being of Denver neighborhoods is to ensure that students attend school every day. The benefits of consistent school attendance include improved academic achievement, increased graduation rates, reduced juvenile justice costs, and decreased poverty.\(^{193}\)

No matter the grade or school, students must participate regularly to benefit. The more school time missed by children, the harder it is to keep up with the coursework. Children miss school throughout the school year for a variety of reasons. These may include chronic illness, involvement with the juvenile justice system, housing issues, family responsibilities, bullying, unsafe conditions, or lack information on the importance of attending school. According to the report by Attendance Works, students’ test scores on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) who missed more school than their peers who attended regularly were consistently lower. This is true for every age and every racial or ethnic category analyzed.\(^{194}\)

The Attendance Works report also summarizes the current research around chronic absenteeism and lists what we know so far:

- Poor attendance in the first month of school can predict chronic absence for the entire year;
- Absenteeism in kindergarten can affect whether a child develops the grit and perseverance needed to succeed in school;
- Absenteeism in preschool and kindergarten can influence whether a child will be held back in third grade;
- Absenteeism in middle and high school can predict dropout rates;
- Absenteeism influences not just chances for graduating but also for completing college;
- Improving attendance is an essential strategy for reducing achievement gaps;
- When students reduce absences, they can make academic gains; and
- Research points to effective strategies for improving attendance.\(^{195}\)

Chronic absenteeism is typically defined as missing ten percent or more of the school year and is tracked by grade and school. In Denver, nearly 26,700 students, or 27 percent, were chronically absent in the 2015-2016 school year. This means that about one in four Denver students was absent for at least ten percent of the time that they were enrolled and missed out on a significant amount of valuable instruction time.


The highest instances of chronic absenteeism occur in the early grades and then again in high school, rising to 51 percent of 12th graders missing ten percent or more of the school year (Figure 121).

During the 2015-2016 school year, the percentage of high school students (grades 9-12) chronically absent was 44 percent and varied by race/ethnicity. Children of color, American Indian, black, and Hispanic, were more likely to be chronically absent in high school compared to their Asian and non-Hispanic white peers (Figure 122).

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196 Denver Public Schools. Department of Planning and Analysis. 2015-2016 School Year.
197 Ibid.
Denver Public Schools track attendance data by grade and race/ethnicity. In sixth grade, approximately 20 percent of students were chronically absent during the 2015-2016 school year. Black male students were chronically absent more than any other group of students by race/ethnicity (Figure 123). When mapped by where chronically absent students live, some neighborhoods have much higher rates than others (Figure 124).\(^{198}\)

Figure 123: Chronically Absent Sixth Graders by Race/Ethnicity

![Bar chart showing attendance rates by race/ethnicity for sixth graders.]

Figure 124: Chronically Absent Sixth Graders by Neighborhood

![Map showing chronic absenteeism by neighborhood.]

\(^{198}\) Denver Public Schools. Department of Planning and Analysis. 2015-2016 School Year.
In ninth grade, 38 percent of students were chronically absent in the 2015-2016 school year. Native American students are chronically absent most often with black males and Hispanic and black females next highest (Figure 125).

The map in Figure 126 illustrates the percentage of ninth grade students in Denver Public School programs that are chronically absent by the neighborhood.

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199 Denver Public Schools. Department of Planning and Analysis. 2015-2016 School Year.
Youth Unemployment

Of the youth ages 16-24 in the labor force, six percent were unemployed in Denver compared to ten percent for Colorado and 13 percent for the nation in 2015 (Figure 127).\footnote{U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2005-2015 Single-Year Estimates: Sex by Age By Employment Status for the Population 16 Years and Over, Table B23001. Retrieved from American Fact Finder, February 2017: http://factfinder.census.gov.}

Unemployed youth and young adults ages 16-24 are mapped by census tract within Denver neighborhoods in Figure 128.\footnote{U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2011-2015 Five-Year Estimates. Sex by Age by Employment Status for the Population 16 Years and Over: Table B23001. Retrieved February 2017, from American Fact Finder.}

Figure 128: Map of Youth (in the Labor Force) who are Unemployed (Ages 16-24)
Challenges for Denver’s Young Men of Color

In Denver and across the nation, young men of color face significant challenges. These challenges include living in high-poverty areas with high crime rates and low performing schools. Also, impacting achievement are high rates of chronic absenteeism, lack of positive role models, and living in single-parent families.

If not overcome, the impacts of these challenges result in persistent gaps in achievement and graduation rates. Asian and non-Hispanic white male students typically graduate high school in four years at significantly higher rates than black, Hispanic or Native American young men (Figure 129).202

Chronically absent students, or students missing ten percent of the school year or more, compound community challenges faced by these young men. If students are not in school, they have a very difficult time succeeding in coursework and meeting the criteria necessary to graduate on time. Again, the data illustrates that disadvantages associated with chronic absenteeism disproportionally impact young men of color.

Although improved since the previous school year, nearly half of high school-aged young men of color in grades nine through 12 were chronically absent in 2015-2016 in DPS (Figure 130).203

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203 Denver Public Schools. Department of Planning and Analysis. 2015-2016 School Year.
The Status of Denver's Children: A Community Resource 2017 can be downloaded from the Office of Children’s Affairs website:
www.denvergov.org/childrensaffairs

For more information on any topic or data included in this document please contact:

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